

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR  
AGEING AND SPIRITUALITY**  
**August 30<sup>th</sup> – September 2<sup>nd</sup>**  
**Auckland, New Zealand**

***Exploring the experience of ageing and reflecting on what  
may assist in making this a time to celebrate***

I want to reflect on how we might age creatively, with a sense of wonder and contentment. How we might journey towards death not with fear and apprehension but with gratitude and a sense of mystery. I am moved to think about these things because of the many people I meet who begrudge growing old, who complain about it and face the future with growing apprehension. How is it, I wonder, that some people grow old complaining whilst others age with a sense of grace and satisfaction? Are there ways of accepting the ageing process that are rewarding and to be welcomed? If there are – then how do we discover them?

I think that the first time I realised that I was getting old, and that this ageing process inevitably involved losses as well as gains, was when, at the age of seven, I moved from the Infant School to the Junior School. During the summer holidays a wonderful new climbing frame, in the shape of a ship, was erected in the infant school playground but to my dismay, pupils at the junior school were not allowed to play on it. I think that my first experience of old age was when my grandmother came to live with us after my grandfather died. She was very old. Decades later I realised that she was only 64 and she lived with us for the next 24 years. But my first experience of creative ageing occurred in 1962. The first person that I ever gave Holy Communion to as a brash, young and totally inexperienced curate or assistant minister was a lady called Mary Robinson. She was 88 years old and therefore would have been born in 1874 at a time before there were aeroplanes or cars, in fact in that year a bicycle driven by a chain was invented. Also in that year, in England there was a Factories Act which raised the minimum working age to 9, and someone patented the rules for a game they had devised, it is known today as lawn tennis! Mary and her sister Margaret, born in 1876, had chosen to come and live in a deprived multi-racial parish in the centre of Birmingham in order to support the church and be alongside some of the poorest and most marginalised people in Britain at that time. I had only been in the parish for less than two months when she fell and broke her arm – unable to get up; she lay in the gutter, in the street, for quite a time before help arrived. Visiting her, I naively asked, if it hurt. “Yes” she replied “but at my age I regard it as a privilege that I am able to share in the pain of the world”. I will never forget that conversation, nor will I forget Mary.

People often remind us that we only have one life and of course that is true. But it is also true to say that we have many lives and these lives piece together like a jigsaw puzzle - childhood, student days, marriage and family or the single life, different phases of work and responsibility and, of course, retirement – which itself can be divided into several phases.

I want to explore some of the problems that we face as we enter that phase when our bodies and perhaps our minds too, begin to deteriorate. It is a time when pain, suffering, loneliness, regret and grief have to be handled in such a way that we do not lose that essential quality of being alive that reflects something of the mystery and majesty of human life. “The problem with ageing” writes Joan Chittister “is not age; it is petrification, rigidity of soul, inflexibility”. When we close our minds to what is new we close our minds to our responsibility to ourselves and to others to keep on growing”.

I have reached the stage of life where this body that has served me so well for over 70 years is beginning to complain and wear out. If it were a car I would have traded it in for a younger model years ago. My visits to doctors' surgeries or pharmacists are almost as frequent as my visits to the supermarket and I seem to spend as much time in hospital as I do on holiday, fortunately I don't go on many holidays! My friends are growing old alongside me and I attend their funerals and reflect upon what they have taught me. At the same time, intellectually and spiritually, I find that much of what I have learned and discovered over the years no longer sustains me and I feel the need to explore new fields which are less assured, less laid-out and more open to mystery and unknowing. It is a journey into unknown territory. I am conscious of the fact that I have moved from trying to put the clock back, trying to prolong my younger life and I now want to look forward and embrace the unknown future.

### ***Some of the problems of ageing***

I want to reflect on some of the problems of ageing and I have chosen just three areas; health, loss and loneliness. I shall say a few words about death later.

1) *Problems of health.* For most people, as they grow into old age, their bodies begin to show signs of wear and tear. Artificial hips proliferate, visits to hospitals increase and we have to come to terms with those health issues that *can* be sorted out and those that we have to live with. For many people there are problems associated with sight and hearing; problems of mobility increase and there are more accidents. Many people who have lived for sixty, seventy or eighty years with little more than a cough or cold to complain of now face a completely new experience of handicap and vulnerability. Little wonder that some complain and others, though not all, face the future with anxiety and apprehension or, indeed, even fear.

We are always old enough to die. Death can come to us at any stage of life, but if we are fortunate enough to reach old age, then we know for certain that death will arrive at this stage sooner or later

For the last couple of years I have been Chair of a Support Group for men with prostate cancer. We have about 150 members, 80 or so of whom get to our bi-monthly meetings. Every month two or three of our members die. There is a meeting taking place tomorrow evening (obviously I won't be there) and we have had discussions in the committee about one of the subjects to be discussed – '*end of life issues*'. Some of my colleagues have argued, very emotionally, that we shouldn't hold such a discussion in open session as it could be very upsetting for people – instead they are going to run a parallel session which people can opt into for half of the meeting if they can cope with the subject. Cope with the subject? Is there anyone who has been given a diagnosis of cancer who hasn't wondered about end of life issues?

If problems with our body give cause for concern, then problems with our mind are even more problematic and despite the massive improvements in dementia awareness and care over the last two decades, it is still a frightening and bewildering experience, and we have thought about this in some depth in this conference.

2) *Problems of Loss.* The longer we live, the more we have to face the death of friends and loved ones. Bereavement is one of the greatest losses that anyone can experience and, I'm afraid, it is an inevitable part of ageing. The loss of a loved partner or a child leaves a scar on the soul that will never leave, no matter how well we try to cope with our loss. Can we help people to prepare for the loss of their partner, or to discuss how their partner will fare if they die first? In my experience some people are open to such conversations, and with love (and often with humour) they can talk about it; and there are others who are afraid to face the possibility and who refuse to broach the subject. A friend of mine remembers visiting his dying father, with his mother. 'How are you going to manage when dad's gone?' he asked. His mother turned on him sharply 'Don't be so silly, your father's never going to

die' – and the matter was closed. Open minds and closed minds – what a benefit or burden they can be.

When in parish ministry, with many widows in the congregation, I always made a point of finding out about the deceased partner – I wanted to see the person I was visiting as a whole, so that I could understand where they were coming from and what were the factors that made them the people they were. I would suggest that everyone engaged in a caring profession should have a similar approach and know the stories of people's deceased partners. A friend of mine bemoans the fact that every time a new priest arrives she is no longer known as a person, she is seen just as an elderly widow – but she has had a rich life and misses her deceased husband dreadfully, even though he died 25 years ago. 'No one ever asks me about Alexander now' she sighs, 'they don't even know that he existed'.

Some people find that their loss of role can be a problem as they grow older. People who held an influential position in their working life often feel that they are no longer appreciated and that, as time goes by, fewer people remember the contribution they made. It may also be a time when there is a significant loss of income. It is all too easy for professional people, with our company pensions and insurance schemes to forget that for a great many people old age is associated with poverty or the threat of poverty. Another form of loss may be associated with having to come to terms with hopes and aspirations which will now never be fulfilled, perhaps the end of our dreams and fantasies.

3) *Problems of loneliness.* Finally, in this all too brief summary, I want to say something about loneliness. Academics disagree about the prevalence of loneliness in old age, and some have suggested that seventeen year olds may be lonelier than seventy year olds – but they do agree that loneliness increases with age and that widows are the group of people most likely to be lonely. There are many different forms of loneliness and I don't have the time to open them up and discuss them here, but they include social loneliness, emotional loneliness, romantic loneliness and family loneliness. Loneliness is an area which has attracted a great deal of study. Whilst we all know many old people who have fulfilled lives and many friends, we are less likely to know those who don't and for whom loneliness is an erosive experience. A couple of months ago in Edinburgh police broke into a flat to discover that the occupant had been dead for five years – and nobody knew, no-one had missed her.

It is also the case, of course, that those with a rich network of friends also potentially face a greater number of bereavements to cope with.

### ***Some of the blessings of ageing***

It is important that we don't just reflect on the problems of ageing but also acknowledge some of its blessings – and there are many. First amongst them I would want to place a sense of wonder at the majesty and mystery of life and creation. The older we get, the more humble we probably become as we reflect on what it is all about and our place in this majestic cosmos. Then there is the sense of amazement at the progress of scientific and technological advance. When I was a boy, *The Eagle* comic had stories about spacemen and rockets – it was sheer fantasy, but it is now over forty years since men walked on the moon – it is mind-blowing. I love the words of the astronaut Edgar Mitchell:

"Suddenly, from behind the rim of the moon, in long, slow motion moments of immense majesty, there emerges a sparkling blue and white jewel, a light, delicate sky-blue sphere laced with slowly swirling veils of white, rising gradually like a small pearl in a thick sea of black mystery. It takes more than a moment to fully realise that this is earth ..... home"

With age comes experience, and if we are able to learn and profit from it (sometimes a big 'if'), then we are able to gain a sense of perspective. We know that, despite their horror and brutality wars do eventually cease, tyrants do fall, sunshine can follow the rainstorm and the things we fear most so often fade away when we have to confront them. So our experiences of past events – and just remember the events of the last hundred

years – can give us a form of resilience, which enables us to face the future with a sense of hope and often, with a sense of humour. To end this all too short list, there are the blessings of our families and friends (although this is certainly not true for everyone), this something which I shall be returning to later.

Little wonder then that old age, for many people, can be a time of immense contentment as they reflect on the richness of their lives and the experiences of love and laughter, triumph over adversity and the enormous privilege of being alive. This is well expressed in Raymond Carver's poem 'Late Fragment'.

And did you get what  
you wanted from this life, even so?  
I did.  
And what did you want?  
To call myself beloved, to feel myself  
beloved on the earth.

### ***Some responses to ageing***

So, how do we respond to ageing? How does society respond? In this section I want to look at five different types of response.

1) *Society* Society in general responds to ageing in different ways. Back in Scotland pensioners receive a winter fuel allowance, to help with the bills during the cold months and everyone over 60 can travel on the buses without payment. But there are still many problems as you may imagine. Joan Bakewell has been appointed as an official spokesperson for the elderly and Julia Neuberger in 2008 set out a ten point manifesto:

- 1 Don't make assumptions about my age – end age discrimination
- 2 Don't waste my skills and experience – the right to work
- 3 Don't take my pride away – end begging for entitlements
- 4 Don't trap me at home because there are no loos or seats – reclaim the streets
- 5 Don't make me brain dead, let me grow – open access to learning
- 6 Don't force me into a care home – real choice in housing
- 7 Don't treat those who look after me like rubbish – train and reward care assistants properly
- 8 Don't treat me like I'm not worth repairing – community beds and hospitals
- 9 Don't treat my death as meaningless – the right to die well
- 10 Don't assume I'm not enjoying life – grey rage

. . . . and the discussions continue.

2) *Families.* Families react to ageing in different ways and, of course, it also depends upon which member of a family we are talking about. A six year old was asked where his grandmother lived. 'Oh' he said, 'She lives at the airport. When we want her we just go and get her, and then when we're done having her visit we just take her back there.'

For many families, ageing presents them with real problems – what to do with mum! Or, as one middle aged son said to his father – 'you treat me well dad, just remember, I'll be choosing your nursing home!'

But with the breakdown of the extended family, with children moving away and living perhaps hundreds or even thousands of miles away from ageing relatives, traditional patterns break down and a different and more imaginative approach is often called for. Skype, for all its wonders, is not the complete answer to the family's problems.

We must also recognise that for many people the family, with unresolved issues, bitter memories or complex ambiguities add to the problems of ageing rather than compensate for them.

3) *Professional care.* The proliferation of professional care is one response of families and wider society to the issue of ageing. In recent years a large number of different types of care, from domiciliary care in a person's own home, to residential care – itself providing

a vast array of alternatives - have sprung up. A glance at the Selwyn Foundation's website gives a good indication of the sort of provision which is now available in many places. The transition from home into a form of residential care is a huge area of concern and requires very skilled and compassionate handling for most people.

I cannot comment on the quality of care in this part of the world, although I saw some good examples in Australia a few years ago, but I suspect that it is probably similar to back home. A mixture of the excellent, which is in a minority, to the acceptable, to the unsatisfactory to the downright awful. A report by the Mental Welfare Commission in Scotland, published just a few months ago was hugely critical of the care homes it inspected. This is an area where there is still much to do and much to improve, but it is also an area where some people and organisations provide wonderful supportive and imaginative care.

A recent study of nursing in Canada contained conclusions that could well be transferred to care homes. In this quotation I have substituted the word 'nurse' by the word 'carer' and I think it gives us a excellent model of what we are hoping to achieve.

"The individual is seen by the carer as a whole person who does not just need to be washed, fed and changed, but a person who deserves to be washed, fed and changed in a respectful, gentle manner that acknowledges the other's unique humanity. Only a carer who feels and conveys compassion can perform the essential ordinary tasks in this manner. Carers not only need to do the small things; they need to do the right small things, those that are important to a particular person. To be meaningful, even the simple caring gestures need to be individualized."

The other major conclusion of the study was the importance of keeping the promises made to people never to abandon them; if we care, then we care to the end.

The superb work of some is brought down to a lowest common denominator by the many and this must be very dispiriting and demoralising for those staff who approach their work with the elderly and particularly those with dementia with great insight, skill and compassion. A recent issue of the journal *The Gerontologist* contained these words "the experience of living with dementia in residential care was fundamentally one of experiencing difficult and distressing emotions relating to loss, isolation, uncertainty, fear and a sense of worthlessness". In situations like this it is easy to understand why so many people are fearful about their future and why so many dread the ageing process. In general terms it is difficult to see care homes as conducive to creative ageing, although clearly that will not be the case for everyone. It was not true for the residents of one nursing home that Richard Stillgoe and Peter Skellern wrote about:

The Bower, in Bexhill on Sea, provides a quiet life  
For people who are shattered after years of mortal strife.  
A Care Home for the elderly, where no-one seemed to care  
And recently the test bed for the Caithness Self Lift Chair.

The patron and the matron, one a major one a nurse  
Think old ladies are appalling and old men even worse.  
They need helping, they need lifting, and there isn't cash to spare  
So they've swapped a girl called Tricia for the Caithness Self Lift Chair

The old folks at The Bower all liked Tricia, she was nice  
She listened to their stories, though she'd heard them once or twice  
But now she's gone, the lounge is quiet, the inmates sit and stare  
Until suddenly a noise comes from the Caithness Self Lift Chair

Mrs. Mould is not what social services call sprightly  
 She just sits and watches Countdown<sup>1</sup> and shouts at Richard Whiteley  
 But suddenly she's flying in a shower of underwear  
 Propelled across the ceiling by the Caithness Self Lift Chair

The others watch her progress as her mighty knickers snag  
 On the sharp undusted antlers of a taxidermist's stag  
 They exchange conspiring glances, can they do it, do they dare  
 For The Bower bought a dozen of the Caithness Self-Lift Chair.

They open all the windows; move the chairs across the floor  
 Apart from one, which Mrs. Thomas jams against the door  
 Each one sits and faces freedom and says a silent prayer  
 Lord, carry me away now on my Caithness Self Lift Chair

One by one the chairs spring into life and pensioners are hurled  
 Across the cliffs of Bexhill to return to the real world  
 Mrs. Robert's chute has opened; she has landed on the beach  
 She is joined by all the others; they enjoy a wine gum each.

They unfold their pack-up zimmers and they turn to face The Bower  
 And they shout out 'Sod Off matron' in a voice of awesome power.  
 The inmates of the Bower, free from care and free as air  
 Unchained from sheltered living, by the Caithness Self Lift Chair

I suppose that this is a classic example of resilience, one of the components of creative ageing!

4) *The churches.* How many times have I heard clergy speak disparagingly about any particular church, dismissing it as 'just a group of old women'. It breaks my heart. Why are so many clergy blind to the immense resources of experience and faith that such a congregation offers? One book I read said that "churches need to recognize their own corporate sin of abusing older people's willingness to work long hours in support of (the institution) ... they often do the more physical and administrative 'hidden work' while their life-learned wisdom and spiritual expertise goes largely untapped and un-nurtured".

It was to address problems such as this that a few years ago a small group of us in Edinburgh set up the charitable company *Faith in Older People*, to affirm our faith in them and what they have to offer and also to recognize the faith that they have and to seek ways to celebrate it. We are still a long way behind Elizabeth MacKinlay's work in Canberra and Chris Perkins' work here in the Selwyn Foundation, but we are partners in a similar task.

Fifteen years or so, when I was in parish ministry, I decided, one Harvest Festival, that instead of bringing cabbages or tins of beans to decorate the church, we would celebrate 'The Harvest of our Live's instead. I invited the members of the congregation to bring to church something which celebrated their lives. We had a wonderful display, people brought books that they had written, paintings and drawings they had created, pots of jam they had made, quilts they had sewn and pictures of their children and grandchildren. We gathered together a wonderful display and the church had never looked more interesting or celebratory. Two displays remain in my memory. A lady in her nineties – she is now well over a hundred – formidable and very respectable in the local community, brought about six or eight life-size sketches of nudes, which we hung on the walls of the church. She had been an art student in the 1920s and had kept these drawings which, I suspect no-one knew about. We had another elderly member, approaching ninety, a large round lady with

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<sup>1</sup> Countdown is a popular TV programme in the UK and the late Richard Whiteley was its presenter for many years

very few teeth, she reminded me of Grandma Giles (if any of you know that cartoon character) – well, she brought a display box full of medals – she had been an international sprinter and hurdler in her youth – no-one would ever have guessed that! We had a wonderful celebration of the gifts and talents of so many people and I remember it as the best Harvest Service I ever attended.

5) *The personal.* We take our personalities with us as we journey into old age, whether that is a blessing or a curse is perhaps for other to decide upon. So those who, over the years have found ways to adjust to change and cope with loss will almost certainly have a less stressful time than those who have been unable to bend both their bodies and their minds. It is not a matter of coping, we always cope, we have to. The question is – do we cope well? As a Myers Briggs practitioner I am interested in the relationship between personality and ageing.

Jung wrote, eighty years or so ago, that when people are young they look for certainties, they want to know what is black and what is white, what is right and what is wrong. As we grow older, he said, we become less sure about certainties and we look for those things which can help and support us in our doubt and our unknowing. When we are young we believe that we can change the world, when we are older we know that we have missed so many opportunities, made so many mistakes – so what we want then is some form of reassurance and acceptance – forgiveness perhaps? In our youth we want certainty, in our age we want understanding. What once we knew, now we are less sure about; what once was clear now is much more complex and ambiguous. It is not the world that has changed, it is us. We stumble on into our later years, bruised by our experiences, humbled by the extent of our ignorance and only too well aware of our frailty and incompleteness. But this sense of vulnerability, this awareness of our limitations, this hesitancy about the great mysteries of life should not be seen as weakness but as strength; not the cause for anxiety or guilt but rather as the raw material of thanksgiving, for here, as we move towards the end of our life, we face the greatest mystery of all.

One of the tasks of ageing is to prepare ourselves to face it with a sense of dignity, even perhaps, with a sense of welcome, for it is a great mystery. For everyone there is what I would call “the spiritual journey towards our end”. For only a few is it a religious journey, but it is a journey that we all have to make, whether we try to ignore it or ‘rage at the dying of the light’ as Dylan Thomas expressed it; whether we face it with calmness, rage or stoicism. The question is, are there any ways in which we can help ourselves and others in this journey?

I was much taken by the words of a young Dutchman who died in a concentration camp courtesy of the Nazis. He spoke of the need to “come to terms with our bad moods without making others suffer from them” and went on “we have just one moral duty, to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and reflect it towards others. The more peace there is in us, the more peace there will be in our troubled world.

One of the tasks of later life is to look back at the joys and sorrows, the successes and failures, the unresolved problems and unfinished tasks of the past; to look back in order to let go. It is what has been described as ‘the increased interiority of the personality’ and as ‘the inexpressible experiences of transformation’. These are difficult phrases but I mention them here to underline the fact that we are talking about something very serious and profound here. How do we reach this inexpressible experience of transformation when we may be starting at a place in which we are struggling with grief, or with the decline of our body or with the onset of dementia? How can we prepare ourselves for residential care if the ‘letting go’ of things that are dear to us is more related to practical considerations than with the desire to move into a more detached and quiet time of reflection? How do we arrive at that ‘contemplative context of time’, when we gratefully accept the transition from doing to being and have time to consider the wonder and mystery of life? What in theological language might be phrased as moving into an awareness of glory or what one 95 year old friend described to me as her ‘growing awareness of wonder’?

It is a puzzle to me to understand why the writings and teaching and Viktor Frankl are so rarely referred to in the UK. I can still remember the impact his *Man's Search for Meaning* had on me when I came across it almost thirty years ago. In fact I gained a new member of my congregation many years ago when, as a visitor one Sunday she heard me mention Frankl in a sermon. She had never heard him referred to in a church before and that persuaded her to throw her lot in with us, that and our use of inclusive language! Frankl was convinced that when confronted by suffering (as many older people are) we should replace the often asked question 'Why do I have to suffer?' with the statement 'Yes, this has happened, now what can I do?' To be able to answer that second question, we must have a reason for living, a meaning to our life.

The vitality of anyone's life, at any stage, depends upon them having a sense of meaning or meanings. The challenge for older people is to make sense of life at a stage when loss and changes occur more frequently and perhaps more painfully. We need to have a sense of purpose in order to cope successfully with the erosion and diminishment that takes place in so many areas of our life. These losses are real, the question is – will they overwhelm us? When I hear people complaining about growing older, feeling depressed about their situation and fearful for the future, I am so often aware of a lack of purpose, a loss of meaning. This illustrates Kimble's oft repeated view that more and more people today have the means to live but no meaning to live for. 'The crisis in ageing' he says 'appears to be a crisis of meaning'. Frankl put it this way: He who has a Why for living can survive almost any How.

Frankl maintained that we can find meaning in three ways. First, by what we *give* – in terms of creative work and endeavour; second, by what we *take* from the world – in terms of meaningful relationships and experiences, and third by the *stand* we take towards a fate that we can no longer change – be that a bereavement, an illness or whatever. From such a simple assessment we can discover and develop a whole approach to creative aging.

### **Even unto death**

A friend of mine wrote "A sentence is not finished till it has a full stop, and every life needs a dying to complete it". But there are different ways of looking at death. The American comedian George Carlin spoke about it in this way:

"The most unfair thing about life is the way it ends. I mean, life is tough. It takes up a lot of your time. What do you get at the end of it? A death. What's that, a bonus? I think the life cycle is all backwards. You should die first; get it out of the way. Then you live in an old age home. You get kicked out when you're too young, you get a gold watch, you go to work. You work forty years till you're young enough to enjoy your retirement. You do drugs, alcohol, you party, you get ready for high school. You go to grade school, you become a kid, you play, you have no responsibilities, you become a little baby, you go back to the womb, you spend your last nine months floating .... You finish off as an orgasm."

If we can approach death creatively it frees us to enjoy life more fully in our later years. There have been a number of different understandings about old age and death over time but one that is quite prevalent in our Western culture at the moment is where there is a relentless hostility to physical decline and a tendency to regard health as a form of secular salvation and illness and death as a medical failure. Hence the growth of the anti-ageing industry which is worth millions of pounds or dollars – just take note of the TV advertisements. I believe that if we are authentically to stand alongside people as they age and as they endeavour to handle the problems of ageing with hope and approach death with gratitude then we ourselves have to have reflected on that journey and feel comfortable with it. This does not mean having the answers, far from it, it means recognizing the nature of the journey, not denying the struggle but being open to the possibilities for growth – right to the end. Of course – and most importantly – it means that we are open to learn from those who have walked before us and who so very often set us a wonderful example of what creative ageing is all about, they can be an inspiration!



How is all this affected by the growth of secularization and by the rapid decline in the overall size of the churches – certainly in Western Europe? A generation or so ago we could speak of ‘God’ and we could use religious language and it would make sense, if not to everyone then certainly to a large number. But today, belief in God has been eroded in so many different ways that it is now only a small minority of people who turn to religious concepts and language to make sense of their lives and to sustain them into creative ageing (again, I am speaking of Western Europe). Should this be a matter of concern to us as we seek to encourage and stand alongside people as we all endeavour to make sense of our final stages of life? I think not.

Ageing, well if possible, and dying is a universal phenomenon and is not the prerogative of those with a certain set of beliefs. Christians may use a particular vocabulary to describe and explain this process but must not make the mistake of thinking that this particular vocabulary is what the journey is all about. The word ‘water’ cannot quench anyone’s thirst, it can only describe that reality which can quench thirst, so the theological models we build and the terminology and phrases that we use are only partial, fragmentary and, ultimately, dispensable. They are not the journey. That is the journey which every man and woman has to make and which we hope we can make in a meaningful, thankful and celebratory way.

If we have achieved, in some small way, a way of ageing creatively we shall, in doing this, have discovered a way of letting go, of ‘being’ rather than ‘doing’ and finally of taking leave of this wonderful world. Listen now (*music plays*) to how Richard Strauss tries to describe the wonder and the peace of the end of the journey. He sets to music this German poem, *Im Abendrot*, Evening, as the final one of his Four Last Songs

O broad, contented peace!  
So deep through trouble and joy  
we have walked hand in hand;  
we can rest from our wanderings  
now, above the peaceful country-side.

The valleys fall away around us,  
the sky is already darkening,  
only a pair of larks still rise  
dreamily into the scented air.

Come close to me, and let them fly  
for soon it will be time to sleep  
and we must not lose our way  
in this solitude  
in the sunset glow.  
How exhausted we are with our wanderings –  
can this perchance be death?

Malcolm Goldsmith  
September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009

**Note: this is the text of the lecture as delivered.**

**A longer version with references is available from the end of September – contact me on [mcg@malcy.net](mailto:mcg@malcy.net) if you would like a copy forwarded to you**

