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Review of Studies on the Origin of Divine and Resurrection Christology

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Abstract

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Cover Page Footnote

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Loke, Andrew Ter Ern. *Studies on the Origin of Divine and Resurrection Christology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2023. 264 pp. \$35.00.

Studies on the Origin of Divine and Resurrection Christology by Andrew Ter Ern Loke brings together the findings from two of his earlier books: *The Origin of Divine Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) and *Investigating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: A New Transdisciplinary Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2020). In this new work, these two incredibly important topics are combined into one volume. Loke's book, however, is not a systematic treatment of these subjects (for he already has two works doing that), but primarily a response to objections, concerns, and apparent misunderstandings to his earlier arguments as well as other works that could potentially challenge his earlier conclusions.

Chapter one is a helpful introduction to Loke's earlier arguments and conclusions on the issues of Christology and resurrection. Loke is concerned about the subtlety of his arguments being "missed" by a "number of reviewers" producing a needed response to engage the methodological, historical, philosophical, theological, and psychological areas of his research to better identify the transdisciplinary approach espoused in his early works (46-47).¹ Regarding Christology, Loke concludes that "a sizeable group of earliest Christians perceived that Jesus claimed and showed himself to be truly divine, and they thought that God vindicated this claim by raising Jesus from the dead" (4-5). This conclusion is, according to Loke, based upon "fourteen historical considerations" (5-6). Regarding the resurrection, Loke highlights the failure of naturalistic theories to account for nine historical considerations that "are well established" (19).² He adds five general considerations that add further challenges to alternative theories (19-20). At the end of his section on Christology (6-16) and resurrection (20-46), he responds to reviewers of his previous book as well as some initial objections and concerns.³

¹ His interaction with these works is an intentional engagement to bring clarity to his position by showing the evolution of thought and the philosophical nuances that help the reader decipher his positions more clearly. This seems to be more pointedly aimed at the response to his 2020 publication, *Investigating the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*.

² On p. 18 he notes "widespread consensus" regarding the following three historical facts: (1) Jesus' death by crucifixion; (2) soon after "a number of people had experiences they believed were appearances of the risen Jesus"; and (3) that Jesus' body was "missing." This discussion, however, comes in the context of whether or not a historian can say a miracle occurred, and Loke's point here is that even if one did not want to agree that a miracle occurred, they would still agree to these three points.

³ Not all comments are aimed directly at reviewers in the resurrection section. For example, he responds to the Swoon Theory as raised by a recent article (39-43).

Chapter two primarily analyzes the works of David Litwa, Richard Carrier, and Raphael Lataster as they discuss potential parallels to the development of Christological and resurrection views within the early church (50-65). One of Loke's points of emphasis in this chapter is that these authors have misunderstood and/or overlooked the widespread belief that Jesus was considered to have been on the Creator side of the Creator-created divide among the earliest believers as exemplified in texts like 1 Corinthians 8:6 (54, 60). He exposes the neglecting of evidence by Litwa (55-57), the misrepresentation of biblical data by Carrier (60-62), and the lack of engagement of evidenced arguments by Lataster (63) in attempts to undermine the high Christology of early believers.⁴ Moreover, there is no evidence of Jewish worship of other divine figures in a way comparable to the Creator God (64). Jesus' resurrection vindicated Jesus's claims that he was on the Creator's side of the Creator/creature divide (65).

Chapter three addresses issues and nuances related to the *quality* of historical evidence used for Christology and resurrection arguments. Loke opens by considering a concern that the *historical* standard for evidence for these topics is lower than that of *legal* cases and provides some distinctions and differences in purpose (68-76). He then examines the historical value of Paul as a source and offers several critiques of Lataster's negative view of Paul in the process (81-86).⁵ Loke adds clarity in unpacking the important creedal information found in 1 Corinthians 15, such as the group appearances, especially the 500 and ancient travel (92ff.), and the willingness of certain witnesses to suffer (98-102). This is followed by a brief overview of how the early church received Paul's beliefs on Christology and resurrection positively (112-119) and then closes with some further nuances on applying the criterion of multiple independent attestation (119-127).⁶

The fourth chapter turns to the Gospels and engages Daniel Kirk in the applicability of the category of ideal human figures (e.g., Moses) and whether they can be applied to Jesus (132-144). He quickly addresses Matthew Larsen's view that Mark has both high and low Christological ideas because it is a collection of notes (145-7). Lastly, the late Larry Hurtado on the Christological distinctions that can be made regarding the pre- and post-resurrection Jesus (148-158). In this context, Loke's comments that Hurtado "does not consider the distinctions between necessary and sufficient conditions" highlight the importance

⁴ The Lataster critique in this chapter is directly in relation to Loke's previous arguments in *The Origin of Divine Christology*. Loke unpacks these arguments more in chapter three as he engages the works, data, and conclusions of both Carrier and Lataster in much more detail.

⁵ "However, in each case Lataster's argument is based on his failure to interpret the primary sources properly which indicate Lataster's (not Paul's) incapability and unsuitability for historical research" (81, Cf. 159-160).

⁶ There is a formatting issue of the text of the header on p. 111 that was aesthetically problematic.

of a high Christology existing before and after Jesus' resurrection (153, 167). Email exchanges between Hurtado and Loke are then presented, as Loke seeks to clarify his approach to studying Christology against the charge of anachronism: "I am merely elucidating Paul's thoughts on which fourth-century theological position had a certain degree of indebtedness" (168).

Chapter five moves from historical texts to various psychological proposals. Here, although complimentary of Dale Allison at times (169-170, 233), Loke spends the majority of this chapter engaging the various possible alternative explanations postulated by Allison. While Loke rightfully raises the issue of the unique nature of evidence pertaining to Jesus' resurrection, which Allison also agrees (233), Loke questions several sources of Allison for coming from outside peer-reviewed literature. While Loke's concern here is understandable and we should be cautious when using such sources, he oddly cites Wikipedia while making these critiques (e.g. Wikipedia on 191 fn. 89). Nevertheless, Loke again provides helpful distinction between Jesus' resurrection appearances, post-death apparitions, and other related phenomena (172, 177-183, 190-192, 193, 196, 205). He closes by addressing various concerns from recent research on memory studies (216-232).

One of the biggest drawbacks of the book is that the transitions from one topic to another often come across as disjointed. While the chapters are reasonably organized and systematized, the shift between various objections or distinctions takes away from the overall flow of the argument. For example, in his initial interaction on the resurrection, he swerves sharply from discussing the Swoon theory to the stolen body view, which weakens his argumentation (43).

Nevertheless, Loke's book will be helpful to graduate students studying these issues as it provides a helpful springboard for a wide variety of topics related to the early and central claims of Jesus' divinity and resurrection. The book could be particularly helpful for discussions in a classroom setting. Of particular benefit is that Loke makes several helpful distinctions and nuances that are quite beneficial when taking into account the multitude of facets—including arguments, inferences, and assumptions—that are deeply connected in these two crucial topics.