or religion, it leads to religious privatism because the public sphere is envisioned as purely secular.

Yet to see the church only as a community unto itself, which is not concerned with the wider society and even less with its global environment, also amounts to a reductionist view. The gospel, on which the church must ultimately rest, does not support this kind of self-enclosure. Rather, it is public in the sense that it is addressed to all people and that its views of the human being as well as of society hold important ethical implications that are not limited to the church.[32]

The perspective for a future beyond religious individualism and privatism requires a vision for church and religion that is limited neither to abstract universalism nor to a self-enclosed community. A community that thinks only of itself and that cares only for its members clearly contradicts the self-understanding of the Christian faith, which extends love and care even to the enemy. In this sense, I want to call the church a *public community.* It is a community based on a shared faith. But it is also a community that addresses the public and that works toward the common good. From a different perspective, it has been called a "public church," a designation that also points out the public nature of the church.[33]

The modern notion of adulthood is premised on the clear division between church, private religion, and public responsibility. At the beginning of this new century, it has become obvious that this division no longer fits the needs of personal and social life. Rather, it creates many problems: for the future of democracy and civil society, which is in need of moral and religious support; for the individual person whose life becomes empty and shallow if all questions of meaning and truth are confined to the inner world of feelings; and also for the church, which cannot fulfill its mission if it is separated from the personal as well as from the public domain.

To the degree that the contemporary experiences of postmodern life allow for overcoming the division between church, individual, and public religion, they may turn out to be beneficial. This statement does not stand for an undue optimism. Rather, it points toward the task of a practical theology that positions itself at the point of transition between modernity and postmodernity and that has to offer guiding images for the future–images of community and responsibility, of connectedness, and of a second naïveté, not only for individual religion or for a secular public but for the sake of a new type of public religious presence.

CHAPTER 6

Between Adulthood and Old Age

The Question of a "Third Age"

Although my main emphasis in this study is on those stages that sometimes are summarized metaphorically as the first two thirds of the life cycle, that is, the span from childhood to adulthood, we would be clearly mistaken to assume that changes are only happening during those times in life. It is true that the changes affecting childhood and adolescence have received much more attention in the past than those in adulthood or old age. Even a developmental psychology of adulthood is a fairly recent phenomenon, entering the picture only forty to fifty years ago.[1] Before then, most psychologists took for granted that development comes to its end with the transition from adolescence to adulthood as the time of maturity. Yet as I have tried to show in the preceding chapter in respect to images of faith and adulthood, the adult stage of the life cycle can include many major developmental (sub)stages, and this has become generally accepted in the psychology of religion as well.[2] But only recently has it become more common to also include a special focus on religion in old age.

With this background in mind, it is easy to understand why a chapter on old age was not part of my original plan for this book. My earlier work on childhood, adolescence, and adulthood had led me to believe that the most important changes to be addressed in this study would certainly be found in the early stages of the life cycle.[3] Those who attended my lectures on such topics, however, soon made me aware of the need to carry my analysis of the changing shape of

the life cycle even further by also including its later stages. And indeed, they were right. Whoever is interested in the postmodern life cycle and in its challenges for church and theology cannot close their eyes to old age.

According to the temporal logic of the modern life cycle, the stage of adulthood is followed by "old age," the last stage of the life cycle. It is important to note from the beginning that this sequence is not just a result of human nature in a biological sense. Rather, the understanding of old age as a life-cycle stage is clearly modeled on the identification of adulthood with (paid) work. In this view, a new phase of life begins with retirement, and this phase is characterized by its position at the end of life as the terminal stage. It is exactly at this point that more recent developments and contemporary interpretations of the life cycle have taken issue with the traditional or modern view. According to Peter Laslett, whose work has exerted considerable international influence in this field of discussion, we have to let go of our traditional assumptions concerning the sequence of adulthood and old age in order to consider the possibility of another age or stage, which comes into the picture *after* modern adulthood but clearly *before* the last stage of life.[4] Laslett calls this additional age the "Third Age," distinguishing it from the Second Age (modern adulthood) and from the Fourth Age (old age or senility, the terminal stage of life). It is this distinction to which I am referring in the title of this chapter. Laslett's critique of the traditional model of the life cycle and its application to old age can alert us to the need to consider another new stage within the life cycle, just as we had to consider the emergence of postadolescence as a new stage at an earlier point of this study.

The question of late adulthood or old age also raises important questions concerning the religious implications of the changes to be observed in respect to adulthood and old age. For a long time, church and theology did not give any special attention to this age group, which seemed to be quite content with what the church was offering them. Recently, however, observers in different countries have pointed out that such offerings might, in fact, be based on views of old age that are no longer accurate and that cannot do justice to the real needs and potentials of the people concerned.[5] Given that many Western societies clearly have turned into aging societies in that the percentage of older adults is becoming a larger and larger segment of the population, these are indeed alarming signs for church and theology.

Traditional Expectations: Beyond the Obligations of Adulthood—The Wisdom of Disengagement

It is probably fair to say that modernity has produced especially contradictory expectations concerning late adulthood and old age. On the one hand, it has created the idea of a time in life that promises to be something like a reward for having worked hard most of one's life. On the other hand, the identification of the adult person with the autonomous individual described in chapter 5 above has made it especially difficult to appreciate the status of no longer pursuing paid work and to enjoy this reward. What can a life be in this view, if this life is no longer productive and progressive in terms of professional achievement? Can there be any meaning and value in it if it no longer matches the standards of independence and autonomy? The important improvements in health care that have been characteristic of modernity have strengthened both tendencies, and they have further emphasized the tensions and contradictions between them. Good health is needed in order to enjoy the benefits of a nonworking life in late adulthood. This clearly is a positive effect of modern medicine. Yet the higher and higher life expectancy has also led to the widespread concern about if and how a society will be able to sustain itself if more and more of its members no longer participate in the production of goods and in making services available.[6] Modern old age clearly has economic implications.

It is a well-known fact that the twentieth century has brought about a new pattern for late adulthood and old age.[7] Through the introduction of pension funds or other retirement benefits, the status of having retired from work has become generalized and has become available for all or most members of this age group in Western countries. To be sure, there have always been individuals who could afford this enjoyable kind of retirement, even long before modernity. But the majority of the population had no chance to ever acquire and accumulate the considerable resources that are needed for having financial security in old age. The new availability of financial resources for mass retirement has certainly solved or at least mitigated a number of serious problems that older members of society had to face at earlier times, most of all the fate of old age poverty or lack of health care. Yet it has also created a most difficult transition at the end of one's working career. After having striven for, and having achieved, a position within working life, and after having defined oneself through this position, many people find it extremely difficult to accept and to appreciate a new and different status that is based exactly on *not* having

this kind of position anymore. The many discussions about the existential crises accompanying the transition into retirement testify to this. Other indicators are the various offers of psychological counseling and support for those who prepare for, or actually are going through, this transition at the end of a professional career.

Erik Erikson's model of the life cycle again proves to be highly interesting in this context. Erikson describes the central crisis of maturity or old age by pointing out the tension between "integrity" and "despair."[8] As the positive pole in this tension, "integrity" takes over from "generativity," the positive pole in Erikson's view of adulthood. The question of integrity implies a far-reaching change of perspectives. While generativity necessarily implies looking ahead because whatever is to be "generated" or achieved can only lie in the future, integrity means looking back at one's past and present. Therefore, it means the "acceptance of one's one and only life cycle as something that had to be."[9] The most serious and truly existential challenge of looking at one's life in such a retrospective manner arises from the fact that we cannot change the past. A life that has been lived must now either be appreciated as something meaningful ("something that *had* to be") or be rejected in "despair" and disgust because of the chances and possibilities that one did not use when there was still time to do so. As we will see below, the question of integrity, of coming to terms with one's life retrospectively, has important religious implications. But before considering the religious dimensions of old age, we first have to look into a number of additional aspects of old age in modernity.

Sometimes, it is assumed that old people used to be well respected in earlier times of history. This assumption refers especially to the so-called wisdom of old age that is based on the accrued experience of a lifetime. In contrast to this, modernity is supposed to have devalued the status of old people as well as the importance of knowledge accumulated in the past. With its focus on future progress, modernity has no place for what is related to the past. Recently, however, historians have contested this view.[10] According to them, old people have always been subject to negative attitudes within the younger generation, at least to some degree, and it seems that stereotypes directed against old people were no less abundant in the Middle Ages than they are in modernity. Yet even if we must be cautious not to idealize the attitudes toward old age in premodern times, there can be no doubt that so-called ageism is a serious problem encountered in the twentieth (and twenty-first) century.

The term *ageism* refers to hostile and denigrating views of old people.[11] As a prejudice, it associates old age with dependence and

inability, with a general loss of value for people who no longer are able to work. Ageism is a kind of stereotyping in that it generalizes certain aspects of old age, thus turning them into an overall negative image that leaves no place for other, possibly more positive, aspects.

As mentioned before, such problematic views must be seen in light of the general changes of the age structure of society. Many Western societies have turned into aging societies, that is, they include higher and higher percentages of older people.[12] Social scientists consider the "graying of America" as inevitable, and they expect severe consequences for the economy.[13] When the number of old people living in a society is growing fast, this can intimidate the younger members of society. Are they to carry the burden of taking care of and feeding an ever-larger number of people who are no longer able or willing to work? Population statistics show that life expectancies in the Western world have increased considerably. In fact, it seems that the last hundred years have been the time for this to happen, which explains why the realization of this change has been something like a shock. We are not talking about a slow process of change over many centuries but about a rapidly changing situation. In England, for example, where these patterns have been researched intensively, a child born in the year 1900 could statistically expect a lifetime of a little more than forty years. By the end of the century, the figure was up to somewhere between seventy and eighty years. And during the same period of time the percentage of the over sixty-year-olds in England doubled from a little more than 10 percent to about 20 percent.[14] Such figures indicate how much the situation has changed, and that the meaning of age has become rather flexible.

What about traditional (modern) expectations concerning *religion* in old age? As mentioned above, Erikson's model makes religious questions a central dimension of the last stage of the life cycle. In a certain sense, the adolescent identity crisis repeats itself at this point, including its religious aspects but now with a different perspective. The adolescent identity crisis is premised on the young person's looking ahead and looking out for meaningful ends to be achieved in his or her future life. According to Erikson, religion contributes to the successful resolution of this crisis by offering a meaningful way of viewing the world and of interpreting history, so that adolescents can find their place in it. Contrary to this, old persons are looking back to the lives that they have led and that they cannot change anymore, at least not in many ways or only to a limited degree. Dissatisfaction or "despair" arises when this life cannot be accepted. But how can this devastating experience be avoided? Again, Erikson speaks of a religious need at this stage that is similar to the need in adolescence.

He calls it "some world order and spiritual sense."[15] In a central passage, Erikson writes about the religious "wisdom" needed at this stage:

> Strength here takes the form of that detached yet active concern with life bounded by death, which we call *wisdom*...Not that each man evolves wisdom for himself. For most, a living *tradition* provides the essence of it. But the end of the cycle also evokes "ultimate concerns" for what chance man may have to transcend the limitations of his identity and his often tragic or bitterly tragicomic engagement in his one and only life cycle within the sequence of generations. Yet great philosophical and religious systems dealing with ultimate individuation seem to have remained responsibly related to the cultures and civilizations of their times. Seeking transcendence by renunciation, they yet remain ethically concerned with the "maintenance of the world."[16]

And in the same context, Erikson also addresses the parallels between religion in adolescence and religion in old age, referring to "a new edition" of the adolescent crisis of identity:

> To whatever abyss ultimate concerns may lead individual men, man as a psychosocial creature will face, toward the end of his life, a new edition of an identity crisis which we may state in the words "I am what survives of me."[17]

Although Erikson does not offer a detailed description of how despair and disgust can be outweighed by wisdom sponsored by a religious or spiritual tradition, it is easy to see that the final crisis of the life cycle is a deeply religious crisis. Religious understandings of death and afterlife will be of great help to a person who is wondering about the meaning of his or her life as it is now approaching the end.

Research data on church membership and on participation in Sunday worship services clearly support the expectations based on this theoretical point of view. Interest in religion becomes stronger in late adulthood and old age. Correspondingly, congregations often comprise a considerable number of older adults and only few active members between the age of twenty and fifty or sixty.[18]

Although there seems to be a good match between the expectation that religion has an important role to play in late adulthood or old age and the actual participation of older people in the church, there also are critical questions concerning the ambivalences created by this situation. As mentioned in chapter 5, there is the concern that associating religion with adolescence on the one hand, and with old age on the other excludes the meaning of religion in most of adulthood. This way of viewing religion as a matter only for children and for old people clearly contradicts the self-understanding of the Christian faith as comprising all of life and as giving shape and orientation to all ages, including adulthood. In addition to this, there is at least some evidence (considered in chapter 4) that the traditional patterns of the life cycle–adolescents moving away from the church in order to come back to it later in life–cannot necessarily be taken for granted anymore, and that in the future, given today's lack of religious involvement in earlier stages, there may not be such a return to the church in late adulthood or old age.

Finally, the programs offered by the church have been criticized for not taking old people seriously enough.[19] In this view, such programs fit all too well with the understandings maintained by a dated gerontology. Generally speaking, many programs offered for older adults by the church follow the logic of *taking care* of them. Either they are designed to support people as they become weaker and more dependent, or, on the contrary, they are trying to activate old people in order to keep them as young and healthy as possible. The first option corresponds to the theory of *disengagement,* which is focused on aspects like weakness, fragility, dependence, and disability in old age. The second option follows from the theory of *activation,* which has its focus on the possibility of counteracting senility by keeping old people active. Many researchers consider both theories as outdated.[20] In different ways, both the theory of disengagement and the theory of activation are criticized for not doing justice to the complex realities of life in old age. And even more important, neither approach takes old people seriously as responsible subjects who are not looking for treatments and who do not want to be taken care of. As we will see in the next section, this critical evaluation is strongly supported by the views connected to postmodernity and to the changes to be observed with older adulthood and old age today.

Postmodern Challenges: Redesigning the Life Cycle?

In the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned the observation that what used to be the straightforward sequence of adulthood and old age has changed to such a degree that it may make sense to speak of a new phase or additional stage in the life cycle. Let us consider some of these changes that have made the traditional sequence more and more questionable.

A first observation concerns the high level of activity maintained by many of those who, according to their age, fall under the category

of old age. Rather than following the pattern of being content with looking back at one's life, they develop new ideas and start new projects. Travel in old age is one example; volunteer work in the congregation or community is another. The growing number of older adults returning to the university or participating in serious educational programs has rightly received a lot of attention. In this case, learning and being trained, which in the logic of modernity used to be associated almost exclusively with the future-oriented investments of adolescents or young adults, are becoming attractive to older adults as well.

Another important experience is related to the situation of women, especially to women whose primary occupation is homemaking and childcare rather than paid employment. For them, the period between the time when the last child leaves the home and the time when they reach the age of sixty-five or seventy has become longer and longer.[21] Several factors have contributed to this change, which can be observed over the last fifty to one hundred years. The average number of children per family has decreased, so that the duration of active parenthood has become shorter, often ending in the forties when the last child leaves the home. The idea that women at this age move from generativity to integrity, from active life to looking back at activities in their past, is not very plausible. In fact, the situation of not having to take care of the children anymore but also of not having a job in the sense of paid labor is often experienced as depressing. It is experienced as imposed not by any natural course of life but rather by a society that, due to gender specific ageism, has no space for the interests and needs of the women in this age group.

Experiences and observations of this kind have led to the idea that we have to rethink our traditional assumptions about late adulthood and old age. The expectation that working life is followed by inactive retirement and by being taken care of has turned out to be a stereotype or even an ideology. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, one of the most productive responses to this situation has come from the British historian and social researcher Peter Laslett. In his book, aptly called *A Fresh Map of Life,* he traces the "emergence of a Third Age." He wants systematically to distinguish and separate four different ages:

> First comes an era of dependence, socialization, immaturity and education; second an era of independence, maturity and responsibility, of earning and of saving; third an era of personal fulfillment; and fourth an era of final dependence, decrepitude and death.[22]

The main reason for introducing this distinction is the need to reconsider the meaning of old age under the present circumstances of having a larger and larger segment of retired people in society. The traditional characteristics of dependence and weakness are no longer sufficient for doing justice to the different realities of life at this age. And most of all, such negative images fail to give the time of the Third Age a purpose of its own. This is why Laslett is eager to point out the new opportunities and possibilities that come after the many obligations of the Second Age, the obligations of paid work, have ended. And this is also the reason for his suggestion to consider the Third Age as a time with high potential for personal fulfillment, which becomes possible when the constraints of a career lose their hold on a person's life.

Laslett is well aware of the many questions that his idea of a Third Age and of personal fulfillment inevitably encounters, especially in relationship to the employment of older people after the age of retirement, which he discusses, but also in terms of the high expectations for potential fulfillment. In the present context, however, I am less interested in a discussion of Laslett's personal views, which we can leave to the specialists in the social scientific research on old age. What is of central importance for my own purposes is what Laslett's approach indicates. In my understanding, his idea of a Third Age is related to far-reaching changes of the modern (traditional) understanding of old age as the time after retirement from work and, at the same time, as the last stage of life. The traditional view does not do justice to the experiences of many people whose lives do not fit this simple pattern anymore. These experiences are the basis for assuming a new and additional stage of the life cycle, which is located between what used to be called adulthood and old age.

So it is no surprise that the traditional (modern) views of older adulthood or old age have come under criticism, whether through the work of historians and philosophers such as Laslett or through empirical research on old age today. On the basis of recent empirical studies, social scientists have argued that generalizations about old age are more and more likely to miss the realities of life in old age.[23] According to their observations, individualization has strongly affected this stage of the life cycle, no less than is the case with the earlier ones. Becoming older, it is said, is most of all an individual process that, for its concrete characteristics, very much depends on individual circumstances, which cannot be generalized. Consequently, these researchers reject large-scale theories of old age and are trying to replace them with sensitive descriptions that are open for individual

life situations and for personal evaluations by the people themselves. As we will see in the next section below, this raises interesting questions for practical theology and the church. But before considering these questions, we need to again turn to religion in old age.

Religion in late adulthood and old age has not received much attention in research at all. Until recently, psychologists of religion tended to focus almost exclusively on childhood and adolescence, which were seen as the decisive periods of religious development. In the meantime, the picture has changed but only to a certain degree. While psychologists and gerontologists have made available a considerable body of research on religion in old age, the focus of this research is rather narrow and is often defined by a medical context.[24] Most of the research carried out in the field of gerontology is related to questions of physical health and emotional strength, which points to the fact that such studies are more focused on what Laslett calls the Fourth Age of senility than on the Third Age, which, as a time of new possibilities, comes before senility. The religious dimensions of wisdom to which Erikson refers,[25] for example, or the spiritual development of older adults, are rarely studied on their own behalf.

A good and interesting example of this kind of research is Harold G. Koenig's *Aging and God: Spiritual Pathways to Mental Health in Midlife and Later Years,* which comes out of the Program on Religion, Aging, and Health at Duke University.[26] The focus of Koenig's study is on psychological problems like depression and anxiety. The researchers on whose work Koenig is drawing are interested in people's use of religion in coping with such problems. Beyond this concern, Koenig also offers a helpful list of "spiritual needs," which he sees closely connected to old age.[27] The fourteen spiritual needs comprised by this list include, for example, the "need for meaning, purpose, and hope" or the "need to love and serve others," which points to what Laslett and others have identified as the potentials of a Third Age. Yet it is also characteristic of Koenig's approach that his list ends with the "need for preparation for death and dying." This indicates that it is again the terminal stage or the end of life that really is in view here and that shapes this consideration of spiritual needs.

If it is true, however, that changes in society have created the potential for something like the Third Age described by Laslett, a set of entirely different questions arises, questions that have not been addressed in the traditional approaches to religion in old age because they are not related to the end of life. We will consider at least some of them in the following section.

Taking Up the Challenge: Designing Models of Ministry and Education for the Third Age

Let us assume that a Third Age really exists and that at least some people have come to realize the possibilities of this stage for themselves. How will they view the programs offered to them by the church? It is easy to see that persons in their Third Age will not feel attracted by programs that advertise support for "the elderly" and care for the "frail." They do not want to be taken care of. And they also do not feel that their needs or interests are addressed when death and dying are the only topics on which they are supposed to meditate. Rather, just like younger adults, they are looking for opportunities to do something meaningful with the new freedom that they have achieved after their earlier obligations to work or family have ended. And often they are willing to explore possibilities that they were forced to leave aside because of the many constraints on time connected to a working life or to the preparation for this kind of life and career.

Sales and marketing specialists have long realized the potential of this growing group of customers. One has only to look through the advertisement sections of popular magazines in order to recognize how advertisers view their target groups in late adulthood and early old age. Their central topics have little to do with being weak, dependent, or senile. Rather, they refer to unfulfilled longings, long-harbored wishes, and new potentials to be developed. Often they seem to envision–and to promise–a life that finally can be enjoyed.

Of course, I am not arguing here for the church to make popular advertising its guiding model. The task of the church is not to become another source of pleasure that feeds on consumerism. And I am also not in favor of church-sponsored programs to join the widespread repression of the darker sides of life. This avoidance, as can be seen from the example of death and dying, can only result in the contradictory attitude of not talking about it but being even more fascinated or frightened by it and therefore taking refuge, from time to time, in the consumption of popular self-help books on dealing with death and dying.

The life promised to older people by target-group advertising is certainly ambivalent. But once we leave aside the absurdities of contemporary consumerism, there also is something to be learned by church and theology from how others view and address people in late adulthood and early old age. It seems to me that their views clearly confirm Laslett's conviction that we have to appreciate the

emerging Third Age by creating space for it and by offering new opportunities to those at this stage in life.

But what does this mean for the church? Three interrelated tasks are of special importance: to develop a theological understanding of the new stage of a Third Age; to design strategies for supporting the potential of this stage; to offer opportunities for people at this age that do justice to this potential.

(1) I am well aware that the Third Age is still an open question and not a reality. But if we keep this in mind, it still makes sense to think ahead theologically and to develop a theological understanding of this new stage of the life cycle. As we have seen above, the meaning of old age is far from being a natural given. It is subject to social conventions, and it is always dependent on what possibilities are available for older people. In this sense, church and theology are actively involved in defining and redefining old age. Their views and their designs for older people are part of the social expectations that give shape to this stage of the life cycle.

It is important to realize that older people themselves are redefining their status. Therefore, it is no coincidence that there seems to be an emerging new view of ministry with older people.[28] More and more, the idea of taking care of them proves insufficient. More and more frequently, there are references to a "new type" of older persons who want to be actively involved in planning and creating programs and in forming groups for special purposes. But what does this mean in terms of a theological understanding of life at this stage?

Traditionally, since well before the onset of modernity, death, dying, and the afterlife have been of special concern for theology and the church. Ancient concepts such as *ars moriendi*, the art of dying, or *meditatio mortis*, the meditation of death and human finitude, testify to this concern. Another issue for theology and the church that clearly goes back to biblical times is respect for old people who no longer are able to work ("Honor your father and your mother," Ex. 20:12) or who are in need of special protection, for example, widows (1 Tim. 5). These issues remain important, and I will come back to them in the final section of this chapter. Yet it is also easy to see that theology and the church have to go beyond their traditional focus on the terminal stage of life if they are to do justice to the emerging life-cycle stage before senility.

The changing shape of late adulthood and old age challenges theology and the church to acknowledge and to appreciate that a longer life expectancy demands a meaningful period of life *after* retirement and *before* senility.[29] This period does not fit the traditional

patterns to which theology and the church had to refer in earlier times. This is why the Christian tradition does not contain direct references to this new stage of life. But it is nevertheless possible to appreciate this stage as a gift from God, just as all of life must be seen as God's gift. And this view includes the prospect that life in the Third Age should be treated–and enjoyed–respectfully and responsibly as a new opportunity.

In terms of practical church work, this new understanding of late adulthood, which reckons with the possibility of a Third Age, should encourage us to face up to new issues and tasks that have little to do with the traditional topics of church work in old age but that are closely connected to the potentials of a new stage of the life cycle.

(2) Supporting people in their attempts to realize the potential of a Third Age is of crucial importance because of the ambivalence that we encounter at this point. What I said in chapter 5 about the tensions and contradictions of modern adulthood also applies to late adulthood and old age. The danger of excluding certain adults from the status of full adulthood because they no longer are autonomous ("earning") individuals is especially pertinent in the case of postretirement. Theology and the church must therefore develop strategies that, at the same time, are critical in respect to such tendencies and are supportive of the people by giving space to their needs.

Creating space for the Third Age so that more people can realize the potential of an adult life after the obligations of work and family have ended really means to act as a *midwife* for these emerging possibilities. It means making sure that advertising and consumerism are not allowed to be the only defining forces in this field. To put it differently: The new status offered to older people in advertisements and in the popular literature on old age is highly ambivalent. This status rightly refers to the potential and possibilities of old age, which have been denied by modern society because of modernity's focus on work, autonomy, and progress. But if this new status, which is being created now, does not leave space for weakness and dependence anymore, it will be no less oppressive than the situation before it. So practical theology as a midwife to postmodern old age–the Third Age–must do the following: first, help this age to come about by making space for it; second, help people to reflect critically on modern ideologies that equate adulthood with independence, but also reflect on the promises of commercial target-group advertising that has been so quick in discovering the growing number of older customers; and third, make available alternatives to old-age consumerism.

In light of the background of this threefold task or strategy, we are now in a position to address the question of which opportunities a church or congregation should offer to the people of this age group.

(3) One idea that has sometimes also become a reality in some congregations is volunteer work carried out by older people. This is an important development in that older people are reclaiming their status as subjects, rather than being only the objects, of church activities. But given the demands of a Third Age, not just any type of voluntary work within the church will do. If older adults should be enabled to make use of their new and unrealized potential, it is not enough to offer them substitute duties that otherwise would have to be carried out by paid personnel. And it is also not enough to expect the volunteers of the Third Age to be waiting for a pastor to tell them what to do and how to do it. If the church wants to help people in making use of their new possibilities, the church must be willing to change. There clearly is a need for a place where the members of this age group can come together without needing a special occasion and without consumerism as the basis for shared activities. Possibly some kind of tearoom or coffeehouse located in the church could serve this purpose, or there could be a special community center that is designed for this purpose. Given the lack of successful models, there is much leeway for congregations to experiment with new ideas and possibilities. But since this age group is still growing and as it is becoming more important in society, congregations would be well advised to make a conscious decision about how they want to handle this group.

There is another reason why meaningful volunteer work is important in this context. If this kind of work is connected to the idea of a public church, as mentioned in chapter 5, it takes on additional meaning in several important ways. The public church is a community that is not only focused on itself but has a lasting interest in society as a whole. It is connected to the Christian commitment to the whole community as well as to future generations. This is why it can create a meaningful horizon for combining both the search for personal fulfillment by taking on new tasks and by discovering new things on the one hand, and the responsibility of a Christian life on the other.

What opportunities that do justice to the potential of older people can be offered? It is obvious that this is a field for future experimentation, and that we cannot yet draw on many successful examples. It will, however, probably be helpful to consider at least a number of directions to be pursued in this context.

- *Study groups* of all kinds can offer opportunities for exploring new interests and meeting new people. Topics should come not only from theology or a church context but should also include questions of personal development, music and theater, and so forth. And such groups should not always be organized by a pastor or adult educator but should be, wherever possible, under the leadership of the people concerned themselves.
- *Travel programs* are often organized by commercial enterprises catering to those whose financial assets make them interesting customers. This is actually one of the reasons why the church should think of organizing noncommercial programs that are more affordable and, consequently, less exclusive. Another reason has to do with how such programs are planned. Although some of the commercial programs are quite acceptable educationally, many of them do not offer anything beyond the promise of pleasure and entertainment. In contrast, travel programs that are in line with theological and educational expectations could include, for example, a serious encounter with different cultures or religions, with different churches, or with groups of similar age in different countries. And maybe such encounters could even become part of an international movement for peace and mutual understanding, like the exchange programs offered for youth.
- *Community services* also have a tradition within congregations. Soup kitchens or food pantries, for example, play an important role in many communities. Such activities should definitely be valued in the present context as well, especially in terms of their meaning for a public church. The guiding model of a public church can also become an impulse for pursuing the issue of community services even further–for example, by extending it to the challenges of public life in a community. What can be done, for example, in order to facilitate the acceptance of minorities in the community? How can we support mutual understanding and acceptance between different religious groups beyond Christianity?
- *Intergenerational learning* and *mentorships* are less well-known possibilities within congregations. The concept of intergenerational learning suggests that different generations will profit equally from working together and from learning together in fields of recent interest, such as ecological issues that often are

important to young people, or peace issues in relation to globalization. Research on adult development has stressed the importance of older adults acting as mentors for younger ones.[30] While such mentorships have traditionally had their place within the context of work, it would certainly be possible to extend them into different contexts like the congregation. Intergenerational programs could be of help in creating the points of contact that are needed in order to get mentoring relationships started.

- *Church development* is often seen as a task only for pastors. Yet it is easy to see that the inclusion of other members of the congregation can be a powerful way for extending the scope of this development. In the present context, it must be emphasized, however, that the point is not to gain additional help in the pastorate but to allow people to realize their potential. And this includes, in the first place, allowing them to articulate their own ideas about how they want the church to develop. And it also means to let them work not *under* the supervision of the pastors, but as their partners and coworkers.

Much more could be said about these exemplary perspectives, which certainly are demanding and challenging for many congregations. But in the end, it is less important which perspective will be taken up in a given congregation than that the overall task of doing justice to the needs and potentials of a new age group is realized.

The Last Step: Life unto Death—Between Modern Exclusion and New Appropriation

Even the heralds of a Third Age and its possibilities must be aware of the danger of denying the need for thinking about death and dying as part of the human condition. It would be detrimental to repress this aspect of our existence. Consequently, there would be good reasons to include a whole chapter on this topic, which could again give us occasion to address the changing shape of the human life cycle, for example, in relationship to society's ways of including and excluding death in its daily routines. Yet in order to keep this study at a reasonable length, I will limit myself to a brief section on what I metaphorically call the last step. This section serves two limited but important purposes.

The first purpose is to make sure that my focus on the Third Age in this chapter is not misunderstood in such a way that theology and the church should give up their concern with death and dying. The

concepts of *ars moriendi* and of *meditatio mortis*, the art of dying and the meditation of death, viewed in the light of the Christian hope for resurrection, must remain of central importance in their work.

The second purpose has to do with modernity's view of death and dying. In this respect, I want to point out that there is a need for overcoming this view and that postmodern alternatives to this view should indeed be pursued if they open up new possibilities.

Many sociologists and researchers in this field have shown that modernity has no real place for the experience of finitude and death.[31] They argue that modern societies have tended to exclude death from visibility by confining it to places like special hospitals and to isolated wards even within such hospitals. Modernity's optimism and belief in progress are deeply challenged by the finitude and the ultimate limitations of human life on earth. This is why death and dying are often repressed and turned into a taboo.

Another issue, which recently has received a fair amount of attention, is the influence of modern medical technology. Often, this technology keeps people medically alive long after they have ceased to be in contact with other people and long after most of their vital functions have ended. Many people are wondering if this can really be for the good of the patients or for their survivors.

The flip side of the repression of death and dying is the remarkable fascination with death and dying that modernity has also produced at certain times. One of the most impressive examples is the public reaction to the interviews published by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in her bestselling book *On Death and Dying*.[32] Lectures based on this book have turned the experiences of her interviewees into an international media event of considerable popularity. Repression and dramatization by the media can obviously go hand in hand, but they do not lead to healthier attitudes vis-à-vis human finitude.

It is an open question as to whether or not postmodernity has afforded us with more appropriate possibilities in this respect. Our contemporary situation includes some hopeful signs, such as the hospice movement with its commitment to allowing people a more humane experience of approaching death. Yet the overall situation appears generally unchanged. The challenge of overcoming modernity's ambivalence toward death and dying still lies ahead of us.

Challenges of Postmodern Life (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996); see also Jack L. Seymour et al., *The Church in the Education of the Public: Refocusing the Task of Religious Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984).

Chapter 6: Between Adulthood and Old Age

[1]Erik H. Erikson must be honored for one the earliest ventures into this field of adult developmental psychology; see his *Childhood and Society*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1950), esp. the seminal chapter on the "Eight Ages of Man."

[2]One of the clearest examples still is James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981).

[3]See my books: Friedrich Schweitzer, *Lebensgeschichte und Religion. Religiöse Entwicklung und Erziehung im Kindes- und Jugendalter* (Munich: Kaiser, 1987); idem, *Die Religion des Kindes. Zur Problemgeschichte einer religionspädagogischen Grundfrage* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1992); idem, *Die Suche nach eigenem Glauben. Einführung in die Religionspädagogik des Jugendalters* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996); Wolfgang Lück and Friedrich Schweitzer, *Religiöse Bildung Erwachsener. Grundlagen und Impulse für die Praxis* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1999).

[4]Peter Laslett, *A Fresh Map of Life: The Emergence of the Third Age* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989).

[5]See the discussions in Martina Blasberg-Kuhnke, *Gerontologie und Praktische Theologie. Studien zu einer Neuorientierung derAltenpastoral an der psychischen und gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit des alten Menschen* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1985); K. Brynolf Lyon, *Toward a Practical Theology of Aging* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Melvin A. Kimble et al., eds., *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

[6]This concern is as widespread in the political discussions as in the academic literature; for a recent statement, see Beverly Goldberg, *Age Works: What Corporate America Must Do to Survive the Graying of the Workforce* (New York: The Free Press, 2000).

[7]For a summary, see Laslett, *Fresh Map*; Paul Johnson and Pat Thane, eds., *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[8]Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1963), 268.

[9]Ibid.

[10]See Johnson and Thane, *Old Age*; Peter Borscheid, "Der alte Mensch in der Vergangenheit," in *Alter und Altern: Ein interdisziplinärer Studientext zur Gerontologie*, ed. Paul B. Baltes et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), 35–61.

[11]See Gerald J. Gruman, "Cultural Origins of Present-Day 'Age-ism': The Modernization of the Life Cycle," in *Aging and the Elderly: Humanistic Perspectives in Gerontology*, ed. Stuart F. Spicker et al. (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1978), 359–87.

[12]See Laslett, *Fresh Map*; Baltes et al., *Alter und Altern;* Johnson and Thane, *Old Age.*

[13]Goldberg, *Age Works.*

[14]See Laslett, *Fresh Map*, 65.

[15]Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2d ed., 268.

[16]Erik H. Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), 140.

[17]Erikson, *Identity*, 141.

[18]See Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1987); for examples from Germany, see Joachim Matthes, ed., *Kirchenmitgliedschaft im Wandel: Untersuchungen zur Realität der Volkskirche. Beiträge zur zweiten EKD-Umfrage "Was wird aus der Kirche?"* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1990).

[19]See Blasberg-Kuhnke, *Gerontologie und Praktische Theologie;* Lyon, *Practical Theology of Aging.*

[20]See the discussion by Blasberg-Kuhnke, *Gerontologie und Praktische Theologie.*

[21]For a good overview, see Deutsches Jugendinstitut, ed., *Wie geht's der Familie? Ein Handbuch zur Situation der Familien heute* (Munich: Kösel, 1988).

[22]Laslett, *Fresh Map*, 4.

[23]See Karl Ulrich Mayer and Paul B. Baltes, eds., *Die Berliner Altersstudie* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999); see also Baltes and Mittelstraß, op. cit.

[24]See the overviews in the following: Kimble et al., eds., *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion*; Harold G. Koenig, *Aging and God: Spiritual Pathways to Mental Health in Midlife and Later Years* (New York: Harworth Pastoral Press, 1994); Marianne Habersetzer, *Leben und Glauben–ein katechetischer Weg mit älteren Menschen* (Würzburg: Echter, 1998); Ulrich Moser, *Identität, Spiritualität und Lebenssinn. Grundlagen seelsorgerlicher Begleitung im Altenheim* (Würzburg: Echter, 2000).

[25]See the beginning of this chapter.

[26]Koenig, *Aging and God.*

[27]Koenig, *Aging and God*, 284–94.

[28]See statements earlier in this chapter from the works of Martina Blasberg-Kuhnke (notes 5 and 20).

[29]See Alfons Auer, *Geglücktes Altern. Eine theologisch-ethische Ermutigung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1995), 109.

[30]Daniel Levinson, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Knopf, 1978), 97.

[31]The now classic study is Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975); see also Joachim Wittkowski, *Psychologie des Todes* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990).

[32]Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

Chapter 7: Theological Demands on Postmodern Life

[1]The major exception in Germany is Albrecht Grözinger, *Die Kirche–ist sie noch zu retten? Anstiftungen für das Christentum in postmoderner Gesellschaft* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998); for an overview on the German literature, see Wolfgang Steck, *Praktische Theologie. Horizonte der Religion, Konturen des neuzeitlichen Christentums, Strukturen der religiösen Lebenswelt*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2000), 209ff.

[2]See Walter Brueggemann, *Texts under Negotation: The Bible and Postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); or the collections: David Ray Griffin, William A. Beardslee, and Joe Holland, *Varieties of Postmodern Theology* (Albany, N.Y.: State Univ. of New York Press, 1989); Terrence W. Tilley, ed., *Postmodern Theologies: The Challenge of Religious Diversity* (New York: Maryknoll, 1995). To mention a few additional examples from Germany: Bernd Beuscher, *Positives Paradox. Entwurf einer neostrukturalistischen Religionspädagogik* (Vienna: Passagen, 1993); Hermann Kochanek, ed., *Religion und Glaube in der Postmoderne* (Nettetal: Steyler, 1996).

[3]David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989); Wolfgang Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne* (Weinheim: VCH, 1988).

[4]Werner Helsper, "Das 'postmoderne Selbst'–ein neuer Subjekt-und Jugendmythos? Reflexionen anhand religiöser jugendlicher Orientierungen," in *Identitätsarbeit heute. Klassische und aktuelle Perspektiven der Identitätsforschung*, ed. Heiner Keupp and Renate Höfer (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 174–206.

[5]See my earlier books: Friedrich Schweitzer, *Lebensgeschichte und Religion. Religiöse Entwicklung und Erziehung im Kindes- und Jugendalter* (Munich: Kaiser, 1987); idem, *Die Suche nach eigenem Glauben. Einführung in die Religionspädagogik des Jugendalters* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996); idem, *Das Recht des Kindes auf Religion* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000).

[6]Donald Capps, *Pastoral Care: A Thematic Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979); John J. Gleason, *Growing Up to God: Eight Steps in Religious Development* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975); Joachim Scharfenberg, *Einführung in die Pastoralpsychologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985).

[7]For a discussion, see Wilhelm Gräb, *Lebensgeschichten, Lebensentwürfe, Sinndeutungen. Eine Praktische Theologie gelebter Religion* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998).