

# The Origin of Divine Christology

Volume 169

In recent years, there has been considerable debate concerning the origin of divine Christology. Nevertheless, the proposed theories are beset with problems, such as failing to address the evidence of widespread agreement among the earliest Christians concerning divine Christology and the issues related to whether Jesus' intention was falsified. This book offers a new contribution by addressing these issues using transdisciplinary tools. It proposes that the earliest Christians regarded Jesus as divine because a sizeable group of them perceived that Jesus claimed and showed himself to be divine, and thought that God vindicated this claim by raising Jesus from the dead. It also provides a comprehensive critique of alternative proposals and synthesizes their strengths. It defends the appropriateness and merits of utilizing philosophical distinctions (e.g. between ontology and function) and Trinitarian concepts for explaining early Christology, and incorporates comparative religion by examining cases of deification in other contexts.

ANDREW TER ERN LOKE is Research Assistant Professor at the Faith and Global Engagement Initiative, The University of Hong Kong. His previous publications include *A Kryptic Model of the Incarnation* (2014) and several articles in leading international peer-reviewed journals such as *Religious Studies* and the *Journal of Theological Studies*.

SOCIETY FOR NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES:

*MONOGRAPH SERIES*

General Editor: Paul Trebilco

169 THE ORIGIN OF DIVINE CHRISTOLOGY

SOCIETY FOR NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES

*MONOGRAPH SERIES*

**Recent titles in the series:**

143. *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews*

KENNETH L. SCHENCK

144. *The Speeches of Outsiders in Acts*

OSVALDO PADILLA

145. *The Assumed Authorial Unity of Luke and Acts*

PATRICIA WALTERS

146. *Geography and the Ascension Narrative in Acts*

MATTHEW SLEEMAN

147. *The Ituraeans and the Roman Near East*

E. A. MYERS

148. *The Politics of Inheritance in Romans*

MARK FORMAN

149. *The Doctrine of Salvation in the First Letter of Peter*

MARTIN WILLIAMS

150. *Jesus and the Forgiveness of Sins*

TOBIAS HÄGERLAND

151. *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas*

SIMON GATHERCOLE

152. *Paul as an Administrator of God in 1 Corinthians*

JOHN K. GOODRICH

153. *Affirming the Resurrection of the Incarnate Christ*

MATTHEW D. JENSEN

154. *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful*

MARK D. MATHEWS

155. *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reversal in 1 Corinthians*

MATTHEW R. MALCOLM

156. *The Genre of Acts and Collected Biographies*

SEAN A. ADAMS

157. *The Eschatology of 1 Peter*

KELLY D. LIEBENGGOOD

158. *The Hermeneutics of Christological Psalmody in Paul*

MATTHEW SCOTT

159. *Corinthian Wisdom, Stoic Philosophy, and the Ancient Economy*

TIMOTHY A. BROOKINS

160. *Faith and the Faithfulness of Jesus in Hebrews*

MATTHEW C. EASTER

161. *Covenant Renewal and the Consecration of the Gentiles in Romans*

SARAH WHITTLE

162. *The Role of Jewish Feasts in John's Gospel*

GERRY WHEATON

163. *Paul's Political Strategy in 1 Corinthians 1–4*

BRADLEY J. BITNER

164. *The Pauline Church and the Corinthian Ekklēsia*

RICHARD LAST

165. *Jesus and the Temple*

SIMON J. JOSEPH

166. *The Death of Jesus in Matthew*

CATHERINE SIDER HAMILTON

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-19926-2 — The Origin of Divine Christology  
Andrew Ter Ern Loke  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

167. *Ecclesiology and Theosis in the Gospel of John*

ANDREW J. BYERS

168. *The Book of Revelation and Early Jewish Textual Culture*

GARRICK ALLEN

# The Origin of Divine Christology

Volume 169

ANDREW TER ERN LOKE

*The University of Hong Kong*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-19926-2 — The Origin of Divine Christology  
Andrew Ter Ern Loke  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi – 110002, India  
79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107199262](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107199262)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108185486

© Andrew Ter Ern Loke 2017

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2017

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc.

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Loke, Andrew Ter Ern, author.

Title: The origin of divine Christology / Andrew Ter Ern Loke,  
The University of Hong Kong.

Description: New York : Cambridge University Press, 2017. |

Series: Society for New Testament studies monograph series ; Volume 169 |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017004893 | ISBN 9781107199262 (hardback : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Jesus Christ–Divinity–History of doctrines–Early church,  
ca. 30–600. | Jesus Christ–Historicity. | Jesus Christ–Person and offices.

Classification: LCC BT216.3 .L65 2017 | DDC 232/.8–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017004893>

ISBN 978-1-107-19926-2 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-19926-2 — The Origin of Divine Christology  
Andrew Ter Ern Loke  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

For Christ Jesus  
Ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου (John 20:28)

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page xv</i>
<b>1 Introducing the Theories and Approaches Concerning the Origin of Divine Christology</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Significance of the Question	1
1.2 Introducing Various Types of Theories Concerning the Origin of Divine Christology	3
1.3 Introducing the Issue of Jesus’ Self-Understanding	6
1.4 The Approach of This Book	9
1.5 Clarification of Key Terms	12
1.6 An Overview of the Rest of This Book	21
<b>2 The Highest Christology Was Present Among the Earliest Christians: The Evidences</b>	<b>24</b>
2.1 Introduction	24
2.2 1 Corinthians 8:6	26
2.3 Philippians 2:6–11	33
2.4 Evidence from Devotional Practices	41
2.5 Evidence from Expressions of Spiritual Desire for Christ	45
2.6 Conclusion	47
<b>3 Replies to Objections Involving Various Exalted Figures in Second Temple Judaism</b>	<b>48</b>
3.1 Introduction	48
3.2 The Importance of the Creator–Creature Divide	53
3.3 Concerning the Angel of the LORD	66
3.4 Concerning Kings, Messiahs and Others	68



*xii      Contents*

<b>4</b>	<b>Replies to Other Objections Concerning the Highest Christology of the Earliest Christians</b>	<b>79</b>
4.1	Concerning the Claim That According to Acts the Earliest Christians Did Not Worship Jesus	79
4.2	Concerning the Claim That Jesus Was Distinguished from and Subordinated to God	80
4.3	Concerning the Claim That Adoptionism/Exaltation Christology Was Present Earlier	83
4.4	Concerning the Claim That Jesus Was Regarded as Functionally Divine but Not Ontologically Divine	93
4.5	Concerning the Claim That Jesus Was Merely Venerated, Not Worshipped	94
4.6	Concerning the Claim That Sacrifice Is Never Said in the New Testament to Be Offered to Christ	95
4.7	Conclusion	97
<b>5</b>	<b>The Extent of Highest Christology in Earliest Christianity</b>	<b>100</b>
5.1	Introduction	100
5.2	The Argument for Widespread Extent	101
5.3	Is There Absence of Jewish Objection to Paul’s Divine Christology?	103
5.4	Argument from Silence?	107
5.5	Reply to Objections by Bart Ehrman and Others	110
5.6	Examples of Theories Which Fail to Explain the Widespread Extent	114
5.7	Conclusion	131
<b>6</b>	<b>The Best Explanation for the Origin of Highest Christology</b>	<b>134</b>
6.1	Introduction	134
6.2	The Earliest Christians Were Evidently Concerned About Passing on the Traditions of Jesus’ Teachings	134
6.3	The Difficulty of the Idea of Regarding a Human Jesus As Also Truly Divine	137
6.4	The Issue of Falsification of Jesus’ Intention	140
6.5	The Best Historical Explanation for a Diversity of Other Peculiar Beliefs and Practices of the Earliest Christians Is That They Originated from Jesus	144

	<i>Contents</i>	<i>xiii</i>
6.6	It Is Likely That Jesus Was Perceived to Have Given Clear Indications That He Regarded Himself as Truly Divine by a Significant Number of Disciples	146
6.7	The Role of Early Christian Thinking About Intermediary Figures	147
6.8	Is My Proposal Too Christocentric Rather Than Theocentric?	147
6.9	Conclusion	151
<b>7</b>	<b>Assessing the Evidences for the Origin of Highest Christology in the Gospels</b>	<b>153</b>
7.1	Introduction	153
7.2	Counter-Evidence in the Gospels?	153
7.3	Traces in the Gospels	159
<b>8</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>194</b>
	<i>Bibliography</i>	209
	<i>Scripture and Apocrypha Index</i>	232
	<i>Index of Other Ancient Sources</i>	240
	<i>Index of Authors</i>	242
	<i>Index of Subjects</i>	245

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is a special feeling writing this acknowledgement during Christmas 2016, ten years after I embarked on a journey that took me from a medical career to the study of theology.

The idea for this book first came when, while working on my PhD on the historical basis and coherence of the incarnation, I began to wonder why there was absence of disagreement among the earliest Christians concerning the divine status of Christ. I am indebted to Professors Alister McGrath and Richard Burridge for encouraging me to develop this idea and for giving me helpful feedback. I am grateful to Professor James Dunn, who spent hours discussing the Christology of the earliest Christians with me over coffee in Durham, to Professor Larry Hurtado for a very helpful email exchange, and to Professors Glen Thompson, Clement Shum, Brian Thomas and Sarah Williams for their helpful and amazingly timely feedback.

I am thankful for my wonderful colleagues and friends in Hong Kong – in particular, Professor Daniel Chua, Dr Mike Brownutt, Grace Lee Baughan, Carmen Bat and K. Y. Wong – my parents, parents-in-law, daughters Joy, Serene and Evangel and my beloved wife Mary, and my friends at Macedonia Bible Presbyterian Church, for their encouragement, advice and prayer for this project. I am indebted to the Fan Trust and Tom Chan for supporting my work financially at the University of Hong Kong. I would like to thank Professor Kang Phi Seng from China Graduate School of Theology for the use of their excellent library facilities.

I am grateful to Professors Darrell Bock, Paul Trebilco (the editor for the Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, Cambridge University Press) and Simon Gathercole (the reader) for their very helpful comments and recommendations for publication. I would like to thank the team at Cambridge University Press – in particular, Beatrice Rehl, Edgar Mendez and Bethany Johnson – for

xvi      *Acknowledgements*

their assistance, and Dr Lawrence Osborn for his meticulous editorial work. I hope that this monograph will prove worthy of their efforts, though any mistakes remain my responsibility.

I would like to acknowledge the scholarly writings of Professors Richard Bauckham, Larry Hurtado, N. T. Wright, Martin Hengel, Richard Burridge, Dale Allison, Darrell Bock, Craig Keener, Ben Witherington III, Simon Gathercole, Aquila Lee, Sigurd Grindheim, Chris Tilling, Matthew Bates, Wesley Hill, Richard Weymouth and Donald Williams. I have found their writings immensely helpful and am grateful that many of them were discovered or recommended to me just in time for the writing of this book.

Finally, no words can adequately express my indebtedness to the Lord Jesus for the things He has done. I offer this book with love and humble gratitude to Him who – together with God the Father and Holy Spirit – is worthy of all glory and praise.