

Book Review

SHEA, John J. *Finding God Again: Spirituality for Adults*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005. 224pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-0-74-254215-0. \$24.95.

Religion and psychology have been like a bickering old couple who don't get on too well together but would be worse off apart. This statement, however, needs qualification. It has been only certain forms of religion (including spirituality) and certain forms of psychology that have been in a prolonged rocky courtship during the past century. The project of John Shea's new book is to bring this precarious couple into a healthy and holy marriage. He partially succeeds. But, I sense if the union is to be saved, each partner will need to (educationally) cross over to a deeper and broader understanding of the other.

Finding God Again is a book about human development and religious development, and their essential relationality. Its thesis is: human maturity is indispensable to religious maturity. In Shea's terms, the form and structure of "adult religion" depends on the form and structure of "adulthood." Without a mature adult self, there is no mature adult religion, and religion has ignored the former to its own detriment. The heuristic device Shea employs to explore this relationship is to correlate various images of God with particular stages of human development. He proposes two dramatically different paradigms of imaging God: "The Superego God" belongs to religion in its early stages of development and to the "adolescing self." Whereas, "The Living God" is at the center of adult religion and linked to the "adult self."

In Part I and Part II of the book, Shea gives a detailed and rich description of each paradigm. He paints a portrait of two contrasting Gods, with opposite characteristics, functioning at two different levels of human maturation. In Part III, "Transformation: From 'The Superego God' to 'The Living God'," he explores how adolescencing religion can be transformed into adult religion, and what factors hinder or help in the transformation. At the close of each section, he offers a number of first-hand accounts of the self in relationship with the different versions of God. Self and God, for Shea, are intertwined. The journey into self is the journey into God, and the journey into God is the journey into self (Augustine). Consequently, he assumes and advocates that they develop together.

Finding God Again is a constructive and well-designed work. Its primary interest is the pastoral and practical—although it is deeply grounded in some of the best traditional and contemporary psychology and pastoral counseling. I have empathy with Shea's intentions here. However, the framework within which he seeks to accomplish his task is incapable of housing it. I would offer the following three observations of his reductionist framework.

1. The question of human maturity is reduced to psychological categories. The adult self is defined as "an integral self-in-mutuality" (p. 57). It is the fullness of what it means to be human acquired through interpersonal mutuality. This is a standard psychological perspective. However, as a theory about life's development, it is inadequate. Human development is too important to be left to psychologists. Philosophical, political, moral and religious resources are essential for a richer meaning of human maturity.

2. The subtitle of *Finding God Again* is *Spirituality for Adults*. The meaning of spirituality (p. 97), however, is so nebulous and thin that it slips easily from our grasp. Likewise, Shea's definition of religion as "that which is about the self and God together" (p. xvi) is a dangerous reductionism. It affirms a God of Psychology that directs us to the center of the self (ego). What is lacking is a God of History that we experience in daily affairs—in our historical struggle for justice, peace and ecological integrity. Here Shea's spirituality and religion is shaped by his psychology. Carl Jung is his guru and guide. There is a deep anti-institutional religion streak in the work. Organized religion is nearly exclusively associated with authoritarianism, literalism, guilt and a Superego God. It blocks access to the Living God. The same antipathy is shown towards beliefs, dogma and theology. If Shea was more in touch with contemporary theological currents he would discover allies of which he is unaware.

3. Finally, Shea indicts organized religion for its educational practices. Some of this critique is well placed. However, he maligns a whole profession of church educators and caricatures their work—without offering a single scholarly reference to support his criticism (p. 129). What is offered instead is a set of psychological strategies to facilitate transformation.

Finding God Again is a fine piece of work. It kept me engaged from beginning to end. I will use it in my courses as an example of something imaginatively daring and, yet, so dangerous.

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