

Jesus and the Gospel Women

Joanna Collicutt McGrath (SPCK, 2009)

Joanna Collicutt McGrath is very clear that she is coming at this subject as a woman, a psychologist, a person with some sympathy towards feminism, but above all someone who is fascinated by the humanity of Jesus of Nazareth. And it is this that overwhelmingly comes across.

Jesus and the Gospel Women does unpack Jesus and his encounters with the hidden and not so hidden women found in the Gospels, his discourses with them as recorded for us by the Gospel writers and his relationship with women today – but the focus is most definitely the person of Jesus.

McGrath drew me in right from the introduction, making it difficult for me to put the book down as she traced the path of Jesus' relationships and encounters with women. But as she says, this isn't just a book for women, it's for men to learn from too, just as women have taken much from the relationship of Jesus with the disciples.

Throughout the book McGrath picks up what she sees as the three main themes of Jesus' encounters:

- You are not on your own (Immanuel)
- Things don't have to be this way (the offer of salvation)
- The invitation to 'get up and grow up' – (being raised with Christ)

However, McGrath's starting point is quite interesting! Rather than diving straight in with the gospel narrative, she starts in a very different place – in the world of Jane Austen, and in particular the story of *Pride and Prejudice*. Her premise is that for many women, when we respond to the person of Jesus it's because we're looking for a hero, which in and of itself is not wrong. In many ways Jesus is a 'hero' figure, the one who came to save and rescue. The problem for many of us (she asserts) is that he has become something of a romantic hero, a Mr Darcy for the modern woman.

I have to admit to wrestling with this a bit, but as I listen in on the conversations of women around me (and sometimes my own!) I think she may well have a good point!

From this starting point McGrath goes on to present Jesus the man, from his relationship with Mary as he grows into the realisation of who he is as the Son of God, to his encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman, someone from a completely different culture from his own.

I really enjoyed this book, as I met women that I'd previously not noticed, or simply hadn't seen the profundity of Jesus' encounter with. And particularly I appreciated the invitation to get up and grow up, to respond to Jesus as an adult, and as a woman. McGrath's insights as a psychologist add a valuable extra dimension to this highly readable and biblical study.

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