

A Man Attested by God: The Human Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels. By J. R. Daniel Kirk. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016, xvii + 656 pp., \$60.00.

J. R. Daniel Kirk challenges a recent and growing consensus that the Synoptic Gospels present a high Christology like that of John, Paul, and Hebrews (e.g. Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003]; Simon J. Gathercole, *The Preexistent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006]; Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008]; C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009]; Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014]). Specifically, Kirk develops the thesis that the Synoptic portrait of Jesus is best explained against a paradigm of idealized humanity, developed in Jewish tradition and confirmed in Peter's reference to Jesus as "a man attested to you by God through miracles, wonders, and signs" (Acts 2:22). On this basis, Kirk proposes that the Synoptic Gospels portray an idealized human Christology, in which Jesus is functionally rather than ontologically divine.

In the introduction, Kirk explains his approach. He defines idealized human figures as those who stand between the merely human and the divine, and idealized human Christology as that which occupies a middle ground between a low Christology (Jesus as mere human being) and a high Christology (Jesus as or approximate to Israel's God). Kirk's goal is first to establish the category of idealized humanity in Jewish Scripture and tradition. He hypothesizes that the category of "idealized human" has the most potent explanatory power for the evangelists' and the audience's understanding of the Christological concepts in the Synoptic Gospels. To test this hypothesis, he performs a historically informed, narrative study of the Gospels. In the last part of the introduction, Kirk surveys and critiques proposals for a high Christology in the Synoptic Gospels, such as those of Bauckham, Hurtado, Gathercole, and Rowe. He agrees that the Gospel writers identify Jesus with God by ascribing to him certain roles and functions that the Jewish Scriptures ascribe to God alone (e.g. creation, rule, worship). Yet Kirk cannot cross the logical line with those who assume that identification *with* God means identification *as* God. In the rest of the book, Kirk shows that both Jewish tradition and the Gospel narratives depict human beings as performing divine functions. This data, he argues, nullifies claims that the Synoptic Gospels uniquely ascribe divinity to Jesus.

Kirk unfolds his argument throughout the next six chapters. In chapter 1, he establishes a paradigm of idealized human figures from the Jewish Scriptures and a number of Second Temple texts. The hermeneutical key for Kirk's Christology is the creation story in Genesis, in which humanity plays the role of God on earth by sharing in God's sovereignty, authority, and rule. Kirk explains how various Jewish texts develop the creation account to depict the nation of Israel, Israel's prophets (e.g. Moses, Elijah), and the Davidic king as playing the role of God on earth—by displaying God's own attributes—in order to represent him to the nations. Climac-

tically, Jesus is *the* idealized human, that is, “the Human One who exercises God’s authority on the earth as God intended for humanity to do at the beginning” (p. 11).

In chapters 2 through 6, Kirk seeks to demonstrate that the paradigm of idealized humanity best explains the textual data in each of the Synoptic presentations of Jesus. The discussion is organized according to Christological categories that appear in the narratives: Jesus as Son of God (chap. 2); Jesus as Son of Man (chap. 3); Jesus’s birth and resurrection as the messiah (chap. 4); Jesus’s performance of miracles, including exorcisms (chap. 5); and Jesus’s fulfillment of Scripture (chap. 6). Finally, Kirk offers implications in a conclusion.

Kirk’s study is meticulously researched, carefully written, and exegetically insightful. Crucially, the study is a valuable reminder of the significance of the Synoptic tradition’s portrayal of Jesus as a human being: Jesus is God’s climactic and specially empowered representative anticipated in the Scriptures; he serves as the paradigmatic human who shows what it means to love God and love neighbor faithfully; and he embodies the destiny of God’s people. In addition, Kirk’s study suggests significant questions that must bring precision to any methodology for the investigation of the Christology of the Gospels, for example: What are the implications of the Synoptic presentation of God and Jesus as distinct characters? What would an ancient audience have understood by the Christological language in the text? How can we perform a historically informed reading of the text without importing the development of later creeds into our interpretation? Nevertheless, some methodological, logical, and exegetical problems hinder the outright success of Kirk’s thesis.

First, Kirk’s choice of data is unbalanced. He aims to “provide a historically viable reading” (p. 9) of the Synoptic Gospels by investigating their Christology from the standpoint of Israel’s Scriptures and their development in Second Temple Jewish texts rather than from the standpoint of later Trinitarian theology. However, he eschews the performance of such a reading from the standpoint of the evangelists’ own linguistic community by excluding data from other Christian texts—like Pauline letters or first-century Christian texts—that show how other early followers of Jesus understood his identity and were interpreting their Scriptures.

Second, Kirk’s use of the creation account as a hermeneutical key for his Christology is incomplete and as a result skews his interpretation of the Gospels. From creation he identifies the model for idealized humanity without acknowledging what afflicts it. According to that model, humanity’s purpose is to rule the cosmos with God; but Kirk does not explain the implications of sin, rebellion, and exile that mar the image of God in human beings and prevent the realization of that purpose. Kirk reads the Synoptic Gospels in continuity with his conception of idealized humanity by viewing Jesus as a royal Adamic-Davidic messiah. For example, in his analysis of the Synoptic material, Kirk argues that Christological titles like “Son of God” and “Son of Man” express Jesus’s functional identity as God’s agent and that various Christological actions (healings, exorcisms, nature miracles) exhibit his embodiment of humanity’s potential to rule the cosmos with God by virtue of creation. People become idealized humans by following Jesus, *the* idealized human, and acting in his name, that is, by means of discipleship. Yet as with the Jewish texts, Kirk does not adequately address the problem of human sin, failure, and im-

perceptiveness in the Synoptic narratives that would prevent the realization of idealized humanity. While Kirk's study is important for emphasizing that the imitation of Jesus reveals what it is to be truly human, his proposal that discipleship is what achieves this is unpersuasive because it does not account for all the data in the texts.

Third, it is persuasive that the Synoptic Jesus is human but not that the Synoptic Jesus is not divine, because not all of Kirk's exegesis is compelling. For example, Kirk concludes that Jesus's act of forgiveness in Mark 2:1–12 does not indicate his divinity since other human figures also forgive. He assumes that John the Baptist (1:4–5) and the community of disciples (11:25) forgive like God and like Jesus. However, John performs a purity rite (cf., e.g., Lev 4:20, 26) and disciples forgive one another, and both forgive so that God may ultimately forgive and remove sins. By contrast, Jesus offers unmediated forgiveness, and as a result his words (not John's nor the disciples') are taken as blasphemous. It is therefore difficult to sustain Kirk's argument that "Jesus is not the only human in Mark who removes sins" (p. 279).

Fourth, Kirk's running assumption is that the presence of human characteristics in certain Christological titles or functions nullifies the possibility of divinity. For example, he states that, "son of God is a title of suffering royalty rather than preexistent divinity" (p. 190). However, Kirk never adequately establishes on an exegetical or historical basis why the Synoptic presentation of Jesus's full humanity necessitates the mutual exclusion of divinity. Rather, Kirk appears to base his assumption on the theological objective that he expresses at the outset of the study and that is evident in the following comment: "The urge to recognize divinity in the Gospels' depictions of Jesus runs the risk of separating or dividing Jesus's humanity from the actions he performs, or else of turning Jesus into an odd admixture of humanity and divinity" (p. 447). One wonders if Kirk restricts his analysis and therefore his conclusions in order to avoid what might appear to be a proto-Chalcedonian reading.

In conclusion, Kirk's book is impressive and engaging, and a noteworthy contribution to the study of the Christology of the Synoptic Gospels that will be required reading for those who perform a Christological investigation. Most importantly, the book reminds us that Jesus's humanity is a crucial part of Christology and highlights methodological shortcomings in recent approaches to the task that require precision; but the book's own methodological shortcomings may dampen its overall effect.

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The Saving Cross of the Suffering Christ: The Death of Jesus in Lukan Soteriology. By Benjamin R. Wilson. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 223. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016, xi + 216 pp., €93.41.

In this revised University of Cambridge Ph.D. dissertation, Benjamin Wilson offers a fresh contribution to a crowded field of studies on the death of Jesus in