

The Real Painter of the Gospel: The DaVinci Code in the Light of History

By Dr. Jim Denison

Shortly after its publication, I picked up Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code* on the new fiction table at a local bookstore. Its cover and title led me to believe it would be a work of art history. Given my interest in the general subject, and in Leonardo in particular, I began thumbing through the volume. It was quickly obvious that the writer intended something far different.

I read the book that night, and knew immediately that it would be controversial. I write a daily on-line devotional, and dedicated a series to the novel. Response far exceeded my expectations. Even then, I did not know the book would remain so popular.

Mr. Brown's *Angels and Demons* enjoyed a predictable resurgence in interest as well, climbing to #1 on the paperback fiction bestseller list. The author's earlier *Digital Fortress*, a novel with no spiritual overtones whatever, gained popularity as well. *The DaVinci Code* was then made into a movie by Ron Howard, starring Tom Hanks.

Why has this book been the subject of such controversy? Why would a Baptist minister and former seminary professor take an interest in its claims from the perspective of historical facts? Why should you care if the book is accurate or fictional?

Blurring the lines

Part of *The DaVinci Code's* popularity is surely its fascinating plot. To summarize: Christ was deified by Constantine the Great in A.D. 325 at the Council of Nicaea. The "Priory of Sion" (supposedly founded in 1099) knows the "truth": Jesus was a man, married to Mary of Magdalene. The couple had a daughter they named Sarah, who was raised in France; her bloodline can be traced to this day. Her tomb and story are the "Holy Grail," the "cup" containing the "blood" of Christ.

Leonardo daVinci was Grand Master of the Priory of Sion from 1510-19. In this capacity, he used artistic means to tell the "truth." His *The Last Supper* pictures Mary Magdalene at Jesus' right hand. His *Mona Lisa* was named for Amon (the Egyptian male god) and Isis (their female god), intended to show the union of man and woman.

However, the Roman Catholic Church's most militant sect, Opus Dei, has attacked the Priory of Sion before it can release its "truth" to the world. As a result, the current Grand Master of the Priory, Jacques Saunier (curator of the Louvre), must pass the key to the location of the Holy Grail to his granddaughter, Sophia Nevea. Robert Langdon, a Harvard professor of religious symbology, helps her find the key and the path to the Grail, with the assistance of renowned English historian Leigh Teabing.

It's a fascinating plot. Each character is of course fictional. And so many dismiss concerns over the book's claims, citing the fact that the work is a novel. However, Mr. Brown claims that his plot is built on historical truth. The first page of his book is titled "Fact." It ends with this claim: "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate" (p. 1). By "documents" he means the descriptions of the Bible and its origins, the Gnostic gospels, and other documents we'll discuss momentarily.

In interviews, the author has made clear that he believes what his novel claims: that Jesus was a man deified by Constantine; the Church covered up the real records; and orthodox Christian theology is founded on this deception. His book makes the case with authority, placing these assertions in the mouths of the Harvard professor and his expert friend.

When Tom Clancy describes Jack Ryan on a submarine, we know Ryan to be a fictional character but we assume his description of the submarine to be accurate. It is the same with Mr. Brown's depiction of the historical "facts" behind the Christian gospel. It is impossible to tell in the novel where historical fact and fiction separate.

Clearly, many readers have not made the distinction. Celebrities have been quoted with gratitude for Mr. Brown's exposing of the truth behind the Christian movement. I have spoken with a large number of people in recent months who assume the novel's portrait of Christian origins to be accurate. Even many who claim a strong personal commitment to Christ are confused. They don't believe what the novel claims, but don't know how to respond to its falsehoods or explain the truth to others.

Getting some facts straight

So, is the novel an accurate depiction of the history it claims to record? Remember that the book opens with the assertion that its depictions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals are accurate. Before we move to the main subjects of the book, let's consider a few test cases.

First, let's deal with the title of the book. Mr. Brown's characters frequently refer to the artist as DaVinci. But his name was Leonardo. He was born outside Vinci, a village near Florence in central Italy. "DaVinci" simply means "from Vinci." And so art historians all call him "Leonardo," not "DaVinci." No Harvard symbologist and art historian, real or fictional, would call him "DaVinci." This would be like calling Jesus of Nazareth, "of Nazareth."

Later Mr. Brown states, "Originally, Tarot had been devised as a secret means to pass along ideologies banned by the Church. Now, Tarot's mystical qualities were passed on by modern fortune-tellers" (p. 92). The historical fact is that Tarot cards were invented for innocent gaming purposes in the 15th century. They did not acquire occult associations until the late 18th century. The cards' suits carry no Grail symbolism whatever.

In a dramatic plot twist, one of the characters encounters "Job 38:11." Mr. Brown writes, "It was only seven words. Confused, he read it again, sensing something had gone terribly wrong. The verse simply read: Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further" (p. 129). The scene is indeed moving. But the verse is not "only seven words." Here is the entire Scripture: "when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt?'"

Still later, the book describes Noah this way: "Noah of the Ark. An albino. Like you, he had skin white like an angel" (p. 167). Nowhere does the Bible describe Noah as an albino. Apparently Mr. Brown took his idea from the non-canonical 1 Enoch 106:2.

And note that Leigh Teabing, the renowned historian, describes Joseph of Arimathea as "Jesus' trusted uncle" (p. 255). But nothing in the Bible or early historical tradition suggests this connection.

Of course, none of these issues is central to the book's plot or to Christian belief. But such factual inaccuracies do call into question the book's claims to historical accuracy.

Can we trust the Bible?

Now we move to the first subject of central significance: the trustworthiness of the Bible. Remember again that Mr. Brown claims his depictions of documents to be accurate. We'll investigate this issue in three parts: the creation of the biblical canon (the list of books to be included), the trustworthiness of the Bible we possess today, and the significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Gnostic gospels.

The creation of the canon

Historian Teabing calls the creation of the Bible "The fundamental irony of Christianity!" and asserts, "The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great" (p. 231). If this is true, the Bible we have today was produced by a process which occurred around AD 325. Let's look at the actual facts.

The Old Testament canon was finalized by two councils held at the city of Jamnia, one in AD 90 and the other in AD 118. The actual books which compose our Old Testament were in wide use for centuries before, and in fact had been translated into Greek 200 years before these councils met. They in no sense "created" the Old Testament. And they completed their work two centuries before Constantine.

Perhaps Teabing means the canonical process of the New Testament. Here the facts are just as damaging to his case.

The early Christians quickly developed four criteria for accepting a book as Scripture. First, it must have been written by an apostle or based on his eyewitness testimony. Second, the book must possess merit and authority in its use. For instance, *The First Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ* tells of a man who is changed into a mule by a

bewitching spell but converted back to manhood when the infant Christ is put on his back for a ride (7:5-27). In the same book, the boy Jesus causes clay birds and animals to come to life (ch. 15), stretches a throne his father had made too small (ch. 16), and takes the lives of boys who oppose him (19.19-24). It was easy to dismiss such fiction.

Third, a book must come to be accepted by the entire church, not just a single congregation or area. And last, a book must be approved by the decision of the larger church, not just a few advocates.

Here is how this process unfolded. In the first century, a number of books were soon produced in response to the ministry of Jesus. As an example, Peter told his readers, "[Paul] writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do to the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). Thus Peter considered Paul's writings to be "Scripture."

Other less reputable books began to appear as well. Among them was the *Protoevangelion*, purporting to supply details of the birth of Christ; two books on the infancy of Christ, one claiming to be written by Thomas; and the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, sometimes called the *Acts of Pontius Pilate*. However, by the mid-second century only Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were accepted universally by the church. The other "gospels" simply did not meet the four criteria for acceptance set out above.

Note that this process was completed two centuries before Constantine. For example, in AD 115 Ignatius referred to the four gospels of our New Testament as "the gospel"; in AD 170, Tatian made a "harmony of the gospels" using only these four; around AD 180, Irenaeus referred to the four gospels as firmly established in the church.

The Muratorian Canon was established around AD 200, representing the usage of the church at Rome at that time. The list omitted James, 1 and 2 Peter, 3 John, and Hebrews (all due to authorship questions), though these were soon included in later canons. It excluded all gospels but the four in our Bible today. And it did so more than a century before Constantine.

The New Testament list we use today was set forth by Athanasius in A.D. 367. His list was approved by church councils meeting at Hippo Regius in 393 and Carthage in 397. Again, these decisions did not create the New Testament. They simply recognized what the Church had viewed as Scripture for generations. And Constantine had nothing to do with these decisions. I checked several histories on the Council of Nicaea, where Teabing says the emperor created the Bible, and could find no connection whatever.

F. F. Bruce was one of the world's foremost authorities on the creation of the Bible canon. His opinion should be considered: "One thing must be emphatically stated. The New Testament books did not become authoritative for the Church because they were formally included in a canonical list; on the contrary, the Church included them in her canon because she already regarded them as divinely inspired, recognizing their innate worth

and generally apostolic authority, direct or indirect...what these councils did was not to impose something new upon the Christian communities but to codify what was already the general practice of those communities."¹

The trustworthiness of the Bible

Next we turn to the trustworthiness and authenticity of the Bible as we have it today. "Historian" Teabing claims, "Because Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries *after* Jesus' death, thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a *mortal* man. To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke. From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history...Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's *human* traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned" (p. 234, emphasis his). Remember what we have already noted—that Constantine had nothing to do with a "new Bible."

Teabing's assertions grow even more damaging to orthodox Christianity: "The Bible is a product of *man*, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book" (p. 231, emphasis his). Later he adds with a chuckle that scholars cannot confirm the authenticity of the Bible (p. 256).

What are the facts behind his assertions?

Note what the Bible claims about itself. Jesus said, "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). The author of Hebrews adds, "The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12). And Paul concludes, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

But we might expect the Bible to claim to be the trustworthy word of God. Is there objective historical evidence for or against this assertion?

Consider first the *manuscript* evidence (known as the "bibliographic" test by scholars). No original manuscripts exist for any ancient book. Writing materials were too fragile to stand the passage of centuries. This is the case for Aristotle, Plato, Julius Caesar, the writings of Buddha and the Koran just as much as it is for the Old and New Testaments.

However, we possess today some 5,000 ancient Greek copies of the New Testament, and 10,000 copies in other ancient languages. Latin and Coptic copies go back to the second century; fragments of papyrus documents go back to AD 130. Quotations in the writings of early church fathers date to A.D. 100. Complete versions of the Gospels, Acts, Paul's

1 F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1977) 27.

letters and Hebrews date to the early part of the third century; Revelation to the latter half. Complete volumes of the New Testament date to the 4th century. Note that each predates Constantine.

Now compare these manuscripts with other ancient documents. Of Caesar's *Gallic Wars*, we have today only nine or ten good manuscripts, none copied earlier than 900 years after Caesar. For the *Histories* of Tacitus, we have only 4½ of his 14 original books, none copied earlier than the 10th century A.D. For Aristotle's works, we possess only five manuscripts of any one volume, none copied earlier than A.D. 1100 (14 centuries after the original).

Manuscript evidence for the New Testament is remarkable, far surpassing that which exists for any other ancient book. And those who work with these ancient copies (called "textual critics") are convinced that they have been able to recover a Greek New Testament which is virtually identical to the original. Quoting F.F. Bruce again, "The variant readings about which any doubt remains among textual critics of the New Testament affect no material question of historic fact or of Christian faith and practice."²

This evidence does not prove that the Bible is the word of God. But it does demonstrate conclusively that the Bible you have is the same which was first written by its authors. When Teabing asserts, "History has never had a definitive version of the book" and claims that scholars cannot confirm the authenticity of the Bible, he's simply wrong.

Let's look next at the evidence of *archaeology*. Such findings continue to confirm the geographical and historical veracity of the biblical texts. For instance, the pool of Bethesda (John 5:2ff) was once dismissed as historical fiction. Now archaeologists locate it in the northeast quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. I've seen it.

Researchers have identified the remains of Caiaphas, the high priest of Jesus' trial and crucifixion. They have discovered the skeleton of Yohanan, a crucifixion victim from AD 70, and note that these remains confirm the details of Jesus' crucifixion as it is described in the gospels. Archaeological evidence strongly supports the trustworthiness of the biblical narratives.

Last, consider the evidence of *fulfilled prophecy*. At least 48 major Messianic prophecies can be identified in the Old Testament. Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled each one. Endeavoring to determine the odds of such a phenomenon, mathematician Peter Stoner isolated eight of these 48 prophecies. He then calculated the odds that any one person might have fulfilled them all.

Stoner determined those odds to be one in 10 to the 17th power (one followed by 17 zeroes). Visualize the number this way: take this number in silver dollars and lay them across the state of Texas. They will cover the entire state, two feet deep. Now mark one of those silver dollars. Blindfold a man and tell him he can travel as far as he likes, but

² Ibid., 19-20.

he must pick up one silver dollar. What are the chances he will pick the one you marked? the same The same odds that the prophets would have had of writing those eight prophecies and having them all fulfilled in one person.³

Of course, billions of people across 20 centuries can attest to the fact that the teachings of the Bible have been proven true and authoritative in their personal lives. But even such overwhelming subjective evidence to the side, there is still outstanding evidential reason to believe that the Bible is the trustworthy word of God.

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gnostic gospels

Let's consider one last area within the subject of biblical transmission and authority. Listen again to Mr. Teabing: "Fortunately for historians...some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert. And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. In addition to telling the true Grail story, these documents speak of Christ's ministry in very human terms...The scrolls highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda—to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base" (p. 234). Teabing later calls the Nag Hammadi and Dead Sea scrolls "the earliest Christian records" (p. 245).

The Dead Sea Scrolls were actually found in 1947-56, and contain only the Old Testament. There is absolutely *no* New Testament document among them. They have nothing to do with any agenda to "promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ." No one can figure out why Mr. Brown included them in "the earliest Christian records."

The Coptic Scrolls at Nag Hammadi are not "the earliest Christian records," either. We possess quotations and biblical copies which are much older than them. And these are decidedly not "Christian" records.

Gnostic philosophy in brief centered in *gnosis* ("knowledge") is the means of salvation, particularly a kind of esoteric knowledge which was thought to purify the soul. According to this worldview, the physical is evil but the spiritual is good. The man Jesus took on the divine Christ principle at his baptism, and lost it at his crucifixion. This mystery knowledge is the basis for salvation.

Paul wrote Colossians to combat a very early version of this heresy. The documents which describe its beliefs do not give us the "earliest Christian records," but records of heretical philosophy. Mr. Brown uses these "Christian" records to promote his thesis that Jesus was a man, and that he and Mary Magdalene were married. We'll discuss these assertions when we come to the section dealing with this topic.

3 Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999) 193.

In conclusion

The DaVinci Code claims its depictions of documents to be accurate. However, its assertions regarding the creation of the biblical canon, the trustworthiness of the Bible, and early "Christian" records cannot stand the scrutiny of historical investigation. By contrast, theologian J. I. Packer calls the Bible, "God preaching." Augustine described it as "love letters from home." The more we know about the facts behind the biblical text, the more we see that the Bible is what it claims to be: the written word of God.

The divinity of Jesus Christ

The second major issue raised by *The DaVinci Code* regards the nature of Jesus of Nazareth. Mr. Brown's "historians" reserve their most blistering attacks on orthodox Christianity for their assessments of his divinity.

"Historical" rejections of his divinity

Teabing begins with kind, albeit historically inaccurate, praise: "Jesus Christ was a historical figure of staggering influence, perhaps the most enigmatic and inspirational leader the world has ever seen. As the prophesied Messiah, Jesus toppled kings, inspired millions, and founded new philosophies. As a descendant of the lines of King Solomon and King David, Jesus possessed a rightful claim to the throne of the King of the Jews" (p. 231).

Which kings did he topple? Pilate was no king. Herod Antipas (Luke 23:7-12) was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, not a king. And his "rule" survived Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. As regards his "rightful claim to the throne of the King of the Jews," Jesus was one of thousands who could claim similar lineage to David and Solomon. And he never tried a single time to seize such an earthly throne. In fact, he testified before Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).

While Teabing is complimentary toward the human Jesus, he is convinced that's all he was: "until *that* moment in history [at the Council of Nicaea, AD 325], Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless. A mortal" (p. 233, emphasis his). Remember the claim that his followers saw him only as a man—we'll return to it momentarily.

It was Constantine who made Jesus a divine figure, according to Teabing: "By officially endorsing Jesus as the Son of God, Constantine turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world, an entity whose power was unchallengeable" (p. 233). Making Christ divine "not only precluded further pagan challenges to Christianity, but now the followers of Christ were able to redeem themselves *only* via the established sacred channel—the Roman Catholic Church" (p. 233, emphasis his).

In conclusion, "It was all about power...Christ as Messiah was critical to the functioning of Church and state. Many scholars claim that the early Church literally *stole* Jesus from His original followers, hijacking His human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power" (p. 233, emphasis his).

This position should not surprise us, according to Teabing. Sophie asks, "And I assume devout Christians send you hate mail on a daily basis?" Teabing replies, "Why would they?...The vast majority of educated Christians know the history of their faith. Jesus was indeed a great and powerful man. Constantine's underhanded political maneuvers don't diminish the majesty of Christ's life. Nobody is saying that Christ was a fraud, or denying that He walked the earth and inspired millions to better lives. All we are saying is that Constantine took advantage of Christ's substantial influence and importance. And in doing so, he shaped the face of Christianity as we know it today" (p. 234).

Here's the summary: "Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is *false*" (p. 235, emphasis his). I have never read a more devastating indictment of Christianity's central affirmation that Jesus is Lord. Made in the guise of a supposedly reputable historian, claiming that "the vast majority of educated Christians" agree with him, it is easy to see why so many readers have been confused and misled.

Is there objective evidence for orthodox Christian affirmation of the divinity of Jesus Christ? Absolutely.

Non-Christian evidence for Jesus⁴

You would expect the Bible to claim that Jesus is Lord, as it does consistently. For instance, Jesus makes a claim before his ascension which is found nowhere else in recorded literature. No Nero, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, or Hitler ever thought to speak these words: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matthew 28:18). If we believe the Bible, we must believe that Jesus is Lord and God.

Teabing would claim that the biblical records were doctored centuries later to promote this thesis, of course. The previous section gives the lie to such supposition and makes clear that the Bible we have is the Bible they wrote. But another critic might easily claim that Jesus' followers were mistaken. We have what they wrote, but what they wrote was wrong, or even deceptive. Is there evidence for the life and divinity of Christ outside the biblical materials?

We'll look at the record as it was produced chronologically, beginning with Thallus the Samaritan. In A.D. 52 he wrote a work tracing the history of Greece from the Trojan War to his own day. In it he describes the darkness of the crucifixion as an eclipse of the sun, attempting to refute its supernatural origin. This is the earliest pagan reference to Jesus' existence and death, made by no friend of the faith.

4 The following sources contain these documents: Maurice Goguel, *The Life of Jesus*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1933) 70-105; R. T. France, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986) 21-58; Gary R. Habermas, *The Verdict of History: Conclusive Evidence for the Life of Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988) 87-118; Roderic Dunkerley, *Beyond the Gospels* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1957) 24-55.

Mara bar Serapion (writing after A.D. 70) adds, "What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished." He makes clear that Jesus was seen by his followers as a "wise King," not just a religious teacher. Such a claim would lead to the conflict with Rome which Suetonius documents next.

Suetonius (AD 65-135) records, "Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief" (*Nero* 16.2). The Empire would not punish people who followed a religious teacher, only one who made him Lord in place of Caesar. Clearly they did not see him as simply a human teacher or religious leader.

Now we turn to Tacitus (AD 55-120), the greatest ancient Roman historian, who writes (ca. AD 115): "Christus . . . suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition broke out" (*Annals* XV.44). "Superstition" makes clear the fact that Tacitus considered the followers of Christus to believe something miraculous, not simply that he was a great human teacher. The historian documents clearly his life and death, and the fact that his disciples considered him in some sense to be supernatural.

Pliny the Younger was a Roman administrator and governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor; 2 volumes of his letters are extant today. The tenth of his correspondence books (written around AD 112) contains the earliest non-biblical description of Christian worship: "They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ as to a god." Note that they worshipped Christ as God, not merely a religious teacher or leader. And they did so in AD 112, not AD 325 after Constantine.

Finally we consider Flavius Josephus (AD 37/38—97), the great Jewish historian: "Ananias called a Sanhedrin together, brought before it James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others . . . and he caused them to be stoned" (*Antiquities* 20.9.1). Thus the Christians called Jesus the Christ, the Messiah.

The so-called Testimonium Flavianum (*Antiquities* 18.3.3) is perhaps the most famous ancient non-biblical description of Jesus: "Now, there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works,—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day" (Whiston's translation).

While most historians do not believe that this paragraph represents Josephus's own faith commitment, it does document the beliefs of the Christians regarding Jesus. And note that it was written before the end of the first century.

So what do we learn from non-biblical ancient records? That Jesus existed, that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, that the first Christians believed him to be the risen Lord, and that they worshiped him as God. Everything orthodox Christianity claims for Jesus, the ancient records document as the belief of Christians from the beginning. I am not claiming that these records prove that Jesus is Lord and God, just that they prove that the first Christians considered him to be Lord and God.

Teabing claims that "Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet" until "that moment in history" when Constantine and the Nicean Council declared him divine. But Teabing is simply wrong on the merits. The historical record conclusively proves otherwise. The "vast majority of educated Christians" know this to be the true story of our faith.

Early Christian evidence for Jesus⁵

Mr. Brown's thesis that Jesus was seen by his followers as human and not divine is disproven by non-biblical records made by non-Christian historians. And when we turn to the ancient writings of Christians, we find even more clearly their consistent belief that Jesus was and is the divine Son of God, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Here is a brief sampling from hundreds of letters and documents written by the first followers of Jesus Christ.

The Didache (meaning "teaching") records the beliefs of the apostles. In its current form it was compiled in the fourth century, but is based on documents and statements which go back to the first century of Christian faith. It repeatedly calls Jesus "the Lord," and ends, "The Lord shall come and all his saints with him. Then shall the world 'see the Lord coming on the clouds of Heaven'" (16.7-8).

Clement of Rome (AD 95) repeatedly refers to the "Lord Jesus Christ." He also promises a "future resurrection" on the basis of his "raising the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead" (24.1). Ignatius (AD 110-15) refers to "Jesus Christ our God" (intro. to *Ephesians*). To the Smyrnaeans he writes, "I give glory to Jesus Christ, the God who has thus given you wisdom" (1.1).

And Justin the Martyr (AD 150) repeatedly refers to Jesus as the Son of God (cf. *Apol.* 22). He also describes the fact that God raised him from the dead and brought him to heaven (*Apol.* 45).

⁵ The most complete source for these documents remains *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989 [1885]), vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*.

We could go on and on. Evidence that the first Christians believed Jesus to be divine is simply overwhelming. Mr. Brown's claim that they saw Jesus as only a man is impossible to maintain on the basis of the historical record. The early Christians were absolutely united in their common affirmation, Jesus is Lord. They may have been right or wrong, but that is what they believed.

Why did Christians believe Jesus to be Lord?

We know Jesus existed, and was crucified at the hands of Pontius Pilate. We know that the first Christians believed him to be raised from the dead (cf. the letter of Pliny the Younger, the descriptions of Josephus). But believing doesn't make it so. Is there objective evidence for their faith in a risen Savior?

David Hume was an 18th-century Scottish philosopher, known today as the "Father of Skepticism." He made it his life's work to debunk assumptions which he considered to be unprovable, among them the veracity of miracles. He argued for six criteria by which we should judge any person who claims to have witnessed a miracle: they should be numerous, intelligent, educated, of unquestioned integrity, willing to undergo severe loss if proven wrong, and their claims should be capable of easy validation.⁶ Each is appropriate for determining the truthfulness of a witness. How do the eyewitnesses to the risen Christ fare by such standards?

They were *numerous*: over 500 saw the resurrected Lord (1 Corinthians 15:6). They were *intelligent* and *well-educated*, as the literature they produced makes clear (the Acts 4:13 claim that they were "unschooled, ordinary men" meant only that they had not attended rabbinic schools). Paul was in fact trained by Gamaliel, the finest scholar in Judaism (Acts 22:3). They were men and women of *unquestioned integrity*, clearly *willing to undergo severe loss*, as proven by their martyrdoms. And their claims were *easily validated*, as witnessed by the empty tomb (cf. Acts 26:26, "this thing was not done in a corner").

So the witnesses were credible. What of the objective evidence for their claims? It is a fact of history that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and buried, and that on the third day his tomb was found empty. Skeptics have struggled to explain the empty tomb ever since.

Three strategies center on theft. The first was to claim that while the guards slept, the disciples stole the body (Matthew 28:11-15). How would sleeping guards know the identity of such thieves? How could the disciples convince 500 people that the corpse was alive? And why would these disciples then die for what they knew to be a lie? A second approach claims that the women stole the body. How would they overpower the guards? How would they make a corpse look alive? Why would they suffer and die for such fabrication? A third explanation is that the authorities stole the body. When the misguided disciples found an empty tomb, they announced a risen Lord. But why would

⁶ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 2d ed. (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court, 1966) 128-9.

the authorities steal the body they had positioned guards to watch? And when the Christians began preaching the resurrection, wouldn't they quickly produce the corpse?

A fourth approach is the wrong tomb theory—the grief-stricken women and apostles went to the wrong tomb, found it empty, and began announcing Easter. But the women saw where he was buried (Mt 27:61); Joseph of Arimathea would have corrected the error (Mt 27:57-61); and the authorities would have gone to the correct tomb and produced the corpse.

A fifth strategy is the "swoon theory"—Jesus did not actually die on the cross. He or his followers bribed the medical examiner to pronounce him dead, then he revived in the tomb and appeared to be resurrected. But how could he survive burial clothes which cut off all air? How could he shove aside the stone and overpower the guards? How could he appear through walls (John 20:19, 26) and ascend to heaven (Acts 1:9)?

There is only one reasonable explanation for the empty tomb, the changed lives of the disciples, and the overnight explosion of the Christian movement upon the world stage: Jesus Christ rose from the dead. He is therefore who he claimed to be: our Lord and God.

Worship on Sunday

Before we leave the question of Jesus' divinity, let's consider one other related assertion. Robert Langdon, the Harvard "historian," states that "Originally, Christianity honored the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday, but Constantine shifted it to coincide with the pagan's veneration day of the sun...To this day, most churchgoers attend services on Sunday morning with no idea that they are there on account of the pagan sun god's weekly tribute—*Sunday*" (pp. 232-3, emphasis his). Is this true? Again, let's check the historical record.

The Didache (written from documents which go back to the first century) references the fact that Christians worshiped on Sunday, and called this "the Lords' Day of the Lord." This was centuries before Constantine.

Justin (writing in AD 150) further documents: "On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read...." (*First Apology* 67). He describes their worship: "Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things which we have submitted to you also for your consideration" (ibid).

I have no idea why Mr. Brown would have his Harvard "historian" claim that Sunday was chosen by Constantine as the day of Christian worship. Documents from two centuries earlier prove otherwise. The "Lord's Day" to which John refers on Patmos (Revelation 1:10) was always the day when Christians worshiped their risen Lord.

In conclusion

Evidence from non-biblical records made both by non-Christians and by followers of Jesus Christ is clear: his disciples have always claimed that he is Lord and God. Why else would the Empire have persecuted Christians? They were moral citizens, as even their enemies admitted. But they were unwilling to call Caesar their Lord, insisting instead on no Lord but Jesus. And they died for their faith by the thousands.

What else explains the radical faith and courage of the first apostles except that they met the risen Lord and made him their God? How else do we account for the rapid spread of the Christian movement? How do we explain the changed lives of billions of people, mine included?

If you would like to learn for yourself whether or not Jesus is Lord, there's one more step you can take. You can meet him for yourself.

Mary Magdalene

Now we move to topics raised by *The DaVinci Code* which are less central to orthodox Christianity, though equally confusing and controversial. We begin with Mary Magdalene, the supposed wife of Jesus and mother of his child.

Her character

Teabing stated indignantly, "Magdalene was no such thing [a prostitute]. That unfortunate misconception is the legacy of a smear campaign launched by the early Church. The Church needed to defame Mary Magdalene in order to cover up her dangerous secret—her role as the Holy Grail" (p. 244).

Later he adds, "The Church, in order to defend itself against the Magdalene's power, perpetuated her image as a whore and buried evidence of Christ's marriage to her, thereby defusing any potential claims that Christ had a surviving bloodline and was a mortal prophet" (p. 254). When Sophie turns to Langdon he nods: "Sophie, the historical evidence supporting this is substantial" (p. 254).

What is the actual "historical evidence" on the subject?

The only mention in Scripture of Mary Magdalene prior to the crucifixion is in Luke 8: "Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out . . ." (vs. 1-2). Later she is the first person to whom Jesus appears on Easter Sunday (John 20:13-16). She is the first he commissions to tell his disciples about his resurrection (vs. 17-18).

Teabing is right about one fact: she was not a prostitute. Mary Magdalene was categorically not the "sinful woman" who anointed Jesus' feet (Luke 7:36-39). Mary of

Bethany performed a similar act of worship a week before Jesus' death (Jn 12:3). Perhaps the similarity of her name (there are seven Marys in the Bible) led to the unfortunate mistake by Gregory the Great in A.D. 591, confusing Mary Magdalene and the "sinful woman" of Luke 7. But note that he made this mistake nearly three centuries after Constantine and the supposed "creation" of the Bible we possess today.

If the Church wished to defame Mary Magdalene, why did it portray her as the first human to whom Jesus spoke at Easter, and his first evangelist and missionary (Jn 20:13-18)? She is mentioned by name 14 times in the New Testament. In eight of these references, she heads the list. In a ninth, it follows the name of Mary the mother of Jesus and the "other Mary." In five it appears alone. Several times she is found at the side of Jesus' mother. It seems clear that the church did anything but defame or cover up Mary Magdalene in the gospels.

Her relationship with Jesus

Teabing is confident that "Jesus was the original feminist. He intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene" (p. 248).

How did he assure this intention? According to the British "historian," Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene is "a matter of historical record . . . and Da Vinci was certainly aware of that fact. *The Last Supper* practically shouts at the viewer that Jesus and Magdalene were a pair" (p. 244; we'll discuss the painting later).

Teabing later mentions "countless references to Jesus and Magdalene's union. That has been explored ad nauseum by modern historians" (p. 247). He then quotes from the Gospel of Mary Magdalene to support his assertion (p. 247).

What is the "historian" quoting? Why would he make these claims?

The Gnostics (see the section on their gospels above) made Mary Magdalene their source among Jesus' disciples. Their *Gospel of Mary* depicts her as favored with insights and visions which far surpass those of Peter and the other apostles. Their *Dialogue of the Savior* calls her the "woman who knew the All." Many Gnostics claimed to have received their revelations from Jesus through Mary's transmission.

To bolster their claim, they posited a close and romantic relationship between Jesus and Mary. Their *Gospel of Philip* goes so far as to claim that Christ loved Mary "more than [all] the disciples and used to kiss her [often] on her [mouth; note that the text is missing here, and may not be her mouth or lips at all]. The rest of [the disciples were offended by it . . .]. They said to him, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?' The Savior answered and said to them, 'Why do I not love you as [I love] her?'"⁷

This is the "historical record" of Jesus' and Mary's "marriage." The Gnostic text nowhere claims that they were actually married, or had a daughter. But it does continue its

7 Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) 64.

description of her life and legacy, in a way which is most damaging to Mr. Brown's thesis.

According to the Gnostics, Mary Magdalene rejected the "works of femaleness" (*Dialogue of the Savior*), sexual activity and procreation. The *Gospel of Thomas* states that she transcended her human nature and "became male." In *The Gospel of Mary*, Mary urged the other disciples to "praise his greatness, for he has prepared us, and made us into men."⁸ Clearly she could not have carried the "blood" of Jesus through his offspring—in fact, she eschewed all sexual relationships. Such is the record of the Gnostic gospels used by Mr. Brown to document his claim that Mary and Jesus were married and produced a child.

The orthodox Church Fathers knew nothing of these legends. None quotes Mary Magdalene or seeks to build a case against her. If she posed a threat to the biblical tradition that Jesus had no sexual relationships or heirs, they would have responded to that threat. Instead, we have only silence.

Jesus' sexuality

Let's consider one other assertion with regard to Jesus' relationship with Mary Magdalene: his sexuality. Langdon is confident that "Jesus was a Jew . . . and the social decorum during that time virtually forbid a Jewish man to be unmarried. According to Jewish custom, celibacy was condemned, and the obligation for a Jewish father was to find a suitable wife for his son.

If Jesus were not married, at least one of the Bible's gospels would have mentioned it and offered some explanation for His unnatural state of bachelorhood" (p. 245).

Here is the biblical record. Peter, the other apostles, and the brothers of the Lord all had wives (1 Corinthians 9.5). Thus the Church was not embarrassed by their status as married men. If Jesus had been married, Paul would have said so here.

Note that Jesus had no official position within Judaism (Mark 11.28). He was not technically a rabbi, nor did he portray himself as one. And so any conventional expectation that religious leaders would be married would not have applied to him. And note that members of the Essenes, a famous spiritual sect within Judaism, were known for their emphasis on celibacy (cf. Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.1.5.21).

There is no basis in the biblical or historical record for claiming that Jesus and Mary had any kind of relationship outside the one described in Scripture: he cast seven demons from her, made her one of his followers, appeared to her at Easter, and commissioned her to tell his other disciples of his resurrection. No marriage, no child, no Holy Grail.

⁸ Ibid., 67.

Women and the Bible

Mr. Brown's argument that Mary Magdalene was maligned by the Church extends through his book to a more general charge of chauvinism. Langdon cites the supposed belief of the Priory of Sion that "Constantine and his male successors successfully converted the world from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity by waging a campaign of propaganda that demonized the sacred feminine, obliterating the goddess from modern religion forever" (p. 124).

The persecution which resulted from this campaign was supposedly fierce: "Midwives also were killed for their heretical practice of using medical knowledge to ease the pain of childbirth—a suffering, the Church claimed, that was God's rightful punishment for Eve's partaking of the Apple of Knowledge, thus giving birth to the idea of Original Sin. During three hundred years of witch hunts, the Church burned at the stake an astounding five *million* women" (p. 125, emphasis his).

This vendetta had a supposed theological motivation as well: "The power of the female and her ability to produce life was once very sacred, but it posed a threat to the rise of the predominantly male Church, and so the sacred feminine was demonized and called unclean. It was *man*, not God, who created the concept of 'original sin,' whereby Eve tasted of the apple and caused the downfall of the human race. Woman, once the sacred giver of life, was now the enemy" (p. 238, emphasis his).

What are the actual facts of history and biblical record?

First, let's remember that Genesis does not describe the nature of the "fruit of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:17). We certainly do not know that it was the "Apple of Knowledge." And let's note that the European witch craze claimed between 30,000 and 50,000 victims. Not all were executed by the Church, not all were women, and not all were burned. Horrendous, to be sure, but not the "five million women" Langdon claims were "burned at the stake" by the Church.

Now let's see how the Bible actually relates to women. First, the example of Jesus. Our Lord spoke to a Samaritan woman when no one else would (John 4). He befriended an immoral woman no one else would welcome (Luke 7:36-50, decidedly not Mary Magdalene). He commended a widow's offering at the Temple (Luke 21:1-4). He cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2), and called her and others to be his disciples.

What was the general status of women in the Scriptures? Miriam was a prophetess (a preacher; Exodus 15:20), as were Deborah (Judges 4:4) and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14). The New Testament cites Anna (Luke 2:36) and Philip's "four unmarried daughters who prophesied" (Acts 21:9). Paul cautioned a woman to cover her head when she "prophesied" in the church (1 Corinthians 11:5). The apostle recognized Priscilla as the leader of the church in Rome with her husband Aquila (Romans 16:3-5). He commended

Euodia and Syntyche as his "fellow workers" (Philippians 4:2-3). And he listed Junias as "among the apostles," the highest level of leadership in the early church (Romans 16:7).

Remember that the resurrected Christ chose to appear first to Mary Magdalene, and to send her to the disciples with the news of Easter as the first evangelist in Christian history (John 20:17). Remember that Paul's first convert in Europe was Lydia, one of the leading citizens of Philippi; she soon established the church which met in her home (Acts 16:14-15, 40).

It is hard to see how these descriptions fit with Mr. Brown's claim that the Church and its Bible waged a "campaign of propaganda" against women. Scripture is clear: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:28-29). Women and men alike.

Leonardo, Opus Dei, and the Priory of Sion

We'll close with a brief examination of *The DaVinci Code's* assertions regarding these three figures of pivotal significance to its plot. We begin with perhaps the most famous painter in art history.

Leonardo and his art

Remember that art historians all call him "Leonardo," not "Da Vinci." Two of his paintings figure especially in the book's narrative.

First is the Mona Lisa. Mr. Brown claims that "The painting's well-documented collage of double entendres and playful allusions had been revealed in most art history tomes, and yet, incredibly, the public at large still considered her smile a great mystery" (p. 119). He has Mr. Langdon, the Harvard art historian, explain the "truth." Her name comes from Amon (the Egyptian god of masculine fertility) and L'isa (the Egyptian goddess of fertility) (p. 120-1). The painting actually intends to portray the sacred union of male and female. With this result: "And *that*, my friends, is Da Vinci's little secret, and the reason for Mona Lisa's knowing smile" (p. 121).

Actually, the portrait most likely portrays a real woman, Madonna (or Monna) Lisa, wife of Francesco di Bartolomeo del Giocondo. Thus the name, Mona Lisa. There are other theories behind the painting's origin as well, all described in art history books. But in consulting several, I could find no reference to Brown's theory. This despite the fact that it has "been revealed in most art history tomes."

Second, we must mention briefly *The Last Supper*. According to Mr. Brown, the figure painted by Leonardo at Jesus' right hand is none other than his "wife," Mary Magdalene. The figure is in fact more feminine in portrait than the others at the table. But nearly all art historians believe this to be John, Jesus' beloved disciple. John was typically rendered as beardless and youthful. And if this is not John, where is he in the painting? We would expect Jesus' closest friend to be at his Last Supper.

Opus Dei

This organization, named "the word of God" in Latin, figures prominently in Mr. Brown's plot. He mentions the "1934 publication of Josemaria Escriva's spiritual book *The Way*—999 points of meditation for doing God's Work in one's own life" (p. 29). The novel states that the pope has placed the founder of Opus Dei on the "fast track" to sainthood (p. 41). In fact, Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, who died in 1975, was beatified amidst substantial controversy in 1992 and canonized on October 6, 2002 in Rome, Italy.

According to the organization's web site, its stated purpose is to "spread throughout society a profound awareness of the universal call to holiness and apostolate through one's professional work carried out with freedom and personal responsibility." The movement claims 80,000 members all over the world.

As the novel makes clear, there is also a watchdog organization called "Opus Dei Awareness Network." I consulted their web site (www.odan.org) in preparing this manuscript.

Opus Dei members are understandably upset with Mr. Brown's characterization of their supposed chauvinism: "Female numeraries were forced to clean the men's residence halls for no pay while the men were at mass; women slept on hardwood floors, while the men had straw mats; and women were forced to endure additional requirements of corporal mortification . . . all as added penance for original sin. It seemed Eve's bite from the apple of knowledge was a debt women were doomed to pay for eternity" (p. 41; there's the "apple" again).

However, I could find nothing to document this description even on ODAN's web site. And I could find no record that Opus Dei has ever had any kind of relationship with the Priory of Sion or the issues raised by Mr. Brown's novel. The organization of course denies any such activity as well.

The Priory of Sion

We close with this organization, so central to the novel. Langdon calls its members "one of the oldest surviving secret societies on earth (p. 113). He states as a fact, "The Priory's membership has included some of history's most cultured individuals: men like Botticelli, Sir Isaac Newton, Victor Hugo . . . and, Leonardo da Vinci" (p. 113).

Langdon explains, "The Priory of Sion . . . was founded in Jerusalem in 1099 by a French king named Godefroi de Bouillon, immediately after he had conquered the city" (p. 157). The Knights Templar were created by the Priory of Sion to find and then preserve the documents leading to the Holy Grail (pp. 158-9).

They were persecuted beginning on Friday, October 13, 1307, making "Friday the 13th" an unlucky day (pp. 159-60). The *Dossiers Secrets* is an historical document which "had been authenticated by many specialists and incontrovertibly confirmed what historians had suspected for a long time: Priory Masters included Leonardo da Vinci, Botticelli, Sir

Isaac Newton, Victor Hugo, and, more recently, Jean Cocteau, the famous Parisian artist" (p. 206). Happily for Mr. Brown's thesis, "The Priory of Sion, to this day, still worships Mary Magdalene as the Goddess, the Holy Grail, the rose, and the Divine Mother" (p. 255).

Let's deal with two simple problems first. "Friday the 13th" is considered by many to be unlucky, but not because it has anything to do with the Knights Templar. Rather, an early tradition exists that Jesus was crucified on a Friday the 13th. Some Christians considered 13 to be unlucky since there were 13 present at the Last Supper. But the superstition actually goes back to Norse mythology, in which there were 13 present at a banquet in Valhalla when Balder (son of Odin) was slain; this tragedy led to the downfall of the gods. Around 1000 B.C., Hesiod wrote in *Works and Days* that the thirteenth day is unlucky for sowing, but favorable for planting.

Next let's note that the Priory of Sion "worships Mary Magdalene as the Goddess." Given its belief that Jesus was only a mortal, a religious leader and no more, such worship of his "wife" seems odd at best.

Now let's turn to the Priory itself. There is an actual organization called the Priory of Sion which registered officially with the French government in 1956. It claimed to have originated after World War II.

Then, in the late 1960s, a set of documents were discovered deep in the French National Library. These documents made numerous references to this supposed society. They offered a family tree going back to the Merovingian Kings, monarchs who ruled in the south of France from the 6th to the 8th century. But historians who have examined these documents do not consider them credible. With the exception of filmmaker and artist Jean Cocteau (1889-1963), its illustrious list of Grand Masters is not credible historically.

According to Henry Lincoln, co-author of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, these legends say the first king's mother was impregnated by a sea creature. Since one of the earliest symbols for Jesus and Christianity was a fish, it is alleged that the order can be traced back to Jesus. This is apparently the only evidence for such a connection.

The Knights Templar were in fact an order that existed in the 12th century, founded in 1118 to protect pilgrims in the Holy Land. They were rendered redundant after the last Crusader stronghold fell in 1291. The movement existed for 200 years until its members were accused of heresy by King Philip the Fair of France. They were arrested in 1307; 120 were burned by Inquisition courts for not confessing or retracting a confession. Sodomy was the principal charge against the order.

In an ABCNews interview, Mr. Brown himself admitted, "Realistically, I doubt we will ever have absolute proof one way or another regarding the Priory's existence."

Conclusion

Why did Mr. Brown write his novel? According to his web site, "I chose this topic for personal reasons—primarily as an exploration of my own faith and my own ideas about religion. I believe that one of the reasons the book has become controversial is that religion is a very hard thing to discuss in quantitative terms. If you ask three people what it means to be a Christian, you will get three different answers. Some feel being baptized is sufficient. Others feel you must accept the Bible as immutable historical fact. Still others require a belief that all those who do not accept Christ as their personal savior are doomed to hell. Faith is a continuum, and we each fall on that line where we may. . . . I consider myself a student of many religions. The more I learn, the more questions I have. For me, the spiritual quest will be a lifelong work in progress. Deciding to write about this topic was simply part of my own personal quest for understanding."

In this "personal quest for understanding," however, the author makes very clear his assessment of traditional, orthodox Christianity: "The Church's version of the Christ story is inaccurate, and . . . the greatest story ever told is, in fact, the greatest story ever *sold*" (pp. 266-7, emphasis his).

Now you and I must decide between Mr. Brown's version of Jesus' life and significance, and the one held sacred by Christians. On the basis of objective historical evidence we have seen that the Bible we have today is trustworthy, reflecting with extreme accuracy the records left by first-century eyewitnesses to Jesus. From the first, his followers believed him to be the risen Lord and worshiped him as God.

Now we are each offered a personal invitation to meet him for ourselves. If we will acknowledge him as God, admit to him our mistakes and failures, ask his forgiveness, and invite him to be our Lord and Master, he will answer our prayer. He will make us the children of God. And we will spend eternity with him in his Father's house.

Of course, no discussion of historical evidence can compel us to make this decision. Faith is a relationship, and all relationships require a commitment which transcends the evidence. If you are waiting to be married until you can prove that you should, you'll never walk to the altar. If you're waiting to have children until you can prove that you will be good parents, you'll never paint a nursery. Every relationship in your life requires a level of faith commitment.

Such faith then becomes self-validating. If you are married, you now know more about the marriage experience that you could possibly have understood beforehand. No parent can explain fully to others what it is like to hold a newborn baby.

But let us not leave our subject with the possibility that Jesus Christ was a good man and nothing more. That option does not really exist. C. S. Lewis, himself a converted atheist, makes the point better than I can:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I

don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."⁹

The New Testament writers are the real painter of the gospel. If you'll examine the historical evidence for their truth claims, I believe you'll find a compelling case for trusting Christ as your personal Savior and Lord. The rest is up to you.

9 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952) 55-6.