ForeWord Reviews

FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

Jesus and Psychology
Fraser Watts, editor
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Biblical scholarship isn't what it used to be—and according to Fraser Watts, that's a good thing. As the editor of this insightful collection of essays, Watts shows how religious scholarship has become increasingly interdisciplinary over the past century, merging with literature, history, and politics. In particular, a renewed interest in psychological approaches to the Bible adds new layers of meaning to this already rich and nuanced text.

Watts directs the Psychology and Religion Research Group at the University of Cambridge, where he also serves as a Reader in Natural Science and Theology. The author of *Science Meets Faith* and *Theology and Psychology*, he is also a fellow of Queens' College and Vicar-Chaplain of St. Edward's Church in Cambridge. For this project, Watts has assembled a talented group of eight contributors from various backgrounds in academic psychology, theology, and religious counseling.

Psychology certainly has much to offer the study of religion, yet it also presents a disturbing question for believers: How can one avoid reducing the power of faith to a psychological exercise? The authors of this collection are well aware of the issue, and at times, fundamental questions over the legitimacy of their task restrains their scholarship. In the essay "Psychology and the Historical Jesus," for example, Justin J. Meggitt spends much time examining the arguments against using psychology to understand Jesus as a historical figure, but offers only a cursory look at the insights such an analysis could actually yield. The collection is much stronger when authors delve directly and fearlessly into their topics. Liz Gulliford's "Fully Human, Fully Divine?" is a fascinating exploration of how three popular films—*The Passion of the Christ*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and *Jesus Christ Superstar*—reflect different interpretations of Jesus' humanity. Likewise, in "Personal Development" James M. Day deftly applies the theories of developmental psychology to analyze how early life experiences shape each individual's conception of God.

At times uneven, this collection still offers a fascinating introduction to psychology and the Bible. The questions it raises will challenge readers to expand their understanding of the

Gospels, its teachings, and themselves.