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REVIEW

Christ Ascended: A Study in the Significance of the Ascension of Jesus Christ by Brian K. Donne. Paternoster Press, 1983. pp.xiii, 98. £3.80.

For a Baptist minister in the pastorate to produce a monograph is a noteworthy achievement. We warmly congratulate Brian Donne on having written about the Ascension. I concur heartily in his concern that Christians need a firmer grasp on its significance for Christ and us. All other treatments being out of print, Brian Donne's slim book fills a gap.

The work falls into three parts - exegesis of N.T. passages, theological evaluation and contemporary significance. The last two are the best portions: the exaltation of Christ, his heavenly intercession, the link with the gift of the Spirit and the bearing on Christian hope are well brought out and discussed. These pages should prompt reflection that leads to sermons.

Mr Donne is a less sure guide (in my opinion) on the N.T. side. Did Luke really write as early as 'twenty years after the event' (p.9)? Why should 'some doubted' (Matt. 28.17) not apply to the Twelve? Matthew 28 is not 'preparatory' for Pentecost, nor does it anticipate the Ascension (28.18)! W. R. Farmer is quoted as authoritative (p.14) but his work is virtually universally rejected. Donne stresses that Luke's Jesus has a spiritual body (p.24), yet it is Luke who records that Jesus ate and drank with the disciples. There seems to be a lack of letting the differences speak for themselves.

I was sorry that Donne gave assent to a Church Times either/or assertion: 'Either he ascended in their sight or he did not. These things are either truth or lies. There is really no halfway house possible' (p.24). Does the 'truth' of Hamlet depend on whether Shakespeare is historically accurate? Does the 'truth' of Jonah depend on its being literally true or not? Why shouldn't the Ascension be a myth in the theologians' use of that word (i.e. conveying truth through story)?

Another feature of this book needs mentioning. Probably no page is free of quotation from a 'reputable' scholar, and some pages have numerous citations. We have a kind of 'Christian rabbinism'. Reactions to this will differ. I find it rather tedious.

These things said, I still want to congratulate Brian Donne. Many of us have joined the staffs of our theological colleges and not produced a book. I would like to know how he managed it!

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