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BOOK REVIEW

Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross. *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012. 330 pp. Pbk. ISBN 083086346X.

Over the last decade, there has been a growing body of literature dedicated to exploring the importance of intergenerational life for contemporary congregations. In this recent publication, Allen and Ross have made a substantial contribution that promises to move this conversation forward significantly. Allen, professor of Christian ministries at John Brown University, and Ross, professor of Christian Education at Concordia University, Irvine, have dedicated many years to researching intergenerational ministry. This book comprises the fruit of their efforts to date.

Allen and Ross devote this volume to advocating an approach to ministry that involves congregations intentionally bringing generations together “in mutual serving, sharing or learning within the core activities of the church in order to live out being the body of Christ to each other and the greater community” (17). In developing this overarching focus, the authors divide their material into four sections.

Part One provides the context for this discussion by defining the problem: the tendency toward the separation of generations within churches throughout recent decades, which has prevented congregations from experiencing many of the significant benefits that can only arise when generations share life together. Allen and Ross provide a concise historical account of how we arrived in this situation and present their case for why an intentionally intergenerational approach to ministry is a desirable response to this situation.

In Part Two, the authors survey key biblical, theological, and

theoretical frameworks that support the value and importance of intergenerational ministry. In this section, highlights include the authors' detailed overview of biblical foundations of intergenerational ministry (chapter 5), summaries of the work of a number of important theoreticians (chapter 6), reflections upon churches as communities of practice (chapter 7), and the development of a Trinitarian perspective on the inherent relationality of human personhood (chapter 8). Each of these chapters contributes substantively to the contemporary discussion of intergenerational ministry.

In Part Three, the authors explore a series of social-scientific perspectives that they believe can aid the church in its understanding of intergenerational ministry. While some of the material in this section has already been treated excessively in previous ministry-related publications (e.g., chapter 11 on "Generational Theory"), it is also in this section the authors make some of their most original and important contributions (e.g., chapter 10, "Contributions from Gerontology").

Part Four is dedicated to a wide-ranging exploration of intergenerational "practices." This section includes an analysis of practical topics as diverse as worship (chapter 14), storytelling (chapter 16), and small groups (chapter 18), among others. These chapters provide a wealth of practical insight for ministry leaders desiring to investigate the implementation of intergenerational ministry within various aspects of the church's life.

Allen and Ross include a number of additional elements that enhance the "user-friendliness" of this publication. At various points throughout the book, the authors insert helpful text-boxes in which they present case studies and practical suggestions. Much of this material is the product of the authors' own field research conducted among intentionally intergenerational congregations. The appendices also are sure to serve as stimulating resources to anyone interested in investigating this subject further or in beginning to experiment with intergenerational approaches to ministry.

Without question, the comprehensiveness of this text is one of its greatest assets. Many of the topics the authors explore have been treated at length elsewhere. However, one of the things that

is most significant about Ross and Allen's contribution lies in the fact that they successfully bring this wide-ranging group of themes together in one place. They do so while faithfully maintaining thematic clarity and coherence. Each chapter is thorough, clearly organized, and richly informative. Each chapter also contributes meaningfully to the book's overall focus. While the authors engage an impressively broad range of disciplines, the thoroughness of their research has enabled them to identify the most relevant sources in each discipline. Allen and Ross also demonstrate a nearly exhaustive acquaintance with the North American doctoral dissertations that have been written on intergenerational ministry in recent decades, which is a distinctive strength of this volume.

Some of the chapters in this text pioneer new ground in the study of intergenerational ministry. Allen and Ross achieve this by developing connections to disciplinary traditions that have gone largely ignored within the intergenerational ministry literature in the past. As was noted above, chapter 10, "The Very Young and the Very Old" explores insights from gerontology and the study of "intergenerational programs." Allen and Ross outline the valuable contribution that these disciplines can make in helping the church understand the dynamics of intergenerational relationships and programs. In doing so, the authors offer a great service to the church. Hopefully a growing number of others will follow their example and join them in engaging with these disciplines.

Allen and Ross are also to be commended for their choice to include chapter 19, "Cross-Generational Relationships in Multicultural Churches." In this chapter, they focus upon the intergenerational challenges that have confronted many Korean-American churches, as an example. Allen and Ross's examination of this topic provides an informative overview of some of the key texts written by Korean-American authors. While much has been written about intergenerational dynamics in majority culture churches, and much has also been written about the complexities of first and second generation relations in Korean-American churches, little effort has been made previously to connect these

two streams of reflection. This chapter represents a significant stride forward in bringing these discussions into conversation with one another. I would have liked to see the authors give greater attention to the question of what majority culture congregations can learn from the experiences of Korean-American churches. One paragraph toward the end of the chapter is devoted to acknowledging the value of this point. That being said, Allen and Ross have helped set the stage for others to take this dialogue more seriously in the future.

Chapter 20, which explores “Intergenerationality and Mega-churches,” also provides a significant contribution to the existing literature on intergenerational ministry. This is an important topic within the current landscape of church life. However, only a few scholars have recently begun to turn their attention toward this subject. There is much more work to be done in this area. It is good to see Allen and Ross speak into this emerging theme.

This book’s breadth, while most certainly an asset, might also pose one of its greatest limitations. The chapters included in this book consistently provide a thorough exploration of the topics to which they are devoted. However, the issues addressed in some chapters are simply too complex to be treated adequately within the constraints of a single chapter. In some of these cases (e.g., chapter 14, “Intergenerational Worship”), there are, fortunately, other resources available to which the reader can readily turn for further guidance. The authors’ footnotes should prove to be of great service in pointing readers to not only high-quality, but relevant, resources.

However, in at least two chapters, the complexities of the themes addressed cause them to be deserving of more extensive development than we find in this book. Perhaps the most notable example of this is chapter 13, “Creating a Culture of Intergenerationality.” The authors should be applauded for including this chapter; its position as the lead chapter in the section devoted to “Intergenerational Christian Formation Practices” (Part Four) communicates something significant about the cruciality of this subject for congregations seeking to move toward intentionally intergenerational approaches to ministry. Allen and Ross strike a candid tone in this chapter regarding the challenges associated

with implementing intergenerational approaches to ministry in congregational settings where this has not been the norm. Furthermore, the practical counsel that the authors provide in this chapter is rooted in good research and helps to orient the reader to a responsible path of change.

That being said, any church that embarks on this journey of cultural change will most assuredly need the assistance of resources beyond what Allen and Ross introduce. While one must certainly respect the authors' need to place certain constraints on the book's scope, it would have been helpful to see them connect this chapter to the rather ample reservoir of resources on congregational change available today. Perhaps this is felt all the more because of how effectively these authors ground so many other chapters in a concise, robust engagement with relevant bodies of literature.

The limitations of another chapter, in reality, are indicative of a gap within the broader intergenerational ministry literature. Chapter 17, "Intergenerational Service and Mission," includes some wise practical counsel and stimulating anecdotal insights. However, this chapter is almost utterly devoid of the same sort of rich bibliographical bedrock that undergirds the rest of the book. The reason for this is quite simple: the topic of this chapter constitutes a significant gap within the current intergenerational ministry literature. The authors readily acknowledge this (229). They also note the significance of this gap in an era in which local congregations are encouraged to place greater emphasis on "missional" activity within their communities (231). This is most certainly a subject awaiting greater attention. That being said, it would have been interesting to see Allen and Ross interact with some of the key voices within the missional conversation whose insights could have added value to this chapter.

One final critique of this book that deserves mentioning pertains to what is missing from its pages. Although the authors adeptly engage an impressive range of theoretical conversation partners, there are some notable omissions. For example, while the importance of intergenerational communication runs implicitly throughout their text, Allen and Ross do not directly ad-

dress the ample body of literature on intergenerational communication and “intergroup theory,” with the exception of a footnote on page 224. In addition, though the entirety of chapter 10 is devoted to gerontological perspectives, the absence of any references to the work of Vern Bengston is noteworthy. The “intergenerational solidarity” theory developed by this renowned gerontologist and his collaborators over the course of four decades holds great potential for the life of the church, and it seems that an exploration of gerontology from an intergenerational perspective should refer to Bengston’s work, even if just in passing. His insights could have meaningfully augmented the vision of intergenerational community presented by Allen and Ross. Precisely because this book is otherwise so nearly comprehensive in its examination of theories relevant to the current conversation about intergenerational ministry, the absence of these elements is felt acutely.

This book provides an important contribution to the growing body of literature on intergenerational ministry. In fact, a good argument could be made that this is the most significant book on this subject since James W. White’s *Intergenerational Religious Education* was published a generation ago in 1988. Allen and Ross’s work is certainly on par with White’s in terms of scope and substance. It also has the potential to inform this generation’s discussion of intergenerational ministry in the same definitive and enduring way that White did for the previous generation.

For the reader interested in exploring the topic of intergenerational ministry, this book would be a great place to start. The thorough overview provided here offers a tremendous invitation into the unfolding conversation on this subject. Even those who are more intimately acquainted with the literature on intergenerational ministry will find value in Allen and Ross’s contribution. The linkages they identify with various theoretical disciplines, together with the wide-ranging and thorough bibliographical citations they present, are likely to open new avenues of exploration for even the most experienced readers in this field. In fact, Allen and Ross’s text should be considered a key to identifying the “growth edges” within the broader field of intergenerational ministry research that await further exploration.

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Intergenerational Christian Formation would be a valuable text to use in upper-division undergraduate and seminary-level ministry courses. The book's overall tone, practical pointers, and insights drawn from congregational field research also make it a great resource for ministry practitioners desiring to explore the theory and practice of intergenerational ministry. This is an important book that deserves to be read widely, one that is sure to have an enduring impact for many years to come.

Cory Seibel
Central Baptist Church
Edmonton, AB