Book Reviews


Four of the five chapters in The Risen Lord, first published in Great Britain by T&T Clark (1996), focus on the historical Jesus and were delivered as the 1995 Scottish Journal of Theology Lectures at the University of Aberdeen. A final chapter offers an interesting discussion of the figure of the Lamb in the book of Revelation's servant christology and is an expanded version of an earlier article (Heythrop Journal 36 [1995] 493-511). The author includes a bibliography and indexes of modern authors and ancient texts.

The Aberdeen lectures build upon Barker's 1992 book, The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God, in which she argued that "some, perhaps most, [Jews] ... throughout the second temple period" followed the earliest Israelite traditions in not uniformly affirming monotheism. Instead, they held that "Yahweh, the LORD, had been the second God, the guardian angel and patron deity of Israel, the Son of El Elyon" (Risen Lord, xi). In the volume under review Barker argues that this early Israelite concept of the Great Angel was taken up by Jesus himself: whereas certain Jews distinguished the deities El Elyon and Yahweh, Jesus—followed by many Christian writers after him—made a distinction between God and himself. Accordingly, Barker attempts to sketch out how Jesus thought of, for example, his atonement, lordship and resurrection in light of the two-deity conception he adopted and modified.

Two examples illustrate the line of argument employed here. First, Jesus understood his resurrection in terms of his mystical experience at baptism at which point he became "conscious of being the LORD," that is, the deity Yahweh (26). Second, with regard to the atonement, "Jesus saw himself as the great high priest" who "would restore the eternal covenant" and "bring healing and renewal for the creation and judgement on Azazel" (81). Others will probably agree that the findings of this study are as peculiar as the premise of the investigation, and that the methodology employed here lies largely outside the broad range of approaches to historical Jesus research entertained by most scholars. More disturbing is the fact that in this, her latest book, Barker seems unaware of, or perhaps unwilling to interact with, pointed criticisms of her argument in The Great Angel (e.g., Catholic Biblical Quarterly 55 [1993] 795-97, Theology 96 [1993] 319-20; contrast Alan F. Segal's more careful, thorough and persuasive analysis along somewhat similar lines of certain later rabbinical texts: Two Powers in Heaven, 1977). Given that The Risen Lord is primarily a development of the dubious thesis first articulated in The Great Angel, I can only marginally recommend this book for those with a particular interest in historical Jesus scholarship.

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The authors of the twelve articles in this book discuss the effect of Paul's Damascus road experience on his thought, using "first-class biblical scholarship in a way that is able to be understood by and speaks to the needs of alert and intelligent people in the church today" (ix). All are moderately conservative New Testament exegesis.

Most of the contributors summarize well contemporary scholarship on their chosen topic. The essays include: "History of Interpretation: Interpreting Paul's Conversion Then and Now," by Bruce Corely; "A New Understanding of the Present and the Future: Paul and Eschatology," by I. Howard Marshall; "Israelite,