

Journal of Jungian Scholarly Studies
Vol. 6, No. 7, 2010

Book Review

***Recovering Feminine Spirituality: The Mysteries and the Mass as Symbols of Individuation*, by Evangeline Rand, Coventure Ltd, 1997, ISBN 0879041235**

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Evangelina Rand is a therapist with extensive experience in treating survivors of abuse; she is also a renowned scholar of the feminine imagination. Bringing together these two arms for a powerful embrace, *Recovering Feminine Spirituality*, is a book to heal the starved Christian soul of either sex.

For many of us the sacred ritual of consecrating the host has been so removed from the house church, from the love-glow of the goddess, and from the primordial depths of her vessel of transformation that the ritual no longer speaks to us. . . . Soul's green language no longer pushes out of the earth because there has been no conscious descent into her apple orchard... The whole drama remains trapped and condemned in the unvalued body in the Great mother's tomb, or etherealized into spiritual fantasy. We do not know of the core silence of the women's mysteries. (71)

Many have diagnosed the patriarchal biases of the dominant Christian narratives of Western modernity. Rand's work is, by contrast, something much more vital, more *alive*. *Recovering Feminine Spirituality* is an act of restitution, of symbol building. To read this book is to be immersed in rich language of the feminine mysteries; of the female body as sexual, maternal, corporeal. Above all, this book shows the feminine as *fertile* in the dual sense of psychic and physical birthing. Rand's quest here is to rejoin psyche and body in our cultural being. Her aim is to restore by *re-storying* the core myths of consciousness; those we need to make us whole.

Theories of separation of mind and body since the Enlightenment have been sponsored by a patriarchal religion that was ultimately dedicated to purifying the masculine by subordinating the feminine. The process has gone too far for the mental health of the modern person. Rand seeks to heal by making whole; a practice etymologically congruent. Where the father's mysteries have been

distorted by lack of connection to the “other,” it is Rand’s special vision to show how feminine mysteries are still available to the hungry modern psyche.

So *Recovering Feminine Spirituality* demonstrates the psychological function of ancient myths and mysteries of the feminine such as those dedicated to Demeter at Eleusis. It also carves out a renewed space for feminine ways of understanding the living cultivation of the embodied soul. For what Rand is deeply aware of is the loss of the sacred as received through knowing the earth as divine mother. Earth mother consciousness is necessarily about the body as a *source* of the sacred, not an alternative to it. Therefore, sexuality contains a potential for experiencing the divine: matter *matters* because it is *animated*, not separate from spirit.

What is crucial, of course, is that these feminine mysteries may have modeled themselves on the female form, yet are not exclusive to women. Given that the Earth mother gives birth to both women and men from her divine fertility, her base mode of connectivity means that she is prior to the division between the genders. Looking for the goddess in the interstices of patriarchal modernity is an attempt to redeem the body for both women and men.

On the other hand, *Recovering Feminine Spirituality* shows us why the huge work of re-balancing the symbolic imagination is so vital to the lives of women today. One of the great strengths of the book is the weaving of therapeutic material and scholarship of religion and symbolism. Women suffer through their bodies by being born into a culture that does not value female corporeality. Whether through sexual abuse or by being ignored or ridiculed for not serving the patriarchal fashioning of desire, women come to therapy feeling degraded through their bodies.

This book shows how women with abused souls can be healed. These women are on the frontline of the deep need to restructure the symbolic systems we live by. Rand’s work here is for these women and for us, her readers. To engage with *Recovering Feminine Spirituality* is to become part of an important movement of cultural renewal. As with all the best poetry, Evangeline Rand makes words that animate body and psyche, together. I strongly recommend this book.