

Review of "Faithfulness and fortitude: in conversation with the theological ethics of Stanley Hauerwas" edited by Mark Thiessen Nation and Samuel Wells. *Anvil* 20 (2):151-2.

Faithfulness and Fortitude:

Eds Mark Thiessen Nation & Samuel Wells

T&T Clark, 2000, 344pp

£16.99

Stanley Hauerwas is indisputably among the most significant, provocative and stimulating of writers in the field of Christian ethics. This volume, produced to mark his 60th birthday and his giving of the distinguished Gifford lectures, comprises largely sympathetic engagements with his work by writers from the United Kingdom. It is a must-buy for those already interested in Hauerwas work but many others will discover parts of it of great value.

The volume is helpfully introduced by Sam Wells, himself author of the best study of Hauerwas' work (*Transforming Fate into Destiny*), and followed by his co-editor's brief and vivid portrayal of Hauerwas. This provides those who only know Hauerwas through his writings with a helpful short biography and personal profile.

In the book's first part, Hauerwas' approach is applied to four different areas.

Unfortunately the first of these makes no reference to Hauerwas. Although marginally more readable than anything else I have read by John Milbank, this important critical study of the development of the academy and the place of theology within it is probably not the best place for a general reader to begin! Better to open with Stephen Sykes' study of spirituality and mental sickness which will prove of great value to Christians involved in health care and to any eager to think through the strange but popular catch-all category of 'spirituality'. The two editors then provide more personal reflections, Nation on how he became a pacifist because of the life and worship of his (non-pacifist) church and Wells in a reflection on his parish experience in the context of urban deprivation and government renewal programs which provides much material for all parish priests thinking about church and community.

The next three essays focus on a more academic assessment of Hauerwas' work beginning with Nigel Biggar's brilliant discussion in response to the many who unhelpfully dismiss Hauerwas as being sectarian. Following Linda Woodhead's critique of Hauerwas' blindspot in relation to issues of gender this section closes with a powerful and thought-provoking reflection by Duncan Forrester on the existence of a church just outside Dachau's concentration camp. In the light of Todorov's study of the moral life in the camps and the apparent failure of this local congregation to challenge what was happening, he pointedly asks whether Hauerwas' account of the relationship between church and world sometimes fails to face such harsh realities and the church's failure to be the church.

The final section enables four writers to enter into conversation with Hauerwas' work. Unfortunately, with the exception of the interesting and innovative material in Anne Loades' 'feminist and theological reflections' on abortion, these are perhaps likely to be of less interest to a non-academic readership. Both Colin Gunton's trinitarian framework for thinking about the church as a school of virtue and Gerard Loughlin's intriguing discussion of 'seeing' in relation to Plato's cave, the pagan cults, contemporary cinema, and the church are stimulating but rather too abstract while the final piece by Enda McDonagh is a more autobiographical reflection discussing the inter-relationship of the

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wisdom, prophetic and priestly callings in the light of his experiences in Ireland and Africa.

The book closes with a classic Hauerwas response – it opens ‘Jesus, I must be dead’ – to the articles. Perhaps most helpfully this also provides his own reflections on his work’s rationale and goals and highlights his debt to John Howard Yoder.

As with any edited volume of essays this is a mixed bag which will satisfy some audiences more than others but no thinking Christian will go away unchanged by reading it.

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