

February 2020

Value: *A Reflection on Henri J.M. Nouwen & Walter J. Gaffney's Aging: The Fulfillment of Life*

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In this book, Nouwen and Gaffney challenge the way we as a society think about the process of aging and the way we treat the elderly in our communities. While aging is the most inevitable thing in this life, it is also the most feared, and as such we tend to ostracize those whose very existence is a tangible reminder of our own mortality and the lack of control we have in this process. So we treat aging only as a path to darkness, and in doing so, we miss how aging is also a path to the light.

The darkness of aging cannot be denied. There is unimaginable pain in losing friends and loved ones, losing memories and physical abilities, losing independence and familiarity. However, in painting aging only in this light, we miss the beauty and freedom that is found in this later part of life. Nouwen and Gaffney wrote, "The darkness of old age has been pretty well documented, but the light does not seem to fit into the computers and tabulation machines of the profit-makers," (56).

As we age, we become less "profitable" - at least in the eyes of a capitalistic society. We exist in a world that tells us our value is tied to what we do, have, make, or achieve. As we age and are no longer able to "produce" in the ways the world is accustomed to, the world tells us we have little to no value, and pushes us to the margins - to the darkness.

However, Nouwen and Gaffney say that as we age, we enter into the process of being able to, "see that we are worth not only what we achieve but what we are, that what life might lose in use, it may win in meaning," (71). As we grow older, we are more free to understand our inherent value - a value that is not reliant on anything other than our very being - our very existence.

Aging is not a process to be feared and dreaded, but rather is an opportunity for our true identity and value to be revealed to us. As a Christian, I know that I am valued by nature of being a child of God - and yet, I still believe the world when it tells me that my value lies in what I

produce and achieve. Our church gets caught up in this as well - it is an unavoidable consequence of living in this world. But we can still change our focus - even if we have to do so every single day. May we choose to learn from our elders and look to them as a reminder of our inherent value - a value that is reliant not on the mark we have made on the world, but the mark God has placed on each of us as beloved children of God.

In Peace,
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