

In this post I can begin to explain what I *think* is the point of contention between Michael Bird and me on the question of how the followers of Jesus came to think he was God. When I say that I “think” this is the main point, it’s because I’m not completely sure. As I’ve pointed out, Michael never laid out an alternative hypothesis for how the early Christian views of Christ came into existence or developed. Moreover, since he never said how he thought it happened, he obviously didn’t mount a case for his view or indicate what he thought was the evidence for it. So it’s a little hard to know how to assess his view.

What is clear is that he disagrees with a fundamental point in my view, and his main talk at the debate was focused on this point.

My thesis is simple. During his lifetime Jesus’ followers did not consider him to be God (as the Gospels themselves indicate so well). After his lifetime they did (as seen, for example, in Paul). Why did they not think so during his life but did think so after his death? It was for one and only one reason: they came to think he had been raised from the dead and exalted to heaven.

In the ancient world there were stories about a person (here and there) being taken up to the divine realm after death. What did it mean for someone to be exalted to heaven? It meant that...

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