

Still Becoming: Women, Men and the Search for Meaning in Later Life

"We are creatures, not of the minute, but of the hour, the day, the week, the year, the decade ... of shared historical times. We are becoming, rather than being." Raymond Tallis¹

Introduction: How shall we live our lives?

It starts with one or two, the people you thought of as a different generation anyway. Then it's a trickle of friends and relations on Facebook, documenting days spent looking after grandchildren, their trips to far-flung places, their progress in painting or golf, their epic charity cycle rides. Finally it reaches you. The person you live with retires, or it's you yourself picking up the goodwill cards and garden centre vouchers from your grieving colleagues and contemplating life as a pensioner. Goodbye to the daily commute, the endless emails and paperwork - and praise for important jobs well done. Hello to a major life change you always knew was ahead of you, but somehow thought would never arrive. After all, barring a few creaks, you still feel in your prime.

You will find plenty of guidance on coping with your new status. How to keep your mind and body active with regular exercise and adult education classes. How to manage your finances, whether you're buying an annuity or a Lamborghini². How to cope with common health issues in old age, and the possibility of long-term care for yourself and those you love. You will also find guidance on managing relationships and sexuality as we age. What, though, does it all mean? What has your life been for? What hopes can you have for your future?

These are the questions I address in this book. There is a growing interest in and literature about spirituality and old age which I will draw on, but my focus is on what the quest for meaning in later life has on the way we live our lives in all their dimensions. Does retirement from work have to signal withdrawal from mainstream life and an end to our growth as people? Specifically, can those of us within the Christian tradition meaningfully talk about older people having a sense of calling?

A time to retire

I am contemplating these questions while still working full-time myself. My year group has another six years to go until we get our state pensions, but many of those born in the fifties have already taken retirement. "Very early retirement", I hear myself say when telling people my husband has joined their ranks. Given he's days younger than I am, this feels like an important qualification. As he approached 60, my husband started balancing financial considerations against the rewards and downsides of his job: do I really want to carry on doing this, or can I afford to stop? He decided he could stop.

He is far from alone. A great many people from across the income spectrum plan how to retire as early as they possibly can, prepared to accommodate a cut in income levels in exchange for freedom.³ Not everyone is fortunate enough to have that choice, of course. Some who would

¹ Raymond Tallis, *The Waiting*, R4. Quoted in *Observer* 24 – 8 - 14

² Pensions minister Steve Webb widely quoted after he said in June 2014, "if people do get a Lamborghini, and end up on the state pension ... that is their choice."

³ Reference to data on who takes early retirement, when?

prefer to retire have to carry on earning well after retirement age for financial reasons. Others are traumatised by being forced to retire when they would rather stay in the job. Who knows what choices future generations will have. But for now, a significant number of the “baby-boomer” generation have retired early with potentially a couple of decades ahead of them.

From one perspective, we have earned our freedom and pensions through years of hard work. From another, such as David Willetts in *The Pinch: How the Baby Boomers Stole Their Children's Future*⁴, a better response is reproof. It's an increasingly common theme among commentators: the baby-boomer generation – roughly, those born between 1945 and 1965 - have selfishly accumulated wealth and failed to attend to the needs of younger generations. Our houses go up in value, while young people are condemned to short-term rental contracts; we retire with generous pensions, while young people start working lives with huge graduate debts. There is some truth in this picture, though it is an incomplete one. It leaves out the sizeable proportion of baby boomers who left school at 14 or 16, suffered in economic downturns and now live on small state pensions, with poor health. Loneliness, recent research found, is epidemic among elderly people.⁵

Nonetheless, Willetts is right to draw attention to the advantages enjoyed by the baby boomers. We benefitted from free education, the National Health Service, and heavy investment in infrastructure. Though not the focus of this book, how we pay pensions and health-care costs as life expectancy after retirement increases⁶, and how we divide the “cake” between younger and older workers, remain key issues.

Why work?

As a freelancer working from home, my husband's retirement had practical implications for me. How to lose myself in writing when I'm aware of someone else in the house? How to cope with knowing the dishwasher is getting stacked all wrong while I'm honing this paragraph? Such issues are common, and with goodwill and flexibility, we work them out. Surprisingly, his retirement also raised deeper questions for me. Since I'm doing work I love, I couldn't imagine ever wanting to stop. Yet as people increasingly asked, “So when are *you* going to retire?”, I found myself questioning the purpose and value of my work. I started balancing those financial considerations against the rewards and downsides of freelancing, and wondering not only how long I should carry on, but what it had all been for anyway.

Such inner questioning can be a feature of retirement for those – more usually men - whose identity has been strongly bound up with their job. While this is less of an issue in an era where people change careers more frequently, even leaving a job we've done for a short time gets us thinking. We leave, with the echo of our boss's and workmates' praise for our unique contribution ringing in our ears, and then we're replaced. Or perhaps we're not replaced, which makes us wonder why we were there in the first place. The question of who I am when I am not in paid work merges into the question of who I was when I did work. Maybe the only point of it was to earn enough to supply our needs, and a retirement where we can do pretty much as we please is our reward for putting in all those weary hours.

⁴ Reference needed + research others making this point

⁵ [A study of loneliness](#) in older Britons in 2012 found that more than a fifth felt lonely all the time, and a quarter became more lonely over five years Also cf [Guardian Feb 2014](#)

⁶ In 1970, men could expect a further 12.8 and women a further 17.2 years of life after 65; by 2020, the equivalent figures are 22.6 and 25.1 Department of Work and Pensions, 2011

As I pondered those questions, the Facebook posts of happily-retired friends and family scrolled before me, like alluring holiday adverts with their sunshine and beauty and cocktails at sunset. Just as I know the adverts idealise vacations, I know that these posts are filtered versions, which rarely show the complexity of my friends' lives. While some talk openly about ill-health or "feeling their years", others deliberately avoid doing so. The reality of caring for elderly parents, partners, siblings, friends or neighbours rarely features⁷. They are also often putting something back into the community through part-time work or taking up what the Americans call an "encore career", and a great many of them volunteer and are active in their local communities and churches. But looking in from the outside, what I see is the possibility of endless "me time", when I don't have to be responsible for anything – except maybe the dishwasher. My husband has shown it is possible. We could adjust our lives and make it happen for me as well as him, if that was what we wanted. The siren call of a free and leisured existence becomes all the more powerful when it actually becomes possible.⁸

There is much to be said for adults rediscovering the benefits of playfulness,⁹ and I look at this in Chapter (). But the idea of nothing but play does feel like a siren call. The concrete expression of it for me in the months following my husband's retirement was: do I write another book? Writing is "what I do". I love doing it. As well as providing some income, it has always been a key form of self-expression and communication. I'm also aware that once I commit to a book, it will take over my life for years to come. It will be hard work and other things will take a back seat. Supposing I stopped writing, life would be so much less pressured. The fact that this thought so quickly became a book, essentially about whether or not to write a book, directed me towards the answer. I'm not ready to stop work or writing, but I was certainly tempted. I know of other freelancers of a similar age who experience the same temptation when pondering a new project. Yes, it's exciting and worthwhile, but do I really want to do this, if I don't have to do so for financial reasons?

Vocation

For those of us who think in terms of vocation – whether in religious terms or general ones – it is shocking to find ourselves contemplating not bothering. "God give me work till my life is done, and life till my work is done," has always been our prayer.¹⁰ Not paid work, necessarily, but something meaningful we can contribute, a sense of purpose. As a personal coach, I've accompanied many people as they sought work which fulfilled their innermost needs. Some of them have been on the verge of retirement, looking for a satisfying and meaningful way of life once they stopped full-time employment. With both religious and non-religious clients, we talked the language of thriving, inner purpose, vocation, and "what I was born to do". But what if vocation has a use-by date?

There are plenty of examples of people who continue to be committed to their calling well into old age. The novelist Ursula Holden wrote in *The Author* about how, at 91 and in a care home, she set

⁷ Or not the ones I see. Such things may be shared with a smaller network, but that is my point.

⁸ Clearly, the affluent have many more options, but those on low incomes can also get to create happy, leisured lives in retirement. The large ex-pat communities on the Spanish Costas show that working-class people can have a life in the sun, for example.

⁹ E.g. see Stuart Brown, *Play: How it shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination and Invigorates the Soul* 2009

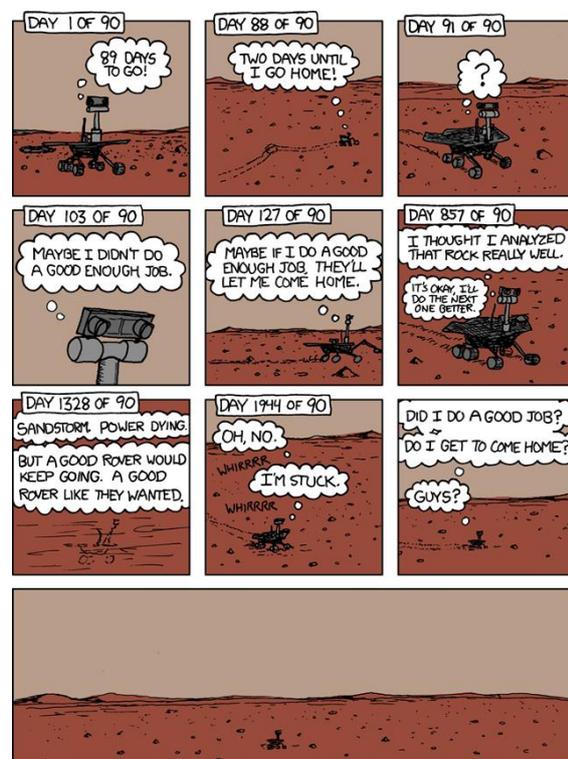
¹⁰ Epitaph on novelist Winifred Holtby's tombstone. A belief that our life's work is God's work is rife with dangers, of course. Individual perceptions and beliefs about our purpose in life have to be judged by other standards, such as, for Christians, love of God and neighbour, or the instruction to "Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God".

aside an hour a day to write, despite exhaustion and arthritic hands.¹¹ My mother Pat became a Church of England lay minister at the age of 60, dismissing inner doubts that she was too old. She exercised that ministry in her local church for nearly 20 years, often alongside my lay minister father. I remember them, at 77 and 87 respectively, doing Evensong in tandem, covering for each other when there were occasional lapses. At her funeral, the rector spoke movingly about how Pat had won over those who had been dubious about women’s ministry. Her ministry cost her. She often asked the question, do I really have to keep on doing all this, or can I stop? She – and my father - kept going because deep down they believed this was what they were called to do.

My parents taught me that God had a purpose for us all, and that our duty as Christians was to follow God’s calling. A large part of my work, beginning with industrial chaplaincy in the 1980s, through to being a personal coach in the 2000s, and researching and writing about the theology of work, was about affirming Christian vocation in daily life. As a tutor on a ministry training course full of middle-aged students, I was surrounded by people with a clear sense of calling. Part of my calling was to remind them that vocation was as much, if not more, about living as Christians in the workplace and our leisure activities as it was about doing jobs in the church. This became a strong theme in my first novel *Messiahs Don’t Fly*.

At the time, I believed that my calling was to write fiction, yet I struggled to find a mainstream publisher. Was I wrong about the vocation? Did God not want my offering? I remember being in a chapel filled with ordinands singing in full, triumphant voice: “Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night”, and feeling like I was at the back jumping up and down with my hand up saying, “pick me, pick me!”, and being passed over. Or like the Mars Rover Spirit, abandoned despite having worked so hard and so long.

These days, I am less likely to use overtly Christian language about my calling, and yet I still have the same drive to live out Christian values, to serve others, to stretch myself in response to what God requires: to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God. To love my neighbour as myself. There are no religious elements to the table tennis community project I’m currently establishing in a local church, yet it feels of a piece with what I have done before. I’m encouraging people to try new things, stretch themselves, meet and co-operate with others from a wide range of backgrounds, and of all ages.¹²



¹¹ Reference The Author

¹² The inspiring 2012 film *Ping Pong* brings table-tennis and reflections on ageing together as it follows players competing in the over-80s world table-tennis championships, including a woman of 100 and a man with terminal cancer.

Meaning and mattering

Voluntary activity or paid work after retirement helps to give a sense of meaning. We might be ageing, but we still matter, we are still doing something worthwhile. We have some significance over and above our importance to family and/or friends. While Buddhists can speak of losing attachment to the world and accepting our lack of individual importance, many of us are desperate to feel that we matter – otherwise, what is it all for? Christopher Fry sums it up in *The Lady's Not for Burning*:

*"I seem to wish to have some importance
In the play of time. If not,
then sad was my mother's pain, my breath, my bones,
My web of nerves, my wondering brain,
to be shaped and quickened with such anticipation
Only to feed the swamp of space."*

While wanting to "have some importance" is understandable, some would say the desire to be important has taken us too far along the road of narcissism. Twenge and Campbell go so far as to speak of a narcissism epidemic¹³, pointing to the rise in numbers of people regarding themselves as, and behaving as if they are, the centre of the universe. This issue has a special resonance for women. Feminists fought for women to be seen as important, rather than the second sex. We wanted women to have self-determination. Christian feminists argued for women to be liberated to be "all we're meant to be",¹⁴ a central theme in my book *A Woman's Work*. Women need to assert that they are individuals in their own right, not mere adjuncts of men, but has over-emphasis on "me and my rights" been bad for both society and women? I will consider issues around narcissism and individualism, including how they relate to the lives of older people, in Chapter ().

We don't need to be the centre of the universe, but we do need to feel that we matter, that we mean something to somebody. While believers find that sense of mattering and meaning in their relationship with God, we need non-religious perspectives here too. Helen Oppenheimer's language about minding and mattering is helpful. I matter to myself, I mind what happens to me, and I can see other people as fellow matterers, each with her own point of view. "Each of us", Oppenheimer says, "is a moving pattern of minding and mattering". I will come back to this point, because it is helpful in thinking through what makes someone a person, and how people are treated when they become frail or demented.

Each human being is unique, made up of a unique collection of traits and genes and experiences and interests, developing as we age and form relationships. What the narcissist fails to see is that there are many people similar to us and equally important. We are only special to a small group, and even if we are well-known now, very few of us will be remembered for more than a generation or two. Thus, thinking how much we really matter to other people brings us face to face with mortality.

Faith and fear

This is a book about living as fully as we can and looking forward to all we might yet do. But inevitably, it is also about death, what Larkin in *Aubade* calls "what we know, Have always known,

¹³ Twenge and Campbell *The Narcissism Epidemic*

¹⁴ reference

know that we can't escape,/ Yet can't accept." As he says, "Most things may never happen: this one will."¹⁵ The poem is a bleak portrayal of the fears that haunt our nights:

*Waking at four to soundless dark, I stare.
In time the curtain-edges will grow light.
Till then I see what's really always there:
Unresting death, a whole day nearer now,*

Religion offers no solace to Larkin, but coming to terms with mortality and what that means for our lives now is a key part of the spiritual journey. This has particular resonance for those in later life, conscious of their generation dying out, yet such fears and questionings are human, and may overwhelm us at any age. Teenagers, who are very much "still becoming", will often have deep questions about the meaning of life similar to those of older people, though the generations rarely share such experiences.¹⁶

Ann and Barry Ulanov capture the way that, for those of faith, the experience is a dark night of the soul. Those questions and fears are fired at God, and it is devastating when nothing comes back:

'We wake in the middle of the night besieged by our fears, and feel utterly abandoned to them. There is no counseling word, no heartening vision, no calming insight or plan of action. ... we worry that people do not like us and that they will not want to see us. We worry about what others will think of what we say ... We fear that our work does not really amount to anything important and never has ... We fear isolation, unceasing vulnerability, ... physical pain, aging, dying. ... Fear grows to encompass fears for our children and friends, fears of wars, disaster, evil. We call out to God. But nothing comes back. Bereft even of the wishes, fantasies, and images that once took us toward the divine and helped us see how close by God already was, we feel impossibly alone and helpless. ... All our false gods lie exposed like so many discarded Christmas wrappings. But even there, in that debris, we cannot find a shred of the presence of God.'¹⁷

Plenty of people become more sure in their faith as they get older, and find security in religious certainties. Their stories about becoming, and finding meaning, are also reflected in this book. Yet their experience is much more closely reflected in church worship than the experience of those who live through periods of darkness and loss of faith. A key element in writing this book has been gathering people together to talk through these issues of doubt, struggle and fear, because they are not always easily voiced. Or where they are voiced, are quickly responded to with over-easy reassurance. Instead, people have found it helpful to know they are not alone in experiencing a dark night of the soul, and to hear that it is a common feature in the life of faith. As Giles Fraser puts it, "In my experience, faith is a continual process of ideas about God being dismantled and reconstructed. The faith bit is a trust that the God thing will survive the next stage of deconstruction."¹⁸

Losing a parent

The quest for meaning becomes ever more important as we age. People we love die, and the rent in the fabric of the world closes quickly over for everyone except those closest to them. Organising

¹⁵ Reference for Larkin

¹⁶ As far as I know. Research may throw up examples, or I might initiate cross-generational conversations myself

¹⁷ Ann and Barry Ulanov, *The Psychology of Prayer*

¹⁸ Giles Fraser quoted in *The Guardian* 13th Dec 2013

funerals for relatives, attending them for family and for increasing numbers of friends, makes us reflect on our own lives and legacies. Many of us are responsible for clearing out parents' homes after they have died, and that too causes us to see our own lives in a different light. I have kept many of my parents' treasures, their family photos, the sermons they wrote, pieces of furniture which have nothing but sentimental value. I have kept some items which came from their parents, because these were grandparents I knew. But I threw out many things which held my parents' memories, but which had none for me. It's just an egg-cup, a book, a table. The people who treasured it mattered in their time, but fade from memory.

We have public debates on the practicalities of caring for a parent who loses capacity, goes into hospital or care home, and dies. We talk much less about what it means emotionally to lose a parent in later life, how it affects us personally.¹⁹ Scrolling through my Facebook feed, I come across the photo of an elderly woman, and the briefest of comments: "RIP my beloved mum, died 1 year ago today." The death of our mothers is a profound loss, of particular - sometimes life-changing - significance to women. Our relationship with her is usually one of the most important, certainly the longest-standing, relationships in our lives, yet losing her is by and large a private grief. We flash the photos of children and animals when we meet friends, but not the pictures of parents, even when they are consuming most of our emotional and physical energy.²⁰

Sons have their own particular relationship with their mothers; the way sons and daughters relate to the loss of a father is also shaped by our gender. I will consider this in Chapter (), alongside general questions about what it means to lose a parent, to become an orphan. Can it be a chance to heal a strained relationship with a parent? How do we cope with regret and pain when a parent dies unreconciled, or when, due to dementia, there is no chance to say goodbye? What of the guilt we can feel if we are glad that their death has freed us from a burden? Some of these points also apply to losing partners and close friends. Those working in the area of bereavement counselling have much wisdom here, which can help us to address questions about the meaning of life when we face them outside of the bereavement context.²¹

For those whose parents live to old age, there is a point where responsibility shifts: we take care of them, rather than they of us. We want to protect them, and yet they may not want to be protected. Working through those issues, feelings and practicalities, is my focus in Chapter (). How do adult children avoid being the kind of "helicopter children" who try to manage every aspect of parental lives, in the same way that "helicopter parents" try to manage their children's lives? In Chapter (), I will look at being the parent of older children, and the blurred transition between us feeling responsible for them, and them feeling responsible for us. While not all of us are parents, these issues extend into the way that older and younger generations treat each other generally. Do we infantilise elderly people, or patronise them? Do elderly people appreciate younger generations or write them off? How useful is it to view everyone through the prism of age, anyway?

Women

¹⁹ Research needed – this may be too much of a generalisation.

²⁰ This may be less true of young people who share images constantly. How do they frame images of parents, elderly or frail relatives? Generally, what are the predominant images and stories about old people on social media? This is another area I would like to research.

²¹ I anticipate this. Research needed

When I first sketched out a plan for this book, I called it, “How shall we live our lives?”. I was especially interested in the experiences and the challenges faced by the generation of women growing up in the UK after World War Two. We have certainly gained new opportunities. The pill helped us to control fertility, maternal mortality dropped, opportunities opened up in the workplace with Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts. The files of yellowing newspaper cuttings which I collected pre-internet days for my own previous research and writing on women’s lives and relationships are still on my shelves, reminding me of how much has changed – and how little. Women are paid on average less than men²², few reach the top positions, misogyny is pervasive in the unpoliced spaces of the internet, even if it is relatively unacceptable in the public sphere. But taken overall, women’s lives have opened up. We are encouraged to achieve educationally, we no longer have to give up jobs on marriage, and married women are privileged to do our own tax returns instead of all HMRC correspondence being addressed to our husbands. Look at the women who have succeeded in employment fields which were once barred to them: armed forces, police, the sporting arena. Think of the greater openness about female sexuality and health issues.

The church felt the impact of feminism and the opening up of opportunities for women just as much as society at large, albeit it took somewhat longer to change. Methodist and United Reformed churches have long had female ministers, but my generation saw a very public fight for women to be equally accepted into ministry in the Church of England. Now, female clergy are common. Christian feminism has helped to bring in changes in the language of worship away from the universal “men”, has opened up new ways of talking about God, and inspired women into roles beyond the home and submission to male leadership. Again, issues remain. Female clergy in the Church of England are more likely to be unpaid and part-time. A substantial minority in the pews objects to women bishops. The Catholic church still bars women from ordination and generally restates traditional roles. Fundamentalist churches still preach submission and “complementarity”, which stresses distinct roles for women and men. Yet overall, the world of the church has changed dramatically.

One of the initial questions which gave rise to this book was how those women who were so active in fighting for equal opportunities in society and church live as they reach retirement age. How do their lives now relate to the aspirations they once had to be more than a housewife and carer, to make their mark as women in the wider world? I still look at this question, specifically in Chapters (), but once the book became focused on “becoming”, its scope naturally expanded to include men as well as women. When I ask, “How shall we live our lives?”, the “we” encompasses not only women of my generation, but anyone who is interested in talking about meaning in later life, and how we live even when our circumstances are constrained. What enables us to keep being engaged with life and striving to grow as we age, whether we are men or women, religious or non-religious?

Still Becoming

The word “retire” is all about withdrawal from the action – people retire from work, players retire from competition. We retire to our rooms to sleep or think. A common image for retirement is the elder sitting in their armchair being wise and kindly - and occasionally comical. It’s as if they have reached a plateau from which there will be no more change. They are who they are. Central to this book is a belief that as long as we retain some capacity, we can keep developing ourselves, keep travelling on the journey of faith.

²² References needed

This was what I saw in my mother. Pat died three years after my father, at the age of 80, after several strokes which left her disabled enough to be in a care home. Life was a struggle, with many tears and frustrations, deafness and a fallible memory, yet her spirit persisted. She taught herself to write again by tracing letters over and over, like a child in school. She spoke in church one last time at an old friend's funeral, dictating her short speech for me to write out for her, and delivering it clearly. Disability didn't stop her having a small ministry in her care home. "Some of them are poor old things" she said once, before laughingly adding, "I suppose I'm one of them". Once we'd bought a lightweight walker, she went for daily walks around the local streets, while the care home staff had hearts in their mouths in case she stepped into traffic. They knew that pushing herself and getting out independently was what kept her alive, like the elderly man "nearer the end than the beginning" in Sheenagh Pugh's poem:

*He walks mile
after mile, blanking aches, stays up late
in the blue half-light, resists the pull
of sleep while he can, while his sight
still serves him, before that jerry-build,
his body, can no longer house a spirit
still nowhere near done with the world.²³*

In *Valuing Age*, James Woodward includes first-hand stories from a wide range of older people. It's a valuable reminder that people face the infirmities and challenges of old age with different mindsets. I acknowledge this variety, though my main interest is in those who are still open to "becoming". The contrast between embracing the waning, retiring if you like, and the passionate desire to seize the day, is well made in this poem from David Sloan.²⁴ "Some nights I feel I've lived too long," says the speaker, remembering the time an owl caused devastation among the couple's chickens, and the partner's acceptance that they're both getting old:

*"How many more tattered moons
will seek me out? You embrace this waning,
but I can't find a way to love the less.
You said, "Yes, we lose leaves, but we gain sky."
I say, "Give me back my legs." Let me
scale this tree, turn panther, pounce
on an owl under a hatching moon,
pillow the night with a fury of feathers."*

The third age

As I said at the start, there is a great deal of self-help literature on ageing well. Much of it focuses primarily on practical and health matters, although it can include reflections on finding meaning in life as we get older. As well as referencing relevant aspects from this area, I will refer to the political and charitable campaigning which fights for older people's causes, such as Age UK. Pensioner poverty and the cost of care are key issues, and though I will say that older people can achieve fulfilment despite such things, this is far from saying society can sit back and let them suffer.

²³ Sheenagh Pugh Short Days, Long Shadows

²⁴ David Sloan Living Too Long, Goodreads

I will also draw on books written by feminists reflecting on what ageing means for women. Betty Friedan's *The Fountain of Age* and Una Kroll's *Growing Older* are older examples²⁵, Lynne Segal's *Out of Time*²⁶ a more recent one. Like me, Segal is interested in women's inner lives, but she has little on spirituality. Theologians are tackling issues of age, too, with works on theology, pastoral care, and spirituality in later life. The Church of England's wise report *Ageing* opened up this area in the 1990s and James Woodward has similarly pertinent observations in *Valuing Age*²⁷. As in my earlier books on women and work, relationships between the sexes, and family values, I draw on sociology, psychology, theology and popular culture, as well as some first-hand research among older people. My disparate work and leisure activities have proved useful here. I have asked my questions of exam invigilators, urban and rural Women's Institute members, and players at a community table-tennis project in East Oxford. I have spoken to women clergy and the lay women who were part of the swell of activity in the church in the eighties and nineties. How do they see vocation now, as they take or approach retirement? More than I expected, I have quoted poetry, which often handles the deeper questions about meaning and purpose better than straightforward prose.

I set out to write this book because I needed to explore the question of vocation in later life for myself, particularly in response to my husband's retirement. I write from a privileged position, I know. Financially secure, in good health, and with no caring responsibilities. All that could change in an instant, though if you are reading this, I have presumably remained privileged enough to complete this book! While I speak of my own experience because I know that it chimes with the experience of many of my peers, I do my best to reflect those who see things differently. I have framed this search in terms of Christian vocation, yet I hope much of it will resonate with those with no or little attachment to Christianity or the church.

We may not agree on what, ultimately, God – or life - demands of us. But let us agree that whatever our age, the question "How shall we live our lives?" is well worth asking.

²⁵ B Friedan *The Fountain of Age* 1993 U Kroll *Growing Older* 1988

²⁶ L Segal *Out of Time* 2013

²⁷ *Ageing* 1990 J Woodward *Valuing Age* SPCK 2008