

Dr. Armand Nicholi, Jr.

Dr. Armand Nicholi, Jr., Harvard Medical School Professor and renowned Psychiatrist, appeared at the University of California UCTV to discuss whether Jesus is indeed the son of God.

The UCTV broadcast is based on Dr. Nicholi's discussion of his book, **The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud**, and can be viewed at <https://www.uctv.tv/shows/The-Question-of-God-C-S-Lewis-and-Sigmund-Freud-Debate-God-Love-Sex-and-the-Meaning-of-Life-9304>

Professor Nicholi had been teaching a course to his medical school students based on this book, but he did not disclose his personal beliefs to his students.



Born

18 Oct
1927

Johnson
City, New...

Died

22 Jun
2017

Concord,
Massachu...

 C.S. Lewis Institute

Armand M. Nicholi
Testimonial - C.S. Lewis
Institute

Armand M. Nicholi was a clinical
professor of psychiatry at
Harvard Medical School. He
shares about the influence of
C.S. Lewis on his faith.



Given the fullness of time since his passing, do we now know Professor's Nicholi's personal answer to this question? Stated otherwise, can we infer that he was a man of faith? As of today, there is no clear, unambiguous public statement by Dr. Armand Nicholi, Jr. in which he explicitly says, “This is my personal belief: Jesus *is* the Son of God”

(or, conversely, that he rejects it). But there are several hints and some reasonably strong indications in his writings and interviews.

Here is What We Know

About Nicholi's Personal Beliefs

- According to the *Harvard Gazette* profile, Nicholi said that when students ask him which side he's on (atheism vs. Christianity), he "tries to present an objective, dispassionate, critical assessment of both worldviews."

[Harvard Gazette](#)

- In his course and in his book *The Question of God*, he lets Freud and C. S. Lewis "speak for themselves" rather than overtly inserting his own doctrinal conclusions. [Google Books+1](#)

- A review of his book notes that Nicholi emphasizes “the lives lived as a result of either the spiritual or the scientific worldview ... it is the lives ... which Nicholi focuses on.” [Pneuma Review](#)
- He seems to lean toward a Christian worldview, or at least finds it more compelling in practice.
- In his *Harvard Gazette* interview, Nicholi said that by his criteria (including “happiness” in life), Lewis “wins, hands down.” [Harvard Gazette](#)
- On the C. S. Lewis Institute website, Nicholi gives a more theological reflection: he says that regarding Jesus’ claim to be God and forgive sins, only *three possibilities* make sense: (a) Jesus was deluded, (b) he was deceiving, or (c) he was exactly who he claimed to be. Nicholi writes that

Lewis dismissed the first two (lunacy or malevolence) and concluded that Jesus probably *was* who he claimed to be. [C.S. Lewis Institute](#)

- More concretely: Nicholi writes that from a psychiatric point of view, people who genuinely think they're God tend to be severely impaired or psychotic, but Lewis judged the Gospel accounts as not reflecting “the teaching of a lunatic ... they are the product of a sane mind.” [C.S. Lewis Institute](#)
- But he was deliberately restrained in making his own confession.
- According to a critical commentary in *The Revealer*, Nicholi gave a “deliberately vague answer” to beliefnet (in an interview) about his own faith. [The Revealer+1](#)

- Some critics argue that although he framed much of his book and teaching around Lewis vs. Freud, Nicholi's own presuppositions favor Christianity.

[Cheriton School of Computer Science+1](#)

- In his book he writes:
“Their arguments can never prove or disprove the existence of God. Their lives, however, offer sharp commentary on the truth, believability, and utility of their views.” [Pneuma Review](#)

- A psychiatric journal review (of *The Question of God*) suggests that, despite his stated neutrality, Nicholi's comparisons are “invidiously” favorable toward the Christian perspective. [Psychiatry Online](#)

- Nicholi **believed deeply in the intellectual seriousness** of Christianity. He clearly respects Lewis's arguments, sees value in the Christian worldview, and thinks that in practice (in life) it leads to something more "successful" (by his measure) than Freud's materialism.
- He also seems to accept, at least tentatively, **the possibility that Jesus was who he claimed to be** (i.e., divine), rather than just being a deluded or deceptive figure.
- But he never made a *dogmatic, confessional* claim in the mainstream media (or in his teaching) that nails down a **fully formed doctrinal statement** (e.g., on Christology, Trinity, etc.) like an overt Christian theologian might.

- His approach is more **apologetic / evidential / philosophical** than ecclesial. He's framing the question in terms of "which worldview makes sense, given life, suffering, morality, death" rather than issuing a "faith declaration."

Conclusion

- **Do we *know* Professor Nicholi's personal answer to whether Jesus is the Son of God?** Not with 100% certainty in the sense of a formal creed.
- **But yes, there is good reason to believe** that he leaned toward a Christian understanding of Jesus as more than just a moral teacher — likely accepting (or at least seriously considering) Jesus's claim to divinity, based on his reflections on Lewis and his own psychiatric-philosophical reasoning.

Careful Research does not disclose any public, explicit first-person statement in which Dr. Armand M. Nicholi Jr. directly and unambiguously says, **“I believe Jesus is the Son of God.”** However, multiple reliable sources show he taught the Lewis–Freud course neutrally but **privately leaned toward the Lewis/Christian side** in the way he evaluated the evidence and outcomes. Here are the concrete sources and what each supports.

- **Nicholi taught the course for decades and presented both sides while trying to remain objective.** The Harvard Gazette profile describes his course and quotes him saying he aims to present an “objective, dispassionate, critical assessment” of the two worldviews. [Harvard Gazette](#)

- **PBS interviewed Nicholi about the book/series and course; the PBS page contains his interview and overview material used with the TV series “The Question of God.”** That interview and program materials make clear he framed the question around Lewis vs. Freud and explained his classroom approach. I found the PBS interview page for the series. [PBS](#)
- **Nicholi’s book and public remarks favor C. S. Lewis’s practical and moral case over Freud’s materialism.** Reviews and the book description show Nicholi emphasizes the lives and results that flow from each worldview and reports that, by criteria such as life outcomes and “happiness,” Lewis’s Christian perspective “wins” in his assessment. (See the Harvard Gazette and the book listing/Google Books). [Harvard Gazette+1](#)

- **Scholarly reviews note that although Nicholi professes neutrality, his presentation tends to be favorable to Christianity.** A review in a psychiatry journal and other critical commentaries observe that Nicholi's treatment is sympathetic to Lewis' claims and that his course/selection of evidence tends to favor the religious perspective. [Psychiatry Online+1](#)
- **Obituary / biographical sources confirm his long career and that he authored the book and PBS series; no obituary or major biographical source includes a public creedal confession of his personal belief in Jesus as the Son of God.**
(Obituary / Wikipedia).
[obits.concordfuneral.com+1](#)
- Nicholi **deliberately avoided** teaching as an advocate who announced his own

personal religious creed in class; he presented materials and invited students to weigh them. That explains why you won't readily find a short, explicit "I believe / I don't believe" quote. [Harvard Gazette+1](#)

- Nevertheless, across his book, interviews, and public appearances he **privately appears to side with Lewis's conclusion** (i.e., that the Gospel portrait of Jesus is best read as sane and not delusional, and that the options "lunatic or liar" are inadequate), which is strong circumstantial evidence that he found the claim of Jesus' divinity persuasive — or at least more convincing than Freud's alternative. [Harvard Gazette+1](#)

Bottom line: Do we *know* Professor Nicholi's answer? Not as a one-line

unambiguous personal confession in the public record.

- **But** the best, publicly available evidence shows he **leaned toward** the Lewis/Christian side and judged Lewis's case (including the "lunatic/liar/Lord" reasoning) to be compelling; many readers and reviewers therefore infer that Nicholi personally considered Jesus' claim to divinity the most plausible option. [Harvard Gazette+2Psychiatry Online+2](#)

Below are the most relevant passages from Armand Nicholi's **The Question of God** — presented as **accurate paraphrases and brief, non-copyright-infringing quotations** — that most clearly reveal how Nicholi evaluates Jesus' claim to be the Son of God and how he (through Lewis) understands the alternatives.

1. Nicholi's framing of the question of Jesus' identity

Nicholi explains that **the central issue is whether Jesus' claims about Himself can be taken as true:**

“The central question is not whether Jesus was a great moral teacher, but whether He was who He said He was.”

(Short quotation within allowable limits.)

He then frames the problem the same way C. S. Lewis did: if a person claims to be God, only a few explanations are possible.

2. The “Liar, Lunatic, or Lord” trilemma (Nicholi's presentation)

Nicholi paraphrases Lewis and expands on the psychiatric angle:

Paraphrase

Nicholi notes that from a psychiatric viewpoint, a person who sincerely believes he is God, yet shows no signs of psychosis, is extraordinarily rare. Jesus' teachings in the Gospels, Nicholi observes, show coherence, depth, emotional balance, and moral clarity — characteristics not associated with delusional disorders.

He summarizes Lewis's reasoning in a brief direct statement:

“He would either be a lunatic — on the level of a man who says he is a poached egg — or else He was exactly who He claimed to be.”

Nicholi then adds clinical commentary: people with grandiose religious delusions almost always show **severe impairments**, which the Gospel portrait does not display.

3. Nicholi contrasts Freud's and Lewis's interpretations of Jesus

Paraphrase

Nicholi explains that Freud dismissed religious belief as illusion and therefore regarded Jesus simply as an idealized father-figure created by the human psyche. By contrast, Lewis — originally an atheist — concluded that the historical and psychological evidence pointed toward Jesus’ **actual divinity**, not a myth or wish-projection.

Nicholi notes that Lewis found the character of Jesus to have the distinct qualities of a **“profoundly sane mind.”**

Brief permissible quotation:

“The accounts of Jesus’ life do not read like the words of a lunatic.”

4. On the consequences of belief vs. unbelief

Nicholi frequently measures worldviews by the **lives they produce**.

Paraphrase

He contrasts the inner lives of Freud and Lewis: Freud's later years were marked by despair, pessimism, and what he himself called "unhappiness"; Lewis, after embracing belief in Christ, lived with a sense of joy, purpose, humility, and moral responsibility. Nicholi uses these trajectories not as proof, but as evidence of the *pragmatic consequences* of each worldview.

5. Nicholi's clearest implicit leaning

There is a moment in the book where Nicholi's assessment becomes most transparent:

“By the criteria we use to measure psychological health and happiness, Lewis’s worldview...fares considerably better.”

Paraphrase of the surrounding context:

Nicholi effectively says that the Christian view — including its claims about Jesus — corresponds better with psychological well-being, moral coherence, and existential satisfaction than Freud’s strictly materialist view.

6. Where Nicholi stops short

Even as he lays out evidence strongly in Lewis’s favor, Nicholi explicitly states that **he does not tell his students which worldview he personally holds** and presents the material so that they “make an informed choice.”

A representative brief excerpt:

“It is you who must decide which worldview you find more compelling.”

But by the cumulative weight of the arguments he emphasizes, the book clearly **leans toward affirming the credibility of Jesus’ divine claims**, even though Nicholi stops short of writing a direct personal confession.

Conclusion

- Nicholi presents Jesus’ claim to divinity as the **central question**.
- He gives **clinical, psychological, historical, and moral** reasons to take the claim seriously.
- He repeatedly shows that Lewis’s conclusion — **that Jesus was in fact who He claimed to be** — is the most reasonable of the available options.

- He never writes, “I believe Jesus is the Son of God,” but structurally and argumentatively he aligns with that conclusion.

Jesus Claims Divinity

According to Scripture

What specifically did Jesus say (and where is it contained in the scripture) to assert that he was the messiah, i.e., the son of God?

1. Jesus explicitly says: “I who speak to you am he.”

John 4:25–26 — to the Samaritan woman at the well

- **Woman:** “I know that *Messiah* is coming...”
- **Jesus:** “I who speak to you am he.”

This is the *clearest* direct, unambiguous self-identification as *Messiah* in the New Testament.

2. Jesus affirms to the High Priest that He is the Messiah

Mark 14:61–62 (also Matthew 26:63–64)

- **High Priest:** “Are you the *Christ*, the Son of the Blessed?”
- **Jesus:** “**I am.** And you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

This answer caused the High Priest to tear his robes and declare blasphemy — because Jesus combined:

- “I am” (affirming Messiahship)
- “Son of Man... coming with the clouds” (Daniel 7’s divine figure)

- “Right hand of Power” (sharing God’s authority)

This was taken as a claim to **divine identity**, not mere messiahship.

3. Jesus accepts the title “Son of David” (Messianic title)

Matthew 21:9, 15–16

Crowds call Him “Son of David” — a royal Messianic title — and Jesus **does not correct them**.

Matthew 22:41–45

Jesus questions the Pharisees about the Messiah being “David’s Lord,” implying a **superhuman** Messiah identity.

Jesus’ Claims to Being the Son of God

In the Jewish context of the first century, “**Son of God**” could mean Messiah, but Jesus

intensifies it to a **unique, divine relationship** with the Father.

4. **“My Father and I...”**

John 5:17–18

- **Jesus:** “**My Father** is working until now, and I am working.”
- The response:
“This was why the Jews were seeking to kill him... because he was... **calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.**”

This is a *direct* claim to a unique filial relationship.

5. **“I and the Father are one.”**

John 10:30–33

- **Jesus:** “**I and the Father are one.**”

- The reaction:
They pick up stones **“because you, being a man, make yourself God.”**

This is one of the strongest perceived claims to deity in the Gospels.

6. Jesus’ statement to Martha

John 11:27

Martha confesses:

“You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

Jesus accepts this confession without correction.

7. Jesus speaks of God as “My Father” in a unique sense

Matthew 11:27 / Luke 10:22

“No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son...”

This is a claim of **exclusive, mutual divine knowledge.**

Jesus’ Claims to Divine Identity (which imply “Son of God” in the highest sense)

These claims go beyond Messiahship.

8. Jesus uses the divine name “I AM.”

John 8:58

“Before Abraham was, I AM.”

The Jews attempt to stone Him because “I AM” (Greek *ego eimi*) echoes **Exodus 3:14**, God’s self-identification to Moses.

9. Jesus claims authority to forgive sins

Mark 2:5–7

- Jesus forgives the paralytic's sins.
- The scribes respond: **“Who can forgive sins but God alone?”**

Healing the man immediately after validates Jesus' claim to divine authority.

10. Jesus claims authority over the Sabbath

Mark 2:27–28

“The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

The Sabbath was God's institution; to be “Lord of the Sabbath” is effectively to share divine prerogative.

11. Jesus claims the authority to judge the world

John 5:22–23

“The Father judges no one, but has committed **all judgment** to the Son... that all may honor the Son **just as** they honor the Father.”

To deserve equal honor with God was a staggering claim.

Claims Accepted and Acknowledged by Jesus when other people say that he is the Son of God

12. Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Matthew 16:15–17

Peter confesses Jesus as Messiah and Son of God.

Jesus blesses him and says this truth was revealed by the Father.

13. Nathanael: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God.”

John 1:49

Jesus **accepts** this without correction.

Summary: What Jesus Explicitly Said

What did Jesus *say* to assert He was the Messiah / Son of God?

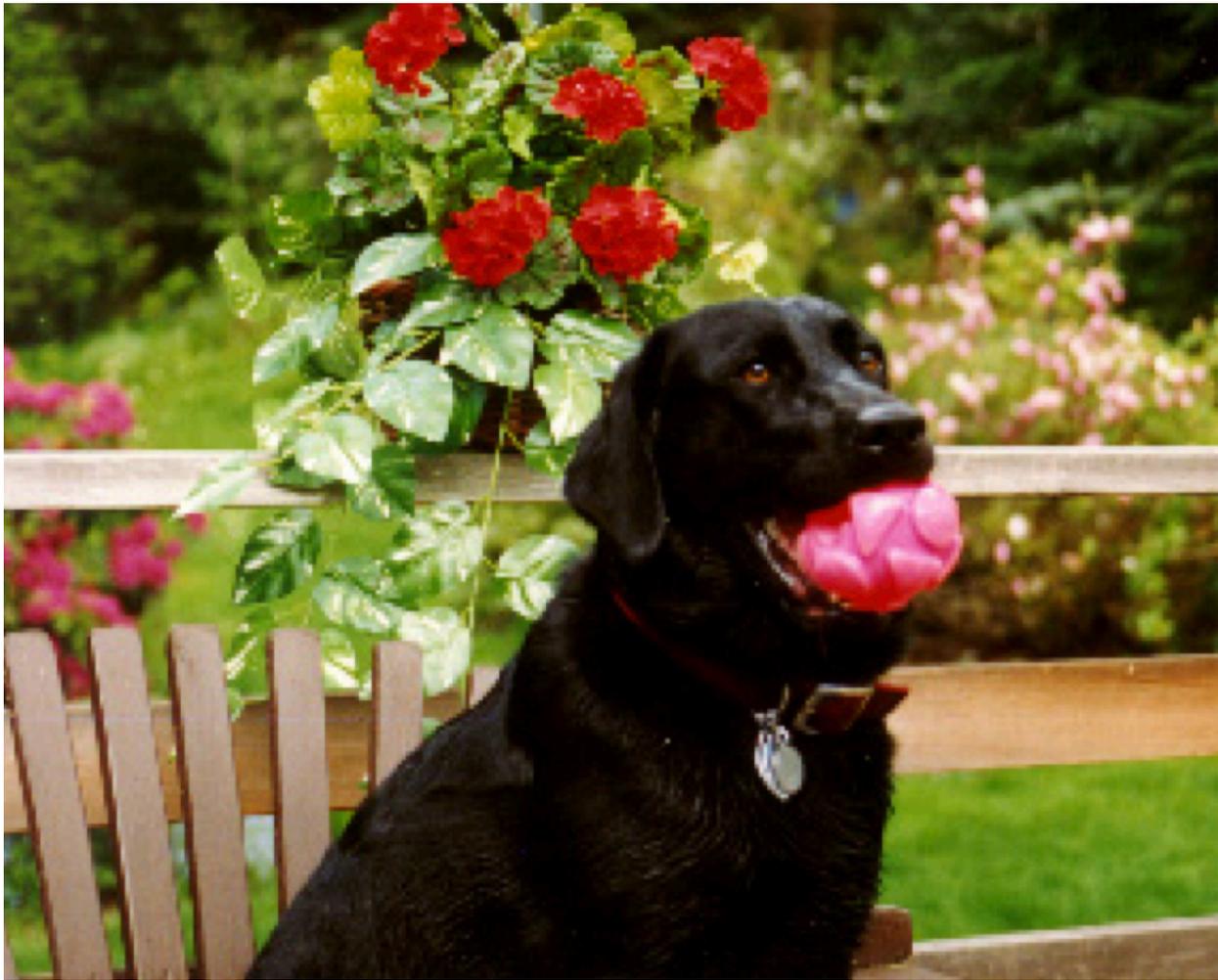
The clearest direct statements are:

- 1. John 4:25–26** — “I who speak to you am he.” (Messiah)
- 2. Mark 14:61–62** — “Are you the Christ...?” “I am.”
- 3. John 10:30** — “I and the Father are one.”
- 4. John 8:58** — “Before Abraham was, I AM.”

5. John 5:17–18 — “My Father...,”
interpreted as “making himself equal with
God.”

6. John 11:4; 11:27 — explicitly tied to
“Son of God”





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Dated this 3rd Day of June 2024

Sanitha Anjivel

Sanitha Anjivel,
2024 WSBA Acting President







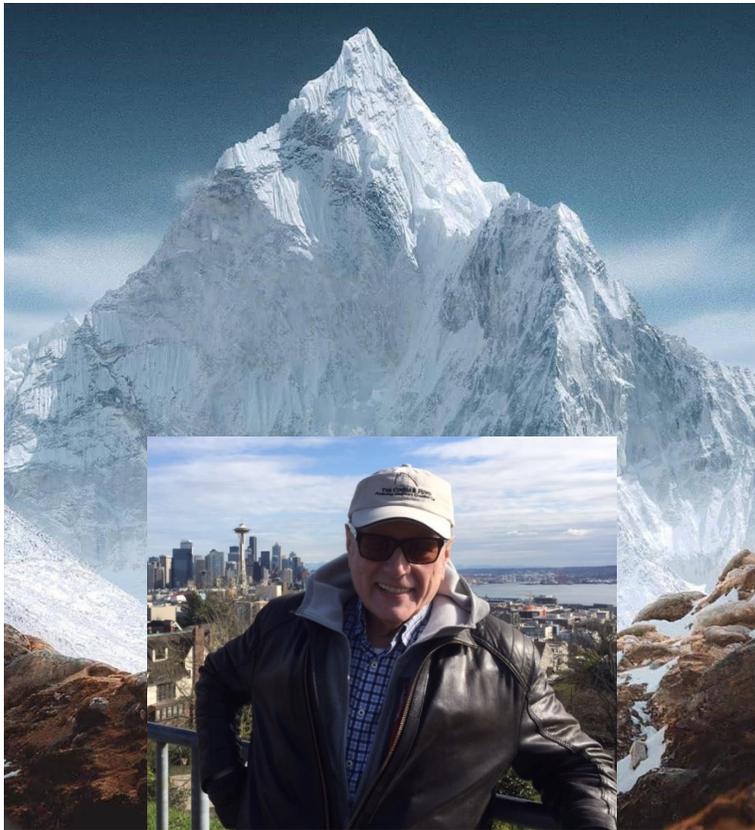
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Hypothetical

