

Peer Review

Review of: "Square Pegs for Round Holes? Applying Michael Licona's Historical Method to Jesus' Resurrection"

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To the Author of "Square Pegs for Round Holes? Applying Michael Licona's Historical Method to Jesus' Resurrection."

I am an interested reader of historical Jesus research, not a Biblical scholar or theologian. In this review, I must limit my critique to the author's argument as an argument. There are some expository problems which, if addressed, would improve what is an interesting analysis.

The first problem concerns the focus of the essay. The title and the introduction identify the work of Michael Licona as the focus of the essay. But the essay does not deal only with Licona's work; indeed, there are sections when Licona is not considered at all. And in other sections, Licona is almost an afterthought. The solution would seem to be to drop Licona's name from the title and to mention other historians, e.g., Craig and Fudge, in the Introduction.

Antecedent Probability: Licona's "argument" couldn't be as bad as it seems. Does he argue first that we need to suspend judgment on the modern worldview? But if we can't agree on what laws apply, judging probability is impossible, no.

With regard to **Bayes' Theorem**, I was unaware of it prior to reading your paper. From your account, which should be clearer, it seems to be a matter of assigning a number to the probability of an event and expostulating a measure of probability based on this (arbitrary?) number (but garbage in, garbage). Also, Licona is not mentioned here, confusing the reader. I take from your description that you think that the use of Bayes' Theorem by Biblical scholars gives at best a patina of objectivity to what is special pleading on behalf of traditional beliefs. If I am correct, you could surely state this.

The section on “**Inference to the Best Explanation**” seems confused to me. You spend time puzzling over why Licona should choose McCullagh as his secular exemplar of the method. But the answer to that question seems obvious from your earlier statement that Craig used it and “Licona followed suit.” Drop it. It is worth pointing out that Craig and Licona cite McCullagh as an exemplar of the method but then reject his application of it to the Resurrection. “Even should a best explanation be established this would not prove it to be historically correct;”: okay, but it would be the best *available* explanation, no? What does it mean “to select the best explanation” if it is not to select the best among available explanations? Some of this comes out in the critique of Licona, which I thought to be the strongest part of your paper. Setting his explanations against his opponents’ is quite effective.

Summary and Conclusion: The first sentence is too casual: “along the way”: No, applying Bayes’ Theorem was necessitated (I hope), and citing Fudge needs to be more than ad hoc and would be if he were moved to the Introduction included among several conservative, Christian historians whose work you are examining. “Most of the distant past has been lost to us”: huh? How distant? Surely, if the events of first- and second-century Palestine have been “lost to us,” how do you explain the industry of historians who have made a living examining it? And other mythologies include Resurrection events and appearances of resurrected bodies. What’s different is that these others go under the sign of “myths,” while the NT is “history” on Christian accounts. Could you remind us of the weaknesses of Licona’s argument on behalf of RH? And regarding your last sentence, there are histories mentioning the events of the NT besides the NT—those by Josephus, Tacitus, and Suetonius. Finally, could you recall the analogy of your title in the conclusion to your essay—developing its entailments?

Thank you for an interesting paper on an important topic.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.