Clarion Review

Christian

The Book of Reception
Steven F. Gardner
Xlibris Corporation
978-1-4771-3228-9
Four Stars (out of Five)

"Nineteen years ago today, on 16 April, I, Steven F. Gardner, was crowned before all the principalities of heaven with the morning star." The author of *The Book of Reception* is, he believes, the "grandson" of the one he calls "G-d." This kinship, he claims, gives him an understanding of higher realities that he wishes to share.

Gardner's connection to "G-d" began in 1993 as he watched the standoff at Waco, Texas, between the FBI and self-styled modern prophet David Koresh of the Branch Davidian Church unfold on TV from his home in Australia. Shortly afterwards, Gardner had a powerful vision: A seven-pointed star (the one mentioned in the Book of Revelation, he believes) was its basic element. In his mind, each point represented a physical sense, a color (as in the rainbow), and had other mystical properties (such as, "the soul is orange and cold"). He named the heart of the star "G-d." Gardner shared this revelation with a few people and "the responses were quite negative." As time passed, the star began to change Gardner's life. A man with little formal education, he began to read the Bible by a method of intuition. One evening, while walking alone, he found himself proclaiming aloud an announcement from "G-d" that identified Gardner himself as a divine "son," which he later translated to mean "grandson."

The star increasingly obsessed Gardner. His business failed, and he took a less taxing job that allowed him "more time to devote to G-d." He began to give pictures of the star, with its inscriptions and numerical codes, to strangers on the streets of his hometown. Unfortunately, this drew more negative attention: The author was institutionalized with a diagnosis of "schizoaffective disorder," though he questions his doctors' qualifications to judge "G-d's" work. Gardner makes no secret of his mental health history or his long-term use of marijuana, although he has now stopped using all such substances, he states. He still tries to share with others his now much amplified and complex version of the star. He sincerely believes that it

contains messages, which are located in the mysteries of the number seven, for the future of the planet and humankind.

This slim volume, filled with illustrations of the star and its outgrowths and timelines, is clearly written and follows its own internal logic. Gardner tells his story in a surprisingly modest way, ending by exhorting his readers to obey “G-d’s” commands, which, as interpreted by the author, seem to mirror the Ten Commandments set out in the Bible. He doesn’t predict any coming cataclysm, and he accepts the existence of what he calls “un-religion,” the natural opposite to the understanding of “G-d’s” ways. His spiritual beliefs appear benign; he believes that his religion is “the endeavor for universal truths wherever they may be found.”

Most jarring, of course, is the author’s assumption that he is the “grandson” of “G-d.” Though he claims to be “purely human,” it is obvious that he thinks he has been endowed with advanced spiritual knowledge. He states in the final chapter of the book that “with clarity of mind, I was able to find the grace to allow G-d’s full purification to engulf every part of my being.” That is a strong claim, especially for someone with a history of mental illness and drug use, so questions are sure to occur among his readers.

Nonetheless, Gardner, like many prophetic personalities, seems joyfully prepared for all criticism, and he may well hope to gather a following through the publication of *The Book of Reception*.

Barbara Bamberger Scott