

This particular post is free and open to the public. If you belonged to the blog, you would get five posts a week, for about what it costs to send a letter. And every penny goes to charity! So why not join?

Mike Licona has burst on the scene as one of the leading spokespersons for evangelical Christianity and its theological claims, especially that Jesus was physically raised from the dead, that purely historical research can actually demonstrate that it happened, and that the Bible is literally inspired by God himself and to be accepted as inerrant.

As many of you know, I have had three public debates with Mike (on the question of whether historians can prove that Jesus was raised from the dead; the debates were not about whether Jesus was raised from the dead – they were about whether this kind of claim can be proved by historians using historical methods, or, instead, is a theological claim that cannot be demonstrated historically); and recently we shared a stage at an evangelical Christian “apologetics” conference that focused on whether there are contradictions in the Gospels, and if so, how/if they affect whether we can consider the Gospels historically reliable.

Mike and I take different positions on these and many other issues. A few weeks ago I on the blog I summarized his views about contradictions and the inspiration of the Bible – he agrees that there are some passages that in fact can *not* be reconciled with others but at the same time he affirms that the Bible is “inerrant.” I wasn’t sure I was summarizing his views accurately, and so I asked him if he would be willing to write some blog posts for us explaining what he actually thinks. He has graciously done so, and here is his first of three posts. *(Please note — it took me a minute to realize this — his argument below is cumulative. That is, he is not making three separate arguments that the Bible is inspired [if you look at it this way, the first two arguments may seem to be non-sequiturs]; instead, the third argument is premised on the truth/validity of the first two arguments; if they are true, then the third has probative force).*

Feel free to ask him questions or to make some observations!

-

Mike Licona is author of [Why Are There Differences in the Gospels and Evidence for God: 50 Arguments For Faith From The Bible, History, Philosophy, And Science.](#)

The Case for the Divine Inspiration of the Bible

I would like to thank my friend Bart for inviting me to contribute three posts to his blog. Yes, we are friends, despite our disagreements. Strangely, we became friends through public debates. Those interested in learning how that happened, I describe it in this article: <https://bit.ly/32LkMaY>. Now, onto my three posts.

Historians do not possess the tools to verify theological claims. Take, for example, the statement “Jesus died for our sins.” While historians can verify that Jesus died, they cannot verify that his death has atoning qualities. As a historian, I do not possess the tools to verify the theological claim that the Bible is divinely inspired. However, I do think it’s rational for a Christian to believe that it is. And I’m going to provide reasons that ground my belief.

To begin, it’s important to ask what it means to say the Bible is *divinely inspired*. The answer may seem intuitive: To say the Bible is divinely inspired would appear to suggest

that it's the product of divine dictation. However, it's actually not so simple. In fact, Christians disagree on the matter. And it's rare to find a Christian who holds this view if she has even a smidge of theological sophistication.

I reject divine dictation as the method of inscripturation, because the human element in Scripture is clear. The human element goes far beyond recognizing the biblical authors' different personalities, writing styles, vocabularies, and education levels. The human element also includes Mark's poor grammar that Matthew and Luke often improve. Surely, we are not to imagine God reviewing Mark later and thinking, "I can do better than that. Let's say it this way in Matthew." The human element also includes a couple instances of Luke's editorial fatigue when using sources. Surely, we are not to imagine God catching this at a later time and thinking, "How in heaven did I miss those?" Then there's Paul's memory lapse in 1 Corinthians 1:16 pertaining to whether he had baptized anyone outside the household of Stephanus. Surely, we are not to imagine God prompting Paul to take a writing break while he checked heaven's records! These observations clearly reveal a human element in Scripture; an element that includes imperfections and rules out divine dictation. Accordingly, although the process of divine inspiration is not described in the Bible, our interpretation of what it means to say the Bible is "divinely inspired" must allow for human imperfections in Scripture.

Twenty years ago, Christian philosopher and theologian William Lane Craig argued, in essence, that God, knowing all circumstances that could possibly occur, generated those whereby the biblical authors would write what they did at an appropriate time. In that sense, the biblical literature is divinely inspired, because God approved it. For example, in Paul's letter to the church in Rome, the words are Paul's. The logic and arguments belong to Paul. If God were to dictate the letter, he may have said things differently. But he approved the letter. (The article was originally published in *Philosophia Christi*, 1.1, 1999, 45-82 and may now be viewed at <https://bit.ly/32u8Rya>). Although the scenario Craig posits cannot be confirmed, I think it's perhaps the best way for understanding what it means to say the Bible is divinely inspired, since it takes into serious consideration what the Bible says about itself as well as the character of Scripture. You can see that this view has implications pertaining to how the doctrine of biblical inerrancy can and perhaps should be understood. This will be the topic of my next post.

So, why think the Bible is divinely inspired? In what follows, I'll provide 3 key reasons.

#1 Jesus rose from the dead.

I'm fully aware that most readers of this blog do not think Jesus rose from the dead. However, I'm sharing *my reasons* for thinking the Bible is divinely inspired. Although I cannot devote any space to the topic here, I have argued in great depth elsewhere that there are good historical reasons for thinking the resurrection of Jesus actually occurred. And a historian can arrive at this conclusion apart from any belief that the Bible is divinely inspired. Those interested may consult my book [*The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach*](#) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

If Jesus rose from the dead, we would have a good reason for giving our serious consideration to his teachings. Of course, one could reply that Jesus could have been an alien from another planet with powers beyond our comprehension and who decided to deceive us. Although such a scenario cannot be disproved, it's terribly *ad hoc*. Every

worldview, including atheism, requires a bit of faith. Given Jesus's resurrection, Christians' believing Jesus's teachings about himself would require faith. But it would be a reasonable faith.

#2 The New Testament preserves significant information pertaining to Jesus's claims.

Historians of Jesus do not have the luxury of assuming the divine inspiration or inerrancy of the Bible. Historians acting responsibly will consider the data apart from such assumptions and seek to conclude what the data suggest. Using common-sense criteria, such as multiple independent sources, embarrassing sources, unsympathetic sources, and eyewitness sources, we can render a number of conclusions possessing various degrees of confidence. For example, it's granted by nearly every historian of Jesus, regardless of their theological and philosophical persuasion, that Jesus believed he had a special relationship with God who had chosen him to usher in his kingdom and that he performed numerous deeds that astonished crowds and that he and others claimed were divine miracles and exorcisms. Moreover, a growing number of historians hold that Jesus claimed to be divine in some sense and that he predicted his imminent death and subsequent resurrection. If Jesus rose from the dead, it becomes quite probable that he actually had a special relationship with God, that his astonishing deeds were actually divine in their nature, and that his claims of divinity were correct.

#3 Jesus believed the Scriptures are divinely inspired.

Jesus's belief that the Old Testament is authoritative is a clear motif throughout all four Gospels. Jesus appealed to the Scriptures to settle theological disputes. He saw his ministry as fulfilling prophecy. Then there are statements where Jesus says, "David himself said in the Holy Spirit . . ." (Mark 12:36) and "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35); "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail" (Luke 16:17). But why are the Scriptures authoritative? It's because their authority comes from God. Thus, to disobey Scripture is to disobey God. This was also the understanding of the Jewish leaders who confronted Jesus when he healed on the Sabbath, which they claimed was to break God's law (see Mark 2:24; 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:2-16; 9:1-38).

What about the New Testament? If Jesus was the Son of God in a divine sense, his teachings are authoritative. Although it's unlikely that the Gospels preserve precise transcripts of Jesus's teachings - and it's clear that they often redact them, I'm persuaded by a number of reasons that the Gospels preserve the gist of what Jesus taught. And some occasions may be close to the actual words. Word limitations prohibit my elaborating further.

Outside the Gospels, Paul believed he had received authority from Jesus to teach (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:17; 14:37; 2 Cor. 13:10). And his essential teachings were confirmed by the apostolic leadership (Gal. 2:1-10; cf. Pol. *Phil.* 3:2). John taught that those who are not from God do not listen to apostolic teaching (1 John 4:6).

Of course, merely claiming to have received authority from God to teach does not give one that authority. However, if Jesus is divine, his teachings are authoritative and we would

expect for him to have commissioned his disciples to pass them along. And this he does (Matt. 28:19; John 14:26; 15:25-16:3). That commissioning would bestow authority on them. Accordingly, to the extent that the apostolic teachings are preserved in the New Testament literature, we may say that literature is not only authoritative but also divinely inspired as defined above.

Of course, only a little can be said in such a small space. In my next post, I will discuss the matter of biblical inerrancy.



[Maybe Jesus DOES Talk about “Homosexuality”?](#)
[Jesus and “Homosexuality”](#)