

**One Foot in Heaven: Growing Older and Living to the Full**, Michael Hare Duke  
(SPCK 2001), 120 pp, £7.99 pbk

**Going against the Stream: Ethical Aspects of Ageing and Care**, Peter Jeffery  
(Gracewing 2001), 282 pp, £14.99 pbk

In the light of recent social and medical developments, significant old age does not now begin for most people in Western society until the age of 75. Further, there are a growing number of people surviving, in varying states of disability, well beyond that age. We are an ageing society with a significant proportion growing older and presenting particular needs, both physical and spiritual. These two books tackle this challenge from different standpoints.

Jeffery, a Roman Catholic ethicist, is concerned with the question of allowing or assisting life to come to an end when conditions become problematic. He also discusses the challenges of the need for ever increasing care for older people in a variety of settings. His discussion of the provision of care for older people, particularly in the UK, presents the churches with an opportunity to engage in critical and constructive challenge to a society where the social and financial provision for the care of older people is not a priority. Jeffery uncovers a disturbing picture of poorly managed care, inadequate collaboration between medicine and social services and with little commitment to listening to older people and their needs. These raise theological questions asserting the imperative need to renew basic claims relating to the personhood of the individual and the need for deliberate compassion.

Hare Duke speaks from within his own experience of growing sympathy about a positive understanding of old age, and how, within the framework of faith, older people can rediscover a positive role. This, he argues, might be done through volunteering, a different attitude to time, through learning and faith development and having some measure of realism about life's successes and failures as a preparation for death. His text is both realistic and comes from the wisdom of an individual who has forged some depth out of his lived experience. It is admirably brief and some older people would certainly benefit from reading it, though the publishers might have explored the possibility of a larger print - the present typeface isn't easy to read for the youngest of eyes!

Both books pose a wide range of questions that demand further reflection and action. In a period when the churches are in decline, it is doubtful that older people will be a priority. Indeed, the church itself might rightly be accused of a kind of ageism which fails to embrace the wisdom of the older person. In terms of our spiritual growth and the quality of care that might await us in old age we all have a vested interest in ageing! I hope that the churches might take a very different view of the process of ageing, and the place of older people within its life.

*James Woodward*  
Temple Balsall

