

3 Key Examples of Tony's Misrepresentations

By Dan Jensen (2021)

Introduction

In my debate with Tony Jones, I discuss the question of orthopraxy at length in my opening statement. My opening statement is split into two parts. The first part is on this question of orthopraxy, while the second is on the question of the doctrine of inerrancy. As I make clear in the debate, the reason I did things this way in regard to part two is because if inerrancy can be shown to be the biblical doctrine, the Progressive Christian movement falls apart and the thesis of the debate has been disproven. And the reason I did things this way in regard to part one is because the Progressive Christian movement so highly emphasizes both the importance of orthopraxy, as well as its own orthopraxy itself. As I make clear in the debate, many in the movement may very well have listened to part two, if I had not included part one, and said, "Ok, Dan makes some good points here, points I will need to think through further. But, I am still committed to the Progressive Christian camp because at the end of the day, I still think we are stronger on orthopraxy." Part one was intended to show that not only is this approach completely unbiblical (John 4:24 and 1 Timothy 4:16), the orthopraxy of the Progressive Christian movement is not all that stellar, despite their many repeated claims to the contrary.

I said in the debate that I could give many examples of this, and that if anyone wanted me to do so, he or she can make the request through my website and I will happily comply on the website itself. That offer still stands. In the debate, however, I only focus on one example of clear and blatant bad orthopraxy. This example is that of misrepresenting facts, especially in regard to the positions of others. I made it clear that I could also provide many examples of Progressive Christians engaging in this form of bad orthopraxy, and if anyone would like me to do so, he or she can make the request through my website and I will also happily comply on the website itself. That offer also

still stands. I made it clear that for the purposes of the debate, I would be focusing on Tony's bad behavior in this regard. I made it clear that while I was only going to be focusing on one key example of this in my opening statement, that I would be fully documenting this in an essay coming out soon (this essay is now up on my website as "The Errors of Tony Jones"). But I did say that I have already documented three specific key examples of this behavior in the immediate, and these three are provided in this essay below.

I further made it clear in the debate that this accusation does not solely stick to Tony, even regarding his own errors. This is because many of his errors in this regard come from his most famous book, *Did God Kill Jesus?*¹ And this book was endorsed by many of the biggest names in the Progressive Christian movement, such as Nadia Bolz-Weber; Shane Claiborne; Phyllis Tickle; Brian McLaren; Peter Enns; and Rachel Held Evans. I make it clear that all of these leaders should have recognized at least some of these errors. And Enns should have recognized all of them. The fact that they all still endorsed the book in spite of these errors is egregiously negligent. I make it clear in the debate that I understand that an endorsement of a book is not an endorsement of all that is said and argued in that book. But, I also make it clear in the debate, that this is not the issue. These are not simply errors that are debatable. For instance, one of the above names might disagree with some of the theological conclusions Tony makes in this book, and may even call those mistakes errors on some level. But the errors I am talking about in this essay are ones that would be recognized by all scholars in the respective fields as overt and substantive errors and misrepresentations. This makes the endorsements of the above named people entirely inexcusable. Two of the three errors documented below are from *Did God Kill Jesus?*

I also made it clear in the debate that all of these examples in this essay are not in regard to Tony specifically misrepresenting Traditional Evangelicals (in the second example below, he does misrepresent us, but he does so along with many other

¹ Tony Jones, *Did God Kill Jesus?: Searching for Love in History's Most Famous Execution* (New York: HarperOne, 2015).

communities of faith), showing that I am not simply being biased. He does indeed misrepresent us often in his works and speaking engagements, and I demonstrate this in my essay “The Errors of Tony Jones.” But again, the point of this essay is to show that I am not solely fixated on his errors in regard to my community. This pattern of misrepresentation is something he has a clear penchant for and it is inexcusable, as I make clear in the debate. I also make clear that one of these examples is of him misrepresenting a fellow Progressive Christian and how he was firmly rebuked for it. The third example of the three provided below in this essay is that example.

The 3 Examples

Example 1

On page 221 of *Did God Kill Jesus?*, Tony writes, “Except in small pockets of the Eastern Church - still referred to as ‘Nestorians’ - the church has held firmly to this statement from Chalcedon.”² But this is incorrect. The Oriental Orthodox Church, which dwarfs the Nestorians (the Church of the East), also rejects Chalcedon and always has. This may seem like a small error to many. But, it is not. The Oriental Orthodox Church is made up of around 50-60 million adherents. And the fact that they reject Chalcedon is a core tenet of their faith. This is just plain sloppy scholarship on the part of Tony and he should know better.

Example 2

On page 216, also of *Did God Kill Jesus?*, Tony writes, “This conundrum is solved with the doctrine of the Trinity, which states that God has always existed in three parts, or persons.”³ This is partialism and the traditional doctrine of the Trinity repudiates partialism. Roman Catholics; the Eastern Orthodox; the Oriental Orthodox; and Traditional Protestants would all vehemently reject his definition.

² Ibid., 221.

³ Ibid., 216.

Tony can quibble with me here all he wants that I am making a big deal out of nothing, but the doctrine of the Trinity is by no means a small deal to the communities mentioned above. He, and others in his camp, can say, “All Tony is doing here is stating his doctrine of the Trinity. He has every right to say that the communities you mentioned are nitpicking in regard to the terms *persons* and *parts*.” But, that is *not* what he is saying here at all. Any person who tried to make such an argument would certainly be correct that Tony has every right to state this position and attempt to defend it. I would vehemently disagree with his position, as would the communities mentioned above, but I would have to do so on theological grounds. But Tony clearly says, “... the doctrine of the Trinity, which states...” He does not say that this is his doctrine or even the doctrine of his camp (which would actually be argued against by many in his camp). He simply says this is what the doctrine states, plainly implying that this is how most who profess some version of Christianity (both true Christians and heretics) have understood the doctrine throughout church history. And that is patently false.

It doesn't matter if Tony thinks that partialism is no big deal. That is not the issue. The communities above do think it is a very big deal. He, and others, can argue that these communities shouldn't make such a big deal of it. But again, that is not what he does. He clearly misrepresents the doctrine as it has been traditionally articulated by the overwhelming number of those who profess some version of Christianity, who have held to the doctrine throughout church history up to the present day. Again, he is very sloppy with his scholarship. That is not my opinion. That is an objective fact that is derived from reading his works. And as stated, this is inexcusable, especially for someone of his stature.

Example 3

Tony terribly misrepresented Marcus Borg's position on the resurrection of Christ and was firmly called out on it by Borg. And Borg was a fellow Progressive Christian. Simply Google “Marcus Borg on Tony Jones” and a lot of pertinent information will pop up.