Book Reviews

The Risen Lord. The Jesus of History as the Christ of Faith.
Margaret Barker, T & T Clark: Edinburgh.

Since the mid 1980s the Third Quest for the Historical Jesus has held sway, despite qualms over the appropriateness of the term. Jesus has been confidently identified by various scholars with a Jewish peasant, an Essene, a Pharisee, a miracle worker, an exorcist or an eschatological prophet. Sometimes he has been depicted as literate, sometimes illiterate; sometimes he has been exposed as belligerent; sometimes pacifist. Whatever construction the historian imposes, there is always a further question: when and how did this historical Jesus assume the mantle of divinity?

It seems to me that there are three types of response to this question, beyond mere assumption of the fact of divinity by an act of faith or unconfirmable experience. First, there are those who, in the traditional vein, attempt to demonstrate that the divinity of Jesus was actually part of the historical process. Thus, historical demonstration of his virgin birth, his miracle working, his power over demons and his resurrection are claimed to prove cumulatively his divinity. Secondly, there are attempts to trace the trajectory by which early followers would have moved from responding to the historical figure (with whatever historical construction he is invested) to believing him to be a god. Finally, there are those who would like to uncover precisely when and how Jesus came to believe himself to be divine so that thereafter the early disciples simply accepted his divinity on his word. Barker is in the third category. From the outset I would like to say that I have problems with demonstrations in that particular category of psychohistory. I think that any objective Jesus scholarship should confine itself to the second category.

Psychohistory has become a respectable art form. A number of books have begun with the question: when and why did Hitler come to believe that he was the Fuehrer and that the Jews were vermin? But there is evidence on which to base such a psychoanalysis: living witnesses, contemporary texts, even *Mein Kampf*. There is, I would maintain, too little evidence to psychoanalyse Jesus.

Barker's thesis presupposes her earlier research into First Temple Judaism where she showed that YHWH was the son of El 'Elyon and was appointed to be the guardian of Israel. He was a secondary, lesser god. Monotheism was introduced subsequently by the Deuteronomic reform, which did not manage to stifle earlier beliefs. Those beliefs would surface in Second Temple Judaism.

Her new thesis claims that Jesus identified himself with YHWH, the secondary God. Further, she can pinpoint the physical moment of self-identification - the mystical experience of resurrection in which he realised his transformation into the angelic (read YHWH) state. But the 'resurrection' in this sense took place, according to Barker, at his baptism by John. From that historically defined moment he was

aware of his identification with YHWH, the lesser God.

Jesus as YHWH interpreted himself as the High Priest of the last times, knowing that his death would be the final atonement. Barker marshals material from the canonical Scriptures (eg. the 'Man' in Daniel 7), from Qumran (11Q Melchizedek), from the Apocrypha and from the Targumim to bring home her point in this string of identification.

On this basis, she calls for a re-reading of the Christian Scriptures. Tradition, she would say, has confused two mystical ascents of Jesus: the baptism, in which he was raised up as the divine High Priest, and the crucifixion, in which he underwent a final exaltation and atonement.

I have already declared my prejudice against psychohistory in the search for the historical Jesus. I enjoyed and profited from Barker's learned and revealing dissection of texts. I think that 11Q Melchizedek provides an invaluable exemplar to understand how the early Christians eventually, against the mainstream of the Jewish mindset, came to express their belief in Jesus as divine. But Barker relies on shaky premises when she goes further. For example, she writes:

> The gospels which we now read as a record of the young church's beliefs about Jesus could well be an accurate description of beliefs held by some of the disciples before the crucifixion and they almost certainly record what Jesus believed about himself. (p.85)

That is easily stated but - *quod est demonstrandum.* There are other slippages in a similar style:

> It is not impossible that Jesus knew the Melchizedek text found at Qumran, or something similar... (p. 86)

All things are possible but may not be historically demonstrable.

I do not gainsay Barker's breadth of scholarship and, as an introduction to the matrix of complex Jewish thought in the late Second Temple period, she offers a great deal. Nor do I have *a priori* problems with her presuppositions or conclusions. It is simply a matter that, having situated herself in the historical genre, I do not think she has used the stringent historical methodology that is then required.

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Jameson and Jeroboam.

Boer, Roland. The Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Series.
Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996. ISBN 0-7885-0116-X

Roland Boer's book, which grew out of his dissertation under the direction of Robert Culley at McGill University, is an attempt to apply the Marxist literary model of interpretation of Frederick Jameson to the Bible. While biblical studies has seen its conventional historical critical approach sharing the interpretation of biblical texts with an increasing use of literary approaches drawn from the broader theoretical

discussion concerning the interpretation of texts, there has been little use made of Marxist theory apart from scholars such as Gottwald, Jobling, Miranda and a few others. Boer's book is an attempt to overcome this dearth in biblical studies of what he sees as a resurgence of Marxist criticism in the academy.

The book is not easy reading and reflects its nascence as a doctoral dissertation. The first chapter is ninety pages in length and outlines in all its complexity Jameson's Marxist theory. In good dialectical fashion this chapter represents both the strengths and weaknesses of this book. Its strengths lie in Boer's enormous reading and the clear comprehension of his analysis of Jameson's thought. One wonders, however, how many readers, especially those unfamiliar with Marxist interpretation in general (and Jameson's in particular) will wade through this material. With the enormous amount of literary theory making its way into biblical studies and the difficulty of some of these studies with their own idiosyncratic jargon, one looks for the translation of this jargon into more readily available prose. By the time this reader finished the extended discussion of theory, he was longing for the move from theory to praxis.

According to Boer Jameson's theory of textual interpretation is twofold: (1) "metacommentary" or "transcoding" and (2) "a blueprint for an all-encompassing Marxist method of interpretation." In this two pronged approach Jameson attempts on the one hand to deal with the plurality of interpretation through metacommentary and the "untranscendable horizon" of Marxist method. It is this tension between "pluralism and dominance" that is seen as productive outcome by some and as a major criticism of his work by others.

The second half of the book applies Jameson's approach to three texts all having to do with the breakup of the Kingdom of Israel after Solomon: 1 Kings 11-14, 3 Reigns 11-14 (the Septuagint text) and II Chronicleres 10-13. To subject these particular texts to the Jameson analysis isimportant because "they are paradigmatic sections for wider textual contexts in which the are found," and "they set the patterns by which the reader is meant to understand in each case the story of the divided monarchy" (p. 298).

It is impossible to portray in clear fashion the complexities both of Jameson's approach and Boer's use of that approach in a short essay such as this. Importantly, this book represents the movement away from the ideological underpinnings of the German historiographic tradition, on which the historical-critical approach is based, and moves the discussion in the direction of cultural studies, which brings the study of the bible in line with other developments in the humanities. Roland Boer is a young scholar in Australia and this book clearly marks him out as a key player in the development of biblical studies in Australia and beyond.

Ed Conrad, University of Queensland

The Land is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies.

Habel, Norman C, Overtures to Biblical Theology. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. pp. 190

Norman Habel has always been at the forefront of Old Testament scholarship both in Australia and abroad. This book on the land in the eminent series, Overtures to Biblical Theology, is no exception. The first book in this series was Walter Brueggemann's *The Land* published in 1977. To return to the same subject in the Overtures nearly twenty years later is timely. Since Bruggemann's earlier work, biblical scholars have become keenly aware of the role of ideology in both the production and reception of biblical texts. Habel means by 'ideology' not the Marxist notion of 'false consciousness' but a more neutral understanding of ideology 'as a pattern of beliefs [that] functions to promote the social and political cause of a particular group in society, to justify its vision, and to promote its interpretation of reality as truth' (p. 12). Every writer and every reader brings an ideology with them, which is encoded in the written text as well as in the interpretation of a text.

When the Bible is used as a resource in discussion about the land, as in recent discussions about native title to the land in Australia, it is necessary to address the issue of the role of ideology in the construction of realities about the land. We are now keenly aware of the ideology of European settlers of Australia for whom land is "terrain to be conquered" (p. 2)—an ideology that "laid claim to the land under the legal fiction of *terra nullius*, a land without inhabitants" (p.7). The ideology of the indigenous inhabitants of the land is also not far from the consciousness of many Australians: "the land is sacred, filled with ancestral dreamings that determine kinship, sacred site, and ceremony. All species of life, including humans, are bound to the land. Land does not belong to people; people belong to the land" (p. 2). What has gone unnoticed for many who use the Bible in the clash of ideologies concerning the land in contemporary societies like Australia is the role of ideology in shaping the Bible's own understanding of the land. Habel does not see a single land ideology in the Old Testament, however. As the subtitle of the book indicates, he locates six different ideologies of the land in the Hebrew Scriptures: a royal ideology, a theocratic ideology, an ancestral household ideology, a prophetic ideology, an agrarian ideology and an immigrant ideology. Each of these ideologies is discussed in a separate chapter in the book. The different ideologies are analysed according to four broad categories: "the dominant image of the land, the location of God, charters of entitlement, and the locus of power and rights to or of the land" (134). To discuss the different biblical land ideologies under these broad categories facilitates a comparison of the ideologies in a concluding chapter in the book. For example, under the category of locus of power it can be seen that, while the LORD's promise of the land justifying Israel's entitlement of the land is common to all the ideologies, this promise is "appropriated and adapted"by a different power group associated with each ideology to bolster its "claims for control or ownership of all or parts of the land" (p. 143). Also, only one ideology, the immigrant ideology of the Abraham narratives "reflects any sympathy for the indigenous Canaanites" (p. 147).

It is the recognition of the plurality of land ideologies in the Bible that makes a significant contribution and moves the discussion in new directions. This is an

important book and I recommend the book highly for scholars who are interested in ideology criticism of the Bible as well as for clergy and lay people who wish to use the Bible as a resource for dealing with land right issues in the twentieth century.

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The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth: A New Diagram of Man in the Universe
D E Harding, University of Florida Press, 1979. Introduction by C S Lewis

The decision by a respected university press to continue publishing this remarkable boo, having reissued it decades after its initial UK edition had apparently vanished into the limbo of English literary eccentricities, is among other thing evidence that C S Lewis was a man of wider and more prophetic vision than even many of his admirers realise. For Lewis did far more to encourage its original 1952 publication than is evident from his brief introduction.

Harding himself is something of a phenomenon, in that he came into his own as a religious and secular author only quite recently on the strength of works written well after he had already outlived the Biblically-allotted threescore years and ten. Indeed one of these, *The Little Book of Life and Death* (Routledge/Arkana, 1988), was composed when he was approaching 79 as a preparation for his own demise which he assumed could not be far away. The American thanatologist Ram Dass wrote of it that "as a result of this gift, I predict, the literature on dying will never be the same again".

However, it was a completely unknown and (by his account) painfully shy Douglas Harding who in 1951 steeled himself to approach the famous C S Lewis for his opinion on a bulky first manuscript over which he had laboured for some time in his spare time from an architectural practice. He had worked out a way of doing something which Lewis had proclaimed as the objective of his own 'interplanetary' novels - namely, to restore in modern scientific terms the ancient sense of the universe as a living cosmos, 'deep heaven' rather than mere 'space-time-matter'. Yet Harding wrote with some trepidation, because his vision came from an experience that had more affinity with Zen Buddhism than Christian orthodoxy: the kind of living universe he portrayed in *The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth* was quite different from anything envisaged in Lewis' writing.

Lewis' reply was better than Harding had hoped for in his wildest dreams. It reveals an element in Lewis' character that has received too little attention from commentators and was, indeed, rarely given much rein by Lewis himself in public utterances - a capacity for delighted enthusiasm at any new work he felt to be really good, even though its specific ideas differed from his own. He wrote:

> Hang it all, you've made me drunk, roaring drunk as I haven't been on a book (I mean a book of doctrine; imaginative works are another matter) since I first read Bergson during World War I. Who or what are you? Have you lived 40 years without my hearing of you before? Understand that my delight is not, alas! as significant as it may seem, for I was never a scientist and have long ceased to be

> even a minor philosopher. A great deal of your book is beyond me. My opinion is of no value. But my **sensation** is that you have written a work of the highest genius.

There follows some practical criticisms and advice about possible publishers. The outcome was a personal introduction to Faber and Faber, who in 1952 published the book with a Preface wherein Lewis expresses his enthusiasm in more formal terms.

> This book is, I believe, the first attempt to reverse a movement of thought which has been going on since the beginning of philosophy.... It has also given me that bracing and satisfying experience in which, in certain books of theory, seems to be partially independent of our final agreement or disagreement...a delight very like that which would be given by Mr Hesse's glass bead game (in the book of that name) if it could really exist. I owe a new experience of that kind to Mr Harding.

Rereading the book now, forty-five years on, Lewis' prescience strikes me a quite astonishing. Back then Harding's fundamental starting point was so radically alien to Western ways of thinking, religious and secular alike, that I'm sure many potential readers were as unable as I was to get seriously beyond his very first page where, in a disarmingly innocent tone without technical philosophic jargon, he blithely bypasses the split between consciousness and physical existence which has bedevilled the West since the Greeks. The passage, even without saying so, parodies Descartes' famous reflections:

> What am I? That is the question. Let me try to answer it as honestly and as simply as I can, forgetting the ready-made answers. Common sense tells me that I am a man very similar to other men (adding that I am five-feet-ten, fortyish, grey-headed, around eleven stone, and so on), and that I know just what it is here and now to be me, writing on this sheet of paper. So far, surely, nothing can have gone wrong. But has my common sense really described what it is like to be me? Others cannot help me here: only I am in a position to say what I am. At once I make a startling discovery: common sense could not have been more wrong....I have no head! Here are my hands, arms, parts of my trunk and shoulders, not a head, but these words and this paper and this desk, the wall of the room, the window, the grey sky beyond....My head has gone, and in its place a world. And all my life long I had imagined myself to be built according to the ordinary human and animal plan!

Today the notion of 'lateral thinking' has become commonplace, and almost any educated Western reader has at least heard of the Zennotion that enlightenment is not a matter of reaching some exotic state of consciousness through strenuous effort, but of using special outrageous statements (*koans*) to jerk the mind free from ingrained habits of thought so as to access an **already present** direct awareness of our living unity with the cosmos - an awareness which is ordinarily blocked out by the mind's constant re-interpretation of experience into customary categories. And thanks to a string of scholars from Aldous Huxley and Allan Watts in the 1950s,

through Jacob Needleman and Thomas Merton in the 1960s and '70s, to Morris Berman and Matthew Fox in the 1980s, there is also now wide public familiarity with the fact that such 'marketplace mysticism" is a vital but neglected part of our own Western heritage, which our current ecological crisis is driving us to reclaim. Harding's book anticipated all of this, and spelt out in elegant detail, as no writer I know of has done since, how the goal which Berman calls 're-enchantment of the world' can be achieved in the actual lives of ordinary people without any heavy discipline (or psychodelic drugs) and without going back in any way on the genuine advances achieved by Western science and culture.

But in 1952 very few indeed of us, not even of those who on Christian grounds were intellectually sympathetic to the idea of a sacramental universe, were sufficiently lateral-minded to see anything more than ingenious word-spinning in Harding's "no-headed" account of how everything, from electrons to galaxies, is actually experienced as a single hierarchy of consciousness, without being in any way robbed of its materiality. His book went out of print without ever getting the attention Lewis knew (and I now know) it deserved. So he went back to the drawing board, and in 1961 put out a much smaller book, concentrating on reaching the then growing counter-culture who mightaccept his basic idea of headlessness as a latterday Zen *koan*. He actually called it *On Having No Head: Zen and the Rediscovery of the Obvious*, and it was a sign of the changing times that in some circles it became a minor classic.

Harding was acclaimed not only by such leading scholars as Professor Huston Smith of Minnesota, doyen of contemporary religious philosophers, but also in top music charts by the British group the Incredible String Band whose *Douglas Harding Song* celebrates him as "the sage without a head". Then in 1988 he went on, in *The Little Book of Life and Death*, to link his ideas with the newly emerging research on 'Near Death Experiences' or NDEs, in which vast numbers of people from all walks of life have experienced precisely the kind of 'mystical' consciousness-shift when snatched back from the brink after heart attacks, drowning and such, by modern medical skills.

Harding's 1990 book *Head Off Stress* (Routledge/Arkana) brought him to still wider notice, dealing as it does with the archetypal problem of modern society, affecting sections of the public who would never read books about Zen or death. This, combined with the growing ecological awareness as our century approaches its close, surely makes the time ripe for a really wide re-discovery of his first book *The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth*, which is a fuller statement of his total sacramental vision than anything he has written since, and has hardly dated at all.

Harding, even more than Lewis, has Chesterton's gift for presenting high philosophical arguments in everyday terms with a marvellous dance of words. For example, he encapsulates into a single paragraph the extraordinary paradox of human identity in the light of what modern biology reveals:

> But the science-based observer is not content to keep a ...respectful distance: he goes into matters. And he finds this smooth exterior to be a tissue-thin screen for a fabulous menagerie of living things, fed at intervals through a hole near the top of their cage - beings which, though blind and brainless, have a wonderful way of helping one another, and of responding with exquisite accuracy to their keeper-trainer's unspoken demands....But... even at their most unruly such specialists do not rank as true individuals, but as fragments. Not so the cells of which they are composed. These - and there are billions of them - are distinct, self-contained animals, of many different types and ways of life. Most are sedentary, but some make their way freely about the body; and each, whatever its way of picking up a living, is born separately and dies separately, feeds for itself upon its environment, and excretes into it. And certainly there is, in the community of cells, no lack of what, at other levels, are called ruthlessness and struggle for existence.

Yet Harding goes beyond that to make us aware of ourselves as also communities of molecules, atoms and mysterious subatomic entities, all engaged in an unimaginable dance that we still manage to call 'myself'. And then, by a switch of perspective which no other architect I know has ever envisages, he makes us realise that the mystery called 'I' is also conscious as a home, a district, a land and beyond that even the stars.

I can grasp now Lewis' generous prophetic vision and echo his enthusiasm in strongly recommending Harding's *The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth.*

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The Man from the East

Istimah Week. Vantage Press Inc., N. Y. 1966 ISBN: 0-533-11698-8
Available from Consulting Associates, P. O. Box 531, Northbridge, NSW 2063, $22.65 (inc. postage)

In the New York summer of 1958, Istimah Week, a devout but somewhat dissatisfied Chilean Roman Catholic, received news from her brother that was to change her life. As a student of the well-known Gurdjieff teacher John G. Bennett (founder of the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at Coombe Springs, England), her brother had just been instructed to abandon his Gurdjieff studies in favour of "a direct experience of the power of God available through a man from the East." Dr. Bennett, who had received the contact, described it as a force so pure that it could directly enter into the soul of any man or woman who asked for it, simply by passing from one person who had already received it to another who sought it. With no teaching or dogma, it was compatible with all religions. It was just what Istimah Week was looking for.

The eponymous Man from the East turned out to be an Indonesian Muslim named Mohammed Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo (Pak Subuh of simply Bapak for short), founder of the modern spiritualmovement known as Subud (an abbreviation of the words *Susila Budhi Dharma*, meaning the possibility of right living through the grace of God). Based

on Bapak's own spontaneous spiritual "opening" to "divine grace" in 1925, and his apparent ability to pass it on to others, Subud grew gradually from a small group of Javanese practitioners to larger groups scattered around the world. And it was to the New York Subud group that an excited Istimah Weed betook herself in 1958, receiving the contact immediately after the mandatory three month waiting period.

The contact usually takes place in small segregated groups of man and women who are "opened" in a kind of standing meditation (the *latihan*) by helpers authorised to transmit the divine power. It consists only of closing the eyes, surrendering whole-bodily to the will of God, and for the next half hour taking what comes. People respond in radically different ways - some (like Istimah Week) moving around gently to feelings of peace and love, and the incorrigibles (like myself) who never experience anything at all. Once you've been opened, on more intermediaries are needed, and the latihan may be practised bi-weekly either in Subud groups or privately at home. For some, this brings a deepening of the spiritual experience, while for others there is little change.

While the book abounds with explanatory quotes from Pak Subuh on the principles and purposes of the latihan, there is nowhere a satisfactory clarification of the possible reasons for such diverse responses. We are told only that everyone responds in their own way according to their unique needs for "purification." I like to think that my brother needed more purification than I did, but I fear that Pak Subuh and Istimah Week would not agree. Throughout the book, one gets the definite impression that any response is better than none, and that perhaps "non-movers" are somehow too psychologically rigid to surrender wholeheartedly to the will of God. The story is told of one such recalcitrant having the backs of his knees pushed in by Pak Subuh in order to get him moving! Certainly I myself stood enviously through three years (1957-60) of bi-weekly dramatic latihans, many conducted by Pak Subuh's wife Ibu, unable to share in the healings and miracles of those very early days at Coombe Springs.

The book, however, is mainly about the very positive effect of Subud on the lives of Istimah Week, her family and friends. It also tells of her close association with Pak Subah from 1959 to his death in 1987, particularly of her years in Java as part of his inner circle, and during his 1970 world tour. Historians of new religious movements should find it a valuable aid in years to come when Pak Subuh the man has become deified or demonised image - for the author leaves us in no doubt that despite her devotion and gratitude, there were questionable aspects of his daily life, particularly some of his business deals, which she found hard to accept.

Subud has now spread to 70 countries, including Australia and New Zealand, with centres in most capital cities. All appear in the phone book under SUBUD. The headquarters, which changes every four years according to the latest international congress venue, is currently in the United States. There is no advertising or proselytising, news of Subud being spread by word of mouth, example, and the occasional valuable inside story like this one. Subud membership is free of charge and open to anyone over 17 years of age - and would make an ideal PhD study for students interested in researching personality differences in response to the latihan.

Ann Faraday