



# Growing Old Grace-fully

## The Role of Christian Doctrine in Promoting Successful Ageing

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# Themes

- Neglect of doctrine in studies of religion and ageing
- The 'informal theology' of churchgoers
- Doctrine makes a difference
- Proposed research project
- Doctrinal resources for successful ageing

# Doctrine makes a Difference

‘We in the Catholic Church are convinced that our prayers are valuable in helping them *to get* to heaven, and conversely we believe that the prayers of the souls of the departed are beneficial for our benefit here, I think it’s a two-way thing ... you’re purely attempting to assist them in whatever process they’re going through’ (Spreadbury and Coleman , 2011:89, original emphasis).

# Proposed Research Project

- *Phase 1: Laying the foundations.*

Study of Anglican churches in Greater Manchester with the aim of collecting initial data for the project. Churches selected according to churchmanship and social context.

- *Phase 2: Extension of project to other denominations*

Extension of the project to Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, United Reformed, and independent evangelical churches.

# Doctrinal Resources for Successful Ageing

- The biblical witness
- The *Imago Dei*
- The Church as the Body of Christ
- The Incarnation

# The Biblical Witness (1)

- ‘Grey hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life’ (Prov. 16.31).
- ‘The glory of youths is their strength; but the beauty of the aged is their grey hair’ (Prov. 20.29).
- ‘In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap’ (Ps. 92.14).

# The Biblical Witness (2)

- Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 18.1-15).
- Elizabeth and Zechariah (Luke 1.5-25, 57-58).
- Simeon and Anna (Luke 2.22-38).

# The Biblical Witness (3)

‘Nowhere in the biblical canon are [the elderly] pitied, patronized, or treated with condescension. Nowhere is growing old itself described as a problem. Nowhere are elders described as pitiable, irrelevant, or behind the curve, as inactive or unproductive. Nowhere are they, as in so many Western dramas and narratives, lampooned as comic figures. On the contrary, they are seen as the bearers of wisdom by virtue of their age. Death is treated as an enemy to be conquered by Christ at the eschaton (e.g 1 Cor. 15.24-26), but it never seems to occur to the New Testament authors to characterize the aging process itself as an evil to be overcome. Thus, the New Testament offers us an alternative vision in which the modern, popular view of aging as a “problem” might appear puzzling and unhealthy’ (Hays and Hays, 2003:11).



# The *Imago Dei*

Human beings are made in the image of God:

‘Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness .... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them’ (Gen. 1.26-27).

# The Church as the Body of Christ

‘For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another’ (Rom. 12.4-5).

Cf. 1 Cor. 12.12-27.

# The Incarnation

‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth’ (John 1.14).

‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross’ (Phil. 2.6-8).

# St. Anthony of Padua, Patron Saint of the Elderly

