

opportunities as they arise to fulfil his vision. He traces the seeds of the research question to an undergraduate project in 1963 that led to a thirty-five-year longitudinal study of generations that began in 1970 as a cross-sectional study with 2,044 respondents, members of 358 three-generation families (grandparents, their middle-aged adult children and spouses, and their teenage and young adult grandchildren). In 1985 the cross-sectional study was turned into a longitudinal panel, collecting data from these families at three-year intervals over the next twenty years. In 1991 the scope was further extended by drawing in the fourth generation of great-grandchildren. Across the thirty-five years of the study, over 3,500 family members participated in the research. Moreover, these survey data were augmented by an in-depth qualitative study, involving interviews with 156 family members from 25 of the multi-generational families. Behind *Faith and Families* stands a solid archive of some 250 research articles and 16 books.

Three research questions addressed by *Faith and families*. Are parents passing on their faith in today's rapidly changing society? Have the changes of the last half-century eroded the ability of families to transmit religion to the next generation? Why are some parents successful at passing on their faith while others are not? Reflecting on what has been learnt from the research, Bengtson concludes that many of the results surprised him and that many appeared contrary to what could be regarded as 'common knowledge'. The following findings provoke reflection. First, the theory that increased individualism among younger generations is a cause of religious decline is challenged by the observation that parental religious influence has not declined since the 1970s. Non-religious parents are successfully passing on their (non-)religious identity. Second, the religious groups most effective in religious transmission are Mormons, Evangelicals and religious Jews. These groups socialize in close-knit religious communities. Against this tight socialization approach, however, transmission is most effective when it is balanced with parental warmth and lenience. Third, the gender differences in religious transmission are not as clear-cut as sometimes assumed. Although daughters are more likely to be religious than sons, mothers and fathers exert equal influence on their children's religious identity. What does make a difference, however, is the quality of the parents' relationship with their children. Fourth, grandparents also have an important part to play in religious transmission, a point overlooked by research that only includes two generations in the transmission analysis.

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Christopher B. Barnett, ***From Despair to Faith: The Spirituality of Søren Kierkegaard***, Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2014; 192 pp.: 9781451474695, £25.99/\$39.00 (pbk)

When undergraduates are introduced to Kierkegaard's writings, they are often introduced to the 'doom-and-gloom' caricature that fathered Existentialism,

advocated fideism, and who was an iconoclastic critic of the Danish State Church. In this wonderful book, however, Christopher Barnett helps readers move away from that initial impression of Kierkegaard as the despairing individual, to take more seriously the deep spirituality that buttressed the writings of one of the most influential thinkers of the nineteenth century. The Kierkegaard that Barnett holds out before us is one who worked hard to help his own readers turn away from hopelessness and towards faith in God.

Barnett's previous book, *Kierkegaard, Pietism, and Holiness* (2011) provided the groundbreaking research for this new reading of Kierkegaard as a spiritual writer. In the first chapter of *From Despair to Faith*, Barnett uncovers aspects of the spirituality of Kierkegaard's Pietist upbringing. For Barnett, Kierkegaard's authorial strategy indicates that Kierkegaard would assume a therapeutic stance to habituate the reader into the pilgrimage of living one's life before God. In this way, Barnett reads Kierkegaard in the company of other spiritual writers such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Meister Eckhart. After placing Kierkegaard's writings in the context of Christian spirituality, Barnett turns in the second chapter to examine more closely how Kierkegaard's belief that every human creature is on a journey of ascent towards union with God. Barnett defends this claim through a judicious comparison of *The Sickness unto Death* and *The Changelessness of God*. Barnett spends the rest of the book examining what he calls Kierkegaard's 'icons of faith' – that is, concrete moral exemplars (found in Scripture and in objects of nature) which Kierkegaard holds out before his readers to imitate spiritually. Following Jean-Luc Marion, Barnett argues that Kierkegaard endorses a dialectical view of theological aesthetics – that is, 'aesthetic imagery can function either in the manner of icons or in that of idols' (p. 68). What emerges is a view of Kierkegaard as a spiritual writer in the Christian tradition, employing everything at his disposal to encourage his readers towards a deeper relationship with God. Barnett nimbly shows how, for Kierkegaard, the clouds of autumn, the lilies and the birds, the human being, the ocean, even John the Baptist, Paul, Job, Anna, the Tax Collector and Jesus Christ all illuminate various aspects of faith as humility, suffering and love.

For some readers, Barnett's book may conclude too soon, only whetting the appetite. I would say, however, that this is what a good introduction to Kierkegaard is meant to do. Barnett offers a very accessible book that is a great starting place for learning more about Kierkegaard's spirituality. Libraries everywhere should add it to their collection. Interested readers should also consult Lee Barrett's *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard* (2013) and Simon Podmore's *Struggling with God: Kierkegaard and the Temptation of Spiritual Trial* (2013).

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