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A loving, hard-working, godly couple has long been denied a family of their own. Finally, the wife makes a deal with God: if he blesses her with a child, she will dedicate that child to God's service. The result of that prayer was the birth of an influential -- some say prophetic -- voice. Surprisingly, this is not the biblical story of Samuel but the account of Stanley Hauerwas, one of today's leading theologians in the church and the academy. The story of Hauerwas's journey into Christian discipleship is captivating and inspiring. With genuine humility, he describes his intellectual struggles with faith, how he has dealt with the complex reality of marriage to a mentally ill partner, and the gift of friendships that have influenced his character. Throughout the narrative shines Hauerwas's conviction that the tale of his life is worth telling only because of the greater Christian story providing foundation and direction for his own.

Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir Details

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From Reader Review Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir for online ebook

Jonathan Platter says

This book has a large number of positive reviews, and my own ramblings will hardly contribute much. I simply want to add that though the writing may be "dry" for a memoir (a quality which unfortunately leads one reviewer to give a largely negative review) it is a fairly lively book of theology. And though the genre is "memoir", the subject is theology.

In an interview on youtube, Hauerwas even states that he wanted to subtitle the book "a theological memoir" but had to change it for the publisher so that it had a broader appeal. This book should be read as a work of theology, and in this vein it has two virtues:

1) It can serve as an excellent introduction to Hauerwas' theology. This is a great service on its own, considering the massive quantity of books he has written, some of which are fairly technical. For those who are unfamiliar with how Hauerwas thinks and why it is important, this book can act as a primer. Because it is also a "memoir" it is less dry, as theology goes.

2) It is an exemplar of reflecting theologically on one's own life. Hauerwas admits his book is not properly written in the "confessional" mode, like St. Augustine's *Confessions*, but it comes close! Though not explicitly written as a prayer, the book frames his self understanding in the context of the story of Christ and his Church. Consequently, Hauerwas shows what it might look like to learn to tell one's own story in a truly Christian mode.

Adam Shields says

Short Review: I have been on a memoir kick lately. I have been actively seeking out memoirs of elder christians to glean wisdom. I have been wanting to read more Hauerwas for a while and so I picked this up. It makes me want to read more of Hauerwas' work, so that clearly did some of its job.

He is a fascinating character. He does not like being boxed in to a position, and is outside of many traditional boxes.

We do need more memoir like this, especially from people like Hauerwas that have not had either traditional or easy lives.

my full review is on my blog at <http://bookwi.se/hannahs-child/>

Neil Lettinga says

Stanley Hauerwas's *Hannah's Child* is Hauerwas' memoir. Hauerwas tells a good story of a theologian who doesn't really come to faith until well after he's earned his PhD and has been teaching a writing for a while. He also faces up to some very difficult issues in his life, including marriage to a woman with bipolar disorder

and the disintegration of that marriage. I found myself reading chunks of it aloud to my wife through the first two thirds of the book. Once he finds happiness in a second marriage and his career really stabilizes, Hauerwas kind of loses interest in the memoir, so the last third is fairly dull reading. Hauerwas describes himself as an essayist, who struggles writing books. That's probably pretty accurate, and the essays that are the early chapters are well worth the price of the book. The last chapters just didn't make very good essays.

Barbara P says

After hearing Stanley Hauerwas speak at a conference sponsored by Fuller Seminary in Pasadena a couple of weeks ago I bought his book, *Hannah's Child*. Hauerwas was married to Ann, for 24 years, who lived with Bi-Polar illness. Hauerwas is a theologian who teaches at Duke University and is a noted scholar. *Hannah's Child* is the memoirs of Hauerwas that include his life with Ann, the family burden of mental illness and his efforts to try and make some theological sense out of mental illness. The memoirs address many other parts of his life's journey and is beautifully written with zest, humor, sadness, struggle and Christian centered. Hauerwas was a faithful husband who tried to bring love and support to Ann even when most of her manic and depressed episodes were aimed at Stanley. As a Christian Hauerwas has no simple answers to the sorrow and heartache of mental illness except to return to Christian 101: be faithful to those given to you to love, find support for yourself, share your burdens, live to your fullest in the midst of the struggle and on and on. And most of all his belief that God was and is with Anne. She died in her late 50's of congestive heart failure. In the book he describes his mourning for Anne when she was alive and alone and when she was dead. He also addressed the impact Anne's illness had on Adam, their son. I could resonate with a particular statement: "I never felt sorry for myself. I thought that what Anne, Adam, and I were going through was hard. But I also thought that the only thing to do was to keep going. I had been given a job to do - I was a theologian. As a mother to Lynda I was touched by another statement: My best advice for those who find that they must learn to live with someone who is seriously mentally ill is that their first duty is to survive. If you do not survive, no one will survive. Trying to survive is not selfish. You must strive to survive if you are to sustain any hope that life can go on. It was the anger, not the illness, at least insofar as those can be distinguished, that finally exhausted me.

Cathy says

This was a good book--one that I might have enjoyed better if I were a theologian. Hauerwas's references to the Nieburhs (Richard and Reinhold), Barth, Yoder and other theologians were esoteric and sent me out of his book to cross-reference them. This made it difficult and time-consuming for me to thoroughly enjoy this memoir-ish tome. I would imagine that my husband, a United Methodist clergyman, would really enjoy reading this book. It is not a book that I would imagine most mainstream readers would or could finish. My recommendation to those who know Hauerwas is hearty. My recommendation to those who are unfamiliar with him would be to skip this book.

Nathan says

Stanley Hauerwas - the blue-collar, cursing theologian - is a beast. I mean this not in the British sense (though he can be that sort of beast if you are on the opposite side of a theological debate with him), but in that he devours books, works with dizzying rapidity, and writes more than most people read.

Yet the "vitae" within his "curriculum vitae" is equally interesting. His life has been a long struggle to understand the God of the Bible within the context of being an apprentice bricklayer, a student, a teacher, a father, and a husband to a mentally ill wife. His struggle to live with his wife forms the main conflict of his story - how do you love someone who cannot receive your love; how do you live with someone so delusional she might kill you in your sleep? For twenty five years, Hauerwas dealt with this conflict as he continued to publish and dedicate his works to a wife who gradually hated him more and more.

During most of his life, Hauerwas seems to have been a lukewarm Christian by his own estimation. He never could pray - until he began to write prayers to read before class at the end of his career. He also seems to have had a meager diet of Scripture.

How does such a preeminent theologian scrape by with such a limited engagement with the discipline of prayer and reading Scripture? By his own admonition, he wasn't even sure he was a Christian when he began teaching. But Hauerwas' story isn't about his own crappy spirituality, but about how the Triune God shaped and molded him over the years until he finally become a Christian - one who could respond prophetically to 9/11, who could write a heartfelt eulogy for his beloved father, or who could endure so much abuse from his wife without returning it. Despite his unspiritual disposition, Hauerwas was formed by a Master Craftsman and built up like well-layed brick house.

Another big theme in Hauerwas' story is the way in which friendship sustained him. Influenced by Aristotle and Aquinas, Stanley sees friendship as a virtue - something that we work at and is formed little by little over time. It is the iron that sharpens our own iron.

Of course, Hauerwas' wit and sardonic humor come through often in this memoir. For instance, commenting on what it is like to teach at a small liberal arts college, he blurted out in a staff meeting that "our task is to give parents the impression that by sending their daughters to Augustana [the college he was at] they would not lose the virginity they had already lost in high school." Ouch! Yet I can guarantee he was naming more truth than the school's admission brochure. Ultimately, for those trying to use Christianity to insulate themselves from the world, he would always quickly point out that the world is present in the church too.

Hauerwas' life is marked by erudition, but at the end of the day it's his prophetic character and ability to name (as he puts it) "bullshit in the church" that marks him as an important character in theology. At the end of his life, Hauerwas did live into his mother's prayer that he would be dedicated to the church; he is Hannah's child - a Samuel for yet another wayward generation.

Drew says

Splendid book. Hauerwas is a theologian on the faculty of Duke Divinity School. Texas boy--graduated from Southwestern in Georgetown, TX. His father was a brick layer and so was he. Very powerful voice.

Only book I have ever written quotes from as I read it. Here are some of the passages that caught my attention--

"I have, moreover, tried to live a life I hope is unintelligible if the God we Christians worship does not exist."

"The first task of the church is not to make the world more just but to make the world the world."

"to be a Christian meant that you could never protect yourself from the truth."

"Jesus does not tell us that we should try to be poor in spirit, or meek, or peacemakers. He simply says that many who are called into his kingdom will find themselves so constituted."

"We are complex creatures constituted by contradictions we refuse to acknowledge."

"But if God is the God of Jesus Christ, then God does not need our protection. What God demands is not protection, but truth."

"the problem with most pastors and theologians was that the way they went about their business did not require the existence of God."

"Change, if it is significant, takes time. At least change takes time if you remember that finally any change that is accomplished nonviolently comes about through persuasion."

Lyndon says

I never imagined Hauerwas would write a memoir. I have no reason for thinking this other than I thought he already *appeared* in all his writings. At least, I thought he appeared. "Stanley Hauerwas" requires describing besides the many tales told by his students or the persona developed by his readers and interlocutors. This book is such a description. Worthwhile in how Stanley places himself in the landscape of Texas, Yale, South Bend and Duke, he provides an account of his life as understood through friendship, suffering and doubt. This is not a book about "Stanley Hauerwas". It is a personal tale of how the Christian life takes a life lived. Who we meet is someone who happens to be called Stanley Hauerwas, and by no fault of his own, is *in via* like the rest of us who try to worship God faithfully and truthfully.

Jon Beadle says

What a beautiful book. It's truly a page-turner. I really give it 3.5 stars. For someone who has not read any of his other work, this would not be an enjoyable read. Since I have read a few of his books, finding myself caught up in his sharp wit and southern charm, I quite enjoyed the memoir.

In an odd way, reading his journey through books and calling helped me clarify some of my own journey, as well as create a strong desire to read Aquinas. We'll see.

Hannah Notess says

I will admit that some of the more intricate theological parts of this book ("I used so-and-so's argument to prove such-and-such in response to so-and-so") were way over my head since I wasn't familiar with the discussions.

But this book answers a big question I always bring to any theology work: How does this person connect their life and their ideas? Where do these ideas come from? That's why I often struggle to read theology and philosophy in the first place - it often seems so divorced from stories and human beings who actually live in the world and have bodies.

I think I will be more interested in reading Hauerwas' theology now that I have a sense of him as a person.

Judith says

Excellent book, the honesty, but lack of self pity, was very moving. It also communicated a real excitement about theology and why it is so important. Made me want to re-read what I have read of Hauerwas and read more that he has written.

Jim says

I was not prepared to love this book as much as I did. Wow. What an engaging story. Full of great theological observations, reflections on the nature and meaning of life and death (and how it all relates to a commitment towards non-violence), and profound recollections on the nature of family, friendship, and the church.

Chris Schutte says

A wonderful reflection on Christian growth and faithfulness from one of our most provocative theologians. He is also very humorous - I grinned and chuckled quite a bit, and even laughed out loud several times - not typical responses to theological writing . . .

Dwight Davis says

A beautiful and transparent memoir. Just what I needed right now.

James says

One of the things that mark's me out as abnormal is that I have been eagerly awaiting the publication of one of my favorite theologians memoirs for the past year. This book will likely not seen as his most important book (that would be the Peacable Kingdom), his most popular book (that would be Resident Aliens), but I found it refreshing to hear Hauerwas in his own words share some of his journey as a theologian and revealing the soil that his ideas came to fruition.

Tim says

Hauerwas's memoir, is really that of an extrovert, relating the books and especially the people that formed his thoughts and life. It was a little dry at times in its detailings and his recounting of his life with his mentally ill wife was horrific, but mostly it is a celebration of friendship and an invitation to the church to ignore fads, power, and the desire for control and live in the freedom and uncertainty of Jesus. His pacifism

and refusal to bow to nationalistic or capitalistic distortions of ethics and faith are so necessary for the American church. I am proud to say that Hauerwas has sworn at me personally (when I noted I was a historian), but have not allowed his personal charm to overwhelm my thought processes. I appreciate the centrality of the church to his thought and the general humor and humility of his writing. I also appreciate his inability to withhold comment on administrative yahoos in the university or church leaders with horrible metrics of success. It all makes me want to go back to the Hauerwas I have read and not yet read.

Brandon G. Smith says

The spiritual memoir is probably my favorite genre of book. This is once again proven by Hannah's Child. One of my favorite theologian's, Stanley Hauerwas comes thru on telling his story with the wit, wisdom, and yes, profanity that you would expect of him. The painful tales of living with his first wife's horrible mental illness, to the finding of true love in his second wife, all while going on one theological adventure after another is enough to keep any theologically minded reader engaged.

Maureen says

This is the story of a brick layer's son who grows up to be Time magazine's "best theologian in America." He loved teaching and his greatest love is his students. The book is written in the Augustinian tradition of Confessions. Very interesting life story.

Rod Buchanan says

In reading Hauerwas' books I wanted to know more about him. And get to know him I did. He holds nothing back and in his earthy style lets you in on his journey. Some may get bogged down with names and infighting of faculty at places they either don't know or care about, but for those somewhat aware of theological/academic figures it holds some interest. Some of these tales drag on a bit. Hauerwas is nothing if not honest, and his life is very interesting. As a side note, I thought it was interesting that he decries materialism while talking of his rather large collection of expensive art.

Dave Fagg says

For those who love the work of Stanley Hauerwas, you will love this book. He combines personal narrative with reflections on friendship, God, church, theological education, all of which are suffused with his characteristic humour, lack of bullshit, and straight out refusal to use contractions (e.g. don't, wasn't, wouldn't etc).

The most powerful part of this book is the inclusion of details of his life married to a woman who experienced regular psychotic episodes, and the pain he and his son experienced because of that.

For those who haven't heard of him before, it's still worth reading for its engaging insights into the task of a theologian.

