

**Book Review by Professor David Jolley,
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Spirituality and personhood in dementia

Editor: Albert Jewell

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Albert Jewell's two previous compilations of essays on the spirituality later life are precious and frequently retrieved from the library of books and papers which sustain me.

This third edition is focussed on dementia which has emerged as the most important issue as the world population struggles to come to terms with its own maturation, change of shape and expectation of living to be old. It is a gripping prospect.

But this is a complicated book. The essays vary in style from Enid Blyton to Sartre at his most obscure, the texts from personal accounts through reports of individual research projects to philosophical contemplations and back to fairly directive advice on how to organise worship or other spiritually enriching exercises. Most are seeped and delivered in modesty.

Doctor Jewell's introductory chapter is a master-class in how to introduce such a collection. Not for him a tedious listing of who will say what, why and how. He has messages to convey and does so in a structure of his own design, decorated and informed by reference to the chapters which will follow and to the wider world of literature.

Daphne Wallace, some years on from her brain scan diagnosis of dementia and still functioning as a consultant psychiatrist, writes well, confirming that tests show no deterioration. Her thoughts on the possibilities for the future come from this well-preserved, richly informed and literate perspective.

For me the most powerful and useful essay comes from Marianne Talbot. Professionally she is a very accomplished academic. For

the purposes of this exercise she is a vulnerable, caring single daughter determined to do her best for a mum she loved:

- Finding a belief in her forties, which is a replay of her mother's timing
- Weeping at defeat by the Inland Revenue's website
- Thanking the church for its inclusivity
- Never to forgive the church when it failed to provide transport to services when this became necessary
- Guilty at the realisation that mum benefited so much from admission to a care home: the admission too long delayed for the best of motives
- Wonder and joy as mum sang carols with a group of self-conscious visiting students

Magical.

And the same can be said of John Killick's essay on time and dementia. It is worth buying the book just for these.

The issue of time within dementia, which had been investigated by Jane Gilliard and Mary Marshall in their 'Time for dementia', is visited by several of the writers. It would seem this is time's time and the analyses concur that in dementia time is in the contracted 'now'. In this there may be lessons for others who are immersed in the frantic.

There are eighteen essays, each with an individual author. All but three come from the UK. Dr Jewell's first compilation was groundbreaking and can be seen to have been a major influence releasing the subsequent publication of many books and learned papers on the subject of spirituality, religion and late life and its associated pathologies. Thinking, speaking and writing on these subjects now has the benefit of all that has been said between times. The current collection includes many cross-references to colleagues contributing to this and other publications, often from the supportive Jessica Kingsley stable.

It is good to find Rosemary Clarke's 'floating together in a sea of unknowingness' (Telling tales on dementia) and Sally Knocker's shared sunset: 'That's what life is all about; isn't it?' (Time for dementia).

Yet there is little to beat Goldsmith's reliance on Ecclesiasticus as he, amongst others, points to the spirituality of everyday life lived with care and respect for the world and for other people:

'Their work is their prayer'

This will be a reassurance to many lay and professional carers as well as people with dementia who hesitate at the mysterious, nebulous concept of spirituality or feel ill-at-ease with formal religion. Most of the writers emphasise that spirituality is to be found everywhere in ordinary living, sometimes appreciated as such but often taken as granted. The horizontal interactions of the spiritual dimension are there and part of our shared experiences. Vertical transcendental communications may be known less often.

The importance of the arts, including music with or without ritual has become better understood in sustaining pleasure and meaning within dementia as within lives of all of us. McFadden points to the joys which flow when creativity is encouraged with play and humour. These are practical applications of the new appreciation of spiritual phenomena. How frustrating and annoying it is that they are so rarely applied or costed into the basic care regimes for any but the most fortunate (and well-off). Informal versions such as whistling while you work or singing through bath-time might be rewarded by appreciation at little expense and with positive benefits for morale.

Common ground is covered in several essays, each of which is designed to stand alone as a personal statement of views of the moment. The visitation of important themes by more than one perspective does not diminish any.

The most scholarly final reflections tell of another level of understanding of these matters. Despite my personal affection for the authors I found these the most difficult to follow. That is to acknowledge my limitations. Perhaps they will mean more when I have lived and learned more.

This is a valuable collection of essays. It will become a favourite resource for teaching in lay and professional circles.

Our debt to Dr Jewell is massive but carried lightly.