

*Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide For Teaching Christian Formation*

**by Terry Linhart: Book Critique**

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I have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

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Linhart, T. (2016). *Teaching the next generations: A comprehensive guide for teaching Christian formation*. Baker Academic.

### Summary

Terry Linhart (2016), in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, seeks to offer those who feel called to teach a tool through which they can faithfully fulfill their responsibilities as a teacher by helping those in their care to mature in Christ. He believes that people are not desiring to learn these days but rather that there might be a problem with the teaching being presented. He also believes that young people need engaging teachers leading them to the right place to find answers to the complex and more profound questions they may not currently be getting the answers to, contributing to the departure of young people from the Church.

In the book, Linhart breaks the **book into five sections**. The first and most crucial section begins with the "theological, biblical, and philosophical purposes that undergird Christian teaching" (p. 1). It helps with the why of teaching and is a reminder of the mission of Christ to teach. The second section discusses the influences that shape learning and reminds Christian teachers that teaching is not a "one-size-fits-all" model; environment and other factors often require adaptability. The third section helps the reader reflect on the entire curriculum and all that is involved and affected by the curriculum. The fourth section aims to help the reader understand the most effective teaching methods and how to implement them in their ministry context. The fifth section addresses maximizing teaching for the greatest impact by focusing on "three of the most critical areas of teaching effectiveness—evaluating, equipping others, and using technology" (p. 285).

### Critique

This book is unique in that it is not simply one author conveying the methodology of teaching the next generations but the contributions of twenty-six people who are knowledgeable in Christian formation and teaching. Linhart does a great job of presenting their material in a well-ordered manner that is easy to follow and practical in theory. Linhart provides the contributing authors' material as well as questions and activities at the end of each chapter. The questions and activities challenge the reader to reflect on the material and how to practically apply it in real life. Additionally, Linhart provides further resources at the end of each chapter for those interested in digging deeper into the subject matter.

This book presents a lot of material, almost like small books within a larger book, because of the amount of material one must digest. However, the work is thorough, and while addressing the need to teach the next generations, Linhart succeeds at teaching the reader because of the information he presents. Linhart's desire that Christians not teach just for the sake of teaching but to teach so that spiritual formation might occur is communicated throughout the book. Linhart's reminder of Dewey's philosophy regarding the teaching environment being of significant influence just as much if not more than the presented material and Maxine Greene's thoughts about implicit curriculum's ability to create students who do not think for themselves and therefore create a "social destiny" that may not be the best atmosphere to learn, caused this reader to contemplate these two schools of thought. Linhart stated that he believes that young people do not desire not to learn, but rather, they are not presented with material in the right way to allow them to learn properly. This creates a teaching dilemma that many blindly participate in to keep the status quo.

Throughout the book, Linhart focuses on teaching for spiritual formation, not simply teaching for knowledge. Just as Jesus knew the audience he was teaching to, this book serves as a reminder that Christian teachers must understand who their audience is so that information can be transmitted to the learner in a manner that is unwavering in its foundational truth but understandable and approachable to the intended recipient of the information. Linhart puts the pressure not on the learner to learn but on the teacher who has accepted the call to teach. Tying teaching with spiritual formation takes the Christian teacher from thinking on the natural level to the supernatural level because, as stated in the book, "There's a lot at stake for those who teach the next generation" (p. 113).

### **Evaluation**

This book is not a one-time read but should be a resource picked up repeatedly as a reference and reminder for Christians called to teach. It should be a required handbook for anyone teaching children, students, and young adults. It highlights some of the problems many in ministry have today of either using the same tried and true curriculum that worked twenty years ago or, on the other end of the spectrum, copying what the church down the street or in another state is doing because they see their success. While curriculum and styles can be shared and copied, this reader agrees with Linhart in that each teacher and the staff overseeing each teacher must know their audience. Teachers need to know their students because the teacher-student relationship should naturally fall into a discipleship model.

This reader would love to see an updated version of this book because much has changed regarding education and technology since it was written seven years ago. However, the premise of the goal of teaching to help believers mature in Christ remains true regardless of the passing of time. While the book's last chapter addresses technological tools for Christian teaching, it is

limited in its information to help teachers effectively create and navigate digital learning environments that meet a student where they are not just to teach but to assist in the transformation process of the individual. There is an emphatic plea to teachers to embrace the digital technology platform that is "here to stay" to enhance, not replace, the teaching process (p. 323). This reader finds the book itself to be an example of not holding too tightly to teaching material; however, because much of this book addresses the teaching methods and the why behind Christian teaching, it will always be a good resource subject to adaptability by the individual teacher.