

The other recent development in conservative evangelical apologetics - so far as I can discern as an outsider - is a real move to adopt serious historical scholarship on the Bible and apply it to the defense of the reliability of Scripture. That may seem like a paradoxical move to non-evangelicals, since it is precisely serious historical scholarship that, since the 18th century, has been the major problem when it comes to the reliability of the Scripture. In fact, it's the *main* problem. So, uh, how does that work?

I believe, but I may be wrong, that Mike Licona is at the forefront of this development within evangelical circles. Two of his most popular books are [Evidence for God](#) and [The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus](#). His view is that we should not try to harmonize different Gospel accounts in every instance. Sometimes, of course, it's perfectly suitable and appropriate (I agree on this). But sometimes harmonization simply leads to weirdness and implausibility. At least in the eyes of most reasonable human beings.

And so, for example, in Matthew's Gospel, at the Last Supper, Jesus tells Peter that he, Peter, will deny him three times that night before the cock crows. In Mark's Gospel, he tells Peter that he will deny him three times before the cock crows twice. Well, which is it? In the old style of harmonization - I thought this was funny even in my younger days - a standard reconciliation is to say that what actually happened is that Peter denied Jesus SIX times: three times before the cock crowed and three more before it crowed the second time. Yeah, right.

The problem with that interpretation, apart from being rather risible, is that it means that none of

the Gospels indicates what Jesus actually said or what actually happened, since what *really* happened isn't what any of the Gospels says. Do you really want to change, or rather, sacrifice what the authors said in order to make sure they don't disagree?

Mike has written a recent book taking a very different approach, one that actually is interested in historical research; it's called [Why Are There Differences in the Gospels](#) (Oxford University Press, 2016). Rather than harmonize the accounts, he tries to explain why they are different. And they are different because ...

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