



Absolute Truths

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It is 1965, and Charles Ashworth has attained the plum position of bishop of Starbridge, an honor that keeps him in a heady whirl of activity that would exhaust the most seasoned corporate executive. With the invaluable support of his minions and his attractive, unsinkable wife, Ashworth stands against the amorality and decadence of the age—"Anti-Sex Ashworth." He slays his opponents by being a tough, efficient, confident churchman, the torments of his past long since dead and buried.

And then the unexpected, the unthinkable, strikes.

Suddenly Ashworth finds himself staring into the chasm of all the lies hes been telling himself for years: about his marriage, his children, even his views on the Church. And as he suspects his old nemesis and dean, Neville Aysgarth, of drinking too much, of financial chicanery, of—God forbid—having an affair, Ashworth discovers to his horror that he is tempted to commit the very acts that he has so publicly denounced....

Absolute Truths Details

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From Reader Review Absolute Truths for online ebook

Patty Leunig says

Reading this book reminded me of a miniseries on Masterpiece Theater. This story evolves around the Church of England. Like a miniseries it has a slow start as the author introduces the players and past wrongs. Everyone carries their own baggage from childhood they spend a lifetime trying to fix! Forgiveness heals all.

Craig says

I read this and the other Starbridge series novels in Seminary in the '90s. They are great reads- exciting, deep characters, great plots. Through the characters of this and the other novels in the series three streams of 20th Century Anglican theology are explored, with many analogues to contemporary evangelical theology (my home). I found myself more in awe of the way God works in and through us in spite of our limitations and failings, and more in love with Jesus for the way he rescues people from the damage caused by others and their own folly. Though it is very different in tone and content from C.S. Lewis' fiction, it seems to me to have the same devotional quality. I hope to reread them soon.

Adam Shields says

Short Review: This is my second reading of Absolute Truths. It is the final and best of this excellent series. The series as a whole is about a group of Church of England clergy in the mid 20th century. The focus of this book is what it means when Romans says 'all things work together for good for those that love the Lord.' Charles Ashworth (now Bishop of Starbridge) has his third life crisis.

This is not traditional Christian fiction, I don't think US evangelical publishers would publish the series. But this is what Christian fiction should be, a real reflection of life, theologically rich, but not false perfection.

My full review is on my blog at <http://bookwi.se/absolute-truths-by-s...>

Rhona Arthur says

Well, that's the end of the first 6 books. I feel quite sad, like saying goodbye to friends; however, I know there's the next trilogy sitting at home waiting for me. This final book is a weighty time, not just the pages and scholarly mixture of psychology and theology but the sheer opportunity for contemplation. Each section and chapter has at least three quotes to take through the day to mull over. You can read this book and worry about the Church of England's liberal, conservative and anglo catholic factions, you can enjoy the family saga or you can use it to examine your own character and challenge how you see the world.

Karen says

This is the 6th and final book in the "Church of England" series. In this volume, we return to the original character towards the latter part of his life. It's always interesting to me that no matter how much you think you know, as life goes on, when you look back you realise you knew very little. The powerful message of forgiveness and redemption presented here is very comforting.

Here are some favorite quotes:

Charles Ashworth

"I must make it clear--if indeed it is not already obvious--that I am not a great spiritual athlete and in no way superior to the uneducated person who knows nothing of Platonic forms and just gets on with the job of praying without going through any intellectual hoops. In fact I envy such a person. My busy over-educated brain is a positive hindrance to prayer, and far too often my thoughts speed off on tangents which are intellectually fascinating but quite irrelevant to the task of praying in an acceptable manner."

Lewis Hall

"Oh, forget all about that bishop business for five minutes," said Hall crossly. "Ditch it along with the stiff upper lip, why not, and stop worrying about what I'd think of you because just at this moment I don't care who you are, I wouldn't even care if you were the Pope or Marilyn Monroe, all I care about is helping you bash your way out of this bugger-awful corner you're in."

Jonathan Darrow

At last when we were both utterly silent and utterly still he said: "I have but one comment to make on your behavior and that's this: it all seems a very long way from Jesus of Nazareth." And turning his back on us abruptly, he stalked away into his kitchen.

Neville "Stephen" Aysgarth

"All that matters," said Aysgarth firmly, "is that at the end of the day--and I'm glad to tell you the sun's just about to set on my activities--the accounts will be straight as a die and we'll all live happily ever after. I've just been living a little riskily for some months, that's all."

Carmello says

Surprised me with how looking into the life of a pastor struggling with his faith could be so compelling. Plot is not so focused, but the day-in-day-out is fascinating and heartbreaking.

Tom says

I could have rated this as high as 4 stars if it had been 200 pages, but 600+ was bloating and exhausting. I plodded on because it is required for a spiritual direction practicum and I was determined to find out why. There is some good stuff here about forgiveness and the art of spiritual direction, so I forgive the teacher so long as he repents and finds shorter works. And that is the absolute truth.

Ann Webb says

My word, Susan Howatch can be verbose! This is my fifth foray into the Church of England series and my second helping of Charles Ashworth's story. While Howatch writes very well and knows her theology, I found myself tiring of the same psychological dilemma of her main characters. They are always dealing with father issues in the most Freudian ways. And although she writes from one female's viewpoint in the previous novel; Venetia Flaxton, we are treated only to the psychological minds of men. We get a hint that Venetia is intellectual but a love affair with the archdeacon promptly turns her to jelly. In this novel, we come full circle to Charles Ashworth, who made his appearance in her first novel in the series "Glittering Images." I can say that if you've read one Church of England book you've read them all. Stick to her excellent novels about family dynasties: Penmarric and Cashelmarra.

Adam Shields says

Short review: In a series that I really, really liked, this is the the best book. It is not often that the last book in a series is the best, but in this case it is. Unfortunately you cannot read the last book as a stand alone novel and get the entire weight of the book. You can read it as a stand alone book. But because these books are all narrated by a single character, you will not get the understanding of the other characters that are detailed in the prior books.

In this book Charles Ashworth, the original protagonist at the beginning of the series, takes up his life in the 1960s. He is now Bishop of Starbridge. His two boys are now on their own. He and his wife Lyle get along better than in most of their marriage (and they realize that having an empty nest is a good thing.) On the negative side, Neville (enemy would be too strong, but they do not get along) is the Dean of the Cathedral and somewhat independent of his authority. His spiritual director and friend is aging and probably near death. It is at this point that his third major life crisis occurs and he is totally unprepared to deal with it.

I like Charles much more in this book than the first. I understand his lostness here more than in the first book. It is not a break with reality as much as a crisis of faith. Not so much in God, but in the way he understands God and Charles' own role in life.

Excellent book

My full review is on my blog at <http://bookwi.se/absolute-truths-by-s...>

Richard Schwindt says

When we encounter Charles Ashworth at mid life; successful, affluent, esteemed; a cornerstone of church morality with a sexy wife we kind of know it's all going to come tumbling down. I have often asked myself why Howatch's stories grab me the way they do, they have formulaic moments (it's not good to be a wife in this series), hilariously non erotic sex and an awful lot of theology. If you think that is a pain, you are wrong. They are completely gripping, loads of fun and full of characters you want to hang out with. Ashworth should come across as a bit of a prig but like all of Howatch's characters we are aware that underneath his

human flaws lies a good and devout man. She can see the humanity and divine in the most troubled of her churchmen. There isn't a bad book in this series.

Jep says

I've typically rated her novels with 3 stars as excellent fictional stories. However, the entire series is utterly engaging, relatable, emotive, and redemptive. I love the people she created. It makes me wonder about her life and experiences...

Jan says

This is the last of the 6 book series (Starbridge, #6). I was fascinated by this series, although I enjoyed some of the books more than others. I believe my favorites were the first, second, and 6th. Actually, I especially enjoyed the 6th, and didn't want it to end.

Susan Howatch is an exceptional writer. This series is about the Church of England in the 20th Century. I learned a great deal about the Church of England: its workings and organization. In 5 or ten years I may want to read the whole series again. I'd had many questions, which arose from reading English novels. This series answered most (but not all) questions I had, and was also extremely entertaining. Very good characterizations: I felt I know each of these characters personally. Thanks to my cousin, Les, for first mentioning book number 1, and my cousin, Grace, for recommending the whole series.

Michael says

Looking back, this was one of the most engaging books I read in the last year. It is hard to say, but probably what I enjoyed about it most was that the main characters were strong, complex, intelligent, and flawed. Despite the fact that their beliefs and lifestyles were very different from my own, I was still able to empathize with their predicaments, decisions, and the emotional fallout from the various plot developments.

Another reason that I found the book compelling was the philosophical and theological discussion regarding the conservative, liberal, and charismatic elements of the Anglican church in 20th century England. While I am an atheist myself, I was raised by a conservative Episcopalian father and a faithful Catholic mother, and I still find the points of view that separate different wings of the Christian community quite interesting.

Somewhat surprisingly, I found myself strongly empathizing with the main character, Charles Ashworth, despite the fact that he is a conservative Anglican Bishop. Probably because he consistently seeks to challenge and better understand his beliefs and opinions, and that he is able to evolve them over the course of the book, despite a number of non-trivial setbacks. In addition, many of the family and career issues that he faces are universal enough that even an individual like myself in a completely different time and environment can relate.

While it does not push any literary boundaries, the novel does tackle emotional, psychological, and philosophical issues, develops a dramatic narrative with quick pacing, and presents everything in an intelligent and articulate way.

Jeanette says

This very busy book is the sixth and concluding book of the Starbridge series. It is narrated by Charles Ashworth, Bishop of the Starbridge. By this time in the series all the characters have become real people to me and all the events have actually happened. I am very involved.

Events almost happen faster than I the reader can absorb them. Lyle, the much loved but somewhat standoffish wife of Charles dies and when her journal comes to light Charles discovers that she had a much richer inner spiritual life than he had ever imagined. Added to his almost overwhelming grief Charles also has to contend with the insecurity of his oldest son, the rebelliousness of the younger son, a cathedral that is sending out bad vibes, the suspicion that it's Dean, Neville Aysgarth, is playing fast and loose with the cathedral's assets, an apparent ghost who has recently taken up residence in the cathedral, a controversial divorced priest who wants to set up a Healing Center in the diocese, a pushy archdeacon, and another priest who has been collecting pornography.

Jon once again rides to the rescue in spite of now being 88 years old and manages to pick up Neville and set him back on his feet spiritually, and helps he and Charles to come to a meeting of the minds regarding the operation of the cathedral. The controversial priest Lewis Hall metaphorically airs out the cathedral and rids it of the bad vibes, confronts the ghost who turns out to be a former Bishop who is just trying to be helpful and sorts out the priest with the dirty pictures. In the end everything works its self out just like a good novel is supposed to.

Warren Hicks says

I thought this was the very best of the series. The characters were believable multi-faceted.

Maybe it's because I'd gotten to know them so well. Any way, I think I liked this one best. I also think that the spiritual message of 'integration' redemption and modeling of the Middle Way of Anglicanism was brilliant.

Charles Ashworth's journey and the ruminations on the role of mysticism in a church rent to the breaking point by its Liberal and Conservative wings gives me further cause for hope.

I'll read this one again.

Elizabeth says

A very busy book (though I kept thinking in the end was she going to have time to wrap up all the pieces?).

And just like her, she surprises you by the narrator-let's go back to the first guy and back in time since book 5. I loved the way the books interweave and especially how the three main guys are brought together in the end (and oh the great aspects of the church they all represent and side note, I wonder if SH had a favorite, I'll never know how a writer's mind works...) Just like the God she reflects upon and these guys try to serve, this book cannot be labeled or put into a little nice box.

Its kinda sad to be reviewing this because it means this series is over and wow what a part of my life its been this past year. Another side note, I am doing Beth Moore's Bible study at church, When godly people do ungodly things, which is about making a big mistake as a believer and then being healed, and this book is a perfect story of all that and how God intermingles all for the GOOD of those who love him.

Mark Griffiths says

Love this book series.

Keith Massey says

This is the only book I have ever read that, at one crucial point, did not just bring me to tears. It elicited from me a convulsive bout of deep mourning, sorrow for all that had happened in the lives of the people Susan Howatch had created in this entire series. I had to put the book down and bury my head in my hands and work through the grief of all the entire Starbridge Series had meant.

And I loved it.

Start from the beginning of the series and work your way to this book. You will eventually need to read the St. Benet's Trilogy, but the six books of the Starbridge Series stand alone and apart.

Every year the Nobel Prize for Literature is announced and Susan Howatch is not the winner is an affront to any Justice in the Universe.

Kelly Augustine says

Boring

Libby says

I love this series - learn something new about theology with every reading. Already looking forward to re-reading the series in another 10 years! :)
