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Christopher Hitchens

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Among his many books, perhaps none have sparked more outrage than *The Missionary Position*, Christopher Hitchens's meticulous study of the life and deeds of Mother Teresa.

A Nobel Peace Prize recipient beatified by the Catholic Church in 2003, Mother Teresa of Calcutta was celebrated by heads of state and adored by millions for her work on behalf of the poor. In his measured critique, Hitchens asks only that Mother Teresa's reputation be judged by her actions-not the other way around.

With characteristic elan and rhetorical dexterity, Hitchens eviscerates the fawning cult of Teresa, recasting the Albanian missionary as a spurious, despotic, and megalomaniacal operative of the wealthy who long opposed measures to end poverty, and fraternized, for financial gain, with tyrants and white-collar criminals throughout the world.

The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice Details

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Christopher Hitchens

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Ashish Iyer says

This book is quite shocking and insightful book book for me. A well-researched and excellently written book that exposes the monster and charlatan that was Mother Teresa. It left me disturbed for a while as I digested the information provided to me after years of research and hard work. This book made me think about a lot of things and raised a lot of questions.

Mother Theresa had only one thing in mind to "save people for Jesus." She looked upon poor folks only to convert them. The conditions in her homes was unhygienic and filthy. The sisters of Charity would "baptise" people who were at death's door to see that they "went to heaven". No one had knowledge of medicine. She became a 'Saint' by serving the poor of Calcutta. Christopher Hitchens has removed the veil of Sainthood from the much publicized and adored Nobel Peace Prize winner and looked at her critically by analyzing stone cold facts. They had bulk of money but they wouldn't spend on poor or even improve the facility. In fact, Mother Teresa consistently resisted any moves to have adequate medical care there, while she availed herself of the best hospitals in the Western world when she was battling her own medical ailments.

Once you read this book, Mother Teresa will appear to be no more than an opportunistic and religious fundamentalist whose love for religious dogma far exceeded her love for the poor. All facts are righ there. Highly recommended.

Margitte says

From the blurb:

Among his many books, perhaps none have sparked more outrage than *The Missionary Position*, Christopher Hitchens's meticulous study of the life and deeds of Mother Teresa.

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If you're interested you can read my review of **No One Left To Lie To: The Traingulation of William Jefferson Clinton** to become more acquainted with Christopher Hitchens. He was a one-man-band against the 'evils' of the world and collected a global following which defied logic and common sense.

Hitchens initially wanted to title the book, *Sacred Cow*, which would have been typical of his satirical onslaught. He tackled issues which defines history, and attracted debate and headlines. He was a seasoned

Leftist journalist who knew his craft. The results were brutal, leaving no room for prisoners.

He left no stone upturned to expose Mother Theresa as *no saint, more like a fraud, a liar and a thief*.

Add his other intellectual warfare against religions as '*despotism of the sky*' to the message in this book, and it becomes understandable why Mother Theresa, as the icon for what was noble and holy to the world of the religious enclaves, became one of his primary targets. His book *God Is Not Great - how religion poisons everything* became an international bestseller. Hitchens, a neo-atheist, became a crusader against 'clerical and theocratic bullying'. Religion, according to him, included 'nuclear-armed mullahs, as well as insidious campaigns to have stultifying pseudo-science taught in American schools.'

Like with Bill Clinton, Mother Theresa is stripped to the bare bones in an eloquent, well-researched, well-documented, fast-reading book. Nothing escapes the crocodile-snapping wrath of Hitchens, and in this case it was as effective as was planned.

Hitchens implied in the book that Mother Theresa had a sadistic streak. He used the show-don't-tell principle to illustrate his point. She refused dying people medical treatment, believed in severe pain as a sign of a person's nearness to God, and ripped all items which could make their last days comfortable, from their lives, while stashing millions of dollars away in bank accounts which was meant for the poor and sick in her care. She withheld food from both the patients as well as the volunteers and sisters in her employment. Needles were not sterilized, only rinsed in cold water, etc.

To Hitchens she was nothing better than the televangelists who ripped people off under the guise of religion. Mother Theresa was a calculating money-making-machine who knew exactly what she was doing.

So if you are interested in this controversial smear against one of the greatest icons of all times, this is the book for you.

I have read several rumors about Mother Theresa through the years and was curious. It's that other side of the pancake again. Being a huge fan of Christopher Hitchens' work, I knew exactly what to expect and voilà this book delivered. However, I realized the modus operandi of the author from within his ideological framework and took that seriously into account in rating this book. Therefore, 4 stars it will be.

Adam says

I enjoy reading books that plausibly and intelligently challenge commonly held beliefs. That is why I appreciated Diane Johnstone's "Fool's Crusade", which questioned the almost religiously held belief that Serbia was the principal, if not only, malefactor in the Balkan wars that led to the break-up of Yugoslavia during the 1990s. Christopher Hitchens' book "The Missionary Position" provides a powerful challenge to another belief that began in the Balkans, the Mother Teresa phenomenon. Until I read his book, I assumed that this benefactor of the poor in Calcutta, who was born of Albanian parentage in the Macedonian city of Skopje, was a saintly character. Now, I have serious doubts.

If we can rely on Hitchens' evidence as being largely objective, then we must begin to consider the 'good' Mother in rather the same light as her somewhat less sympathetic compatriot, the late Enver Hoxha who ruled Albania with a fist of iron for four decades. Both Mother Teresa and Hoxha believed that what they were doing was in order to promote the well-being of their 'subjects' or 'flocks'. Hoxha's activities were

restricted to the small population of Albania, whereas Teresa's affected not only vast number of poor people of Calcutta but also in many other places across the globe.

The main thrust of Hitchen's argument is that Mother Teresa aimed not to help the bodies of the poor but to save their spirits, to ensure that they gained salvation after they had ended their miserable lives miserably. It seems that little she did actually made much material or physical or medical difference to the poor. Hitchens and others provide evidence that the medical care offered to those who sought her help was largely ineffective if not outdated. Krishna Dutta in "Calcutta: a cultural and literary history" (first publ. 2003) writes: "...many people who worked at Nirmal Hriday, especially foreign volunteers with medical knowledge, were dismayed by the lack of training available to the helpers... and by the lack of commitment to scientific medical treatment." He also points out, as does Hitchens, that those who were dying were given last rites according to Roman Catholic practices regardless of their actual religion, often Hindu or Moslem. Dutta, incidentally, felt that on balance Mother Teresa was not a bad thing for Calcutta, but felt that her mission would do well by devoting itself to, "... looking after the poor as well as the dying by offering proper medical care." The word 'proper' is important. Hitchens quotes evidence that helpers in the Calcutta mission were instructed to mop the foreheads of the dying as if they were actually soothing them, when in reality they were quietly baptising the sufferers before they passed away.

It would seem from Hitchen's book that Mother Teresa's principal aims were those of the Roman Catholic Church; proselytising, prevention of abortion, and condemnation of birth control. Whilst proselytising might not harm the poor (many low-caste Indians have benefited materially by becoming Christians), damning abortion and birth-control is unlikely to alleviate the lives of the impoverished. Hitchens emphasises that Mother Teresa's aim was to improve the spiritual condition of those who sought her help, not their physical well-being. It is interesting that one of Teresa's friends and admirers was India's President Indira Gandhi during whose reign strongly encouraged sterilisation and a programme of birth-control was carried out widespread in India.

Mother Teresa was a phenomenal fund-raiser - one of the world's best. Hitchens wonders what became of those funds, but can provide no answers. She was beloved by the rich and famous and also infamous. In the opening pages of the book, Hitchens describes how the good Mother was filmed offering respect to Michèle Duvalier the wife of Haiti's unpleasant dictator 'Baby Doc' Duvalier at the occasion when she was happy to receive the Haitian award, the Légion d'Honneur. This was soon before the Duvaliers fled to the French Riviera. This is one of several examples of Teresa's apparent lack of discomfort with hob-nobbing with the infamous.

Hitchen's book is well-written, concise, and seems to be based on solid sources. It is essential reading for those interested in modern India, and also of some interest to those interested in the Balkans. Sometime after Enver Hoxha died, Mother Teresa visited Tirana where she laid a wreath on the grave of her compatriot Enver Hoxha. There is no record of her having said a word against this man who tyrannised and killed many of his subjects for over 40 years.

Reviewed by author of "Scrabble with Slivovitz" and "Albania on my Mind"

K says

Mother Teresa is probably the last person I'd expect to be the target of an angry expose.

In this short volume, Christopher Hitchens includes the following points:

1. Much of the publicity around Mother Teresa is revisionistic and dubious, and her displays of humility are an act. How humble is it to claim a personal relationship with Jesus?
2. Mother Teresa is about saving souls, not bodies. Her institutions are unsanitary and poorly operated despite a plethora of donations which should make better conditions affordable. Mother Teresa's statements about the godliness of poverty and suffering appear to be her justification for this.
3. Mother Teresa uses her influence to promote anti-birth control and anti-abortion dogmas, despite the fact that overpopulation and unwanted children are likely factors in the need for her institutions.
4. Mother Teresa is associated with all kinds of dubious individuals, from Robert Maxwell to Michele Duvalier to Charles Keating. She actually tried to advocate for the latter as he was being prosecuted for fraud; when Keating's prosecutor informed Mother Teresa of Keating's activities and encouraged her to return the funds he donated to her cause so that these funds could then be returned to the defrauded individuals, Mother Teresa never responded.
5. Mother Teresa is a font of unhelpful platitudes which do not hold up to scrutiny but are viewed as profound simply because she said them.
6. Mother Teresa and the West feed off each other. The West feels a need to believe they are helping the poor savages of the East; Mother Teresa publicly fills that need for them independent of the degree of help she is actually contributing.

Hitchens' writing is sharp and on-target, and he certainly makes an interesting case. I also appreciated the book's short length. With that, my sense is that Hitchens' anti-religious agenda is the driving force behind this book rather than any actual wrongdoing on Mother Teresa's part.

Mother Teresa's alleged false modesty, while hardly admirable, is certainly no crime. Her embracing poverty and suffering at the expense of those she is officially helping is more problematic; at the same time, it's not as if she's using the donated funds for her own material pleasure. Mother Teresa is a religious figure and does not claim otherwise; it's only natural that she would promote anti-abortion views and consort indiscriminately with despised characters, feeling that God loves everybody. As for the inflated and uncritical view of her platitudes, as Hitchens himself remarks, this is "...an argument not with a deceiver but with the deceived. If Mother Teresa is the adored object of many credulous and uncritical observers, then the blame is not hers, or hers alone."

Whether or not one agrees with Hitchens' claims, they are certainly provocative and well-articulated, not to mention humorous.

Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Bill Kerwin says

I liked this book when I read it twenty years ago, appreciating it as a wicked piece of invective. Now, though, after I have—like all of us—endured twenty years of Christian assaults on our democracy, from both Protestant dominionists and Catholic irredentists, who conceal their political daggers beneath the simple peasant cloak of morality, I respect Hitchens' criticism of Mother Teresa much more than I did before.

He shows us a woman who, although she claimed to be apolitical, never met an oppressive right-wing party she didn't like, provided of course that it opposed abortion and contraception: Haiti's "Baby Doc," Ethiopia's Dergue, the royalist survivors of Franco's Spain, and the supporters of the *contras* of Nicaragua and the death squads of El Salvador--all have contributed to her efforts and received her praise.

Although she solicited no money, she—like an old school New York cop—accepted it freely whenever it was offered, even if it came from two-bit cultists like MSIA's John-Roger or major economic felons like Charles Keating, who stole \$252,000,000 from investors during the Savings and Loan Scandal of the '80's. (Keating donated 1.25 million dollars to Mother Teresa. When Keating's co-prosecutor Paul Turley wrote to Mother, offering to put her "in direct contact with the rightful owners of the property now in your possession," Mother failed to write him back.)

Perhaps even more damning—if I may be forgiven the use such a word in this context—is how Mother permitted her religious beliefs—particularly her belief in the spiritual benefits of suffering and a good death—to affect her sisters' treatment of the poor, particularly in regard hygienic, palliative and even medical standards. Hitchens quotes eyewitness testimony: needles merely rinsed, not immersed in boiling water; the pain of terminal cancer treated with aspirin or other analgesics; the failure to transfer eminently treatable cases (in one instance, a boy of fifteen) out of the "Home for the Dying" before it was too late. This, Hitchens says, occurs because "the point is not the honest relief of suffering but the promulgation of a cult based on death and suffering and subjection."

Let us continue, in Hitchens' own words:

Mother Teresa (who herself, it should be noted, has checked into some of the finest and costliest clinics and hospitals in the West during her bouts with heart trouble and old age) once gave this game away in a filmed interview. She described a person who was in the last agonies of cancer and suffering unbearable pain. With a smile, Mother Teresa told the camer what she told this terminal patient: "You are suffering like Christ on the cross. So Jesus must be kissing you." Unconscious of the account to which this irony might be charged, she then told of the sufferers reply: "Then please tell him to stop kissing me." There are many people in the direst need and pain who have had cause to wish, in their own extremity, that Mother Teresa was less free with her own metaphysical caresses and a little more attentive to actual suffering.

Personally, I think Hitchens is a bit too hard on Mother Teresa. Although, like Hitchens, I value reason and abhor superstition, I am more sympathetic to her core beliefs--if not her politics--than he is, and I am convinced that it was a sincere conviction that led her to her nursing philosophy (however wrongheaded it may be). Also, I am certain many poor people would have died alone, without any comfort or companionship,, if it had not been for the ministrations of Mother and her sisters.

Still, this is a powerful and memorable book, and cautions all of us to be suspicious of religious beliefs when they are summoned to service and then applied to a particular political agenda. "She is, finally," as Hitchens

says, "the emissary of a very determined and very politicized papacy. Her world travels are not the wanderings of a pilgrim but a campaign which accords with the requirements of power."

It is as Lord Action--a Catholic, by the way--once said: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

A.J. Howard says

The Missionary Position, by the sake of its cover alone, is arguably one of the most bold polemics in recent memory. The title itself forces you to picture the wrinkled, ancient, and now deceased, woman on the cover.... well, let's just say engaging in an activity that we have good reason to believe she abstained from for the entirety of her life. Let me pause while I shudder quickly. Despite the pure shock power of the title, Hitchens' originally preferred title may have been more appropriate, *The Sacred Cow*. Because if you were unaware of Hitchens' argument, Mother Theresa of Calcutta seems to be one of the least appropriate target for such harsh criticism, even when the bile is produced by such a virulent contrarian and secularist as Hitchens.

However, Hitchens makes clear that his ire is not directed at Mother Theresa herself, or devout Catholics who consider her a saint. This book is for the secular or casually religious who consider the late nun as the exemplar of charity, compassion, humility, and devoutness. Hitchens argument is that all the modifiers but the latter are inappropriate.

Hitchens main point is that the good Mother Theresa did for the world were means to the end of promoting a specific and retrograde worldview, "to propagandize one highly subjective view of human nature and need, so that she may one day be counted as a beatific founder of a new order and discipline within the Church itself." Hitchens also points out that when the welfare of the poor conflicted with any of her religious beliefs it was the former that were sacrificed. This is not only relating to her frequent pronouncements on the evils of birth control. The Catholic Church, and Theresa as one of the most outspoken mouthpieces of the organization on this subject, is liable for the millions of deaths and an untold amount of suffering worldwide by its unbelievably outdated position on the subject. But wait there's more. Hitchens cites testimonials that make it appear that people under the care of the Missionaries of Charity suffered needlessly not because of a lack of funds, but because Mother Theresa sought to maintain conditions of poverty. Better care for patients under their care was not provided, not because Mother Theresa was unable to provide, but because she was unwilling to provide it.

Hitchens also ridicules Mother Theresa's supposed refusal to engage in politics. Of course this was only the case where politics didn't involve moral issues, and she didn't hesitate to give her blessings to demagogues who shilled her line. Also, her supposed non-engagement freed her up to be used as a pawn by thugs, dictators, and crooks who were eager for a photo-op. One such engagement was when she wrote a letter to Judge Lance Ito, appealing for leniency in the sentencing of Charles Keating, the perpetrator of the Savings and Loan scandal. She had the gall to cite how Keating donated money to her charities as proof of his better

nature, while never addressing the fact that this money was stolen by Keating through fraud. When faced with calls to return these stolen funds she answered with complete silence.

Hitchens has several more bones to pick that I won't get into. Hitch's screed is more of a pamphlet than a book, coming in at just under 100 pages scarcely filled pages that will take at most a couple of hours to read. Because it's so brief, I'm going with three stars instead of four. Hitchens is the kind of guy you would never want to get into an argument you want to win with. Here, he takes aim at the previously unassailable and manages to but a few dents in her secular halo.

dely says

2,5

It was an interesting book, above all the depositions of volunteers that have worked in Mother Teresa's hospital. The rest of the book is interesting too and the author shows how Mother Teresa didn't really worry about the poor and the sick, but wanted only to instill them her religious believes and, above all, the endurance of suffering in order to be nearer to Jesus. No one knows how much money she had, but she never used it for the poor, these had to continue to suffer and to live in poverty. Hers weren't real hospitals because there weren't doctors or professional staff; it was only a place where people could die even if in a real hospital they could have been saved or at least suffer less before dying. It's not very Christian this behaviour. She also accepted money from dictators or swindlers and never said a bad word about them and about what they were doing.

It's not only an attack on Mother Teresa, but to Catholicism, clergy and Vatican City. All in all, Mother Teresa followed the precepts of her religion.

I rated it so low only because it was too short. The best part were the depositions of the volunteers, in the middle of the book. The rest is interesting too but I had the impression the book had no "order", there wasn't a real logic to follow from the start to the end. At the end of the book some things were repeated and about others there was only a quick hint. I would have liked if the author would have deepened many things and I wanted more real depositions.

I think that Catholics shouldn't read this book, they would never believe it and I don't think that it would open their eyes.

Sam Quixote says

The great polemicist Christopher Hitchens turns his attention to Agnes Bojaxhiu, aka Mother Teresa, in this searing look into her work that is universally accepted as humanitarian and above reproach. Hitchens presents an image of Teresa that is highly critical of her reputation in this brilliantly argued book on her life's work.

Hitchens recounts Teresa's relationships with known dictators such as the Haitian dictator Jean-Claude

Duvalier and his wife Michele who all but bankrupted their country and fled to France. Teresa, despite supposedly caring for the poor, does little for them - she demands that they accept their lot and live with poverty rather than try to help them escape it. This is a woman whose fame rests upon her help with the poor, and yet she failed to use her power and influence to alleviate their suffering by encouraging the many world leaders she met to work on this issue.

But she's not political! you say, as she claimed many times herself. And yet she often involved herself in politics, especially when it came to the subject of abortion. She travelled to Spain to protest when post-Franco legislation was to be passed regarding the legalisation of divorce, abortion, and birth control, and even spoke to Margaret Thatcher about passing a bill that was in the House of Commons that wanted to limit the availability of abortions.

Teresa was a fond one for abortion (despite being a virgin and not knowing anything about what it's like to give birth, and sex, besides the end product) and made it the subject of her speech when she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 (a win that remains questionable as to what she actually contributed to world peace or peace in any single country), claiming that abortion was the biggest threat to mankind.

Maybe the biggest criticism of Mother Teresa above all is the way she and her order withheld painkillers from the very sick and dying. In a filmed interview, she recounted an exchange she had with a cancer patient who was dying, who she refused to give painkillers to, where she said "You are suffering like Christ on the cross. So Jesus must be kissing you", to which the person replied "Then please tell him to stop kissing me". Teresa, it seems, was unaware of the irony of that comment. Also, her Homes for the Dying are run by nuns who aren't medically trained or know anything about palliative care, or even basic hygiene as they wash medical equipment in cold tapwater rather than sterilise them!

Hitchens also raises the question of what Teresa did with the millions she received in donations. There will never be an audit because it's the Catholic Church but given the basic requirements of her homes, it seems likely that a lot of it didn't go into helping the poor. And a lot of the donations came from questionable sources like Charles Keating, a fraud who was imprisoned for 10 years for his part in the Savings and Loans scandal in the early 90s. He donated \$1.25 million to Mother Teresa who wrote a character reference to the judge when he was on trial. It had no effect but the co-prosecutor of the case, Paul Turley, wrote back explaining to her why he was on trial, informing her that the money she had received was stolen from ordinary, hard working people who're now poor people like the ones she tries to help, and that she should return it on basic principle. He never received a reply to his letter and the money was not refunded.

Teresa comes across as a PR tool for the Catholic Church and a political pawn, willingly used for the Church's own dogmatic ideas and as a fundraising figure. Hitchens has written a fascinating book in "The Missionary Position" which rightly questions a person long held to be untouchable because of her work and yet whose actions remain highly dubious and contradictory. "The Missionary Position" is a highly recommended and thought-provoking read.

Also worth checking out is Hitchen's documentary on Mother Teresa, Hell's Angel. The first half of this book is basically a retelling of the documentary. It's available for free on Youtube.

Kurt Pankau says

This is an ambitious attempt at iconoclasm from a world-class iconoclast that is absolutely undone by the

author's style of writing. From the overly catty title to the confused layout, the book is frustrating when it should be enlightening and only works for about fifteen pages in the middle when substance is finally allowed to triumph over style.

Hitchens has some fantastic observations about the misguided ways in which Mother Theresa "helps" the poor but in fact just makes them suffer. Those fifteen pages are worth reading, without question. But he works them towards a flimsy thesis that Mother Theresa was some kind of diabolical genius. In doing so, he assumes that the reader knows quite a bit about Mother Theresa and the Catholic Church already, and disdains them both. He doesn't give any kind of history of the woman until 4/5's of the way through, at which point he assumes that the reader knows the major players in 1930's Albanian politics. His scattershot rambling approach to an argument really does him no justice. It's a boon to his work as an essayist, but it's the reason his books are all slight, pithy, and dense. This book needed to guide the reader, but Hitchens never constructs anything like a narrative.

I view this as a blown opportunity. The evidence of Mother Theresa's woes on humanity are not hard to find. You can see a nice overview in the "Criticism" section of her Wikipedia page. Her goal was not to heal but to convert. She would give deathbed baptisms to Hindus and Muslims without their explicit consent. She would deny antibiotics to the sick and painkillers to the dying--she seemed to think suffering was making her charges more Christ-like. She viewed the influx of donations as an endorsement of her methods from God, but the money went unspent and/or unaccounted for. People suffered needlessly under her care. There is no question that she did horrible things and was never held to account by the world at large.

But the stronger argument is not that Mother Theresa was a bad person, but that she was an exemplary Catholic and that Catholic doctrine writ large is as great an evil now as it was during the Inquisition. Hitchens dances around this, but never quite nails it. The Catholic prohibition on contraception--largely ignored in the first world--is one of the issues Mother Theresa championed alongside abortion. And to this day those prohibitions are a direct cause of the third world being flush with the starving children that Mother Theresa's nuns look after. The irony is flabbergasting, but Hitchens would have us believe that it's all part of some evil scheme towards beatification, and I don't think he argued it strongly enough.

It pains me to rate this as low as I did. I'm a fan of Christopher Hitchens and view his death as a serious loss to the intellectual world. But this is far from his best work. It's too long and too comprehensive to work as an essay, but it's too short and disorganized to work as a book. In the end, I'm not mad, I'm just disappointed.

Ailsa says

"The naive and simple are seldom as naive and simple as they seem, and this suspicion is reinforced by those who proclaim their own naïveté and simplicity. There is no conceit equal to false modesty"

2018 is my year of Hitch. What a pleasure.

My only quibble is at 100 pages with a large font, it is quite a bit shorter than I was expecting. Surely there was plenty more meat on the carcass for him to sink his teeth into? *The Missionary Position* is more an extended journal article than a book in its own right. Luckily, I have *god is not Great* on hand to fill the void.

Cwn_annwn_13 says

I really didn't need to read this book to figure out that Mother Teresa was just another globalist tool and a propaganda/fundraising cash cow for the Catholic church but Missionary Position does a good job of driving that point home and giving good solid evidence to that fact. To give a few examples, the millions she took from the mega swindler Keating and never returned, her response to the Dupont chemical spill in India instead of seeking justice and calling to make Dupont accountable was telling people to "just forgive" so as not to cause any problems with the globalist corporats. Then of course there were the notoriously deplorable conditions in her hospitals and shelters, totally filthy, where they not only reused needles but their idea of sterilizing them was washing them with cold water! Also people were not given proper pain medication (Mother Teresa had this idea that the more you suffered the closer you were to Christ!) So you had things like this going on but at the same time it was found out in just the bank account for her shelters in the New York area there was \$50 million dollars sitting idly. When the city of San Francisco donated a fully furnished shelter to her for a shelter for homeless men who had AIDS she promptly had all the couches, beds and televisions thrown out insuring that the dying would live as comfortless as possible. All I can say is thankfully this cash cow for the forces of evil in this world is dead!

David says

Hitchens has turned his humbuggery on little old nuns. Well played, Hitchens. Well played.

As much as I'd like to just keep the review at that, I feel compelled to continue with an actual review.

His complaints focus on several facets of her organization.

1. While she devoted her life to helping the poor, her goal was conversion rather than actually improving the lives of the poor.
2. Despite the millions of dollars donated to her organization, she actively stood in the way of high-quality healthcare for her clinics, and kept them poor and struggling to treat those in need (in interest of ascetic soul-strengthening). Much of the donated money went to missionary causes, and there was no transparency to the finances in the organization.
3. She accepted money from anyone, and traded her influence as a "good person" for money from corrupt politicians or political regimes.
4. She actively opposed and spoke out against birth control of any type, despite the fact that Indian overpopulation was one of the contributing factors to rampant poverty in Calcutta.
5. She denied use of strong painkillers or antibiotics on principle. This led to far more suffering than was necessary, and made what should have been minor issues life-threatening due to infection that went untreated.
6. Her repeated rejection of "worldly interests" mostly kept people from critically investigating the work she was doing. It also led to huge donations from governments as well as individuals, which were then not used efficiently to actually help the poor.

7. While working to help the poor, she did nothing to alleviate poverty, and even encouraged the current status quo: "I think it is very beautiful for the poor to accept their lot, to share it with the passion of Christ. I think the world is being much helped by the suffering of the poor people."

There were more complaints, but this is all I can recall at the moment. Many of these were due to Mother Teresa's view that God would look after his flock (despite the fact that God's care is what put them in need of help), and that suffering would bring them closer to Jesus. This caused her to turn away medical professionals and expertise in the interest of volunteers who often knew nothing of medicine.

Much of the criticism Hitchens quoted came from medical professionals who had visited her clinics and were appalled at the unnecessary suffering of patients.

I found this all very interesting, and it seems like a sad example of a major religious figure with seriously skewed priorities. It is sad that her reputation stopped any serious investigation of her methods or motivations.

While not a fun read, I'd certainly recommend this. It's a sobering way to temper the traditional saintly view of her.

Mikey B. says

A forceful and convincing (if somewhat strident) destruction of the myth of Mother Teresa. Christopher Hitchens takes on quite a few angles of the 'sacredness of Mother Teresa'.

One of the most convincing is the squalor of the hospices in Calcutta and elsewhere. Very little of the donated money (and this is in the millions) goes into improving the facilities. Aspirins are the only anaesthetics provided to terminally ill patients. Needles are recycled on different patients. Unremitting suffering is seen as ennobling and medical care is not a priority. In these hospices the attendants are not to question their roles – they are part of the Mother Teresa cult.

Despite the frugality of her hospices Mother Teresa cavorts with the rich and famous – the English monarchy and the Duvalier's of Haiti. She espouses the most rigid doctrines of the Catholic Church (as in her Nobel Prize winning speech) – she is against any form of contraceptive use and lashes out that abortion is the worst sin.

Perhaps Hitchens' goes too far in attacking her contacts with world leaders. What has Mother Teresa done to empower the people of Calcutta, to educate them and to prevent them from dying in the streets? She is treating the end effect. Where has all the money gone from the donations?

Nandakishore Varma says

Actually, this is a follow-up read to Mother Teresa: The Untold Story by Dr. Aroup Chatterjee, where he took apart the myth of this modern day saint with great precision. There, this book as well as the documentary by Hitchens were mentioned, which immediately whetted my appetite to read it. But whereas in

Dr. Chatterjee's book, the approach is pedantic and clinical, Hitchens's tome is a no-holds-barred attack on the icon. In cricketing parlance, *Mother Teresa: The Untold Story* is a test match: this book is a 20/20 hitabout.

Hitchens's aim is clear. He is out to discredit the saintly icon built up over the years by the international press and the Catholic church, and he is not going to do it gently: because he is a rationalist and an atheist, and demands hard answers to questions left unasked.

Who would be so base as to pick on a wizened, shriveled old lady, well stricken in years, who has consecrated her entire life to the needy and the destitute? On the other hand, who would be so incurious as to leave unexamined the influence and motives of a woman who once boasted of operating more than five hundred convents in upward of 105 countries—"without counting India"? Lone self-sacrificing zealot, or chair of a missionary multinational? The scale alters with the perspective, and the perspective alters with the scale.

Indeed. Also, this is only a small part of the continuing offensive of reason against blind faith.

This is a small episode in an unending argument between those who know they are right and therefore claim the mandate of heaven, and those who suspect that the human race has nothing but the poor candle of reason by which to light its way.

The book opens with Mother Teresa's gushing endorsement of Mme. Duvalier, the wife of the Haitian dictator Jean Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier, a cruel and corrupt blackguard of no small proportions. It also touches upon her friendship with John-Roger, the leader of a dangerous cult.

There are many rascals that this saint has endorsed: Why? Is it plain naivete, as her devotees claim? Or is it the fat cheques (or other favours) that these individuals are willing to contribute to the Mother's mission?

We will discover Mother Teresa keeping company with several other frauds, crooks and exploiters as this little tale unfolds. At what point—her apologists might want to permit themselves this little tincture of skepticism—does such association cease to be coincidental?

Or to put it more simply - when do we start calling a spade a spade?

If we look at the title of this book, we may take it to be a tongue-in-cheek reference to a sexual position - but Hitch's mean humour goes much deeper. As the subtitle makes clear, Mother Teresa is a missionary bent on proselytisation. That is her aim in life - all else, the hospitals, the orphanages, the care for the destitute and dying - are only the tools of the trade.

According to the author, the myth of the saintly mother was created by Malcolm Muggeridge through a dubious "miracle" - and he also built up her reputation as a kind of angel patrolling the streets of a hellish Calcutta; and in the process of building her up, he trashed Calcutta. Muggeridge did such a good job of propaganda in his movie so that anyone who looks critically at Mother Teresa's reputation does so at his own

peril.

Ever since *Something Beautiful for God*, the critic of Mother Teresa, in small things as well as in great ones, has had to operate against an enormous weight of received opinion, a weight made no easier to shift by the fact that it is made up, quite literally, of illusion.

But according to Hitchens, "Mother Teresa has never pretended that her work is anything but a fundamentalist religious campaign." And he uses the remainder of this short book to expose her real agenda:

1. The conversion of as many people as possible to Catholicism.
2. A relentless campaign against abortion and contraception.

For this, she used all the tricks of the trade - and her proximity to powerful political figures and crooked capitalists helped her along. Hitch spends the remaining part of the book in detailing, with evidence, Mother Teresa's real mission and how she went about it. (And Pope John Paul II, who was beatifying and canonising with a sort of divine frenzy, couldn't wait to convert her into a saint.) It makes for fascinating reading.

There are enough documented examples in this book to leave any neutral person with no doubt about the Mother. The faithful will no doubt find loopholes in all of them: blind faith is like that. But that should not prevent those who think rationally from subjecting her myth to the harsh light of truth.

As Edward Gibbon observed about the modes of worship prevalent in the Roman world, they were "considered by the people as equally true, by the philosopher as equally false and by the magistrate as equally useful." Mother Teresa descends from each element in this grisly triptych. She has herself purposely blurred the supposed distinction between the sacred and the profane, to say nothing of the line that separates the sublime from the ridiculous. It is past time that she was subjected to the rational critique that she has evaded so arrogantly and for so long.

A short and pithy read for questing minds.
