

BOOK REVIEW

Ageing Disgracefully, with Grace: Enjoying Growing Older

Authors: Michael John Lewis (Chartered Psychologist, Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, Honorary Academic Writer University of the Highlands and Islands, Scotland)

This is an appositely titled book which expresses its subject succinctly in ten compact chapters. The heart of the author's argument concerning ageing, for me, is summed up in the phrase that we are "as old as we feel." With longevity and better health care the later years of life continue to be very productive years for an increasing number of people. Chronological age becomes increasingly less relevant in appreciating those in the third or fourth age of life. The author produces a clear rebuttal of the stereotyping of those in their later years. I wholeheartedly concur with his findings from my own experience for diversity is as much a characteristic of those in their later years as any other generation. They are not a homogenous group. Lord Filkin (2013) in his well researched House of Lord's Select Committee Report "Ready for Ageing?," makes plain how the older generation are well engaged and fulfilling valuable roles in a wide range of voluntary organisations in the community.

Dr.Lewis refers to a range of helpful research which enables the reader to appreciate the developing understanding of the nature of the ageing process. It was particularly useful to have the clearly stated ten criteria of *ego identity*, based on the work of the psychologist Erikson. Readers should find this a helpful practical guide in seeking to understand the later stages of life better.

The reference to wisdom is important, for long lives have the potential to yield valuable insights into coping with life's challenges and continuing questions. Research by Sternberg et al (1992) draws particular attention to the importance of wisdom and its development. Reminiscence and Life Review, as the author states, can enable these insights to be shared. The detailed chapters on the Old and New Testament both underline the importance of the responsibility of honouring the elderly but also by the same token the elderly are under the judgment of God to lead a life of righteousness. As with other faith traditions The Judaeo-Christian tradition has relied upon the transmission of the story of faith through those of later years. We respect them for their faithfulness in seeking to lead godly lives and practice that faith in daily living.

Dr. Lewis ends the book with a constructive focus on the importance of humour, music and the arts as ways in which one can age with happiness and grace. I think that I would have preferred the use of Joy instead of Happiness, for the latter does not convey a positive and strong enough message for me. Nonetheless there is no doubt that his concluding intention conveys a hopeful and helpful note which encourages a wholesome and positive approach to growing old.

The reference to money, as always, raises questions. There is no doubt that many in the older generation, with proper pension provision, are adequately or well catered for. But

organisations dealing with the elderly, such as Age UK, can point to significant *fuel poverty*. Their situation should not be lost in a general improvement in the financial position of the majority of older people.

I can warmly commend this book for the thoughtful, focused presentation of a positive approach to understanding the major issues involved in growing older. Its brevity and precision makes it very readable and accessible to a wide audience.

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