



Absolute Truths

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With the completion of this work, Susan Howatch completes her series about the Church of England in middle years of the twentieth century. The series, which begins in 1937 and concludes in 1968, uses multiple narrators, although it does open and close with Charles Ashworth in the central role.

ABSOLUTE TRUTHS finds Charles Ashworth still Bishop of Starbridge and beset on all sides with problems and dilemmas. First, there is the recurring difficulty with Neville Aysgarth, with whom relations have not improved one wit since the events described in SCANDALOUS RISKS. Aysgarth is playing fast and loose with church funds, and Ashworth is uncertain of how to save the Dean of Starbridge Cathedral from the consequences of his latest indiscretion. As he ponders this dilemma, Ashworth determines that his sons are rapidly becoming an embarrassment to themselves and possibly the human race. Charles is desperately seeking a method whereby to survive a career as a parish priest without substantial damage to an already seriously compromised ego. Meanwhile, the youngest son, Michael, appears completely unable to accept anything resembling the conventional lifestyle expected of the son of an Anglican bishop. Fortunately, his beloved wife Lyle is able to offer Ashworth the sage advice which keeps him from shooting Aysgarth, committing Charles to an asylum, and sending Michael off to the colonies as a remittance man. After Lyle unexpectedly dies, however, everything goes off the rails at once, and Ashworth must deal with successive crises and catastrophes with barely time for a glass of sherry.

Susan Howatch has such an eye for detail. Nevertheless, those who open her books would not begrudge her a single observation of even the most trivial nature as the totality conceals literary gold.

Sources for Further Study

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