



Grindheim, Sigurd.

*Christology in the Synoptic Gospels: God or God's Servant?*

London: T&T Clark, 2012. Pp. xiv + 212. Paper. \$32.95. ISBN 9780567246578.

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Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth

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There's certainly no shortage of books on Christology, and I'll go further and say that there's no shortage of *good* books on Christology, but there is a dearth of good *introductions* to Christology. Sigurd Grindheim helps to fill this gap with *Christology in the Synoptic Gospels: God or God's Servant?*, which is his second book on Christology in as many years. In this volume, a textbook geared toward undergraduates and motivated laypersons, Grindheim both builds upon and simplifies the work of his earlier monograph *God's Equal: What Can We Know about Jesus' Self-Understanding?*.

After outlining Israel's varied eschatological expectations concerning (the) Messiah(s), Grindheim moves into an examination of each Synoptic Gospel. He employs a narrative critical approach in his reading of the text by taking the final canonical form of the Gospel and seeking to understand Jesus as he is portrayed in the narrative. From Mark's divine warrior who fulfills OT prophecies and whose identity can only be truly known in light of the cross to Matthew's eschatological shepherd who performs the works of God and is "God with us" to Luke's "coming one"/heavenly Lord, Grindheim helpfully identifies major themes and motifs in the Synoptic Gospels that point toward Jesus as standing in the place where God was expected.

The book's subtitle asks the question, "God or God's Servant?" The answer, according to Grindheim, is both. The concept of Jesus' sonship is what holds both Jesus' equality with and

subordination to God the Father together. He finds this theme more developed in Matthew and Luke but it's not absent from Mark by any means. And it's recognition of this fact that allows Grindheim to conclude that the Gospels "anticipated through their dynamic portraits of Jesus" the Christology that would be expressed in Greek philosophical language at Nicaea in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD (149).

As an introductory text *Christology in the Synoptic Gospels* succeeds on many levels, being limited only by its focus on the Synoptic Gospels to the exclusion of the rest of the NT. The prose is clear and succinct; key terms are highlighted and defined in an end-of-book glossary; and the narrative critical approach is far superior to form critical and redaction critical readings of the text, which are fraught with speculation and say more about the interpreter than the text. The back matter is also filled with material in the bibliography and reference/subject/name indices that students will find invaluable.

I'm also convinced of Grindheim's conclusion that Jesus is depicted as both God and God's servant in the Gospels. Grindheim draws this out through numerous lines of evidence. For example, on the God side of the equation Grindheim highlights how authority is now found in Jesus' name; the way that Jesus elected disciples; the manner in which Jesus fulfilled OT expectations of what God was expected to do; or Jesus' power over the created order. On the servant side one need look no further than Jesus' prayers to God and his willing obedience to his Father's initiatives.

There is, however, room for improvement in one area of this otherwise excellent volume. Something that Grindheim has carried over from his more detailed monograph is the use of unfortunate and potentially confusing or misleading phraseology. In his examination of Mark's Christology he repeatedly speaks of Jesus taking the "place of God" (36, 48-50) as well as the "role of God" (45-49). The former could mislead someone into thinking that Jesus displaces God (he speaks of Jesus' presence "replacing" the Lord's/God's [66 cf. 89]) and the latter can be accounted for by practically any agency theory on file. Both ideas work against Grindheim's thesis.

Other than this there isn't anything too egregious to note. I was surprised to find Larry Hurtado's *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* and *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* missing from his bibliography since both books treat Synoptic Christology (albeit not from a narrative critical reading). I also wished that the book of Acts would have been treated along with Luke but this hardly detracts from the usefulness of this introductory text. Those looking to get their feet wet in NT Christology will do well to begin with Grindheim's concise treatment.