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BOOK REVIEW

Holly Catterton Allen, et al. *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023. Pbk. 352 pp. ISBN 9781514001424. \$40.00.

The authors make a compelling argument for the significance of intergenerational ministries in promoting spiritual growth within a community. While age-specific ministries are important, they should not be given precedence over intergenerational ones. The text emphasizes the value of inclusivity and diversity in personal spiritual development and church ministry (45). This second edition has been updated to incorporate recent statistical data, new stories, and deeper theological reflections.

The book is divided into four parts, each exploring various aspects of bringing the church together in intergenerational ministry. Part 1 covers general realities, including changing paradigms, the current situation, and the inter-generational gap. Part 2 explores the biblical and theological foundations of critical movements, feasts, and house church, leading to “forging” an intergenerational ecclesiology. Part 3 discusses the process of becoming a Christian in a community and explores sociological, theoretical, and empirical aspects. Part 4 covers intergenerational Christian formation practices and includes nine subsections.

The first four chapters of the book analyze the causes of segregation and the importance of bridging the generational gap. In chapter 2, the authors address these questions stating, “There are less regular and structured interactions between old and young . . . than ever before. Not only families but also other institutions in modern society have reduced the chance for old and young to share activities in meaningful ways” (50). Modern society’s in-

fluence on social interaction has dramatically affected the generation gap. However, it seems to me that technology plays a significant role in generational segregation and thus it could receive further attention.

Chapter 4 discusses the “community of believers” concept, which emerged in the twentieth century. This term emphasizes the significance of faith communities, as it is believed that members of a community shape and communicate their faith through their interactions and shared experiences. The authors argue that the meaning of faith is developed by individuals in the context of the events that happen in their lives. As younger and older members of the community interact, they gain a better understanding of their faith and grow more mature in it. The authors suggest that the term “intergenerational Christian formation” may be a better fit than “community of believers” to describe the process of believers coming together and learning from one another (50).

In Part 2, the focus is on biblical, theological, and theoretical support for intergenerational ministry. Chapter 5 presents the idea that intergenerational is not only a common practice among God’s people throughout history but also intended by God to be mutually influential, evidenced from God’s directives given to Moses, Paul, and other biblical figures. The authors point out that faith formation happens in families, communities, and across generations, according to Scripture; this is supported by socio-cultural and social learning theories discussed later in the book. The authors convincingly argue by using biblical evidence that intergenerational ministry is God ideals (e.g., Deut 29:10–12) (see 107).

According to the authors, “generations passing on the faith” is a biblical construct, as is evidenced in Ps 145:4, which indicates that each generation has a responsibility to share God’s work in their lives with people of other generations so all can worship and praise God together (108). Chapter 5 provides clear biblical evidence supporting the idea of intergenerational formation. This chapter lays the foundation for the entire book. It explains that the religious community described in the Bible believed that people of all ages should frequently be present together. However, there were times when only certain groups of people met

together, such as when church leaders gathered in Jerusalem to discuss Gentile-Jewish issues (Acts 15); chapters 3 and 13 further explain the importance of meeting separately (116).

Chapter 6, titled “Growing Each Other Up,” explores the importance of intergenerational faith from the perspectives of developmental theory, social learning theory, and ecological systems theory. This chapter emphasizes the significance of cross-generational mutuality for healthy growth and development, referencing Erickson work on human development to substantiate their argument. While these theories offer significant insights into the influence of social interaction, another theory is needed to explain why intergenerationally is so powerful.

Chapter 7 focuses on the importance of faith communities, particularly intergenerational churches, in nurturing spiritual growth and development. The chapter cites the “situative-sociocultural” perspective on learning theory, which is also mentioned in chapter 6, to explain how churches are well-suited for fostering learning and promoting Christian development.

Chapter 8 expands upon the theological foundations that support intergenerational formation. By citing the unified nature of the Trinity, where distinct co-eternal persons operate as one, the authors highlight that this is the way humanity should function (John 17:20–21; see 152). Further, in the same chapter, readers will gain an understanding of the role of faith communities and the basic principles of situative-sociocultural theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in learning environments more than other learning theories. There is a strong suggestion that the social setting itself plays a crucial role in the learning process. The authors explore the theological significance of faith communities as they provide authentic and complex environments that support the spiritual formation of believers. Within these communities, individuals have the opportunity to learn Christian concepts, experience them, and engage in meaningful dialogue to negotiate their meaning, which ultimately contributes to their spiritual growth and development. They write, “The idea of the social Trinity is that God is a communion of three Persons who exist in mutual relations with one another—one God yet three Persons. Each is distinct from the others,

but each is who he is in relation to the others” (155).

Chapter 9 explores the meaning of “becoming Christian in a community” and emphasizes the need for “religious socialization,” which is the process by which persons learn and internalize attitudes, values, and behaviors within the framework of a religious system of beliefs and practices” (189). The authors posit that religious socialization involves regularly connecting with a faith community and engaging in spiritual practices with others in the community. It also involves building strong relationships with family, peers, and non-parental adults, as well as living a lifestyle that aligns with the beliefs and values of the community. This book’s main premise is that a cross-generational group of believers has a unique ability to foster healthy spiritual growth and development among its members; sociological research on religious socialization examines key aspects of this same premise (171). The main idea conveyed in this chapter is that people can enhance their Christian faith by building relationships and being an active member of a faith-based community. The authors emphasize the importance of these communities in teaching, exemplifying, and practicing their beliefs in a way that spans across generations. This, according to the authors, would yield the most significant benefits.

As observed earlier, the book is divided into four sections which make it easy to follow and grasp the concepts. The first three sections present evidence from various sources like the Bible, theology, sociology, empirical studies, life experiences, and personal accounts to support the claim that faith communities that embrace people of all ages are spiritually beneficial to everyone involved.

Part 4 explores practical ideas, activities, and events that can be implemented to promote intergenerational relationships and benefits. Some ideas include starting with simple but specific events that appeal to the young and old alike.

The authors emphasize that being “intergenerational” is not something churches do; rather, “it is something they become” (246). They acknowledge that, while “implementing intergenerational youth ministry within existing evangelical church congregations,” people who cannot make the adjustment may be lost,

for each one who leaves three more are gained. Why? Because most people understand the innate wisdom of the generations relating to each other (247; cf. Job 12:12).

The authors emphasize that the aging population in North America is frequently perceived as a liability by younger generations and the government. Nevertheless, they highlight that there are ongoing initiatives to shift this perception and recognize this expanding demographic as a precious asset for society, instead of a burden. This is a crucial point to underscore as it reflects a prevalent issue of generational divide.

According to surveys conducted by the authors, many religious leaders believe that inter-generationality is a viable philosophy of ministry. They think so because it allows different generations to learn from each other; it is supported by the Bible; and it creates a sense of family and community within the faith group. Some congregational leaders also mentioned other benefits, such as reduced fear and discipline problems among generations, increased participation of parents, and the growth of children's and young people's faith as they witness lifelong faithfulness. Overall, inter-generationality fosters a sense of unity and provides faith support for all age groups, rather than creating an "us vs. them" mentality (237).

In summary, bringing people together takes hard work, especially people of different age groups. Still, the authors present convincing arguments that education and strong leadership are critical for age-integrated ministry approaches to be achievable. The book provides biblical, theological, historical, and sociological framework for addressing issues associated with connecting believers of all ages through worship and discipleship. Its contents are well-researched and intended to contribute to the field of Christian education, including family ministries and team building, in a scholarly, easy-to-follow manner. This book is structured to meet the needs of Christian educators, church administrators, pastors, and seminarians. However, it can also be helpful for lay leaders and teachers who want to understand the global, intergenerational issues the church faces.

The biblical and theological reasoning, along with anecdotes and surveys, presents a compelling case to support their position.

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The authors have done an impressive job of answering the big question on why bringing people together is important, both in the beginning chapter and chapter 13 of the book. It is worth noting that the reliance on technology is creating a gap between generations. Providing some insight on this issue could be helpful for any future revisions of the book. As a student, I highly recommend this book to church leaders, lay workers, and members alike.

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