

The Lowedown

A monthly newsletter from the life and ministry of Dave & Jennifer Lowe

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The Great Debate

Last Fall, I received an invitation from the Muslim Student Association at UC Davis to discuss co-sponsoring a debate on the person of Jesus.

It was quite unexpected but it seemed like an incredible opportunity.

There were some problems though. It was the beginning of October and the Muslim Student Association wanted to schedule the debate for December 1.

With less than two months, we had no speaker (they had a guy ready to go), no promotion plan and no venue to hold the event.

Right away I began to call people whom I thought could represent the Christian perspective well in an academic debate. My fear was that we would not be able to secure a credible opponent on short notice.

The first person I called was Dr. William Lane Craig, one of the top Christian philosophers and apologists in the world.

Dr. Craig has debated many atheists, appeared on many popular network shows on the person of Jesus, and was interviewed by Lee Strobel in his popular book, "The Case for Christ".

When I called Dr. Craig, my suspicions were confirmed. He was unavailable. He was booked over 9 months in advance.

I then called Ravi Zacharias, another popular apologist, but his assistant told me that he was booked through 2008. Wow!

I called Dr. Gary Habermas, professor at Liberty University and one of the foremost experts in the world on the resurrection of Jesus. Dr. Habermas too was unavailable.

However, in my conversations with Dr. Craig and Dr. Habermas, they both recommended a guy I hadn't heard of before - Michael Licona. Mr. Licona is the Director of Evangelism

and Apologetics for the North American Mission Board, an arm of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Mr. Licona, it turns out, has debated Muslims a few times and fared quite well. Also, he had recently released a book entitled "Paul Meets Muhammad", a fictitious debate between the two religious leaders concerning the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

I contacted Mr. Licona and though he was given a very short window in which to prepare, he agreed to represent us.

With a speaker secured, we finally began making preparations for the event. We agreed that the official topic for the debate would be: Was Jesus Resurrected or Rescued: The Muslim and Christian Perspective on the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus.

If you weren't aware, Muslims believe that Jesus was not actually crucified. As a holy prophet of God, they don't believe that he could have endured the kind of torture and violent death that is depicted in the New Testament. Thus, a major point of Islam is its denial of the need for a sacrificial atonement to pay for sin.

After much prayer and preparation, the night of the event arrived. Because there was a class in the room until 30 minutes before our event started, students started pouring in while we were trying to get the room ready. It was quite chaotic.

The spiritual climate was one I had not experienced before; it was very intense. As we got ready to begin, the room was packed. There were people sitting in the aisles and people were standing 3 rows deep in the back. I estimate that there were between 650-700 students packed out in a room that holds 550.

The debate was certainly lively. At one point during the debate, a Muslim

in the audience stood up and yelled something in Arabic. Many other Muslims joined in and began chanting. The moderator did a good job of restoring order but there were at least 3 or 4 of these kinds of outbursts, all initiated by Muslims in the audience.

The Muslim speaker, in particular, was very charismatic and animated. Most of the evidence presented by him was not in support of his position, but simply was designed to cast doubt on the Christian position. From that perspective, I believe that Mr. Licona presented the more convincing case.

However, in talking with many students afterwards, it's clear to me that most of the Muslims think their guy really cleaned up, while most of the Christians think that Mr. Licona should be declared the winner.

This became even more evident afterwards when I was copied on an e-mail that the Muslim speaker sent to Mr. Licona. In the e-mail, he thanked Mike for debating him and he challenged him to another debate. His challenge included this quip: "Besides, I'm sure you would like to redeem yourself after Thursday's debate."

Though Mr. Licona is unable to commit to another debate because of the demands of his PhD research, there is the possibility of a debate with another Christian speaker, possibly this spring. The speakers have already agreed to debate on the topic of whether Muhammad is a true prophet.

Pray for us as we're deciding what level of involvement we want to commit to this future event. And pray too for the many Muslims on campus and in the world who don't know Jesus because they are blinded by a false god and a false religion.

Thanks for your commitment to helping us reach every student for Jesus.