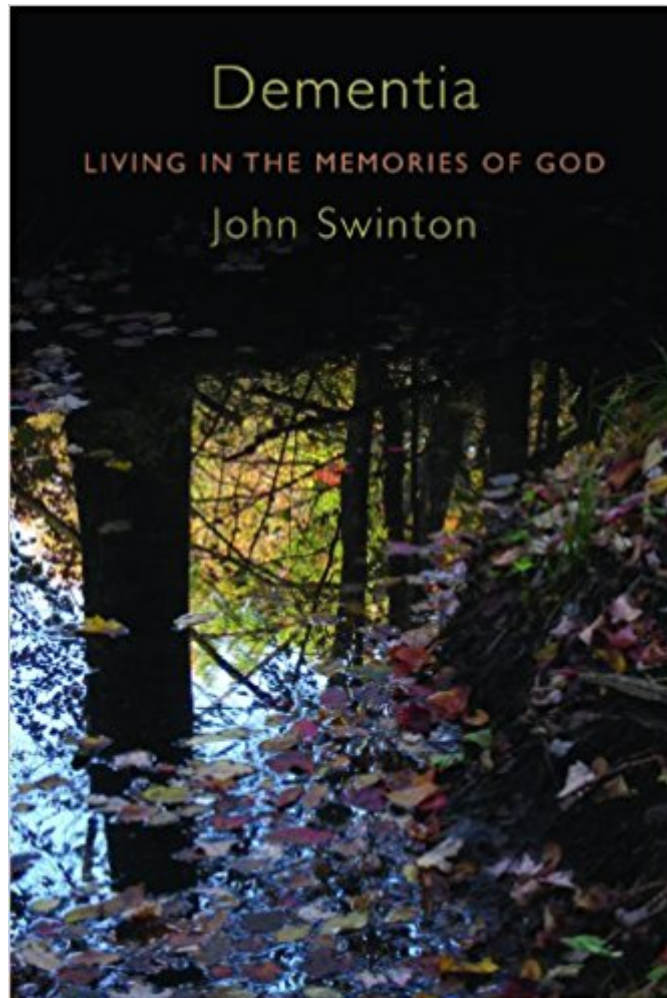




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# Dementia: Living In The Memories Of God



## Synopsis

Dementia is one of the most feared diseases in Western society today. Some have even gone so far as to suggest euthanasia as a solution to the perceived indignity of memory loss and the disorientation that accompanies it. In this book John Swinton develops a practical theology of dementia for caregivers, people with dementia, ministers, hospital chaplains, and medical practitioners as he explores two primary questions: Who am I when I've forgotten who I am? What does it mean to love God and be loved by God when I have forgotten who God is? Offering compassionate and carefully considered theological and pastoral responses to dementia and forgetfulness, Swinton's *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* redefines dementia in light of the transformative counter story that is the gospel.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Michael Ramsey Prize 2016 finalist Stanley Hauerwas -- Duke Divinity School; author of *God, Medicine, and Suffering* "John Swinton has clearly become the premier pastoral theologian of our time. In this book he approaches the troubled topic of dementia with his usual thoroughness, engaging the science with an unapologetic theological voice. *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* will become a classic." Stephen G. Post -- Stony Brook University; author of *The Hidden Gifts of Helping* "Swinton offers us the best constructive theology yet written on the important place for the deeply forgetful in our communities and our lives. His ability to elevate the most significant Christian scholarship on this topic to the level of a compelling new synthesis is clear on each thoughtful page."

Those who want to reflect deeply on where individuals with dementia fit into our world will benefit from this breath of fresh air. It is a brilliant book that stays true to everything meaningful in Christian ethics, theology, and care."Stephen Sapp -- University of Miami; author of *When Alzheimer's Disease Strikes!* "Engagingly written and thoroughly researched, Swinton's *Dementia* is a ringing challenge to current thinking (and speaking and acting) about dementia. Especially significant is the author's insistence that Christians always consider dementia from a theological perspective and move beyond the dominant (and limited) medical model."David Keck -- author of *Forgetting Whose We Are* "This vigorous yet gentle book is changing the way I practice theology. It deserves a broad audience of both theologians and pastors since it challenges fundamental habits of thought, prayer, and service. Indeed, this book -- this offering -- provides hope. It demonstrates the power of faithful theology to engage very difficult, even frightening topics."John Goldingay -- Fuller Theological Seminary; author of *Remembering Ann* "For the last decade of her life my first wife, Ann, couldn't speak, not because she couldn't move her lips but because she could no longer work out what to say. She had dementia. . . . I would worry over how she and God could relate if she couldn't think straight, so I love Swinton's statement that people such as Ann 'remain tightly held within the memories of God' and I resonate with this description of the church as 'a living body of remembering friends.' Indeed, as I read this book, I kept saying, 'Yes, Yes, Yes!'"Elizabeth MacKinlay -- Charles Sturt University; author of *Spiritual Growth and care in the Fourth Age of Life* "This groundbreaking book tells a counter-story of dementia that brings hope and challenges the fears that are so dominant within society and the church."Interpretation • Offers theological insight and practical help. . . . Provides guidance and spiritual help for caregivers who turn to the church and its pastors for help with loved ones suffering from dementia. • Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith • We are fortunate to be able to read such a highly literate, readable, informed, and erudite set of reflections on one of the major health conditions of our time. . . . A most perceptive and informed analysis. • Journal of Christian Nursing • Offering compassionate and carefully considered theological and pastoral responses to dementia and forgetfulness, Swinton's *Dementia* redefines dementia in light of the transformative counter story that is the gospel. • Calvin Theological Journal • This is a thoughtful, provocative, and often heart-rending work. It is as much a book about theological anthropology as it is about pastoral care of persons with dementia; therein lies its beauty. . . . Highly recommended for pastors or seminary level students, particularly those interested in care of the elderly. • Journal of Adult Theological Education • As a survey of much of the literature on the subject, this book is extremely valuable. .

. . Outside the academy and the training institutions, as a work of encouragement to those who minister to, or live with, or fear becoming sufferers from dementia, it should be read widely.â •

Â Themelios â œThis reader highly recommends John Swintonâ™s study to all Christians, but especially pastors and other leaders.â •

Â Catholic Library World â œHighly recommended and should be required reading for those offering clinical or pastoral care of persons with dementia and their families. This work further stands out for its poignant approach and for allowing the voices of theologians, caregivers, and people in the early stages of dementia to resonate loudly and clearly. .

. .Â Also highly appropriate for pastoral libraries or institutions of higher education.â •

Â Presbyterian Outlook â œStunning in its scope and profound in its implications, this is theology that truly deserves the term â^practical.â™. . .Â There is no other book that explores this subject so well.â •

Reviews in Religion and Theology â œSwintonâ™s volume is to be highly commended, both to theologians, lay people, and to medical professionals. It is practical theology of the most charitable and careful kind, avoiding sentimentality and engaging in deep explorations of one of the most painful problems of the human experience.â •

Theology Today â œThis work is practical theology in a thoroughly practical and thoroughly theological sense. It finds its starting point in God and Godâ™s self-revelation, working out from there to its understanding of humanity and so to challenge the prevailing assumptions about dementia, and it generates suggestions for what it means to be practicing Christians, individually and collectively, in the face of dementia.â •

John Swinton is professor of practical theology and pastoral care at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and founding director of the Centre for Spirituality, Health, and Disability at Aberdeen. His other books include Spirituality and Mental Health Care, Resurrecting the Person, and From Bedlam to Shalom.

John Swinton, professor of practical theology and pastoral care at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and founding director of the Centre for Spirituality, Health, and Disability has written Dementia: Living in the Presence of God (Eerdmans, 2012). In it he explores the question: Who Am I? by looking at the different definitions of what constitutes a person. He approaches dementia as a thoroughly theological condition. His basic premise is that standard neurobiological explanations of dementia are deeply inadequate for a full understanding of the nature and experience of dementia. He challenges the notion that when people lose their memories that they are no longer the person they were before. Human beings are much more than bundles of memories. Instead our identity is tightly held in the memories of God. He questions the description of personhood in terms of purely

human relationships. "The problem is that if it is our relationships that make up our personhood, then presumably if we don't have such relationships, we are no longer persons." But what about our relationship with God? "To be a person is to be in an I-Thou relationship specifically with God." The security of human personhood is wholly determined by God. "Even if human beings do not or cannot respond, they remain persons as God the absolute Person continues to relate with them." (Martin Buber) Swinton writes that it is impossible to understand the full meaning of being a human person without first understanding who God is and where human beings stand in relation to God. "It is only when we begin to realize and acknowledge the position of human beings before God that the situation of people with dementia can be fully understood, their personhood authenticated, and their care effectively implemented." We are radically dependent on God. Christian discipleship is about learning to receive our life as a gift without regret. We are not the authors of our own stories. "The experience of dementia brings to the fore a broader amnesia that has befallen the world which has caused it to forget where and what it is: creation. "There is more to being human than memory alone. We are more than our brain's structure and function, which declines daily. Loss of memory does not inevitably lead to loss of self and self-identity. None of us are clear about who we are if who we are is determined by the accuracy of what we remember. To be human is to be held in the memory of God. God watches over us and know us intimately, and remembers us. It is not a person's memory that assures them of their identity, it is the memory of God and, by proxy, the memory of others. (Psalm 139) We Christians are called to be attentive to the presence of God in others. To be attentive is to pay close attention to the other, and in particular to those among us who may be considered weak and vulnerable (1 Cor.12:21-31). A church that remembers well and is attentive to the needs of people with advanced dementia is a church that is remaining faithful. To love one another we need to be present for one another. Love means saying to the other: "it's good that you exist; it's good that you are in this world." We care for the body-self, not just the mind. The body remembers even when the brain does not. Swinton calls for an understanding of the affliction of dementia as part of the passion of Christ. He describes people with dementia as strangers in our midst, but since all believers in Christ are aliens and strangers in this world we have a vocation to include the disabled by providing hospitality to them, for as Jesus said, "I was a stranger and you took me in." (Matt.25) This is an important book that throws much gospel light on an increasingly common affliction.

Insightful, sensitive, humanising, respectful, dignified. Swinton walks us through the challenges of personhood and connection for the person with dementia who typically faces estrangement from

friends and family, disconnection from community and former social groups, confusion and seeing the world from a new perspective. He talks about the importance of the Christian community including and carrying the memories and personhood of people whose cognitive capacity and procedural memory is declining to retain their stories, history, emotions, reminiscences and value. Deeply touching and by far the most in depth book on spiritual life and the dementia journey. Wise and sensitive. Comforting, revealing and possibly helpful for carers and family of a person living with dementia in helping to understand. Combining the experience of a social work and nursing understanding with the humanity, love and compassion of a deeply committed Christian. Particularly suited to a reader with a Christian world view but also relevant to someone caring for another with a Christian background, and for pastoral carers.

Swinton gives presents an outstanding theological response to dementia. He encourages a counter-narrative to those based on a medical definition, without writing off neurological insights to this devastating disease. This is truly a pastoral theology, not stopping with a theological definition of the dementia experience, but offering a well-considered Christian response of care based based upon his theological definition. This is a "must read."

iREALLY ENJOYED THE READ; especially first few chapters . then it became hard going. I guess you have to be a committed Christian, to accept all he is saying, especially about being the enemy of time; and what "existed" before creation . I shall read it again and again. I have found my spouse's condition so much easier to accept after reading this book

I have just gotten into it about 60 pages and it is very helpful so far.as to the person of the dementia person which can be easily overlooked..

How do we love God when we can't remember who God is? Great book for anyone working with people with dementia or a church pastor who has members who are dealing with dementia in their family. It brings compassion and love to the forefront.

Deep, difficult reading but encouraging & practical help for afflicted and caregivers

Very well written amazing insight into dementia

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