

DIOCESAN NEWS

Mother Teresa no saint in eyes of critical writer

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — It's a rare event that can draw both Lambs of Christ and Hell's Angels, but then the man at the center of attention was — in his own words — criticizing a "sacred cow."

About 500 people crowded into the University of Rochester's Hubell Auditorium Nov. 7, to hear British-born journalist Christopher Hitchens offer his controversial views on the late Mother Teresa, founder of the Missionaries of Charity.

Prior to Hitchens' speech, about 60 protesters marched outside the auditorium, and recited the rosary, led by Father Norman U. Weslin, OS, founder of the pro-life activist group Lambs of Christ. The protesters also held signs that read "Christopher Hitchens: What Have You Done For The Poor?" and "U of R Stop Religious Bigotry."

Julie Ellender, a parishioner at Holy Trinity Church in Webster, was among the protesters who said they would not go in and listen to Hitchens.

"I don't think I want to waste my time," she said. "I don't think I want to give him any of my time. I'd rather be out here witnessing to Mother Teresa."

An international journalist, Hitchens authored a scathing critique of Mother Teresa, the 1995 book *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice*. The book summarized and detailed the claims Hitchens made in his 1994 BBC television documentary "Hell's Angel," which was shown prior to his speech.

The book and the documentary depicted Mother Teresa as a willing lackey of brutal dictators and predatory capitalists, and praising their "love for the poor" while tak-

ing money from such tyrants as the Duvaliers of Haiti and from such crooks as Charles H. Keating Jr., convicted savings and loan defrauder.

Hitchens also portrayed Mother Teresa as something of a Catholic extremist, equating abortion — which Hitchens agreed is the killing of a human being — with artificial birth control, which Hitchens sees as a moral method of population control.

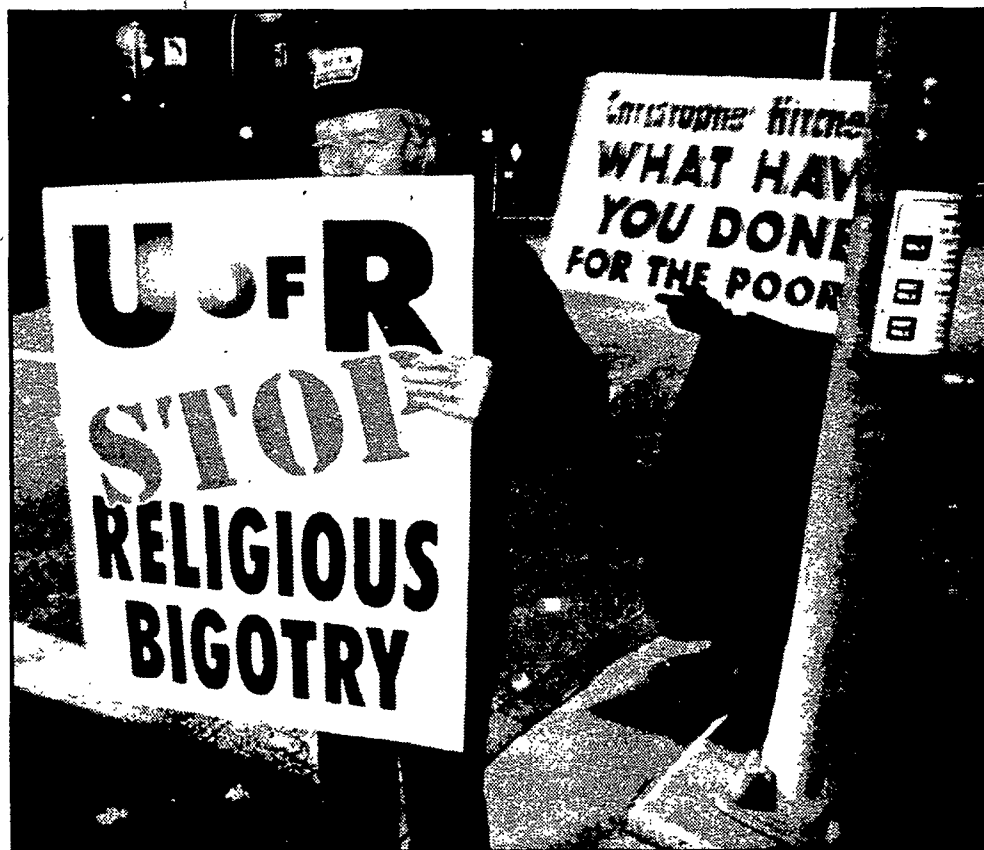
The book and video also quoted former volunteers with Mother Teresa's order and who criticized allegedly substandard conditions in her order's homes for the dying.

As the audience gathered in Hubell before Hitchens' appearance, Bob Moran, a member of the Rochester chapter of the Hell's Angels motorcycle club, explained why he and a handful of his compatriots were there. Hitchens' documentary "Hell's Angel," Moran said, constituted an infringement of the club's trademark.

"We're here because he's using our name, and he's not supposed to be," Moran said. "We have enough of a bad public image."

When asked about Mother Teresa, Moran said: "She's a hard-working lady and this guy's capitalizing on her fame."

Then, as the documentary "Hell's Angel" aired, shouts of "Liar!" and "Chauvinist!" were heard from the audience. "Hell's Angel" showed footage of Mother Teresa with such people as the Duvaliers and Keating, as well as a film of her laying a wreath at the grave of the late Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha, who outlawed religion in Mother Teresa's native country. Hitchens outlined what he saw as a pattern throughout Mother Teresa's life in which she overlooked the brutalities of the powerful in exchange for their money and



Greg Francis/Staff photographer

Bill Smith of Webster protests Christopher Hitchens' speech Nov. 7, at the Elmwood Avenue/Wilson Boulevard entrance to University of Rochester.

company.

"She may or may not have comforted the afflicted, but she certainly has not afflicted the comfortable," he said in the documentary.

The video received a round of applause from most members of the audience. When Hitchens took the podium, he answered several critical and complimentary questions from audience members who ranged from supporters of Mother Teresa to critics of her or the Catholic church.

In his remarks, Hitchens chastised the press for never critically examining Mother Teresa while she was alive, allowing her to become a mythical saintly celebrity despite what he saw as her questionable activities. He added that people of faith — rather than an atheist like himself — should have been the first to examine Mother Teresa's status as an "icon."

"Shame on those of you who take your faith seriously," he said in a joking tone.

One audience member stood up and said he had worked with Mother Teresa for three years, and disagreed that her order's dying patients received inadequate care.

"When they die, they die with a smile, every single one of them," the man said. "You tell me if you can do better."

Hitchens acknowledged that many people who worked with Mother Teresa found it a positive experience. Indeed, he even called Mother Teresa "sincere" in her

work, though it was work he considered ultimately useless to the poor.

For an informed rebuttal to Hitchens' views, the *Catholic Courier* contacted Eileen Egan of New York City on Nov. 10. Egan is a former Catholic Relief Services staff member who had worked with Mother Teresa since 1955. She is also the author of the 1985 book *Such a Vision of the Street: Mother Teresa — The Spirit and the Work*.

Egan agreed that Mother Teresa had her flaws, and made mistakes in publicly praising such people as the Duvaliers and Keating. However, she noted that such mistakes paled in comparison to the enormous amount of good she did for the poor. Essentially, she said Hitchens was making immoral mountains out of Mother Teresa's ethical molehills, when, in fact, she was simply a selfless woman who did her best to serve people others neglected.

Egan acknowledged that Mother Teresa's critics — including a Los Angeles district attorney who worked on the Keating case — wanted her to give back money Keating gave her. Yet, such a request amounted to double standard for Mother Teresa, Egan said.

"There's a lot of people who have gotten grants for their work from people who were convicted later on," Egan said. "Were any of them asked to give it back? I doubt it."

Rally attracts out-of-towners

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — For Ithaca resident Helen Schultz, making a two-hour drive to speak out against abortion is time well spent.

"To me, it's one of the most important things. It's so important, it doesn't feel like a terrible sacrifice," Schultz commented.

Schultz, Betty Leonardo and Joseph Benedict traveled to downtown Rochester Nov. 8, to take part in a pro-life march and demonstration organized by the Lambs of Christ. All three are parishioners at Immaculate Conception Church in Ithaca.

Smith Chamberlain, a parishioner at St. Mary's Church in Auburn, is another activist who travels long distances to defend life. In addition to the Rochester protests, Chamberlain said, he also protests regularly in Syracuse, Utica and Watertown.

"I'm full-time pro-life," Chamberlain said Nov. 8 as he held a sign stating "A Baby Is A Gift from God" near Planned Parenthood's offices on University Avenue.

The Rochester march began at St. Joseph's Park and proceeded four-tenths of a mile to the Planned Parenthood facility. Approximately 75 people took part in the event, which included rosary recitation on the sidewalk in front of Planned Parenthood. Many demonstrators also shouted to Planned Parenthood clients as they entered and exited the parking lot, imploring them to opt against having abortions. The event concluded with a 12:10 p.m. Mass at Our Lady of Victory Church.

The protest was led by Father Norman U. Weslin, OS, founder of the Lambs of Christ pro-life movement. Father Weslin ended a 120-day jail sentence last month for blocking the entrance of Planned Parenthood during a December 1996 protest.

Chamberlain, also, was among the 11 people convicted in June for their role in that demonstration. He was ordered to perform 120 hours of community service.

Ithaca's Benedict said he is inspired by Father Weslin's leadership. The megaphone-wielding priest voiced his intention to "close down this Auschwitz" while leading rosary recitation outside Planned Parenthood Nov. 8.

"He tells it like it is," Benedict remarked. He added that he, Schultz and Leonardo plan to return to Rochester for a similar pro-life demonstration Dec. 13.

Schultz said she is planning bus excursions so that more Southern Tier people will attend the Rochester protests. In addition, she hopes that Father Weslin will come to Tompkins County to rejuvenate protests at the Ithaca Planned Parenthood offices. Schultz and Leonardo said they demonstrated regularly there until the protests died out about two years ago.

"You have to have a leader," Leonardo said.

Currently, Schultz said, approximately 20 people recite a rosary for life after daily Mass at Immaculate Conception Church. In addition, the Ithaca Knights of Columbus erected a monument to the unborn this past May near the entrance of Immaculate Conception School.

However, Schultz said, the defense of life must extend beyond such efforts.

"We've been praying in the church; now we're trying to get people out in the streets," Schultz said.

Chamberlain, also, believes a hands-on approach is imperative. Over his 15 years of demonstrating, he said, aggressive pro-life tactics have "put pressure on abortionists to be more ethical in their approach" and "gotten a lot of women to change their minds" about having abortions.

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