

DISCERNMENT

Theology and the Practice of Ministry

Volume 9 | Issue 1

Article 4

2023

Book Review: A Gospel for All Ages: Teaching and Preaching with the Whole Church

Jennifer Reinsch Schroeder
Abilene Christian University, rjs17a@acu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/discernment>



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

Schroeder, Jennifer Reinsch (2023) "Book Review: A Gospel for All Ages: Teaching and Preaching with the Whole Church," *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry*. Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 4.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/discernment/vol9/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ ACU.

DISCERNMENT

Theology and the Practice of Ministry

Book Review

A Gospel for All Ages: Teaching and Preaching with the Whole Church, by David M. Csinos. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022. 212 pages, \$22.00.

Reviewer: Jennifer Reinsch Schroeder

As churches recognize the impact intergenerationality has on communities of faith, they search for ways to integrate intentional multigenerational practices into the life of their churches. While this can occur in a myriad of ways, one of the most spiritually formative opportunities is intergenerational worship. Through moments of praise, prayer, Scripture reading, and communion, God's kingdom grows in relationship with God and with each other. However, even churches who embrace intergenerational ministry often struggle to do so in one area—preaching—and alterations to this “central practice of a faith community's liturgy” has largely remained beyond reach (p. 5). In his book, *A Gospel for All Ages: Teaching and Preaching with the Whole Church*, Csinos seeks to explore why that is and how to expand practitioners' thinking to a place where the act of proclamation is both imagined differently and viewed as a practice meant for the whole church.

Csinos divides his book into three parts. Part one explores the theological and philosophical constructs that inform intergenerational ministry as a whole and, more specifically, intergenerational preaching. This foundational section creates a lens through which to view this topic that centers the conversation around the way God works in the lives of God's people and the greater community. Part two draws the reader into a dialogue regarding intergenerational preaching across varied contexts by examining congregations throughout the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Europe. In doing so, Csinos contrasts the differences that exist between intergenerational preaching and a traditional approach to preaching through the stories told by these churches. Similarly, part three remains focused on the practical application of intergenerational preaching within a contextual setting. However, at this stage of the text, Csinos makes

the conversation more reflective. He encourages the reader to imagine the implications of intergenerational preaching within one's own community of faith. At the same time, he provides strategies intended to guide and encourage a church that embarks upon this journey, all of which is informed by the original theological framework presented in part one.

To begin part one, Csinos establishes a foundation for intergenerational preaching through tracing the biblical rootedness of the idea of intergenerational community. In doing so, he provides the reader with a narrative that emerges out of Scripture and which sets an important precedent. He then gives a brief nod to the historical elements that prompted the age-and-stage model of ministry that remains prevalent. Likewise, he acknowledges key assumptions that ultimately shape the whole of this text: (1) intergenerational preaching takes sustained and intentional effort, (2) it is challenging, and (3) even small movements are impactful (pp. 29-31).

Csinos continues by sketching out a fundamental understanding of preaching by asking the questions of why does preaching matter and what is preaching. In answer to his first question, Csinos presents three claims that speak to the spiritually formative nature of preaching. These assertions will be revisited throughout the remainder of the text as he moves from the theoretical to the practical. Similarly, as Csinos describes preaching (also referred to as teaching or proclamation), he encourages readers to think more broadly about the mechanism of preaching and shift from a transmissional mindset to an experiential one that engages all generations. This newly constructed ethos is a step, albeit an important one, in understanding the potential that exists in a more expansive view of this intentional act of worship.

As Csinos adds the remaining philosophical and theological pieces to the conversation, he does so through a description of eight central themes that emerged out of his interaction with churches practicing intergenerational preaching. These themes, while not explicitly stated by each of the faith communities, were either frequently mentioned or tacitly evident within the responses. Practitioners spoke of the mutuality of faith formation, the active and participatory nature of proclamation, and the importance of word choice (i.e., language can simultaneously be both theologically robust and accessible), amongst other themes. By framing the conversation in this way, the reader can begin to make contextual connections between abstract ideas and concrete practices.

Despite the desire to integrate intentional ministry across multiple generations, false or incomplete narratives often create tension for the ones

leading intergenerational work. Thus, Csinos seeks to dispel those misconceptions. He begins part two by providing a clear admonition that intergenerational preaching is not about crafting a children's sermon to be offered in the presence of adults, nor is it a sermon developed for adults to which children are granted proximity. Instead, it is an approach to "sharing the gospel that achieve[s] the purposes of Christian preaching while fostering relationships and nurturing connections among people of any and every generation" (p. 93). This clear message is a recurring theme throughout the book. Regardless of what one imagines intergenerational preaching to be, Csinos thoughtfully communicates what he means by intergenerational preaching, and that definition is centered on the theological and philosophical constructs of the first section.

Csinos examines specific intergenerational preaching practices being carried out by some of the churches that participated in his survey. Each of the three chapters within this section identifies two communities and their approach to intergenerational preaching. To provide additional structure, Csinos groups each of the communities based on categories of "interpreting together, speaking together, and experiencing together" (p. 93). As one reads through the stories of each congregation, three important approaches in the way Csinos composed this text are evident. First, each minister talks about the principles that guide their church's interpretation of intergenerational preaching and then gives a clear description of the practice in action. This is an essential element of the text because it keeps the idea from remaining out in the stratosphere of theory. The second point is that as the reader moves from chapter to chapter, the practices become less traditional. This not only affords the reader the opportunity to broaden her own perspective on what preaching can look like, but it speaks to an expanded idea of potential practices. Third, Csinos engages with multiple Christian faiths as part of his study, and because the churches interviewed are ecumenically diverse, the practices are naturally varied as a result of the differences in the liturgies that inform each church.

Witnessing the way others are living out this significant paradigm shift in ministry is of tremendous value. It not only inspires others to do ministry in a way that honors the fullness of God, but it also provides reassurance that ministry can be approached in a less conventional manner. In part three, Csinos reinforces this point by presenting ideas on how to transition into an intentional whole church community of faith while also transforming current preaching practices to reflect the shift. This alternate approach, he asserts, should be the "new normal," and there are ways to support practitioners as they take this on. From having a clear vision of the

journey to celebrating both large and small progressions, Csinos is clear on two points. The first is that intergenerational preaching “requires sacrifices on the part of both pastor and parishioner” (p. 163). Discomfort is inevitable. Secondly, despite the challenging realities of intergenerational preaching, God will be present and the Spirit will be at work as people are transformed into the image of Christ (p. 170).

As Csinos examines the idea of a “new normal,” a minor weakness of the text presents itself in the final chapter, which addresses intergenerational preaching as influenced by the COVID-19 crisis. To be sure, this is an important point in the story of the church from which much can be learned; however, this chapter feels disconnected from the rest of the work. There is a stand-alone quality about it that is disruptive to the reading process. Despite this critique, the chapter touches on a valuable point: crisis can lead a church toward a re-evaluation and reshaping of ministry practices. Additionally, this conversation does not remain situated within the scenario of the pandemic. Instead, Csinos encourages the reader to apply the reflections gathered as a result of the pandemic to future moments of liminality and disruption.

As the reader interacts with the content, the value that emerges from this process is significant because this arm of the conversation is often overlooked when considering spiritually formative practices of the church. Additionally, the strength of this text lies in its theological foundation and its accessibility. By rooting this conversation firmly amidst the biblical text, the reader is offered a vantage point where the importance of intergenerational preaching is not a byproduct of experimentation or something entered into on a whim but is instead a reflection of the kingdom of God. Additionally, while this book may be written with the preacher primarily in mind (e.g., the inclusion of additional resources and questions at the end of each chapter), it clearly issues a challenge for the faith community as a whole to examine its practices and strive to embrace the fullness that is cultivated through intergenerational preaching.

***Jennifer Reinsch Schroeder** – Jennifer, a former children’s minister, now serves in multiple roles at Abilene Christian University. In addition to directing Summit as part of her work with the Siburt Institute for Church Ministry, she teaches undergraduate courses in children and family ministry and is the director for the Center for Women in Christian Ministry. Jennifer earned her Doctor of Ministry degree from Abilene Christian University, and she, her husband, Greg, and their four children live in Abilene, TX.*