

# OpenTheo

## What Can Be Learned From Contemporary, Non-Scriptural Greco-Roman writings?

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### Risen Jesus - Mike Licona

In this episode, Dr. Mike Licona walks the listener through some of the discoveries revealed in his new book *Jesus, Contradicted*. By examining Greco-Roman writings contemporary with the gospels, Dr. Licona has identified common writing techniques of the times that shed light on what we read apparently conflicting gospel accounts. He also discusses what authors meant by the term “God-breathed,” his understanding of biblical inerrancy, and argues that our view of Scripture must be consistent with what we actually observe in its text.

### Transcript

Hello, and welcome to the Risen Jesus podcast with Dr. Mike Licona. Dr. Licona is professor of New Testament studies at Houston Christian University, and he is the president of Risen Jesus, a 501c3 non-profit organization. In this episode, we share an interview Dr. Licona did on the intellectual Catholicism podcast.

This is Dr. Kurt Jairus, and I invite you to listen in on a discussion about *Jesus contradicted* Dr. Licona's new book, which the show's host states is going to shake up the evangelical world. Welcome to this episode of intellectual Catholicism. Today, I am here once again with Dr. Michael R. Licona.

Dr. Licona, I was so honored to be able to look at your book, *Jesus Contradicted*, Zondervan sent me a very nice little note from you and a copy of this book. And so that's the subject of our conversation today. And before we begin, Dr. Licona, how have you been? I'm doing really fine, really well, Swan.

It's nice to be with you again. Yeah, I think last time I told you that I really admire your honesty, especially how in a lot of ways you emulate to me, Dr. Dale Allison. And I just want to say once again that this book, there were moments where I my jaw dropped, because I was like, wow, like Dr. Licona, these, this is going to shake up the evangelical world.

And I think I've already seen articles published and people commenting on it. And so I think I don't want to I want people to read the book. So I'm not going to ask you every little jot and tittle in the book, but we're going to look at some details in it.

That's all right with you. You bet. So, you know, just to start off, I've heard some people, a lot of scholars actually say that they find it easier to write for their fellow academics rather than lay audiences.

It's usually because when you're with other scholars, you can kind of use jargon, you can kind of maybe, you know, you're you're more used to that in your day to day life, you know, being trained in academia. When you wrote this book, knowing that you've written for popular audiences in the past, did you feel that kind of same difficulty in translating your more academic book? Why are there differences in the gospels with Oxford University Press? Or did you just kind of feel like I'm a pro at this now? No, I had never feel like I'm a pro at this stuff. I've got so much more to learn and ways to improve as well.

I'd say yes and no, but for the most part, no, it wasn't more difficult. In fact, it was a lot of fun. One of the advantages that I have someone is I do a lot of lecturing in conferences and in churches and to college groups.

So, you know, in order to do that, you know, there are public speaking skills that you develop over time. I tried to give some good study to public speaking skills so that I can be an effective communicator. That means throwing in humor and illustrations, personal stories, things like that.

So over time, over the decades that I've been doing this, you know, you find certain stories and things that you can say humorous things that really work. Some of the things that you try at times, they don't work and then you try to massage them so that they will work or you just get rid of them altogether. And so, there's ways that I have found over the years to communicate some of the principles that I'm talking about in this new book.

And so, I take the ones that have worked that usually get laughter or people go, whoa, yeah, that illustration, that analogy made so much sense. And I put those in the book. So, I'm able to talk in a conversant manner like I'm speaking, sitting down, having a cup of coffee with the person and talking with them.

And actually, I found that fun. The academic writing is in a sense easier because you're not necessarily trying to do that. You're just setting out the things, the facts and what you found in a straightforward manner.

And, you know, a lot of people are going to find that dry and dull and boring unless they're really into the topic. But no, this was different and it was fun to do. Well, that's great to hear.

And I enjoyed reading the book. It reads very smoothly, very well. So, Dr. Lacona, I know that, you know, there might be some in the audience who aren't familiar with maybe some of the prior discussions that we've had on the channel.

And so, let's just start off by talking about your thesis, which is that, you know, the Gospel writers are writing in the genre of Greco-Roman biographies. You know, they're kind of using the conventions of Plutarch and Theon of Alexandria. And so, let's just talk about, you know, the role of compositional devices in explaining why there are differences in the Gospels.

Yeah, well, as you're well aware, Richard Burridge wrote a book, *What Are the Gospels?* It was published in 1992 and it has since had its update in the 25th anniversary edition published by Baylor University Press. And this book, he set out as a classicist to disprove what a number of New Testament scholars were claiming that the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography. And he set out to disprove that because he believed at the time that the Gospels were of a sui-generis, a unique genre.

And so, he did this really good research on it and he concluded that he was wrong, that the Gospels are, they do belong where they participate in the genre of Greco-Roman biography. And his book has been a watershed resource that has changed the majority opinion, so that now a very large majority of scholars at least acknowledge that the Gospels are closely affiliated with Greco-Roman biography. And many of those think that they are Greco-Roman biographies.

So, what does that mean? Why not Jewish biography? Well, not Jewish biography because for some reason Jews weren't writing biographies of their sages at the time. We only have four biographies written by Jews in the first century. You've got Josephus's autobiography, so that's kind of different.

But then you have three written by Philo, his *Life of Moses*, *Life of Joseph* and *Life of Abraham*. And two of his *Life of Moses* and Josephus's autobiography are very close to the Greco-Roman biography, whereas the other two, the *Life of Abraham* and *Life of Joseph*, are more or less just commentary on some of the scriptures because they deal with not just Moses and Abraham, but a number of other figures, as though they're almost like main characters. So, they don't really follow any kind of he died a few years ago, but he was the foremost Josephus scholar in the world.

He said for some reason that Jews did not write, they did not write biographies of their sages and did not even do so until modern times. So, now that said, we can just call them ancient biographies, but they did not have the same commitment or objective to reporting with the precision that modern scholars, modern biographers have. And so, I set out to look at, well, what kind of literary devices did they use? So, I made a list of all the biographies that were written within, say, 150 years on each side of Jesus.

So, within this 300-year period. And they're right around 90 that have survived written about any individual. And so, I started to look at these, and Plutarch, of those around 90, he wrote 48 of them that have survived.

He wrote more than that, but 48 have survived. And so, I read through those, I started with those, and I noticed those I got to the end of this 48, that nine of them involve main characters who knew one another, and many of them participated in the same events. So, for example, the assassination of Julius Caesar's reported in Plutarch's life of Cicero, life of Caesar, life of Brutus, and life of Antony.

So, there are about 36 stories between these nine biographies that I found that appear two or more times within these biographies. And of these, I found differences in 30 of them. And as I looked at them, it's like you can compare how Plutarch reports the assassination of Caesar in those four.

Does he copy and paste? What does he do? And so, you can see how he writes things differently. He never copies and pastes. He changes things.

He paraphrases. And then, you see over time that there is a pattern in the way he does it. So, which suggests he's using certain compositional devices.

And these were part and parcel of how ancient biographers and historians wrote. And then, you hear about Theon. You mentioned him.

He wrote compositional textbooks. So, did quintillion in the first century. And then, later on, you have ethonias and hermogonies.

And so, these were ways of teaching people who already knew how to write, how to write well. And Theon's clear. He says, these things are used.

Learning how to paraphrase will benefit historians and poets and orators. And then, he says that these ways of paraphrasing and elaboration, etc. are used in every form of writing.

So, that you even have historians and poets who will paraphrase not only their own writings, but also the writings of others. So, Theon says that all forms of writing, all biographers and historians are using these things. So, there are things like changing a statement to a question, or a question to a command, or changing the syntax, or abbreviating, or expanding, things like that to communicate the message behind it in a clearer manner, if you're elaborating or adding.

And so, I figured, well, if I go to the gospels, if this is what you find in every form of writing, of all the ancient historians and biographers are doing this, we ought to be able to see these things occurring in the gospels pretty clearly. And so on, what's really interesting is when you go to the gospels and you read them in view of these ancient

biographies, or compositional devices, it's like, that's exactly what we see going on. This is the stuff we see, it's just permeating the gospels, not only what Theon says, but also these compositional devices that we see Plutarch using.

So, it's pretty cool stuff. I think that in the high 90 percentile of the differences in the gospels can be accounted for in this manner. So, that doesn't mean that they're all responsible for these compositional devices, but I think they are for a very large amount of them.

And if that's the case, then the whole disputing of the gospels as not being trustworthy because of contradictions, that goes out the window. Well, Dr. Lacona, I wanted to bounce an idea off of you and just see what you think about it. So, I've tried to think about how maybe we could compare the gospels to the genre of what we call today biopics, where you go to the movie theater, you watch a movie about Lincoln or Oppenheimer, and for the most part, they are working with maybe a historical source, something that a historian has compiled together.

They're trying their best to give an accurate picture, but maybe sometimes in the course of telling the story, they might embellish something a little bit, they might move around events. Maybe they have to invent conversations that are plausible given the surrounding details, but obviously it's not going to be a word for word like Lincoln exactly said this or said that. I mean, what are your thoughts on that comparison? I think there's some of that can be.

It's hard to say we're some of the gospel authors guilty of wholesale invention of things. So, I'm thinking of an account of Plutarch when they're talking about planning the assassination of Caesar, and one of the main conspirators named Trubonius, he wants to feel out the Antony to see if he'd be involved in it. And so, he and Antony get together at some point to discuss it.

And Antony basically says, yeah, I don't want to participate in it, but I'm not going to stop it. Just don't tell me about it. That kind of stuff.

But we don't know when that happened, when that discussion happened. So, what Plutarch does, I believe it's in his life of Antony, is he creates a situation when Caesar is returning after winning battle, and as would be customary, Romans would go out to meet him outside the city and then escort him in. So, what Plutarch does is he creates a story where Trubonius and Antony share a tent as they go out to meet Caesar.

And as Christopher Pelling, the foremost authority in the world on Plutarch says that setting would have never taken place. He doesn't explain why, and I'm not a classicist that trained in this area, so I can't answer why. But he says what he does is Plutarch creates this scene to infuse the conversation that would have taken place.

But the scene, the context of what should happen would have been invented. So, I suspect that we have some of that, we may have some of that in the Gospels. Maybe like, I think an example, probably more in John than elsewhere, I can think of in John, which I regard as very historically reliable, in terms of giving us the essence of what of the historical Jesus.

But even as conservative, Joe Hennine's specialist, like F.F. Bruce and Paul Anderson and Praykeener and others have said, you know, we've got a theological paraphrase. John is taking great liberties. So, I would suspect something like, maybe the long discourse that Jesus has about the vine and the branches and the high priestly prayer that took place after the last supper, that what John has probably done is taking some things that Jesus has said throughout the course of his ministry and put it together in that.

Matthew, most scholars agree that Matthew has done that with the Sermon on the Mount, that Jesus actually gave the Sermon on the Mount, but Matthew has taken teachings that Jesus gave from other times in his ministry and has woven them together into the sermon with content that he would have probably given on that occasion. So, yeah, does that answer your question? Yeah, no, I'm quite satisfied with that answer. Yeah, I mean, yeah, you know, when I made that connection to my head, it was during my New Testament class, during my first semester out at Harvard.

And I mean, I found myself satisfied with it. And the more that I read your work, the more I kind of thought, like maybe that's an apt comparison. We'll see what people think about it.

But I think, I mean, Dr. Lacona, I think you're spot on with a lot of this. Well, thanks, Swan. I do think that maybe our movies today probably take more liberties than what the gospel authors did.

And especially when you go through and you compare how Plutarch uses the same sources and says the same story multiple times, you notice these things he's doing and the extent to which he's doing it. What's really interesting, though, is when you look at how the gospel authors report the same events, given Mark and priority and let's say Matthew and Luke using Mark and how they report the same story, well, the striking thing is not the differences but the similarities because they don't do, they don't, they don't do things to the extent that say Plutarch and some of the authors do. They stay a lot closer to Mark than Plutarch and Swatonius often stay to their sources.

Yeah, and just to maybe put my last word on this so that people don't misunderstand what I'm saying with the comparison, you know, obviously there are some biopics that take so many liberties that it's like, this is a different story. There are others like, you know, Lincoln being a good example where they really tried to do the homework and be careful with what they did. And if they made, if they had to like make up conversations or even maybe take historical things that the person said but put it at a different time, it

was all in order to tell us about the life and essence of this person in a way that is true to the real character behind the story.

So I mean, either way, I mean, you know, I trust that the gospel writers, they got us the heart and the essence of Christ. So Dr. Kona, I really appreciate it in your book. You did a thorough investigation of the meaning of the Greek word Theopneustos, which means God breathed and used in 2 Timothy 3 16.

I mean, this is the important passage for those who defend the inerrancy of scripture who believe in that doctrine. And for those who are interested, it's going to be in chapter 11 of your book that you go into this. And so let me just ask you, what are the various meanings and uses of the term? And does 2 Timothy 3 16 mean that the Bible was written under divine dictation? Yeah, great question.

So, you know, I did a word study using TLG for this, which has tagged every Greek word in the extant ancient Greek literature beginning in the eighth century BC, all the way up through, you know, whatever. So there's about 2500 occurrences of this word in the ancient Greek literature. So of course, words can change in their meaning over time.

Many of ours have in English. So I wanted to stick close to the time in which Paul is writing 2 Timothy. And so I go as some of these, like the sibling oracles, there's two occurrences in the sibling oracles.

You have collections of these from the 5th and 7th centuries, which is long after Paul wrote. But scholars think that a number of these oracles date even before Christ as early as the 2nd century BC. So how do you date these? It's hard to say.

It could be anywhere from the 2nd century BC through the 7th century. So I just talk about some possible. So there are as many as 8 and possibly as many as 13 occurrences of the Anastas prior to the early 3rd century when Origen is writing.

So Origen uses the term 49 times. But I want to look at the times that he writes prior to them, because even though he's using the Anastas in reference to scripture, being divinely inspired or God-breath, he does believe that there are surface discrepancies. So he's obviously not thinking it's divine dictation.

And so what's going on here? Well, when you look at it, you find in the sibling oracles, the testament of Abraham, the anthologies by Vadius Valens, you've got Clement of Alexandria, the life of lives of corpus papillos and Agathanes, and pseudo-Plutarch. So when we look at these and see what they're saying in context, well, it's not only a scripture, God-breath, but so are streams, so are ointments, so is ether, which is substance, which is you know, lots of things, even air is made out of ether. You got the teachings of the church and you have people that are said to be God-breath.

So it's hard to know because these don't go into greater detail to explain exactly what is

meant by that. So it seems like, at very minimum, to be the Anastas or God-breath means that it has its ultimate origin in God. It derives from God.

So I think we have to be careful not to make too much, pull too much out of this term, more than, let's say, Paul may have meant. So there's a top-down approach that many theologians conservative theologians will take and say, okay, what does scripture say about itself? Well, you got 2 Timothy 3 16. You have 2 Peter 1 verses 20 and 21 to talk about prophecy of scripture.

Is that just prophecy reported in scripture or is it all of scripture? That's disputed. That's debated. But you look at these things and you say, okay, well, what's the mechanism? What does it look like? And you try to say, okay, being God-breath and carried along, born along by the Holy Spirit, okay, what kind of scripture would that produce? And so you have it can't be divine dictation because as though, you know, people, the biblical writers sitting there with reed in hand, getting ready to write on papyrus, and they're waiting to hear from God, okay, and to write down, all right, write this.

Because if that's the case, then Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1 16, he says, I don't remember if I baptized anyone outside the house of Stavanas means the then he finds a relevant item missing. Or what about Matthew and Luke when they improve Mark's awkward grammar? We don't anticipate the Holy Spirit saying, reading Mark at a later time and saying, you know what, I can do better than that. Yeah, let's say it this way in Matthew and Luke.

So, so things like that. When it comes to divine inspiration, it can't be divine dictation. So, and even evangelical scholars will say, yeah, we're not talking about divine dictation.

Well, what are they talking about then if they're saying that every word in scripture, if they're believing inerrancy, a strict form of inerrancy based on their view of inspiration, what what it would result in a text that is entirely error-free even in minor details because God chose every word to put down, but it wasn't divine dictation. Well, how do you get that that he chooses every word, but it's not divine dictation? Well, they'll just punt to mystery. Well, to me, that sounds incoherent.

He said, well, it's mystery. You can't say incoherent, it's just mystery. Okay, well, if you want to claim mystery, that's fine.

That's a top down approach. I prefer to go with what Craig Keener and F.F. Bruce and others do. Mark Strauss, they do a bottom-up approach and they say, okay, let's look at scripture itself.

Let's look at the phenomena we see in scripture like, can't remember. Awkward grammar, that's improved. Editorial fatigue on some occasions.

Let's look at this kind of stuff and then let's work at that with what scripture says about



itself and attempt to send scripture 2 Timothy 3 16, 1 Peter, 120 and 21. They don't give us more details. So let's try to come up with a concept of inspiration that works with what scripture says about itself and what we observe in scripture.

And that's what I try to do in the book. Yeah, I mean, that kind of gets into the next question, which is, what are your two principles by which we should fine tune our understanding of scripture? One obviously being, look at what scripture is actually doing, right? And maybe I'll let you kind of unpack these two principles more. Yeah, well, yeah, I do present two principles in the book.

Those things I've been teaching for years to my students. There's nothing special about these principles. They're just common sense.

Then principle number one is, our view of scripture should be consistent with what we observe in scripture. Our view of scripture should be consistent with what we observe in scripture. Right? So that's the one problem I have with the top down view.

When we look at the phenomenon scripture, it doesn't seem to be in concert with the concept of inspiration and resulting in erancy that many evangelicals have. It's like, well, if your concept of inspiration and erancy is correct, this is the kind of Bible we would have. We don't have that kind of Bible.

Okay. So our view of scripture should be consistent with what we observe in scripture. The second principle is that if we truly want to have a high view of scripture, meaning it's authoritative and from God, then we should accept it as God has given it to us rather than attempting to force it to fit into a mold of how we think he should have given it to us.

And if we refuse to do this, we may claim we have a high view of scripture, but in reality, we have a high view of our view of scripture. Right? Yeah, I mean, that's so good. That's so good.

And now that we can kind of maybe pinpoint further what you're kind of trying to nuance, which is this traditional view of an erancy, and you know, you present three challenges to this position. Maybe can you first help us understand? I think you've already talked about this a little bit, but the traditional view of an erancy being that there are no errors in every exact minute detail, right? That's right. And then, and then further up, right, all the big claims too are going to be correct.

But maybe be more if you can help me unpack further, like, you know, what do you mean by the traditional view of an erancy? And what were the challenges that you think this position faces? So if you look at the traditional view of an erancy, and a really good example of it is the Chicago statement of biblical an erancy that came out in the late 1970s. And it says that God chose the very words. And it says that scripture has a single

author, a single author.

So humans are just basically scribes in that sense. And God mysteriously used their personalities and intellect in this. But it's written by a single author, God, who chose the very words.

That's the traditional view, as put forward by the Chicago statement. And in North America, a lot of your evangelical churches prefer that not all of them. I don't even know that a majority would probably when you're looking at something like the Southern Baptists are maybe, maybe Calvary Chapel, I don't know, but they like the Chicago statement.

The challenges that I see to that number one is it contains unstated freight, this kind of concept of an erancy. So it's usually built upon a syllogism, which goes something like this. God cannot air.

Number two, the Bible is the word of God, conclusion. Therefore, the Bible cannot air. And my contention would be is that that second premise, the Bible is the word of God, is problematic.

Now, it's problematic as the Chicago statement and some others perceive it to be. I have no problem saying the Bible is the word of God, but it's the concept behind what they mean by that because some of them, many of them will elaborate on that and saying by word of God, we mean it is God's speech in written form. So it's like God used the personalities of the individual to write these, but it is actually God's speech in written form.

That's how they go on to say that God chose the words. It's a single author involved in scripture. The problem with that, I think when you view word of God in that sense, and that is the freight, that is the unclaimed freight there, God's speech in written form, which by the way, every time you see that term word of God, it's usually, it's almost always, no, not always, a few times it refers to scripture, but most of the time it's referring to Jesus' teachings and the apostolic teachings, the preaching of the apostles is called the word of God.

So here's what I would say to that. If we're going to look at word of God as the Bible uses it in most times, especially in the New Testament, are we to think that the apostles, when they are out preaching for several decades, that they never once misattributed the location of where Jesus did something. So maybe instead of healing the centurion's servant in Capernaum, maybe it was at Japa, something like that.

They confused it with the centurion who got saved in Acts chapter 10. So are we to say that that never happened in decades of all the preaching of the apostles when they were preaching the gospel or the teachings of Jesus? Well, I would say that really be making a

leap of faith. So, or what about Paul in 2 Corinthians when he's saying on one occasion that Christ is speaking through me? Now, that seems to be like the oddness to us or being carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Are we to say again, at never did Paul misattribute a quote in the Old Testament to the wrong prophet, say to Isaiah rather than Jeremiah, something like that. So, okay, I think most people would acknowledge that, of course, the apostles made some kind of a goof up during one of their preaching or teaching sessions. They probably did many times.

Well, if that is Christ speaking through an apostle, then, and when they're preaching the Word of God, if they can do that in the oral proclamation, why is it so far fetched that it wouldn't happen when they're writing that same proclamation? It just seems to me that you've got some plausible models out there that fit in better with what we see in Scripture. That is not to say that we know that there were errors in the originals. I don't know that we can know that.

We don't have them. We haven't had them for a very long time. But it is to say that I don't think the arguments that we have that there could not have been any errors in the autographs.

I don't think that those arguments are very strong. I don't think that they're conclusive. All right.

Well, Dr. Lacona, I appreciate the nuances that he introduced there. And let's now get to your position, which you call flexible inerrancy. And just to quote from your book on page 206, you define it as the Bible is true, trustworthy, authoritative, and without error in all that it teaches.

So, Dr. Lacona, what separates your position from the traditional view? Well, for one, I'd say rather than demanding that every word of Scripture is without error. Let me go back to something here too. We know, well, I'll come to so rather than saying that every word in the autographs was error-free, something we can't prove.

I'm fine with saying that the message that even if they did misattribute, let's say Mark misattributed or misplaced where the feeding of the 5,000 happened or where the disciples were instructed by Jesus to go afterward. Let's say Mark got one of those details wrong, or where the pigs ran down and were drowned in the sea, the location of that. That seems to be problematic in Mark's gospel.

So, let's say that one of those that Mark just made a simple error there that could have easily been happened through just memory from what do you remember Peter telling him. I would still say that the message would be being taught there. The whole story, except the location, would be correct.

It's like many years ago, my wife and I, shortly after we were married, we went to a

business conference. So, we unpacked our stuff, and then we went down to dinner and then to some lectures afterward. When we came back to our room at night, immediately, I noticed someone had been in our room because the light was on, the radio was playing, our sheets had been pulled down and there were mints on the pillows.

Well, we'd never stayed in a nice restaurant before. So, we weren't familiar with a turn down service. And I called the front desk, what a hick I was, you know, but we were broke at the time.

And I told him what had happened. He said, well, Mr. Lacona, that's our turn down service. We do it for all, I guess.

It was an embarrassing thing, you know, and they must just laugh like crazy at the front desk. So, my wife and I remember everything about that, except the location. She says that it was in Richmond, Virginia, and I said it was in Dallas, Texas.

So, I mean, the story, everything about the story is correct, except that one minor detail of the location. I don't think that that makes one of us unreliable as our memories. It's just something that happens all the time, things like that.

You certainly get the essence, the gist of the story. It's just the location isn't right. So, the difference between the traditional view of an errantcy would be they think that every single word must be without error.

There couldn't be any, even a minor error in it, whereas I'd say the flexible view of an errantcy, it's an errant in what it teaches. It's an errant in its message. And a second thing I'd point out is that the traditional view of an errantcy only applies to the originals, because adherence to the traditional view would say, yep, we do have errors in our present Bible.

Most of them are due to copyist errors, but we still have errors today. And and say, yep, well, we don't know if they're copies there. Some of them they are.

Why do we know this? Because there's parallel text like between Samuel kings and chronicles. So when we see different numbers or let's say first Samuel says that David killed Goliath where second Samuel says Elhanan killed Goliath. Well, which one is it? You've got parallel text there.

So, you can kind of figure out maybe there's a copyist error involved in this. But what about places where we don't have parallel text? There could be errors there, and we'd never be able to recognize them, right? And so we can't say that we've caught them all by any means. So what I'd say is when we're looking at an errant in the originals in the traditional view, my view, it's an errant in what it teaches, that applies not only to the autographs, the originals, but also our current Bible.

So a traditional and errantist, if they're using integrity, they cannot hold up their current Bible and says, say, this is the errant word of God. Where I could, I could do that. And someone would say, well, wait a minute, if we know that there are errors in our current text under your flexible view, then how do we know we can trust any of it? Well, you know, I'd argue that historically we can verify a lot about Jesus.

But let's just say this, you've got the same problem, because God allowed errors under the traditional view, he allowed errors into our present text, and if there are errors in our present text, how do we know that we can trust any of it? So your objection would apply to both views, the flexible and traditional view. And my answer would be, we've got a lot that we can verify about Jesus. Very important things, such as his claims, many of his claims and his resurrection itself, if God loved us so much that it resulted in the incarnation, then certainly we can trust that in his sovereignty, he has preserved what is sufficient for us to know for salvation and living the Christian life.

So we have to believe that either way. So I would say the answer worked both for the traditional and flexible view. And when you say like God has allowed errors into the text, are you talking about the transmission and like the textual kind of just like the wording and so on, so forth, or do you actually mean the content? No, I mean through the well, here's what I'd say to that to be clear.

So he's definitely allowed errors to creep into the text through copies copying over the centuries, right? So we have to acknowledge that there's no question about that. The question is what they've been in the originals. So if God could have prevented errors from creeping into some of the copies, it seems like he could have preserved in an errant text in some sense, but he hasn't.

Maybe it's, I mean, perhaps he could have guided the scribe to write in a perfect manner, but he didn't want to intervene with their free will in order to do that. Well, if he did, if he didn't intervene in the free will and it came to copy and why wouldn't the same principle apply to the composition of those texts. So I mean, there's a number of questions we can ask there, but certainly he has allowed them into our current text through the copying process.

I mean, if I can say something just real quick, I mean, just this thought came to my head, but you talk about kind of the vulnerabilities of the textual transmission process. I'm sure a lot of people might get nervous and they might, you know, start wearing like, wait, wait a minute. What are you saying, Dr. Lacona? But maybe to offer a The Odyssey or an explanation of why God would do this.

I mean, I think Dr. Lacona, the fact that we need each other in the church, right, to transmit the text to kind of compare manuscripts, I think there's a way in which actually this dependence is a way of uniting the church, because you realize, oh, I have manuscripts over here in Egypt, but I need my brothers in, let's say in Jerusalem, right,

to help me out to get this text to maybe more of what the original says. I think there's a beautiful sense in which this vulnerability makes the church dependent and makes us have to work together and not just be like, okay, I'm self-sufficient, because I have this and Aaron Perfect text. I don't need to talk to anybody else.

You know, I think there's a beauty there actually, but we got to pull up our sleeves and do the work, right? Yeah, I think what you presented at Swan is certainly plausible. Of course, anything that either of us or any of us would propose is going to be speculative. But we're looking for something that would be plausible, something that what we want to do, if we want to take, I think the ground up approach is the way to go, because we want our view of scripture to be consistent with what we observe in scripture.

And when we work hard to do this through a ground up approach, bottom up approach, we can end up with a harmonious union between our view of scripture and what scripture says about itself. Dr. Lacona, my last question is, somebody might object, right, that your view, the flexible view of inerrancy is based on a lower view of scripture than what traditional inerrantists have. How would you respond to that? I'd say, what do you do with the universalist who says they have a higher view of God because their view of God accepts everyone regardless of what they believe.

Whereas the Christian view, your view, exclusivist view, in that view, God only accepts those through Jesus Christ. You have to put your faith in Christ. Of course, there are exceptions like those who never heard Old Testament people, things like that.

Babies in a mentally handicap. But typically speaking, you have to put your faith in Jesus Christ in order to have eternal life. Whereas the universalist says, my view of God is higher because he allows everyone in heaven.

Well, my response to that would be, no. Which view is correct? If your view is incorrect, it's not a higher view of scripture of God. It's the wrong view of God.

The highest view of God is the correct view of God. And I'd say the same thing about scripture. If your view of scripture of a very stilted or wooden form of inspiration and inerrancy, if it's the wrong view of scripture, then it's not the highest view of scripture.

It's just the wrong view of scripture. The highest view of scripture is the correct view of scripture or it will. Yeah, the correct view of scripture is the highest view of scripture.

That's how I would answer that. Yeah, Dr. Lacona, I really appreciate you taking the time out to talk to me again. Once again, for everybody who's watching, I really highly recommend that you get Jesus contradicted by Dr. Michael Lacona.

I think, I mean, you know, you work so hard to have integrity, right? And I think it just shows through your pages. And over the years, it's been a joy to watch you in your apologetics ministry and in your biblical scholarship. So once again, Dr. Lacona, this is a

great book.

Thank you so much for your time. And I really encourage my audience to go get a copy and just, you know, even if you disagree with Dr. Lacona, at least read the book, right? And nobody says and don't straw man him. And I think that in the end, what you're going to see is that regardless, this is a serious scholar who's showing as much, you know, integrity as he possibly can.

And I think in the end, it's just, there's a lot of fruit here. There's a lot to think about. Thank you so much, Swan, for those kind words.

Thanks for joining us today. If you'd like to learn more about the work and ministry of Dr. Mike Lacona, visit [RisenJesus.com](http://RisenJesus.com), where you can find authentic answers to genuine questions about the reliability of the Gospels and the resurrection of Jesus. Be sure to subscribe to this podcast, visit Dr. Lacona's YouTube channel, or consider becoming a monthly supporter.

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