



## **Hollywood Book Reviews**

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### **Title: *The Call***

**Author:** Derald Hamilton

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**Reviewed by:** Ella Vincent

*The Call* is a new kind of Christian fiction. In contrast to the bombast of books of the *Left Behind* book series, this novel by Derald Hamilton sends a spiritual message with subtlety and creativity. This novel shows the complications of dysfunctional families, mental illness, and spirituality in a touching and humorous way.

The novel follows Ishmael O'Donnell, who has to contend with his straight-and-narrow army lieutenant father who disapproves of his laid-back approach to life in the 1970's. He only attends church to please him, but eventually Ishmael escapes his domineering father by answering "the call" to become a minister. Though the call brings him inner peace, Ishmael is still haunted by family—namely, the voice of his deceased twin brother, Issac. Ishmael hears the voice as he doubts himself and whether he fits into the conservative, Southern seminary. His fellow students make up a motley crew of devout and profane students that make him question his place in the school. Despite the obvious hypocrisy of his father and the divinity students, Ishmael hopes to find his way in the ministry with the help of God and an unlikely love that helps him cope with his inner turmoil.

*The Call* shows the complexity of remaining spiritual despite crippling obstacles and self-doubt. Ishmael is a likable, relatable character that confronts his demons in a way that's both serious and sarcastic. The cast of characters that make up his divinity school are some of the most entertaining future ministers, from the academic Jerry that's harboring a big secret, to Markem, whose enthusiasm is as big as his appetite. *The Call* is a refreshing look at the inner workings of seminaries and the sometimes theatrical nature of preaching. Ishmael shows how his quiet strength and unconventional sermons can make a strong impact at his seminary.

Hamilton asks a lot of provocative questions about spirituality, family, and Christianity in his novel, but offers no easy answers. The novel encourages readers to answer these questions or, even better, ask their own. *The Call* is a great addition to the canon of Christian fiction and should appeal to a mature audience because of the adult themes and language. The book also deals with the evolution of Christianity during changing times in an honest, heartfelt way that keeps the reader captivated throughout the novel. *The Call* is an intriguing and hilarious look at the difficult, but essential, road to inner peace and spiritual enlightenment.

## PRAISE FOR *THE CALL*

Campbell, CA (PRWEB)

From growing up with a military father, to a deceased twin brother who haunts him, and a stint in the seminary that disillusiones him, Ishmael O'Donnell's quest for purification from a past of family dysfunction is riddled with one unexpected experience after another in Derald Hamilton's new satirical novel "The Call" (ISBN 9780984619207, D. Hamilton Books, 2011).

All his life, Ishmael O'Donnell has wrestled with family dysfunction and being possessed by the spirit of his long-dead twin brother. With a military father who has always controlled him, Ishmael has only escaped corporal punishment through his mother's intercession. Seeking purification from his past and freedom from the haunting spirit of his brother, Ishmael eventually makes his way to the seminary. There he discovers a number of unlikely fellow seminarians and an unending torrent of duplicity, impertinence, and societal abnormalities.

In "The Call," Derald Hamilton creates an unforgettable cast of quirky, humorous, unorthodox, and larger than life characters as Ishmael's fellow seminarians. While some have received a legitimate call to the ministry, others are simply fulfilling a family legacy of being clergy. Female seminarians are fighting against the notion that the ministry is only for men. And several of the students would never be expected in a seminary, including an alligator wrestler from Florida, a former rock musician, a beer guzzling frat boy, and two psychiatric social workers whose real purpose is to research how religion may be related to mental illness. Surprised and shocked by such people and even more by the disillusioning church politics he encounters, Ishmael finds his three years in the seminary are like none he ever could have imagined; and while he initially sought purification at the seminary, in the end, that purification will spring from a most unlikely place.

Set during and directly after the Vietnam War, "The Call" depicts a time when organized religion was undergoing change and being challenged by the counter culture of rock 'n roll and the secular world. Hamilton weaves his characters and story into this time period while raising issues of church politics, integrity, and the quest for fulfillment that are as or more relevant to our lives today. "The Call" will entertain and amuse readers, while offering satire that makes readers question the role of religion and spirituality in their own lives.

Readers are finding "The Call" to be a bizarre, disillusioning, and enticing look at seminary and military life. Richard Blake of Reader Views describes Hamilton's satirical tactics by stating, "Liberal, conservative, charismatic, nor ultra-fundamental escape his invective....brilliant writing that is reflective, funny and provocative—a troubling look at the duplicity of influential leadership in today's culture." Kim McDougall, author of "Between the Cracks," states, "Hamilton's humor is deep and well-embedded in the rich culture and characters that he creates." And Anita Johnson, author of "Sunset Decisions," states that "The Call" "will shock and dismay....a disturbing but 'must read' book."

A riveting and enthralling book that captures the imagination and beliefs of the reader, as the character Ishmael O'Donnell takes on his journey through the ministry.

Having an army officer for a father, his formative years are spent moving around thus making it difficult for Ishmael to find out where he really belongs. Another major influence in his life is the fact that his twin brother died young and Ishmael believes he has entered his spirit and soul and lives on within him. His father's dominant influence makes Ishmael turn away from a career in the army and he chooses to join the ministry to find himself. On joining the ministry he discovers that on one of his father's deployments, he fathered a child, which pushes Ishmael deeper into his studies.

On arriving at the retreat and meeting the other scholars, the author brings to life all the situations and characters, the happily married couple, the single girls, the married couple who get divorced, the playboy and the alcoholic, these can be seen anywhere throughout the world and reading the book the reader can relate (that so and so from....) and follow their individual stories.

The studies, teachings and placements that each of the characters have to achieve is described very well. During the seminars and teachings the questions not only test Ishmael's beliefs but the readers as well and answers some of the questions to what is important to each individual.

During his final phase at the ministry his peers decide that due to his medical conditions he would be unreliable in the ministry, which rocks his world to its roots. He decides to leave and take up a clerical post. His mother becomes seriously ill and on his visit to her she gives him some money to be taken to the woman of his father's child. On visiting he finds out that the grandparents are bringing up the child as the woman had died. Ishmael then finds out the child is named after his twin brother.

On leaving the house he comes across a stray dog, which he decides to adopt. The dog starts to sense a change in Ishmael and demands, that by pushing her nose under his hand, he must stroke her. Ishmael realises that stroking the dog and showing it love all the bad thoughts and stresses go away. He is again comforted by the dog when at his father's funeral the half-brother turns up in full military uniform and salutes.

Through the feelings and emotions that Ishmael receives from the dog, it is a lesson that the dog did not ask for anything but gave everything in order to say thank you. A lesson for us all, which is what our Lord Jesus wanted us to do.

Remember Dog backward spells God.

An excellent read.

~ Sharon Martin

Ever since I read "*A Modest Proposal*" in college, I've been a big fan of satire. Unfortunately, good satire is hard to come by, so I was glad to find "The Call." And like Swift's manifesto, I can see "The Call," being taken at face value. That would be a shame, though kind of funny, too. Hamilton's humor is deep and well embedded in the rich culture and characters that he creates.

Ishmael is inhabited by the soul of his dead twin. It's an uneasy co-existence that pushes Ishmael's needs and strengths to the side. After an emotionally abusive childhood, Ishmael decides to join a seminary college, hoping to be ordained. At Parkins Seminary, he meets a huge cast of characters, each richly drawn, each reflecting Ishmael's struggle

to achieve his goal of ordination. But the governing bodies of the school keep telling Ishmael that the church is not his calling, despite his deep-seated faith that this the proper route for his life. It takes two kinds of love--unfulfilled and unconditional love--to help Ishmael find his way, but readers will be pleasantly surprised at the form of this love.

Not being an overly religious person, I found Hamilton's seminary world a fascinating environment—not at all what I had expected. The story is set against the tumultuous years leading up to the Viet Nam war and Hamilton effortlessly weaves these details into the plot, as well.

The Call has enough layered depth to make it a great read for book clubs or students of literature.

*~ Kim McDougall, Author*

The Prophet Ezekiel said to the bad shepherds of his day, “You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured.”

In Derald Hamilton's book THE CALL, he draws on his own experiences and observations at seminary to write the fictional story of Ishmael O'Donnell, who answers his 'call' to become a pastor by attending a seminary. His experiences there will shock and dismay.

In the midst of fellow students and professors who are training and being trained to be shepherds, he finds neither healing nor strengthening. The healing of this young man, who has been crushed by an abusive father and crippled by the mocking voice of his dead brother, comes from an unexpected source that only Derald Hamilton could have conceived.

THE CALL is a disturbing but 'must read' book.

*~ Anita Johnson, author of SUNSET DECISIONS*

Meet Ishmael, an Army brat who lives in fear and loathing of his father, and with sympathy for his mother. Ishmael is troubled by a ghost from his past, and his domineering father of the present. Travel with him through multiple schools and locations and his aspirations mixed up with the reality of life. Ishmael goes from being an Atheist in his youth, to Seminary School as an adult, and the road he travels begs you to travel with him.

The Call gives an interesting view of Seminary School and its teachings. It will make you laugh, as well as surprise you. You may discover that people who receive “the call” receive only what THEY believe the Calling to be, not an idealistic idea of someone overfilled with God's word and anxious to do God's work. Ishmael, who is tormented by his twin brother's ghost, receives his “call,” but is seeking his identity and trying to find peace in his spirit. His viewpoint of the other students at the Seminary School is clinical and cynical, brushed with humor.

I found The Call a very compelling and interesting book to read. I enjoyed seeing life through Ishmael's eyes. His life is full of captivating trials tinged with humor and sarcasm. His family life is arresting in its dysfunction. His haunting, by his dead brother, is painful and enveloping. The delight in this story is that Ishmael finds himself in the

end, not as you may have wanted him to, or the way his father would have wanted him to, but as Ishmael wanted to.

~ Cathleen Broers

What brings one to answer the word of God? "The Call" is a story of the supernatural and what draws people to it. Following young Ishmael O'Donnell as he looks for a bit of purity in his life which wants nothing to do with him. With a bit of humor, Derald Hamilton gives readers a look at the sad, humorous and depressing that comes with pursuing faith, and makes "The Call" a read that is very much worth considering.

~ Michael J. Carson, *Midwest Book Review*

Ishmael, the main character of this book, is a twin whose brother died young. The twin's soul then took possession of Ishmael's body, only to torment him. This possession and his participation in a dysfunctional family drew him to "the Call" of religion. His journey through seminary life is less than ideal and somewhat comical when he meets his fellow students.

It is a life worth following and it is intriguing to see how Ishmael's life evolves. Will he be a minister? Will he follow other paths in religion? Will he survive the intermittent disturbances his brother's soul causes him? Buy the book. Take the journey. Heed the "Call."

~ *BY THE BOOK*, Jo Sarti, author of *Poetry in Motion and Thoughts in Transit*;  
Free-Lance author of several newspaper articles for  
the *Amador Ledger Dispatch*, Jackson, California

*The Call* by Derald Hamilton tells the story of the young and improbably named Ishmael O'Donnell. Ishmael is like a boat without a rudder - trying to find himself isn't easy when you come from a family like his. Growing up in the turbulent 1960's, his mother is but a doormat to his bully of a father, whose military brand of abuse rivals that of the Great Santini.

Ishmael never manages to put down roots because his family is constantly moved across the world, transferred from station to station. The only constants in his life seem to be his father's string of affairs and the merciless taunting he endures from his brother. His brother died as a toddler and his spirit now resides in Ishmael, coming out occasionally to torment him. Only when his father requests an extended deployment in Korea (in order to spend time with his girlfriend and their illegitimate child) can Ishmael exhale and spread out his wings. Unfortunately, his internal twin brother continues to torment him and, despite his doubt in his faith, he enrolls in seminary school to purge his demons (as well as to make his father stop trying to get him to join the military).

Ishmael endures three years of seminary school and, as with any communal setting, he becomes more entangled in the lives of his peers than he wanted to. Peers whose lives are every bit as screwed up as his. Will he find the freedom from his inner torment and perhaps madness? Will he ever find the acceptance and fulfillment he so desperately needs?

Author Hamilton does a wonderful job of bringing his reader into the life of a young man desperately seeking solid footing in his life. As a protagonist, Ishmael is very believable and you cannot help but root for him. This is the first book I've read by Hamilton but you can bet I'll be seeking him out in the future. Highly recommended!

~ Kelly Davis of [www.bookideas.com](http://www.bookideas.com)

*The Call*, by author Derald Hamilton, is written as actually two discrete books in one; connected only by the commonality of the main character, Ishmael O'Donnell. For example, the first one hundred or so pages of the book tells the first person story of Ishmael O'Donnell's upbringing. Born a twin but losing his sibling at the age of three, Ishmael tells of the spiritual assimilation of his brother's dying soul into his body at the moment of death. Words, at his age then of 3, were not known to him at the time, so for years he dwelled on just the feelings, bringing it into his story first hand to the reader in a very powerful way. He was a son to a military father, whose authoritative and terse ways dealing with discipline and expectations of performance stressed his home life to such a degree that his father ailed from ulcers while he and his mother were sheepishly subordinated to the tyrant's dominant role.

Although I felt some of the stories contained in this first part of *The Call* could have been abridged, it did create the mental spring of tension to the point where the reader would clearly empathize with Ishmael's desire to, once of age, get out of there as soon as he could and go as far away as possible.

This sets the scene for part II of the book, subtitled *Parkins University – Seminary*. *The Call* from God goes out to many people in ways for them to seek fulfillment in the service of His mission. For Ishmael, it was after a few failed attempts to blend into the culture of a changing society, not having acceptance of his peers, at a time of social turmoil during the Vietnam War era.

Derald Hamilton commences to introduce characters at the seminary like people passing through a revolving door at a hotel lobby. All types of students enroll, for each their own reasons, "called" to seek the seminary for their spiritual edification to become ministers within the hierarchy of the Christian faith-based system.

Ishmael learns from a friend that it's all politics. It's about who you know, how well established your family is with families in your congregation and with other congregations within the vicinity; and it's all about how many people you can bring into church on any given Sunday.

What caught me at times are the characters; so realistic that the novel reads more as if it were an autobiography. It nevertheless captivated my attention with the colorful characters and antics of seminary life.

*The Call* has a very whimsical and airy way of bouncing around, sometimes a bit discombobulated with irrelevant (and also irreverent) stories, but always coming back to

what I would call “The world as viewed by Ishmael;” a person you come to trust and love throughout this book.

A truly honest and revealing first novel, Derald Hamilton has much more to offer in his writing career with his wholesome and respectful manner of writing, clever characters, and having been “Called” to tell his story. I recommend this for young adult reading, especially if someone is seeking theological studies at the college or post-graduate level, or a career within organized religion.

*The Call* will be especially helpful for people at crossroads of life, career or at important life stages.

~ Barbara Miller, *Pacific Book Review*

*The Call* by Derald Hamilton offers unexpected revelations. The story begins chronicling the life of the protagonist, Ishmael. This reviewer quickly became empathetic with Ishmael and hopeful that his future would be brighter than the present that the story begins with. He has a cold and demanding father that saturates his home life with military precision. The author slips in the interesting fact that Ishmael was a twin, and on his twin Isaac’s death, Isaac’s soul enters Ishmael. The author does this in a manner that is quiet and unsung, but this fact plays an intricate role in the character’s development and the plot itself.

I expected the remainder of the novel to revolve around the dual soul concept; however, the prose took Ishmael to seminary school. The plot evolves as his life does with the rather unique experiences he endures during three years of seminary. The reader is also given Ishmael’s fellow seminary students to learn about and watch develop. The clashing of personalities on top of the academic and spiritual vigor is fascinating. The author handles this interplay in a believably human manner. Readers will be intrigued by the obstacles that continue to plague Ishmael as well as the random mentioning of his dual soul.

While this novel’s pacing slows down at multiple points after the protagonist enters seminary school, this reader still felt compelled to continue reading due to a vested interest in the character and desire to see him succeed.

The end of the novel appears to bring incredible revelation for Ishmael through the relationship that he develops with a dog. This relationship brings him the peace that he thought seminary school would provide. The end of the novel was well written and pulled the plot together in a manner that leaves the reader feeling satisfied as well as looking inward for their own spiritual insight.

~ M. Chris Johnson, *Portland Book Review*

Derald Hamilton’s “The Call” combines satire, humor, and spoof in this unpredictable fictional account of seminary training and the broad spectrum of individuals who have responded to the “call to ministry.” The story is presented in the first person voice of Ishmael O’Donnell. His childhood is beleaguered by the strict disciplines administered by his military father and his religious mother who accepts as

her “lot” subjection to an unfaithful husband. Added to Ishmael’s dysfunctional childhood is the unexplainable supernatural indwelling or possession of the “spirit” of his long-dead twin brother Isaac.

Hamilton understands the importance of audience to the success of satire. He writes for a wide audience covering a time span of over 30 years directly impacting the veterans and families of three wars or Military conflicts who will relate to the account of Ishmael’s coming of age in the transient lifestyle of military families, the diversity of political views of U. S. involvement in these intervention actions, and the extremes of disciplines and control exercised by his military father. Another audience that will be touched by Hamilton’s observations is made up of anyone concerned about illusion versus reality in organized religion.

As Ishmael grapples with the his family’s dysfunction and the harassment of Isaac’s spirit, Hamilton focuses on another potential audience as he parodies the religious neuroses plaguing Ishmael by the inconsistency of forced church attendance by his father and the genuine religious zeal of his mother. Participation with Campus Parachurch ministries while attending University lead to Ishmael’s “call” to attend seminary as a means to find life fulfillment and spiritual cleansing.

Part Two of the novel deals with the three years of Ishmael’s seminary training. He is frustrated by the inconsistencies and the church politics often practiced within the established church, issues of integrity, and conduct behind the cloistered walls of the seminary. The illusions and reality of Hamilton’s observations open the door for his articulate tongue-in-cheek satiric exposition. Hamilton has cleverly recreated believable characters into caricatures, which disconcertingly uncover fraudulence, impertinence, personal inconsistencies, character flaws, prejudices, and biases often found in the Christian community. Liberal, conservative, charismatic, nor ultra-fundamental escape his invective.

I became deeply involved in Hamilton’s storyline and characters. A composite development of fewer characters and a merging of the curriculum, training, and field assignments into typical content rather than detailed descriptions of the repetitive progression of each individual year of the program would have enhanced the flow and pace of the book for me.

“The Call” offers brilliant writing that is reflective, funny and provocative – a troubling look at the duplicity of influential leadership in today’s culture.

~ *Richard R. Black, Reader Views*

Derald Hamilton’s novel, “The Call,” is told through the eyes of the main character Ishmael O’Donnell. O’Donnell grew up in a military family and moved around quite a bit when he was young. He had a twin brother who died when they were toddlers. Upon his brother’s death, his brother’s spirit entered Ishmael’s body and continued to maintain residence there throughout Ishmael’s life. Ishmael’s father was not the best role model in the world, as he continually sought out other women during times of deployment, even fathering another woman’s child. This dysfunctional upbringing greatly influenced all aspects of Ishmael’s life.

After exploring Ishmael's younger years and watching him as he grows, the next part of the book explores Ishmael's life after he decides to go to seminary. Hamilton's satirical account of the seminary community is particularly interesting and humorous. The characters are unique and not the types that you would expect in the seminary setting. That is one thing I love, when I am presented with the unexpected, as it always makes for an interesting read. In a letter that accompanied the book for review, Hamilton said that he drew upon his personal experiences in seminary training when writing "The Call." It is neat to have an "insider's view" into the seminary world.

"The Call" is definitely an entertaining book and, while the cover and synopsis look and sound quite serious, the book actually has humor in it as well. I enjoyed reading about the protagonist Ishmael's life through Hamilton's captivating writing. If you are intrigued by the unexpected, then I recommend giving "The Call" a try.

*~ Kam Aures for ReccasReads (05/11)*