

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS vs. BILL DONOHUE

On March 23, 2000, Bill Donohue and Christopher Hitchens squared off in a fiery debate at New York's Union League Club. Much of the debate centered on Mother Teresa. The following is an excerpt from a play by professor Remi Dubuque; it is based on the evening's debate. Mother Teresa's upcoming canonization, and Donohue's new book on her critics, explains why we are publishing their exchange now.

Remi Dubuque

In 1995 Mr. Hitchens published a devastating and admittedly scurrilous critique of Mother Teresa, whom he later called, "a thieving, fanatical Albanian dwarf," and a "self-adoring fraud"; he also labeled her a *demagogue and fanatical zealot*. Then, a few years later Hitchens, accepted an invitation to debate in New York City none other than Dr. William Donohue, the formidable president of the Catholic League, which is the leading voice for defending Catholicism against anti-Catholic attacks.

Moderator to Mr. Hitchens: In a few days you'll be debating before a largely Catholic audience against William Donohue. This IS not likely to be one of your usual polite and courteous exchanges. He's known as a bulldog and a fierce defender of his Faith; he also was a great admirer of Mother Teresa. I wouldn't expect him to be overly-friendly and happy to make your acquaintance. He'll be coming with a somewhat justifiable chip on his shoulder.

C.H.: I'm the Englishman. I'm the bulldog—he's only an Irishman, and a Catholic at that. I have nothing to worry about.

Moderator: Donohue is well-read and a published scholar. He'll

come prepared.

C.H.: Good. The bigger they are...(makes hand-sign of someone falling)

Debate

C.H.: (Seated Stage Left, stands and begins)

Everything everybody thinks they know about Mother Teresa is false; not just most of the things, but all of the things. Her international reputation represents the single largest con job of the century. She was corrupt, cynical, nasty, and cruel. Mother Teresa has received worldwide adulation for her saintliness, for at least a few decades now; she has been hailed from every quarter of the globe as a living saint. Mother Teresa is a Nobel Prize winner—though whatever she has done to deserve it remains to me a mystery—and even she herself admits she did nothing to deserve such an honor. At the ceremony when she received the Nobel Peace Prize she cleverly seized the opportunity to preach against abortion—even though one of the obvious major problems in her Calcutta mission was over-population.

Mother Teresa has received awards and plaques from political leaders all over the world; in her role as the Great White Hope coming to the rescue of the heathen of India and other places, her rewards have by no means been restricted to only those in heaven. It was only by my intervention, my 1995 exposé, that we can even now say something bad about Mother Teresa. It was my book about her, *The Missionary Position*, which brought her back down to earth; it was my book that exposed her for the thieving, lying fraud that she really is. I was the one that destroyed the myth of “Holy Mother Teresa,” who built hundreds of hospices and orphanages, but all in her own honor.

What she does with all the financial gifts she has received is not known; she never seemed ready and willing to open her

books to any public accounting. For someone whose kingdom is not of this earth, Mother Teresa had an easy access and rate of success with earthly kingdoms and powers. She has a long history of tapping into the treasures of tyrants and dictators—dictators like the Duvalier family of Haiti, which robbed the country's poor people to greedily boost their own vast and corrupt fortunes. In addition, her well-honed talent for fundraising made her a valuable asset of the Vatican, which rewarded her later on with an oddly premature procedure of canonization.

In the United States, Mother Teresa accepted well over a million dollars from Charles Keating, a California savings and loan tycoon. The only problem was that the money that he gave her didn't belong to him. He had embezzled it from his clients. She never offered to return that stolen money to its rightful owners and Keating went to jail after what was then the greatest financial scandal in America's history.

The annual Mother Teresa cult has resulted in millions of dollars annually for her mission. That money could go to supporting a large hospital. Instead, we observe her homes and hospices offering only a low level of service to the homeless and destitute. She has decided to spend her franchise very thinly. To her, the convent and the Catechism matter more than the clinics.

In her proclaiming that abortion is the greatest threat to world peace, one would have to take leave of his critical faculties to not recognize in her the tedious ravings of the dangerous zealot and the grim fanatic.

She was an old, gruesome Albanian dwarf, an elderly, wrinkled, presumed virgin terrified of sex, and she shouldn't have been preaching to the rest of us who enjoy sex on how to conduct our sex lives. Nor should we listen about sex from the repressive standards of the Catholic hierarchy which also is composed of old, unmarried celibates.

W.D.: (Stands at podium—Stage Right)

You, know, Christopher, both you and Mother Teresa professed deep concern for the plight of the poor and the destitute and the homeless. The only difference is that Mother Teresa actually did something for all of them. How many people have you literally carried out of the filth and vermin of the gutter, washed the maggots off them, put clean clothes on them, fed them, and gave them a secure place to rest, away from the terrors of the street? You criticize her and her nuns for not building a modern hospital for the desperately ill. That was never her stated intention—she was in the vocation of providing for the last days of the destitute and the dying. If you had taken the time to read the sign in front of her hospices, you would have seen it state, "Home for the Dying and Destitute"—and not THE MAYO CLINIC.

In your so-called book on her you criticize her for providing a hospice in the Bronx that is without an elevator. You don't mention how she and the other nuns actually carried the destitute up the stairs—those who were unable to physically make it on their own. Your dishonesty is deplorable.

A number of your criticisms are deliberately misleading by leaving out relevant facts. Your book is a study in bigoted and dishonest selectivity. For example, you accuse her of taking stolen money from Charles Keating; you don't point out that Keating gave the money to Mother Teresa in 1982, but it was not until the 1990s that the details of his swindling came to light—long after the missionaries had already spent it. How conveniently you alter the truth.

Then, you denounce her for taking money from the wealthy and dishonest Duvalier family in Haiti. Tell us, where else in Haiti could she have obtained money to build the orphanages there? From the penniless poor? This is just another phony criticism of yours. As a matter of fact, your entire book on Mother Teresa reeks of phony scholarship: no index, no

footnotes or endnotes, no checkable sources, no evidence. If I were your college teacher, I'd have to give it an "F."

It's part and parcel of the research you produce for your two favorite sources of publication. The *Nation*, a pretentious pseudo-intellectual rag, and *Vanity Fair*, known widely as an anti-Catholic tabloid.

The majority of your writings are on the level of *People* magazine: superficial and without any in-depth research. What you compose most often lacks any careful study or any thorough scholarship. You write for effect—not for discovering the real truth. You're the one who's a fraud, Christopher—not Mother Teresa. She has backed up her world-wide reputation with countless good works for the downtrodden. Her life is her genuine testimony. Your opinion of her is based on distortion and prejudice.

You blame the lack of population control on Catholic doctrine, yet on the very previous page of your book you actually state that the secular-leftist government predominates there in Calcutta—the type of politics that you personally espouse. Thus, your position lacks consistency and logic. Your hatred of her is also partly because you disagree with her position on sexual behavior; she disapproves, like the Catholic Church, of sodomy and promiscuity. If everyone were to follow what the Catholic Church teaches about sex and marriage, there would hardly be any venereal disease and death due to AIDS. And yet you're happy hurling cheap jokes and insults at the missionary nuns, their work, and their celibate vocation.

C.H.: Let me protest that I don't do nun jokes. Never did. Never will. And I resent your implying that I do. Also, to say that AIDS is death from sex I regard as an obscenity. Your Church has a long history of blaming homosexuals for their sexual behavior; what they die of is a filthy and deadly virus which can and will be cured. You have no right to condemn them for expressing love to each other.

W.D.: You don't make jokes about nuns? You just earlier referred to the *supposed* virginity of Mother Teresa. And how about the title of your book against her, *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*? Only a phony would deny there's a cheap sexual pun in the title. Again, you're being the ultimate phony. And do you really think people get AIDS from a bug biting their behinds? Christopher, if you drink too much alcohol, you can get cirrhosis of the liver; if you smoke too many cigarettes, you can get lung cancer; and if you practice sodomy or promiscuous sex, you'll likely wind up with some venereal disease.

Your libertine leftist philosophy somehow prevents you from accepting these truths.

Ultimately, the real reason you hate Mother Teresa is that her whole life stands for Jesus Christ. And you hate Jesus Christ so much that you're unwilling to frankly acknowledge even His historical existence—which is truly stupid and absurd. Christopher, you've lost objectivity; you're so blinded by your bias and ill will. Your attacks on Mother Teresa amount to no more than phony, dishonest logic based on personal animosity.

Moderator (to audience):

Whether Mr. Hitchens won or lost that debate with Dr. Donohue may be a matter of one's opinion. But I can tell you this—judging by his visible outward appearances and facial expressions during the debate, this seemed to be Hitch's most uncomfortable and least pleasurable debating experience. It was evident that he was not used to being openly and blatantly called "a phony." The hostility and ill feelings Hitch had created with his unrelenting attacks on Mother Teresa truly emerged on that memorable evening in New York.

Remi Dubuque received his Ph.D. in English from the University of Notre Dame and is an expert on the Shroud of Turin.