

## **New Memoir by Stanley Hauerwas Tells How Texas Bricklayer's Son Became One of America's Most Provocative Theologians**

Stanley Hauerwas, named “the best theologian in America” by *Time* magazine, tells the story of how a bricklayer’s son from Texas became one of America’s most influential religion scholars, a renowned “theological provocateur,” and a committed pacifist in his new book, *Hannah’s Child: A Theologian’s Memoir* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., \$24.99 hardcover, May 2010).

Hauerwas grew up in Pleasant Grove, Texas, where he learned his father’s trade as a bricklayer. Encouraged by his parents to go to college and seminary, he discovered a love of theology that has possessed him ever since. It also fulfilled the dream of his mother, who like the biblical Hannah, mother of Samuel, had prayed for a child and promised to dedicate him to the service of God.

His working-class roots have shaped his life and work, including a gift for plain speech and plain thinking. “If the work I have done in theology is of any use, it is because of what I learned on the job, that is, you can lay only one brick at a time,” he says.

Hauerwas cannot tell his story without describing the hell of living with his mentally ill first wife, Anne, for twenty-four years, and raising his son, Adam, in such difficult circumstances. “Although it is true that I got through the years with Anne in part because of my boundless energy and stubbornness, I would not have survived if I had not had friends praying for me. I knew God was with me because I knew I had friends all over the world praying for Adam and me,” he says.

Friendship has been such an important and sustaining force in Hauerwas’s life, that what it means to be a Christian and to be a friend has become forever entangled for him. Throughout the book he acknowledges the many friends, teachers, colleagues, and students who have influenced his thought and enhanced his life.

Hauerwas trained to be a theologian at Yale Divinity School, taught at Augustana College in Rock Island, IL, and then spent fourteen years at the University of Notre Dame, where he was one of the first Protestants to teach theology. He is currently Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke University, where he has taught for more than twenty-five years, and where he met Paula, who would become his wife.

While at Notre Dame, Hauerwas worked alongside John Howard Yoder, who was instrumental in his becoming a pacifist: “I am a pacifist because John Howard Yoder convinced me that nonviolence and Christianity are inseparable.” It was also at Notre Dame that Hauerwas “began the slow, agonizing, and happy process that has made me a Christian,” he says.

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As a theologian, Hauerwas is known for an emphasis on the centrality of the church and for criticizing “the accommodated character of the church to the American project.” He is a prolific and provocative writer whose work has been known to ignite firestorms. He has drawn on what he calls “a strange brew of Catholic and Anabaptist resources” to articulate an understanding of what it means to be Christian. He represents “a wholly different Christian” that is “in continuity with Christianity past and present found in the everyday lives of Christian people.” He has articulated “a Christianity that many people, including me, find compelling and that some, including me, find frightening.”

*Time* magazine named Hauerwas “America’s best theologian” in their September 10, 2001 issue. Because of his commitment to nonviolence, he spoke out against the war that followed 9/11, refusing to accept the presumption that patriotism is a natural loyalty. His position on the war cost him some longtime friendships, including with theologian Jean Bethke Elshtain, who had written the *Time* magazine profile of him.

Hauerwas the bricklayer’s son has come a long way from Pleasant Grove, Texas. He ends his memoir musing gratefully on his life: “I simply cannot get over what a surprising and wonderful life God has given me,” he says. Even as he turns seventy this year, a theologian for forty years, he has never got used to being a Christian. It’s the most surprising thing he’s learned: “I am a Christian. How interesting.”

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**About the Author**

Stanley Hauerwas is Gilbert T. Rowe Professor of Theological Ethics at Duke University. Among his many other books are *Resident Aliens*, *A Community of Character*, *Living Gently in a Violent World*, and *A Cross-Shattered Church*. He lives in Durham North Carolina with his wife, Paula.

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**by Stanley Hauerwas**

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