

Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons
<http://dspace.flinders.edu.au/dspace/>
This is the author's radio script of this article.

Hope Endures. Colette Livermore. Heinemann, 2008.

Reviewed by Gillian Dooley for Writers Radio, Radio Adelaide, recorded 29

November 2008

Colette Livermore abandoned her prospects of career in medicine to join the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa's religious order, at the age of eighteen. Seduced by the documentary *Something Beautiful for God*, Livermore left her family and friends to take the fourfold vows of poverty, chastity, humility and obedience.

Mother Teresa is such a byword for saintliness that it comes as a bit of a shock to hear the insider's version in Livermore's book, *Hope Endures*. She found herself in a situation where initiative was punished, intelligence was derided, and even saving lives could be punished if it involved a trivial breach of the regulations. The rule of obedience was strictly enforced: the superior had authority and if she decided to cook elaborate meals rather than minister to the sick, those under her had no right to challenge her decision. This had the inevitable consequence of fostering arrogance among the superiors.

Humility was used to justify ignorance. When Livermore questioned their lack of basic medical training in running a hospital in Manila, her superior replied, 'do you want a hospital taken over by the clever ones of this world, where love and care are discarded?' Even the vow of poverty was perverted: the order had money, 'but in the name of poverty we didn't want to use it' to buy essential medical and educational supplies for their work. It is possible to see this kind of attitude as a perverse kind of pride, rather than genuine humility.

After eleven years of soul-searching and frustration, Livermore was finally allowed to quit the order, though Mother Teresa did her best to talk her out of leaving.

She was able to do medicine and has since worked as a GP in the Northern Territory and East Timor. Her Catholic faith has lapsed and she is now an agnostic, but she retains her passion for service. Now, however, she is free to use her considerable intelligence to help people effectively.

Livermore still respects Mother Teresa's memory – she went to Rome to witness her beatification in 2003, and she felt vindicated when some of Teresa's private correspondence, published after her death, showed that she too had had doubts about her faith. But ultimately she had to reject the fatal contradictions she saw in her life as a member of the order, and by writing this book she has helped demystify one of the twentieth century's great legends.

Livermore has not lost her ideals, and she retains a genuine humility, one which doesn't deny her capacity for meaningful service. *Hope Endures* is passionate and intelligent and very moving.