

❖ Other Voices ❖

[Much] ambiguity permeates our thinking about aging. Is it a decline or an ascent? [Is life] a journey that moves upward until it peaks about middle age and then slopes downward to death? Shall we work to prevent aging or learn to revere it? We cannot learn to understand aging if we undervalue or overvalue its realities, or...simply try to make it appear as much like midlife or youth as possible. The fact is that aging is both descent and ascent, ...loss and gain. This is true of growth at every stage of the life cycle.

KATHLEEN FISCHER, *Winter Grace: Spirituality and Aging*

We are not alone in our worry about both the physical aspects of aging and the prejudice that exists toward the elderly, which is similar to racism or sexism. What makes it different is that the prejudice also exists among those of us who are either within this group or rapidly approaching it.

JIMMY CARTER, *The Virtues of Aging*

I am reviewing carefully the places in Scripture where I might find old age mentioned for the first time. Adam lived for 930 years, yet he is not called an old man. Methuselah's life was 969 years, and he is not called an old man. I am coming all the way down to the flood, and after the flood for almost three thousand years, and I find no one who has been called old. Abraham is the first one, and certainly he was much younger than Methuselah, but he is called an old man because his old age had been anointed with rich oil.... [I]t was full of days.

ST. JEROME, *Homilies on the Psalms 21*

So then, when are we old? The correct answer is...when we think we are—when we accept an attitude of dormancy, dependence on others, a substantial limitation on our physical and mental activity, and restrictions on the number of other people with whom we interact. As I know from experience, this is not tied very closely to how many years we've lived.

JIMMY CARTER, *The Virtues of Aging*

The...situation of many people, old and young alike, is a disease of the imagination. We have accepted the negative images of old age. The task... is to convert the imaginations of both old and young to a new vision of the human. And this can only happen if the old themselves refuse to let society define them, and instead internalize new images of the later years. Large numbers of older people who refuse to be seduced by our current value system could be an unprecedented prophetic force in the world.

KATHLEEN FISCHER, *Winter Grace: Spirituality and Aging*

Paul declares [in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18] that whereas aging and its changes are inevitable, they need not be calamitous. They can instead be opportunities for deeper spiritual awareness, greater understanding, and livelier fulfillment. The Bible makes plain that vision and bold faith are not limited to those under thirty. In fact God often summoned those who were near or beyond their “threescore and ten” to be agents of divine truth and purpose: Abraham and Sarah, Noah, Hannah, Naomi, Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna, Nicodemus.

DONALD J. SHELBY, *“It Takes a Long Time to Become Young”*

[The early Christian fathers and mothers have taught me] that whatever our culture tells us about life being an inevitably demoralizing business of falling apart, it is not what human life is about. Bodies do wear out and our minds do get slower, but human beings are made in the image of God who is love; and God’s intention for us, if we choose to pursue it, is continual growth—growth in love both of God and neighbor.

ROBERTA C. BONDI, *“Smoke, Tears, and Fire: Spirituality and Aging”*

We must expect and demand more of our opportunities to share fellowship with our elders. The church can become an extended family; utilize the experience, skills, gifts and graces of its elders; demand a stewardship on the part of its members which lasts a lifetime; be an advocate for its older members who have been dehumanized by secular systems; celebrate “redirection” rather than “retirement”; and be thankful for the servanthood, so frequently shown...by the loving action of older members. But most importantly, the church can learn more about what it means to be part of the Kingdom by more fully incorporating aging persons in the midst of its ministry.

DANIEL B. OLIVER, *“A Holistic Approach to Ministry”*

Because all the commandments have [a] social dimension, we must do the will of God as a “light of the world,” showing a way to the nation in which we live, indeed to the whole wide world. Care of the elderly should not be simply a family matter among us, for, in a way, Christian community replaces the conventional family unit; Christian community is a new-order family. Therefore, congregations must begin to wrestle with the problem of aging members. We are called to do God’s love and justice with the world’s elderly people.

DAVID G. BUTTRICK, *“Threescore, Ten, and Trouble: A Biblical View of Aging”*

What will the kingdom be like according to Zechariah [8:4-5]? It will be like a public park. There will be benches where the old folks can bask in the sunshine in enjoyment. No disease will have brought them premature death, no feebleness of body or mind will have impaired their ability to

stroll out to the park to chat with their friends. They will be able to enjoy their lives, in their fullness of years.

ELIZABETH ACHEMEIER, *Preaching from the Minor Prophets*

A guaranteed long life of well-being is not to be equated with “medical advances” that extend life expectancy in order to keep people “alive” in various states of misery and dysfunction. Such a vision of the future as conjured by our technological capacity would be completely incongruous with the coming shalom of Jeru-shalom. Thus the vision is not only of an extended quality of life but a quality of life congruent with the gifts of a generous creator. There will be a reordering of resources so that all may luxuriate in life as the creator intends.

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN, *Isaiah 40-66, commenting on Isaiah 65:20*

[W]e should recognize that the commandment [to honor parents] is addressed to adult children. We are not to shout the command at little children or threaten them with stoning if they don’t conform. “Honor your father and mother” is a social injunction designed for mature children and their even more mature parents. Moreover, [it] addresses corporate Israel. We Americans tend to read our Bibles as if every “you” were second-person singular. But the Fifth Commandment is addressed to Israel and is intended to define social policy. ...[T]he commandment has more to do with social security issues than with psychological attitudes within the family.

DAVID G. BUTTRICK, *“Threescore, Ten, and Trouble: A Biblical View of Aging”*

Association with the older generation gives the younger generation practice in the art of living and dying. Life should not be a disjointed affair with each generation living isolated from the next, like sausage links. Life is a flowing stream.... My conclusion is that growing older Christian is not much different than growing up Christian. It’s a matter of models and support. Mother and Dad were my models growing up. Older adults are my models now. I can be a model to younger men and women.

KATIE FUNK WIEBE, *Border Crossing: A Spiritual Journey*

My own relationship with Christ has changed across the years. The Christ to whom I committed my life as a child still reigns over the central altar of my life, but the rugged realities of time, the harsh hurts of broken hearts, and the windy gusts of change have brought me to a more weathered, more mature image of him. There is a deepening awareness of the absolute stability of God’s unchanging presence in the changing realities of my life experience as my childhood images of Jesus age with me. My experience is that Christ ages very well!

JAMES A. HARNISH, *“Do You Know What Time It Is?”*