

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail

Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh & Henry Lincoln

Contents

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln

Title Page

List of Illustrations

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Introduction, 1996

PART ONE: The Mystery

1. Village of Mystery

Rennes-le-Château and Bérenger Saunière

The Possible Treasures

The Intrigue

2. The Cathars and the Great Heresy

The Albigensian Crusade

The Siege of Montségur

The Cathar Treasure

The Mystery of the Cathars

3. The Warrior Monks

Knights Templar - The Orthodox Account

Knights Templar - The Mysteries

Knights Templar - The Hidden Side

4. Secret Documents

PART TWO: The Secret Society

5. The Order Behind the Scenes

The Mystery Surrounding the Foundation of the Knights Templar

Louis VII and the Prieuré de Sion

The 'Cutting of the Elm' at Gisors

Ormus

The Prieuré at Orleans

The 'Head' of the Templars

The Grand Masters of the Templars

6. The Grand Masters and the Underground Stream

René d'Anjou

René and the Theme of Arcadia

The Rosicrucian Manifestos

The Stuart Dynasty

Charles Nodier and His Circle

Debussy and the Rose-Croix

Jean Cocteau

The Two John XXIIIs

7. Conspiracy through the Centuries

The Prieuré de Sion in France

The Dukes of Guise and Lorraine

The Bid for the Throne of France

The Compagnie du Saint-Sacrement

Château Barberie

Nicolas Fouquet

Nicolas Poussin

Rosslyn Chapel and Shugborough Hall

The Pope's Secret Letter

The Rock of Sion

The Catholic Modernist Movement

The Protocols of Sion

The Hiéron du Val d'Or

8. The Secret Society Today

Alain Poher
The Lost King
Curious Pamphlets in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
The Catholic Traditionalists
The Convent of 1981 and Cocteau's Statutes
M. Plantard de Saint-Clair
The Politics of the Prieuré de Sion

9. The Long-haired Monarchs

Legend and the Merovingians
The Bear from Arcadia
The Sicambrians Enter Gaul
Mérovée and His Descendants
Blood Royal
Clovis and His Pact with the Church
Dagobert II
The Usurpation by the Carolingians
The Exclusion of Dagobert II from History
Prince Guillem de Gellone, Comte de Razès
Prince Ursus
The Grail Family
The Elusive Mystery

10. The Exiled Tribe

PART THREE: The Bloodline

11. The Holy Grail

The Legend of the Holy Grail
The Story of Wolfram von Eschenbach
The Grail and Cabalism
The Play on Words
The Lost Kings and the Grail
The Need to Synthesise
Our Hypothesis

12. The Priest-King Who Never Ruled

Palestine at the Time of Jesus
The History of the Gospels
The Marital Status of Jesus
The Wife of Jesus
The Beloved Disciple
The Dynasty of Jesus
The Crucifixion
Who was Barabbas?
The Crucifixion in Detail
The Scenario

13. The Secret the Church Forbade

The Zealots
The Gnostic Writings

14. The Grail Dynasty

Judaism and the Merovingians
The Principality in Septimania
The Seed of David

15. Conclusion and Portents for the Future

Postscript

Appendix 1: The Alleged Grand Masters of the Prieuré de Sion

Appendix 2: The Comte de Chambord and the French Throne

Appendix 3: Eastern European Literary Figures

Appendix 4: The Order of the Fleur de Lys

Picture Section

Bibliography

Notes and References

Index

Copyright

About the Book

The most shattering secret of the last two thousand years

The first publication of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* in 1982 sparked off a storm of controversy that continues to this day. The enigma: a discovery at Rennes-le-Château that offers little in the way of material wealth, but whose secret rocked the foundations of contemporary politics and the Christian faith. The players: the Knights Templar, the Cathar heretics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and a dynasty of obscure French kings deposed more than 1,300 years ago. The conclusion: as persuasive, controversial and explosive as it was when first published over twenty years ago. *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* is not just a classic of its kind, it's a book that's impossible to put down.

About the Authors

MICHAEL BAIGENT was born in New Zealand in 1948, and obtained a degree in psychology from Canterbury University, Christchurch. Since 1976 he has lived in England.

RICHARD LEIGH studied at Tufts University, Boston, the University of Chicago and the State University of New York at Stony Brook.

HENRY LINCOLN was born in London in 1930. An ardent Francophile, he has long been deeply interested in French language, history and culture. He has been a writer for over forty years, having produced more than 100 television scripts. He has lectured extensively, and is best known for the presentation of his own programmes on BBC television.

Also available by Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh

The Temple and the Lodge
The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception
Secret Germany: Claus von Stauffenberg and the Mystical
Crusade against Hitler
The Elixir and the Stone
The Inquisition

Also by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln

The Messianic Legacy

By Michael Baigent

From the Omens of Babylon
Ancient Traces

By Henry Lincoln

The Holy Place
Key to the Sacred Pattern
The Templars' Sacred Island

THE
HOLY
BLOOD
AND THE HOLY
GRAIL

MICHAEL BAIGENT,
RICHARD LEIGH
& HENRY LINCOLN



arrow books

List of Illustrations

Plates

- [1.](#) The village of Rennes-le-Château
- [2.](#) The Château d'Hautpoul
- [3.](#) Bérenger Saunière
- [4.](#) The Villa Bethania
- [5.](#) The Visigothic pillar in the church at Rennes-le-Château
- [6.](#) The inscribed calvary near the entrance of the church at Rennes-le-Château
- [7.](#) The Tour Magdala, Rennes-le-Château
- [8.](#) The Cathar castle of Montségur
- [9.](#) A fifteenth-century print of Jerusalem
- [10.](#) The Tomb of David, Abbey of Notre Dame du Mont de Sion, Jerusalem
- [11.](#) The Temple, Jerusalem
- [12.](#) The octagonal tower of the castle of Gisors
- [13.](#) The sea wall of the castle of Athlit, Palestine
- [14.](#) The church of the Knights Templar, London
- [15.](#) Interior of the Temple church, London
- [16.](#) A Seal of the Abbey of Notre Dame du Mont de Sion b
Seal of the Knights Templar
- [17.](#) The Abbey of Orval
- [18.](#) The tomb near Arques
- [19.](#) 'La Fontaine de Fortune', by René d'Anjou
- [20.](#) 'Et in Arcadia Ego', by Guercino
- [21.](#) 'Et in Arcadia Ego', by Poussin
- [22.](#) 'Les Bergers d'Arcadie,' by Poussin
- [23.](#) 'The Shepherds' Monument', Shugborough Hall
- [24.](#) A seventeenth-century Masonic tomb
- [25.](#) The trepanned skull of Dagobert II

- [26.](#) Pierre Plantard de Saint-Clair
- [27.](#) Sword hilt and scabbard found at the grave of Childeric I
- [28.](#) The crystal ball found in Childeric's grave
- [29.](#) The gold bees found in Childeric's grave
- [30.](#) Garway church, Herefordshire
- [31.](#) Graffiti on the piscina, Garway church
- [32.](#) Jewish coin from the time of Antiochus VII
- [33.](#) Window at Alet Cathedral
- [34.](#) A fifteenth-century illumination depicting fleur-de-lys
- [35.](#) Untitled painting of Godfroi de Bouillon, by Claude Vignon
- [36.](#) Saunière's statue of St Mary Magdalene
- [37.](#) The painted bas-relief of the fourteenth Station of the Cross in Rennes-le-Château church
- [38.](#) Templar gravestone of a Templar master mason
- [39.](#) Manuscript depiction of the burning of the last Templar Grand Master, Jacques de Molay
- [40.](#) The church of the Knights Templar in the Temple, London
- [41.](#) Facsimile of part of the Copper Scroll in the Amman Museum, Jordan
- [42.](#) Authors with Pierre Plantard de Saint-Clair, Paris 1982
- [43.](#) The chateau of Gisors, Normandy
- [44.](#) Statue of the Virgin Mary in the modern monastic quarters of the Abbey of Orval
- [45.](#) 'La Primavera' c. 1480, by Sandro Botticelli
- [46.](#) 'The Last Supper', by Leonardo da Vinci
- [47.](#) The church of Saint Sulpice, Paris
- [48.](#) Base of the astronomical gnomon, Saint Sulpice church
- [49.](#) The brass strip at Saint Sulpice
- [50.](#) The 'Apprentice Pillar' inside Rosslyn Chapel
- [51.](#) The Coronation of Napoleon, as painted by Jacques Louis David

Maps

- [1.](#) The major sites of investigation in France
- [2.](#) Rennes-le-Château and its environs
- [3.](#) The Languedoc of the Cathars
- [4.](#) The major castles and towns of the Holy Land in the mid-twelfth century
- [5.](#) Jerusalem - the Temple and the area of Mount Sion in the mid-twelfth century
- [6.](#) The Duchy of Lorraine in the mid-sixteenth century
- [7.](#) The Merovingian kingdoms
- [8.](#) Judaea, showing the only avenue of escape for the Tribe of Benjamin
- [9.](#) Palestine at the time of Jesus
- [10.](#) The Jewish principedom

Genealogies

- [1.](#) The dukes of Guise and Lorraine
- [2.](#) The Merovingian dynasty - the kings
- [3.](#) The Merovingian dynasty - the counts of Razès
- [4.](#) The Merovingian dynasty - the lost kings
- [5.](#) The families of Gisors, Payen and Saint-Clair

Figures

- [1.](#) The Plantard family crest
- [2.](#) The cover design of the novel, *Circuit*
- [3.](#) The coat of arms of Rennes-le-Château
- [4.](#) The official device of the Prieuré de Sion

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Introduction

In 1969, *en route* for a summer holiday in the Cévennes, I made the casual purchase of a paperback. *Le Trésor Maudit* by Gérard de Sède was a mystery story - a lightweight, entertaining blend of historical fact, genuine mystery and conjecture. It might have remained consigned to the post-holiday oblivion of all such reading had I not stumbled upon a curious and glaring omission in its pages.

The 'accursed treasure' of the title had apparently been found in the 1890s by a village priest through the decipherment of certain cryptic documents unearthed in his church. Although the purported texts of two of these documents were reproduced, the 'secret messages' said to be encoded within them were not. The implication was that the deciphered messages had again been lost. And yet, as I found, a cursory study of the documents reproduced in the book reveals at least one concealed message. Surely the author had found it. In working on his book he must have given the documents more than fleeting attention. He was bound, therefore, to have found what I had found. Moreover the message was exactly the kind of titillating snippet of 'proof' that helps to sell a 'pop' paperback. Why had M. de Sède not published it?

During the ensuing months the oddity of the story and the possibility of further discoveries drew me back to it from time to time. The appeal was that of a rather more than usually intriguing crossword puzzle - with the added curiosity of de Sède's silence. As I caught tantalising new glimpses of layers of meaning buried within the text of the documents, I began to wish I could devote more to the

mystery of Rennes-le-Château than mere moments snatched from my working life as a writer for television. And so, in the late autumn of 1970, I presented the story as a possible documentary subject to the late Paul Johnstone, executive producer of the BBC's historical and archaeological series 'Chronicle'.

Paul saw the possibilities, and I was dispatched to France to talk to de Sède and explore the prospects for a short film. During Christmas week of 1970 I met de Sède in Paris. At that first meeting, I asked the question which had nagged at me for more than a year, 'Why didn't you publish the message hidden in the parchments?' His reply astounded me. 'What message?'

It seemed to me inconceivable that he was unaware of this elementary message. Why was he fencing with me? Suddenly I found myself reluctant to reveal exactly what I had found. We continued an elliptical verbal fencing match for a few minutes. It thus became apparent that we were both aware of the message. I repeated my question, 'Why didn't you publish it?' This time de Sède's answer was calculated, 'Because we thought it might interest someone like you to find it for yourself.'

That reply, as cryptic as the priest's mysterious documents, was the first clear hint that the mystery of Rennes-le-Château was to prove much more than a simple tale of lost treasure.

With my director, Andrew Maxwell-Hyslop, I began to prepare a 'Chronicle' film in the spring of 1971. It was planned as a simple twenty-minute item for a magazine programme. But as we worked de Sède began to feed us further fragments of information. First came the full text of a major encoded message, which spoke of the painters Poussin and Teniers. This was fascinating. The cipher was unbelievably complex. We were told it had been broken by experts of the French Army Cipher Department, using computers. As I studied the convolutions of the code, I

became convinced that this explanation was, to say the least, suspect. I checked with cipher experts of British Intelligence. They agreed with me. 'The cipher does not present a valid problem for a computer.' The code was unbreakable. Someone, somewhere, must have the key.

And then de Sède dropped his second bombshell. A tomb resembling that in Poussin's famous painting, 'Les Bergers d'Arcadie', had been found. He would send details 'as soon as he had them'. Some days later the photographs arrived, and it was clear that our short film on a small local mystery had begun to assume unexpected dimensions. Paul decided to abandon it and committed us to a full-length 'Chronicle' film. Now there would be more time to research and more screen time to explore the story. Transmission was postponed to the spring of the following year.

The Lost Treasure of Jerusalem? was screened in February 1972, and provoked a very strong reaction. I knew that I had found a subject of consuming interest not merely to myself, but to a very large viewing public. Further research would not be self-indulgence. At some time there would have to be a follow-up film. By 1974 I had a mass of new material and Paul assigned Roy Davies to produce my second 'Chronicle' film, *The Priest, the Painter and the Devil*. Again the reaction of the public proved how much the story had caught the popular imagination. But by now it had grown so complex, so far-reaching in its ramifications, that I knew the detailed research was rapidly exceeding the capabilities of any one person. There were too many different leads to follow. The more I pursued one line of investigation, the more conscious I became of the mass of material being neglected. It was at this daunting juncture that Chance, which had first tossed the story so casually into my lap, now made sure that the work would not become bogged down.

In 1975, at a summer school where we were both lecturing on aspects of literature, I had the great good

fortune to meet Richard Leigh. Richard is a novelist and short-story writer with post-graduate degrees in Comparative Literature and a deep knowledge of history, philosophy, psychology and esoterica. He had been working for some years as a university lecturer in the United States, Canada and Britain.

Between our summer-school talks we spent many hours discussing subjects of mutual interest. I mentioned the Knights Templar, who had assumed an important role in the background to the mystery of Rennes-le-Château. To my delight, I found that this shadowy order of medieval warrior-monks had already awakened Richard's profound interest, and he had done considerable research into their history. At one stroke months of work which I had seen stretching ahead of me became unnecessary. Richard could answer most of my queries, and was as intrigued as I was by some of the apparent anomalies I had unearthed. More importantly, he too saw the fascination and sensed the significance of the whole research project on which I had embarked. He offered to help me with the aspect involving the Templars. And he brought in Michael Baigent, a psychology graduate who had recently abandoned a successful career in photo-journalism to devote his time to researching the Templars for a film project he had in mind.

Had I set out to search for them, I could not have found two better qualified and more congenial partners with whom to form a team. After years of solitary labour the impetus brought to the project by two fresh brains was exhilarating. The first tangible result of our collaboration was the third 'Chronicle' film on Rennes-le-Château, *The Shadow of the Templars*, which was produced by Roy Davies in 1979.

The work which we did on that film at last brought us face to face with the underlying foundations upon which the entire mystery of Rennes-le-Château had been built. But the film could only hint at what we were beginning to

discern. Beneath the surface was something more startling, more significant and more immediately relevant than we could have believed possible when we began our work on the 'intriguing little mystery' of what a French priest might have found in a mountain village.

In 1972 I closed my first film with the words, 'Something extraordinary is waiting to be found ... and in the not too distant future, it will be.'

This book explains what that 'something' is - and how extraordinary the discovering has been.

H.L.
January 17th, 1981

Map 1 The Major Sites of Investigation in France



INTRODUCTION, 1996

For reasons the reader will appreciate after reading it, we wanted *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* to be released on 17 January. That year, unfortunately, 17 January fell on a Sunday. The book accordingly appeared a day later, 18 January, 1982, in Britain. The American edition followed on 26 February, also a day off talismanically. During the month or so subsequent to publication in both countries, we found ourselves embroiled in an increasingly bizarre media circus.

We had written a book which we guessed would probably be controversial. We expected it to be criticised in the usual way - in reviews, for example, by the vested theological and historical interests we had implicitly challenged. We certainly didn't expect more attention than publications tend generally to receive. To our bewilderment, however, we found ourselves attracting as much celebrity - or, to be more accurate, notoriety - as if we'd personally attempted a *coup d'état* at the Vatican. We didn't just elicit reviews. We also attained certifiable shock-horror status as a news story - a full-fledged news story, which actually made the front pages of sundry newspapers.

It was, admittedly, a quiet time. The pre-Christmas turbulence in Poland had given way if not quite to calm, then at least to the kind of robotic docility prevailing elsewhere in the Soviet imperium. No public figures had been shot of late. Argentina had not yet invaded the Falklands. In the absence of anything more catastrophic to galvanise popular attention, we became darlings of the media. Responses and reactions assumed torrential proportions, pouring in the letters columns of newspapers, to our publishers and agent, to ourselves. So diverse was the spectrum of opinion that it seemed to be referring to a number of altogether different books. At one extreme, there was praise on a scale epitomised by a letter extolling our opus as 'the greatest work of the century' - an assessment with which, alas, we couldn't honestly concur. At the opposite extreme, there were statements which, albeit less succinctly implied it might well be the worst. Seldom in recent publishing history have so many Don Quixotes tilted so vigorously against one small windmill.

Much of the rumpus was precipitated by the BBC's *Omnibus*, on which we were improbably interviewed by a film critic, Barry Norman. He could not, of course, be expected to have much greater knowledge of our subject matter than the average layman. In consequence, he was

accompanied by two officially recognised experts, the historian Marina Warner and the then Bishop of Birmingham, Hugh Montefiore. Somewhat naively, with a trusting lamb-being-led-to-slaughter acquiescence, we had accepted an invitation to appear on the programme. The producer had earnestly assured us that we'd be participating in a 'discussion' - one that would permit some serious exploration of our book's hypothetical conclusions. His definition of a 'discussion' seemed to us somewhat idiosyncratic. For us, and probably for most people, the word 'ambush' would more accurately convey what ensued.

Barry Norman hurriedly summarised something which bore only a tenuous resemblance to the work we had written. We were then confronted with a prearranged scroll of charges long enough to sanction an immediate *auto-da-fé* of both our book and ourselves. Marina Warner comported herself responsibly, concentrating on specific scholarly points and seeming rather abashed by the executioner's rôle assigned to her. She subsequently expressed her embarrassment at having been lured into the 'attempted mugging'. The Bishop of Birmingham, however, displayed no such Christian compunction.

We found ourselves subjected to a veritable blitz. Broad generalities and pedantic trivialities were launched against us like a Luftwaffe of flies. We could have swatted most of them. We did, in fact, swat a great many. But it takes only a moment for a voice, arrogating the resonance of authority, to stigmatise a book - to label it irresponsible, implausible, poorly researched or simply bad. It takes rather longer to refute such charges. One must do so point by point, citing specific examples. One must become embroiled in minutiae and academic quibbles that do not make for good television, for good television revels more in dramatic bloodbaths than in dry exchanges of information. For every half-dozen objections raised by our critics in the studio, we were allowed to reply to only one; and when the

programme was transmitted, even our replies had been pruned. Each of us was edited down to one or two perfunctory comments, and that was all. In consequence, the 'discussion' witnessed by BBC viewers was very different from the 'discussion' that actually occurred in the studio. A number of people observed afterwards that it seemed we'd not been given much chance to speak. In reality, we'd been given slightly more chance than was apparent, but most of what we said had ended up on the cutting-room floor.

Such things, of course, constantly happen in the world of television - a world with which we were sufficiently familiar not to be unduly surprised. The pity of it was that some magnificently comic moments were irretrievably lost. At one point, for example, Barry Norman asked the Bishop of Birmingham whether such books as ours were potentially 'dangerous'. 'Absolutely,' replied the bishop, who had only read the last two chapters of it. Our book, he declared, was a shameless exploitation of sex and sensationalism. A stunned silence descended on the studio. Sex? Had we written a book about sex? We gaped at one another in stupefaction, half-wondering whether a deranged printer had bound a few pages of the *Kama Sutra* into our text, or replaced one of our illustrations with a picture of a nude Templar. As far as we could gauge, our book, on a scale of sexiness, ranked somewhere below the Turin Shroud - which is, after all, a full-frontal portrait of a naked man, but has never attracted much prurient interest.

Barry Norman twitched his head, as if to shake water out of his ear. Marina Warner looked manifestly embarrassed. Somewhat ironically, we attempted to ascertain precisely which book the bishop had read. Before we could do so, the heavens intervened in the form of a humble technician, who hurried into the studio and requested us to shoot the scene again. Something had gone wrong, he explained - a gremlin had apparently

unsprocketed some technical apparatus. Barry Norman accordingly repeated the question. The bishop by now had realised that instead of moistening his fingers with the tip of his tongue, he'd jammed both hands and feet into his mouth simultaneously. Given a second opportunity, he retreated as fast as his tongue could carry him. Was our book potentially 'dangerous'? Not at all, he replied with seraphic serenity. On the contrary, he was confident that Christianity would prove sufficiently robust to withstand the challenge we had posed. As we harboured no particular desire to demolish Christianity, we did not presume to doubt his optimism.

This entire sequence, and a number of others, were entirely excised from what was transmitted. But if the *Omnibus* editing struck us as less than honourable, that could be ascribed to various extenuating circumstances - the format of the programme, the shortage of time, the exigencies of television as a medium. And we had, after all, written a book which we knew would be subject to attack and distortion. What cannot be excused, however, was the producer's apparent attempt to make the Duke of Devonshire look ridiculous, which seemed to have been a *cause célèbre* on his part. In our book - and the wording is very precise - we state that certain members of the Devonshire family seem to have been privy to suggestive fragments of information. This statement was based on material dating from the eighteenth century, as well as on remarks made by a member of the Devonshire family today - by a member of a collateral branch of the family, not directly connected with the duke at all. We had patiently and painstakingly explained this to our producer, who had pressed us insistently on the matter. But he was bent on exhuming some sensational 'English angle', and rather overzealously trundled out to Chatsworth to interview the Duke of Devonshire personally. In order to maximise the drama, he appeared to have confronted the duke with an

assertion we never made. According to a forthcoming book, His Grace was told, the Devonshires were directly descended from Jesus. Not surprisingly, the duke was mortified. 'Absolutely obnoxious!' he replied indignantly. Because we had not made it, the assertion to which he was replying had to be cut from the transmission. The television viewer only saw His Grace answering 'Absolutely obnoxious!' to something quite unspecified. Someone might have been asking him about French naval tactics at the Battle of Quiberon Bay in 1759, or the quality of modern English tweed.

During the *Omnibus* interview, the Bishop of Birmingham charged us with no less than '79 errors of fact' in two chapters - the two chapters, that is, which he had read. This indictment, issuing from so august a figure, seemed to be authoritative - an unimpugnable judgment pronounced by the Voice of Truth Itself, and therefore definitively damning. It was accordingly seized by the newspapers, by radio and television, and disseminated across the world. 'You were attacked by a bishop,' someone reported anxiously, ringing us long-distance from the United States. 'Are you in any danger?'

We were not unduly alarmed by the prospect of an episcopal assault team - a cadre of mitred commandos with crosiers converted into blow-pipes and SAS balaclavas above flowing copes and stoles. Yet the charge of 79 errors, when it was first levelled against us, took us momentarily aback. Could we really have got 79 things wrong? We must confess to a fleeting disquiet, an instant of self-doubt. But within the week, the bishop deigned to send us a typed list of the 79 errors he claimed to have found. It was a singular document indeed. The bishop *had*, admittedly, discovered four genuine errors of fact. We had mistakenly said that Palestine, in Jesus' era, was divided into two provinces. As the bishop correctly observed, it was actually divided into one province and two tetrarchies. We had mistakenly

ascribed the origin of Jesus' image as a carpenter to Luke's Gospel. As the bishop correctly observed, it actually derives from Mark's. A careless compositor, whose slip we had overlooked in proof-reading, had placed Julius Africanus in the third century rather than in the first; and our manuscript, which alluded to 'the Greek city of Ephesus', had got altered, presumably by a copy editor, to 'the city of Ephesus in Greece'. Ephesus, of course, is in Asia Minor.

On these four points, we could only plead guilty. The bishop was right - we had been in error, and we duly accepted his corrections. But what of the other 75 'errors of fact' for which the media, quoting the bishop, were vociferously taking us to task? Virtually all of them proved not to be errors of fact at all, but errors of faith - or, more specifically, issues of contention and interpretation still being debated by scholars - and we had 'erred' only to the extent that we deviated from established tradition. For example, the bishop listed as 'errors of fact' a number of statements about which, as he said, 'there is much argument', and the explanation we offered 'does not have the support of most scholars' - meaning, of course, the orthodox scholars whom he found most congenial. Then, too, the bishop included in his list of errors our citation of an apocryphal text he did not know and could not find in his library, even though it was readily available in both hardcover and paperback. In other words, it was our 'error' that the bishop's library lacked this particular text. At another point, the bishop had labelled as an error a reference that made no sense to him - because he had not read the earlier chapters of our book, where the meaning was explained. Finally, the bishop castigated as erroneous our assertion that the Gospels 'are historical documents like any other'. 'No,' he declared, 'they are unique documents, telling the good news of Christ under the form of history.' Whatever this might mean, it could hardly incriminate us for a factual error. If we had erred at all, it

was simply because we did not share the bishop's view of the Gospels.

These, then, were the issues from which the Bishop of Birmingham condemned us. They render the damning charge of '79 errors of fact' somewhat puerile, not to say misleading. Yet much of the criticism from the theological establishment was of essentially the same order. In our book, we had addressed ourselves to matters of historical possibility, historical probability and, whenever facts were available, historical fact. Our theological critics, most of whom had little historical background, could only assail us from the standpoint of faith. Faith is not the best perspective for appraising history, but many of our critics had no choice. We had, it seemed to them, implicitly challenged vested interests which they felt obliged to defend, however wobbly the foundations of their arguments. 'Your book hasn't met with a favourable response from Church authorities,' radio and television interviewers would say to us earnestly and fatuously. As if things could possibly have been otherwise. As if every bishop in Christendom might have been expected to say 'Fair cop' and summarily surrender his mitre.

We were also chastised for having speculated. We readily admitted it. We had propounded what we explicitly declared to be no more than a hypothesis; and hypotheses must necessarily rest on speculation. The sheer scarcity of reliable information on biblical matters obliges any researcher of the subject to speculate - if, that is, he is not to remain mute. Granted, one must not speculate wildly. One must confine one's speculation to the framework of known historical information. Within this framework, however, one has no choice but to speculate - to *interpret* the meagre and often opaque evidence that exists. All biblical scholarship entails speculation, as does theology. The Gospels are sketchy, ambiguous and often contradictory documents. During the course of the last two

thousand years, people have argued, even waged wars over what particular passages might mean. In the coalescence of Christian tradition, one principle has consistently obtained. Confronted by any of the numerous ambiguities in scripture, ecclesiastical authorities would *speculate* about its meaning. Their conclusions, once accepted, were enshrined as dogma and - quite erroneously - came to be regarded over the centuries as established fact. Such conclusions, however, are not fact at all. On the contrary, they are speculation and interpretation congealed into a tradition; and it is this tradition that is constantly mistaken for fact.

A single example should serve to illustrate the process. According to all four Gospels, Pilate alludes to Jesus as 'King of the Jews', and an inscription of that title is affixed to the cross. But this is all the Gospels tell us. They offer no indication of whether the title was warranted or not - no indication of whether Jesus had or made a claim to such a kingship. At some point in the past, it was merely assumed that the title must have been intended mockingly. This assumption was based on speculative interpretation. Yet most Christians today blindly accept as established fact that the title was indeed conferred in derision. But it is not established fact at all. If one reads the Gospels with no preconceptions whatever, there is nothing to suggest the title wasn't used in all seriousness, wasn't perfectly legitimate. In the nativity, after all, we are told the three wise men come in search of the infant 'born King of the Jews', and we don't regard them as being derisive. On the contrary, their homage, and Herod's fear of being deposed by a more legitimate sovereign, would seem to suggest that Jesus did indeed possess some sort of royal pedigree, status or claim - which was recognised as such by his contemporaries, including Pilate. It is only tradition that makes this suggestion sound dubious to Christian commentators today. To assert that Jesus might in reality

have been 'King of the Jews' is not, therefore, to be at variance with the evidence. It is merely to be at variance with a long-established tradition, a long-established canon of beliefs based ultimately on someone's speculative interpretation.

'You can't prove your conclusions.' This was another indictment levelled against us by interviewers and theological critics - as if we might have been expected to produce a sworn affidavit signed by Jesus himself, duly witnessed and duly notarised. Of course we couldn't 'prove' our conclusions. As we stressed repeatedly in the book itself, we were simply posing a hypothesis. Had we been able to 'prove' it, it wouldn't have been an hypothesis, but a fact; and there would have been no controversy at all, only a sensational revelation and *fait accompli*. But what, in the present context, *would* constitute genuine 'proof'? Can such 'proof' be found for any issue of consequence in the New Testament? Obviously not. So far as the New Testament is concerned, there is nothing that can be definitively 'proved'. It cannot even be 'proved' that Jesus ever existed as a historical personage. Certain writers, past and present, have argued, sometimes persuasively, that he didn't.

The question of 'proof' is ultimately beside the point. Given the scarcity of both documentary and archaeological testimony, there is very little, if anything, that can be 'proved' about Jesus. The most the researcher has at his disposal is *evidence*, and evidence is not the same thing as 'proof'. Evidence, in the context of New Testament studies, cannot 'prove' anything. It can only suggest greater or lesser possibilities, greater or lesser plausibilities. One must survey the available evidence, assess it, interpret it and draw responsible conclusions from it - that a particular sequence of events, for instance, is *more likely* to have occurred than various others. If this criterion is employed, the matter becomes one of common sense and what we

know of the human condition. It is quite simply more likely that a man would have married, fathered children and attempted to gain a throne than that he would have been born of a virgin, walked on water and risen from the dead.

Contrary to the assertions of both theologians and interviewers, such a statement does not constitute 'an attack on the very core of Christianity and the Christian ethos'. The core of Christianity and the Christian ethos resides in Jesus' teachings. Those teachings are, in many respects, unique. They promulgate values and attitudes that had not previously been expressed on the stage of human history. It is to that extent that they comprise of the 'new message', the 'good news' for humankind, and are valid in themselves. They do not need miraculous biographical details to support them - especially not the kind of miraculous biographical details that characterised rival deities throughout the ancient world. If the teachings *do* require such details, it suggests one of two things - either there is something seriously defective in the teachings or, more likely, there is something defective in the believer's faith. Any thoughtful Christian would concur that Jesus' primary significance resides in the message he sought to communicate. That message would hardly be vitiated if it proved to have issued from a man who was also a husband and a father. Neither would it be any more valid if it issued from a celibate.

The high-level theologians and ecclesiastics who attacked us were almost all Protestant. In fact, the majority were Anglicans, like the Bishop of Birmingham. It is clear, of course, what the Roman Catholic Church would have liked to do to us, and would have been able to do to us in a former age. Being thwarted today of such incendiary ambitions, the Catholic hierarchy had the wisdom to remain sonorously silent and thereby refrain from granting us additional publicity. But an important ex-functionary in the Church confided to us personally that the upper