

Book Review by John Littleton

John J, Shea, 2018. *Adulthood, Morality, and the Fully Human: A Mosaic of Peace*. Lanham, USA and London, UK: Lexington Books. 295 Pages.
Amazon Australia Hardback \$72.97

This ambitious work does not disappoint. We are all human beings. But what might it mean to be fully human? Impressively, John Shea, using a developmental perspective, describes and discusses the attributes of the fully human person. Contemporary academia, Western culture and the globalised world constitute the context.

Shea's understanding of the fully human adult applies to all human beings – religious and non-religious. Such an understanding provides helpful criteria by which to identify adulthood (51, 201, 234-240, 251-254). In this thought-provoking book the author finds his voice and provides a language for discourse on the notion of the fully human; revealing his responsible whole reflective self and mutuality with others in their human becoming.

I read this book on the recommendation of Professor Thomas Groome, a well-respected international Christian educator from the School of Theology and Ministry, Boston College, MA. Groome recommended the book to all religious educators “in that it can clarify the “what for” of our educating - our intended learning outcomes”, that people become morally responsible and fully human adults (Groome 2019). John Shea has been a professor of psychology and religion, human development, pastoral counselling, and pastoral care at Fordham University and later at Boston College, Boston, USA.

This seminal book is well crafted, well written and well argued, scholarly and richly endowed with extensive referencing and insightful Notes, along with descriptions of film scenarios, mention of significant individuals and an appendix with practical questions for reflection and dialogue; a publication for a serious reader of books.

In Part One, the author outlines and discusses the attributes of the fully human adult: integrity, mutuality, a concern for care and justice in action and a disposition of peace; peace is “actually the goal and the pinnacle of human development”(109); a peaceful self, “a self that is in, of, and for peace” (147). Part 1 reveals the mosaic: “integrity and mutuality together beget care and justice, and care and justice together beget peace” (xii). Chapter Two explains and discusses six characteristics of the fully human: the body self, the feeling self (self empathy and empathy for others), the innermost self (the place of the soul), the self with clear boundaries, the intimate self in adulthood, and the responsible whole self. The cultural disconnections for each characteristic are considered.

The author then relates the six characteristics to care and justice, violence and peace. “Violence and peace define each other as opposites in the context of the fully human in action” (108). Shea concludes that violence (abuse, bribery, rape, murder, terrorising...) “is our humanity in its developmental failure”. Peace, taking care and being just “is our humanity at its developmental best”(110). Violence dehumanises; it negates integrity and mutuality and is, developmentally understood, “evil”(136).

Part Two presents three stimulating chapters on education, psychotherapy, spirituality and the fully human. In proposing pedagogy of connection Shea emphasises the centrality of empathy. He writes “In educating for integrity and mutuality, in educating for care and justice, and in educating for peace we have a mosaic of the “whole person” in mind” (148-149). He looks at psychotherapy in its role of helping people “become an integral and mutual self, a caring and just self, a self of peace” (185). The chapter on spirituality - religious or not- is central to the goal of developing as a human being. Maturity “is not whether or not a person is religious but whether or not a person is adult”(xv). The purpose of the book is about “how being an adult and being a moral person go together in being fully human”(xv). In spirituality, humans connect to a reality greater than themselves; a reality in which they participate (229); the wonder, awe and transformative felt power, or presence, or living truth or force or energy of that spirituality “penetrates the heart, enlivens the spirit, and allows the soul to come alive” as fully human (223-225). Compassion is central to a mature adult spirituality (236-245).

A great deal of shared wisdom inhabits the pages of this book. The challenge of exploring the notion of the fully human, as proposed by Shea, has exciting implications for theology and Christian education. Jesus is not mentioned in the book. Yet, again and again, on reading the book, the description of Jesus Christ in the Church’s Nicene Creed, as “truly human” came to mind. The words in the Gospel according to Matthew 5: 1-12, the Beatitudes, are considered to be a portrait of Jesus: poor in spirit, caring, meek, just, compassionate, pure in heart, peacemaker, counter-cultural, persecuted. Many of these attributes, descriptive of Jesus, correlate with Shea's understanding of the fully human: integrity, mutuality, care, compassion, justice and peace. Disciples of Jesus can indeed describe Jesus as the "fully human" one, and thank Shea for his contribution towards articulating a twenty-first century appreciation of a fully human adult and attending to “a phenomenology of the fully human” (xi).

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