

**Coleman, D. Koleva and J. Bornat, eds., Ageing, Ritual and Social Change: Comparing the Secular and Religious in Eastern and Western Europe. Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2013. Pp. xviii, 283. Pb. £19.99. ISBN 978-1-4094-5215-7.**

This volume is a compelling and authoritative contribution to the literature that seeks to understand our quest for meaning in later life. The twelve essays, carefully organised and edited, make a significant contribution to our understanding of the nature of ageing in human society and within two different areas of Europe. The technical nature of this writing may make the book over-specialised for the general reader, but its findings have significant implications for our understanding of religion and its practices in Europe today.

In a variety of ways, we are asked to consider whether and in what way religion might contribute to our well-being, particularly in old age. We are encouraged to reflect on this intriguing question by a rich variety of shared narratives that offer the reader insight into the ways in which value and belief enable individuals and communities to live through the physical processes of ageing. These discussions are contextualised within the experience of rapid social change across Europe. A distinctive feature of this book is that it offers a dialogue between the increasingly secular culture of the UK and the more traditional religious communities of former socialist countries where religion has a very different place in family and community. We learn in these narratives of the essential and existential support that religion provides to enable people to cope with social loss and physical frailty. A picture emerges of how older people play a role in the holding together of religious communities and in transmitting the Christian faith to younger generations.

As the inter-relationship between ageing, ritual and social change is examined, we note the profound value of older people in religious communities and see how religion can contribute to a good old age.

The book is organised into five sections. Section One offers a background which includes an overview of ageing and ritual in Europe; and a discussion of the methods of investigation and in particular oral history. The largest section of the book (chapters 3–6) provides an analysis of the major questions which underlie the research project behind the book; the emergence of religiosity and non-religiosity in people's lives; personal explanations for engagement in ritual practice; and continuing commitment to religious ritual in otherwise non-religious people. The next two sections examine the role of religion in enabling adjustment to

ageing. This includes a focus on death and bereavement. The final section of the book offers a discussion on what conclusions can be drawn from the project. Throughout the book, there is meticulous documentation of sources with a helpful set of appendices, bibliography and index. Why, then, should the general reader of theology take notice of this? In addressing issues of numerical decline, the Church often laments in having to inhabit a demography of an ageing Church. It may follow that many of our strategies (and the theologies that support them) implicit and explicit ageism. This is serious for our understanding of age, for older people and for our attitudes to them. This book and its findings show us that it might be possible to hold together some inter-generational equity whereby we might counteract negative stereotypes and the marginalisation of our ageing congregations. Older people may be our natural spiritual constituency and a vital part of sustaining the religious and spiritual life of our communities.

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