

Cracking the Code

An Episcopal Priest Debunks the Da Vinci Code

By Father Gregory Jones

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Introduction

So what's my problem with Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*?

Is it that *The Da Vinci Code* is a run-away best seller, and will become a major motion picture for Sony – to be directed by Ron Howard? Is it that *The Da Vinci Code* criticizes the Roman Catholic Church? Or is it that *The Da Vinci Code* reasserts the rightful place of the sacred feminine? Not at all.

In fact, I was very glad to be reminded that Mary Magdalene was not the harlot she was painted to be by centuries of Roman Catholic teaching. As well, I hadn't heard that Leonardo was a homosexual, but I suppose I never really cared one way or the other. The sexuality of Leonardo Da Vinci is of no matter to me at all – for my understanding of the Gospel requires that I value him regardless of his sexuality.

So what is my problem? Well, my problem with *The Da Vinci Code* is that the book blurs the lines between fiction and fact – in a way that comes across to me as deceptive, false and willfully misleading. Most of all, I am troubled that many readers finish the book with grave questions about the essentials of the Christian faith and Church history. As a pastor, and a public Christian authority, I have spoken with countless numbers of confused people – who have read the book, and simply don't know what to make of the supposedly factual remarks by the book's scholarly characters. People don't know what to make of the claim to factuality made in the title pages of the hard-cover edition. People in my church, all of whom are normally highly educated, don't know what in the book is true and what is pure fiction.

Now, I wouldn't normally be offended by a work of fiction. Indeed, I like historical fiction. James Michener, Ken Follett, and

Umberto Eco are three favorites of mine. Michener, Follett and Eco have each written books which merge bible or church history with legend and their own invention. Michener and Follett are known for a high degree of factual content in their novels, and Umberto Eco is himself a university academic.

Of the three authors I mention, Eco acts a good foil for Dan Brown. At least three of Eco's books – *Name of the Rose*, *Foucault's Pendulum* and *Baudolino* -- involve an intellectually challenging and delighting blend of invention and historical fact concerning the Church. Eco himself is rather like the real-life version of Dan Brown's Robert Langdon character. Robert Langdon *the fictional character* is a professor of the fictional discipline of "symbology." Umberto Eco *the real-life author* is a professor of the factual academic discipline of semiotics. Why Dan Brown creates a phony academic discipline called symbology is hard to fathom, given that academia already has disciplines called iconology and semiotics. At any rate whereas Eco is an agnostic with great knowledge of Christian theology and history, Brown appears to have an axe to grind with the church, but not much actual knowledge. Both authors write fiction involving the Church, the Knights Templar, Post Modern philosophy, etc.

I suppose the key difference between the two is this: Eco doesn't create his stories out of claims of fact which are completely phony or mistaken. Brown does. And what is stranger, Brown could have written pretty much the same book, without inventing any major historical facts. He could have criticized historic Christianity, taken up the cause of women, and triumphed the place of the "sacred feminine" within the factual context of real Church history. He likewise could have retold the same Holy Grail stuff – with little or no need to invent anything outside of the now vast canon of established Grail Lore. But instead of citing only historical facts, Brown makes numerous claims about historic Christianity and Christian doctrine which if he is right – undermine the essential beliefs of Christianity.

I will never have time to address every single error made by *The Da Vinci Code*, but I hope to address the things, which drove me the most nuts, by virtue of their being simply *false*. Not “false” from a “beliefs” perspective, but from that less mystical perspective of “what is known and agreed upon by all reasonable and educated persons” – regardless of religious beliefs.

And most important, perhaps, I would like to discuss the themes raised by the book, which are of great importance for Modern Christians. Most important of these are: where is the feminine side of Biblical theology and our understanding of the divine; what roles did women have in the early church of the first two or three generations; and how did the early church grapple with gnosticism, the creation of the canon of Scripture, and the eventual rise of “imperial Christianity”?

Who am I?

I am an Episcopal priest. My church traces its origins back to the apostles through the period of the English Reformation, and before that, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Celtic church in the British Isles. I have a Bachelor’s in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and a Master’s in Divinity *Cum Laude* from the Episcopalian General Theological Seminary. I received the prize for best graduate thesis for my work in church history. I am a member of the Priory in the United States of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem -- an organization headed by Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, and descended from the crusading order of Hospitallers. The Order of St. John was disbanded in England after Henry VIII, but restored by Queen Victoria. We are a brother order to the Knights of Malta, and the various members of *L’Alliance de Chevalerie des Hospitaliers de Saint Jean de Jerusalem*. As far as I know, our “ancient order” has no secrets of any importance. We support ambulances and hospitals around the

world, and in Jerusalem. We don't possess the Holy Grail – unless she's Queen Elizabeth II.

In preparing this pamphlet, I have consulted sources of either universal respect, or controversialists whose “agenda” is generally *sympathetic* to feminist scholarship and the incumbent criticisms of the Church through history.

It is helpful to go over some basic vocabulary first.

Church – In English the word derives from the Greek, Kyriokos – “the Lord’s”. In Greek the word is “ecclesia,” meaning the “assembly.” When capitalized, Church implies the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of Jesus Christ – of which there are currently many denominations and branches – but until the 11th century there was one universal body – comprised of dioceses throughout the Old World. These various incarnations of the universal church – the “church catholic or Church” – often went by the name of their patriarchal see city – the Church of Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, etc.

Catholic – Greek word, means “Universal.” Refers initially to the shared doctrines and ideas of the early Church. The term would become a kind of identifier for those Christian churches who could trace their origins to the apostles and who followed the “universally accepted doctrines and practices of the founders.” Wouldn’t refer to the Western Church – aka the Roman Catholic Church – until the 11th century.

Apostolic – Pertaining to the apostles. The apostles were those “sent out” by Jesus, commissioned to tell the Gospel (Good News) to all the world. The apostolic churches were those communities founded and nurtured by persons chosen by Christ in the flesh or in a resurrection appearance. The apostolic churches placed great authority on their loyalty and dedication to the teachings they received in the apostolic era, and which they faithfully preserved and protected.

Orthodox – Greek word, means “straight teaching.” Initially used to describe the “catholic” or “apostolic” doctrines and practices shared throughout the many cities of the early Church. The apostolic church sought to preserve the straight tradition they received, not swerving to the right or left according to the innovations of false prophets or teachers.

Gnostic – Greek. From “Gnosis, or knowledge.” Literally, a gnostic is one who “knows” and an agnostic is one who doesn’t know. Roughly between 100 BC and 300 AD there flourished in the Hellenistic world a vast multitude of philosophical “schools” and religious sects. The intersection of Greek (aka “Hellenistic”) philosophy, “Eastern” mysticism, and Jewish thought deeply influenced the early forerunners of modern Judaism and Christianity. Numerous such groups would be rejected by the rabbis and the Christian clergy – many of these called themselves “Gnostics,” in that they focused their attention on gaining the kind of divine knowledge, which alone would “save.” Typically the Gnostic schools employed complex blends of Platonic thought with various ideas from biblical and extra-biblical traditions. The influence on Christianity would be huge – and was not merely negative, as some have implied. Clearly, there is much that might be called “gnostic” in the New Testament itself.

Doctrine – Teaching.

Canon – Means, “the rule,” or “the list.” Refers to the authorized list of books in either the Old or New Testaments.

Bible – Means, the book or books. Refers to the many books of canonical scriptures.

New Testament – The 27 canonical scriptures written in Greek by the Church. Produced over a hundred years, partially accepted very early, finally “set in stone” by various Church decrees in the 300’s.

Old Testament – 39 canonical scriptures written in Hebrew by the Jews. Produced over a 1,000 years. Partially accepted very early BC . Finally set in stone in 90 AD by the Rabbinical Council of Jamnia. Yet, editions we would consider ‘complete’ existed hundreds of years before that.

Christ – Means, ‘Anointed One,’ or “Messiah.”

Chapter One: Are all Christians Roman Catholic All of a Sudden?

It is strange that the only picture of Apostolic Christianity painted by *The Da Vinci Code* is the Roman Catholic Church. Honestly, not since the 11th century have most Christians been unified in one megalithic Church institution – but *The Da Vinci Code* seems to forget the Orthodox Churches of the East and the Reformed and Protestant Churches of the West. Which is a remarkable thing to forget – half of the world’s Christians – considering that the book essentially undermines not only Roman Catholic ideas, but also basic Christian ones. The vast majority of Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants agree on the core Christian ideas which *The Da Vinci Code* calls false. Moreover, none of these key doctrines and ideas originated in Rome. *The Da Vinci Code* seems to ignore this altogether, postulating that the Church is some kind of secrets-filled empire run by henchman of the Pope in the Vatican.

Almost no mention is made of the vast reforms or progress made in the wider portion of Christianity in the past several centuries. No mention is made of how Christians have spent the past couple hundred years trying to uncover the essentials of the church’s earliest years. Modern science and a new approach to the same old scriptures have revealed again for many “progressive Christians” the highly significant roles women had in the apostolic era of the Church. Especially post-World War II, Christians have made huge strides in rediscovering just how “Jewish” the early church fathers (and mothers) were. Likewise, for many Christians, we have really peeled away years of additions and overlays to get back to a pretty good understanding of the early church and its doctrines. And amazingly – none of what we have found in the past couple centuries of digging – agnostics and believers alike mind you – corresponds with the “real truth” Dan Brown seems to offer.

Chapter Two: Leonardo Da Vinci and Art History

I took Art History in college, but I never learned that much. That's o.k. Because in the August 3, 2003 edition, the *New York Times* ran a piece by an Art Historian named Bruce Boucher – which tears *The Da Vinci Code* to shreds from a purely non-religious art history perspective. The article was entitled, "Does the Da Vinci Code Crack Leonardo?" And the answer is basically, "no."

Early in the book, *The Da Vinci Code* says:

"Da Vinci had always been an awkward subject for historians, especially in the Christian tradition. Despite the visionary's genius, he was a flamboyant homosexual and worshipper of Nature's divine order, both of which place him in a perpetual state of sin against God . . . Even Da Vinci's enormous output of breathtaking Christian art only furthered the artist's reputation for spiritual hypocrisy. Accepting hundreds of lucrative Vatican commissions, Da Vinci painted Christian themes not as an expression of his own beliefs but rather as a commercial venture—a means of funding a lavish lifestyle." (*The Da Vinci Code* 45).

The *New York Times* article demolishes these claims. First off, no curator or art historian would ever refer to the artist as "Da Vinci." The notion that an art historian would do so is absurd. Leonardo is called Leonardo, by anyone in the know. Da Vinci is not his name, but his place of origin.

Secondly, to call Leonardo a "flamboyant homosexual" is a gay-bashing stereotype at worst and a mindless anachronism at best. From the historical record, claims Bruce Boucher, there was only one alleged incident of homosexuality early in Leonardo's adulthood – and apart from that little is known of Leonardo's sexuality.

Thirdly, Leonardo was apparently infamous for his *meager* production of artwork, not his “enormous output of breathtaking Christian art.” Indeed, by most historical accounts, he received only one commission from the Vatican and spent little time in Rome.

Lastly, art historian Bruce Boucher explains that *The Da Vinci Code* offers a misleading interpretation of *The Last Supper* based primarily upon the single fact that the person to Jesus’ right does appear effeminate. Leonardo’s composition apparently “conforms to traditional Florentine depictions of the Last Supper, stressing the betrayal and sacrifice of Christ rather than the institution of the Eucharist and the chalice.” The “disembodied” hand holding the knife is more likely a reference to Peter’s response to the men who arrested Jesus, wherein he drew his sword and cut off the ear of one Malchus. Boucher explains that however effeminate the depiction, the person to Jesus’ right is not Mary Magdalene, but more likely the “Beloved Disciple” John.

Chapter Three: The Priory of Sion

The book acts as if the Priory of Sion is some kind of well-established and ancient order. The idea that Leonardo, Victor Hugo, and the like were all affiliated with the order, is based on the claims of some that a set of parchments found in the French National Library are legitimate.

But in fact, the Priory of Sion, and the “parchments” were revealed in the past twenty years to be the fraudulent creation of one Pierre Plantard in the 1950’s and 60’s. Plantard was an extreme right-wing French nationalist, and pretender to the Merovingian dynasty, who served time in French jails for fraud in the 50’s. The parchments supposedly discovered in the French National Library were proven to be complete frauds – having been deposited there in the mid-1960’s. Several books in France and a BBC special uncovered the whole scam. Moreover, the

Plantard scam itself was based in part on an earlier fraud – involving the Vicar of Rennes-le-Chateau, Father Sauniere.

The Da Vinci Code bases its Priory of Sion/Holy Bloodline of Jesus idea on the 1982 book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* – a book widely read, but hardly conclusive. While now a part of the canon of Grail Lore, nobody actually believes the Jesus/Mary Magdalene/Merovingian/Priory of Sion thing is more than just another silly thing to come out of France.

Chapter Four: Jesus Was a Feminist

In one scene, Sir Leigh Teabing says, “I daresay Peter was something of a sexist” [*The Da Vinci Code* 46]. In another he says, “Jesus was the original feminist. He intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene.” [*The Da Vinci Code* 248] But the funny thing is – if Peter is a sexist – then Jesus is a male chauvinist pig – at least according to the most important Gnostic Gospel of them all – the Gospel of Thomas. In the *Gospel of Thomas*, the pearl of the many “lost books of the Bible” found in Nag Hammadi Egypt in the 1940’s, it says:

“Simon Peter said to them: ‘Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.’” Jesus said, “I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.” (G.Thom v. 114).

Chapter Five: Gnosticism and Nag Hammadi

On this same trajectory, *The Da Vinci Code* acts as if the Gnostic books found in Nag Hammadi Egypt are some big secret – which the patriarchal Vatican Mafia has kept under a tight lid for seventeen centuries. And that is just false. While indeed the second and third centuries of the Church were spent in controversy with the leading and powerful Gnostic prophets and

teachers of Egypt and the Near East – and indeed our Church Fathers only tell us the bad side of these folks – we now know a great deal about Gnosis and their teachings.

Indeed, while much has come of the Nag Hammadi collection of Gnostic books, we have long known of other New Testament “apocryphal texts” “false Gospels” and non-canonical material. And while there really was no time in which the apostolic church took these texts seriously, there is an amazing amount of Gnostic influence in the witness of the New Testament itself.

The definitive book on Gnosticism is *Gnosis* by Kurt Rudolph. The book is used by most serious students of the subject, and even the popular religion writer Elaine Pagels refers to Rudolph’s work. Rudolph explores the many positive contributions Gnostic theology made to early Christian thought – and you can see it in the canonical works of Paul and John. Likewise, we see in the same New Testament how the apostolic founders separated the truth from the lie in the many different movements labeled ‘Gnostic.’

The Da Vinci Code leaves this all out, but plants the idea that the Gnostics were heroic bearers of open-minded truth, who were suppressed by a patriarchal apostolic church Mafia. Yes, there were controversies, but the early Church and the Gnostic movements intermingled for generations, and it was hardly a battle between entrenched patriarchal dogmatics and free-ranging feminist mystics.

The Da Vinci Code leaves out the well-known fact that the basic shape of the Canon of the New Testament was drawn in the 100’s AD in response to the Gnostic Marcion, who himself desired to leave out a great many books, authorizing only a very narrow version of “the Gospel”. Marcion’s Canon included only a short version of Luke and ten letters of Paul. Most historians of the church understand that whereas most Gnostics rejected the Old

Testament outright, and generally were narrow and exclusive of a range of Christian scriptural traditions, the apostolic church were far more expansive. It was the apostolic church that fought to preserve the Old Testament as Scripture for the Church – and it was the apostolic church that preserved the four gospels – not one or another – as well as the other 23 books we now call the New Testament.

The Da Vinci Code spends no time on the obvious problems with the most important Gnostic teachings. Probably this is because they aren't at all in line with his apparent theory of Gnosis as pro-feminine, open-minded and easy-going.

Most of the Gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi hold the Jews and the Old Testament in contempt. Indeed, the prevailing Gnostic theologies held that the God of the Jews was either Satan at worst, or at best a second-class fallen angel type of God. Likewise, the Gnostics typically despised the Creation itself, believing it to be the work of a second class God or the devil himself. Gnostics typically disdained marriage and sex, for men and women. And indeed, as we are reminded from Gospel of Thomas, “becoming male” was key for women to move up and beyond. They were hardly a bunch of nature loving “goddess worshippers.”

Chapter Six: Mary Magdalene, and the *Gospel of Mary*

Perhaps the scholar most associated with the Gnostic *Gospel of Mary* is Karen King. She explains that “Only three fragmentary manuscripts are known to have survived into the modern period, two third-century fragments in Greek, and a fifth-century Coptic version.” And of the three, the Greek manuscripts are the oldest and most trustworthy. She explains that there are important variations between the Greek and Coptic manuscripts. Notably, the Coptic variants reflect theological tendencies that arguably belong to a later time. For example, the Greek fragments seem to presume that the leadership of Mary Magdalene *as a woman* is not

under debate; only her teaching is challenged. The Coptic version, however, points toward a situation in which women's leadership *as such* is being challenged and requires defense. Her theory is that the changes in the text may reflect the historical exclusion of women from their earlier leadership roles in Christian communities. A historical exclusion which is part of the sad practice of discrimination against women which the Church carried on for most of its history – if not throughout the very important ‘early church’ period.

Just as *the Da Vinci Code* tells us, *The Gospel of Mary* exalts Mary Magdalene over the male disciples of Jesus. Without question *The Gospel of Mary* provides important information about the role of women in the early church. Indeed, modern scholars are well aware of the many tensions in second-century Christianity – particular in regard to the establishment of an authoritative set of teachings and practices over against a highly variegated theological landscape in which all sorts of different ideas and practices were peddled throughout the Roman Empire by a variety of supposedly “inspired charismatic prophets and teachers.” Religious and philosophical esoterics were rampant in the first and second century, and we know for a fact that the church quickly sought to preserve the core teachings of Jesus and of his apostolic witnesses. They did this by both establishing a “priesthood” of leaders descended from the apostles – and dedicated to preserving the apostolic inheritance – not improving it. As this “priesthood” became established – being comprised of overseers (*bishops*), elders (*presbyters* or ‘priests’) and deacons -- it did indeed leave out women.

There is no doubt that the role of women diminished from the original apostolic era – primarily because of the patriarchal prejudices of men in that time. And while this is clearly true, an analysis of the *Gospel of Mary* still doesn’t support anything like *The Da Vinci Code* claims about Jesus and Mary.

Following the logic of Karen King, our leading *Gospel of Mary* scholar, *The Gospel of Mary* says more about the role women *should have* than about the role Mary Magdalene herself actually had. It tells us more about the era in which it was written (ca. 150 AD) than the era in which Jesus and Mary were friends.

We know from other sources, that in that period of the second century, charismatic preachers traveled all over the Roman world – and carried the gifts of speaking in tongues and other spiritual powers -- and many of them were women. The more likely situation is that the author of the Gospel of Mary was a Gnostic charismatic – who sought credibility for these charismatic preachers, and set about establishing their authority over and against the fairly well-established Church hierarchy of bishop, priest and deacon, which was now in place throughout the many cities of the Ancient World.

Chapter Seven: Witches and Witch Burning

The Da Vinci Code claims that the Church killed *five million women* during the Inquisitions. “Those deemed witches by the Church included all female scholars, priestesses, gypsies, mystics, nature lovers, herb gatherers, and any women ‘suspiciously attuned to the natural world.’” [*The Da Vinci Code* 125]

Dr. Brian Pavlac is Associate Professor of History at King’s College in Wilkes-Barr, Pennsylvania. His research shows that the Roman Catholic Church – he refers to it as the Latin Catholic Church -- did obviously participate in the horrible persecution of human-beings accused of witch-craft in the early modern period after the Middle Ages. But, he notes, they weren’t all women, there weren’t five million victims, and the Roman Catholic Church didn’t actually conduct most of the atrocities.

His scholarship has led him to estimate that between 30,000 to 110,000 people were killed for being “witches” across several centuries. And a large percentage of them were men.

Pavlac writes:

When the Witch Hunts first began to intensify, in the 1400s, one church hierarchy, what I call the Latin Catholic Church, dominated Western Civilization. Even within that one church, however, uniformity in all matters of faith and belief had not been fully imposed.

The predominant Christian view of witchcraft during the Middle Ages was that it was an illusion. People might think they were witches, but they were fooling themselves, or the Devil was fooling them. Most authorities thought that witchcraft could do no serious harm, because it was not real. It took a number of inquisitor's manuals and a series of papal bulls (written letters of judgment and command) to contradict that traditional Christian idea, and identify witchcraft with a dangerous heresy. Ultimately in 1484, Pope Innocent VIII, in his bull *Summis desiderantes*, let the Inquisition pursue witches.

There is some legitimate historical debate, though, about how far the bull applied throughout the church, and how many church authorities really believed that witches were a serious danger. In any case, just about at that time the "Church" broke apart because of the Reformation. While Roman Catholicism redefined itself under a papal magisterium, Lutheranism and Calvinism asserted other sources for divine authority.

Surprisingly, the Protestant reformers often agreed with Rome, that witches were a clear and present danger. All three of the western Christian "churches" persecuted witches to some degree or another.

But none of these persecutions could have been carried out without the permission and cooperation of secular governments. In only a few small regions, like the Papal States and various Prince-Bishoprics in Germany, were religious and temporal government leaders one and the same. But in all the rest of Western Europe, secular princes ultimately decided whether or not witches were hunted.¹

A feminist human-rights organization named Gendercide Watch has published an excellent article touching on some of the latest scholarship on the early-Modern Witch Hunts. The group argues that estimates such as the one made in *The Da Vinci Code* are completely unfounded on any facts whatsoever. The group writes:

¹ Pavlac, Brian A. "Ten Common Errors and Myths about the Witch Hunts, Corrected and Commented," *Prof. Pavlac's Women's History Resource Site*. (October 31, 2001). URL: <http://www.kings.edu/womens_history/witcherrors.html> (accessed on 12/27/03).

"The most dramatic [recent] changes in our vision of the Great Hunt [have] centered on the death toll," notes Jenny Gibbons. She points out that estimates made prior to the mid-1970s, when detailed research into trial records began, "were almost 100% pure speculation." ... "On the wilder shores of the feminist and witch-cult movements," writes Robin Briggs, "a potent myth has become established, to the effect that 9 million women were burned as witches in Europe; gendercide rather than genocide. ... This is an overestimate by a factor of up to 200, for the most reasonable modern estimates suggest perhaps 100,000 trials between 1450 and 1750, with something between 40,000 and 50,000 executions, of which 20 to 25 per cent were men." Briggs adds that "these figures are chilling enough, but they have to be set in the context of what was probably the harshest period of capital punishments in European history."²

Even with these scholarly estimates of between 40,000 to 50,000 men and women executed as witches over three centuries – this was still an atrocity by a supposedly “Christian” society. But let’s be clear, as *The Da Vinci Code* is not, it wasn’t “the Church” but rather all of Western European society *over three centuries* which took part in these acts of barbarism against women and some men.

Chapter 8: Constantine and Christianity

In a crucial scene, Sir Leah Teabing claims that at the Council of Nicea, in 325, the divinity of Jesus was established by a close vote. He makes it seem like the divinity of Jesus was as tenuous as the election of George W. Bush to the presidency.

He says, “until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet . . . a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless. A mortal.” [*The Da Vinci Code* p. 232] He goes on to say 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. . . .” (*The Da Vinci Code* 233) He says, “Because Constantine upgraded Jesus’ status almost four centuries after Jesus’ death, . . . Constantine [had to create a] a new Bible, which

² Jones, Adam. “Case Study: The European Witch-Hunts, c. 1450-1750 and Witch-Hunts Today”. *Gendercide Watch Website*. Accessed 12/23/03. URL: http://gendercide.org/case_witchhunts.html

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." (*The Da Vinci Code* 234) He concludes "that almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is *false*." [*The Da Vinci Code*: 235]

This is totally false.

The Council of Nicea was called in 325 AD, and indeed the Emperor made it happen. But it is very important to stress that such a council of the leaders of the Church – bishops, presbyters, deacons and laity -- couldn't have happened before that time. Why? Because was illegal to be a Christian before Constantine. We have plenty of records of the extent to which Christians were persecuted, tortured and killed for their faith in between the reign of Nero and the reign of Constantine. There were numerous waves of imperial oppression of Christians and Jews, and as such the church could not "get a group together" to discuss in any "universal sense" the heart and soul doctrines or practices they sought to share in a unified Catholic witness.

Indeed, twenty years before Nicea, in the reign of Diocletian, thousands of Christians were tortured and/or put to death.³ We have records of the persecutions early Church members suffered at the hand of the Romans. Even high-ranking Roman women would be killed if found out to be "unrepentant Christians." A famous example is the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity – a Roman aristocrat and her pregnant servant – who were Christians together – and who were executed by the state in 203 AD for

³ One of Modernity's greatest skeptics and antagonists of the Church is Edward Gibbon, whose *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is perhaps still the most influential *secular* English text on the Roman period of Christianity. The book is contemporary with the Declaration of Independence, and as such comes from the early days of what we might call the "Modern Era" – but still it is a *must read*. His highly dubious and very low estimate of Christians executed by Roman persecution is in the low thousands – more ancient sources put the number higher. Whether the ancients exaggerated is debatable, but likely.

their bold proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ. The great Bishop of Carthage -- Tertullian -- spread her story throughout the Church as a sign of their apostolic witness to Christ in death.

The Council of Nicea *is* best known for producing a rough draft statement of the orthodox faith embodied in what we now the Nicene Creed. Actually, the “Nicene” Creed was finalized at a council in Constantinople in 381. More importantly, the full divinity of Christ was *settled* at Nicea. But, let’s be clear, no one argued that Jesus was **“only a man.”** The question was: “Just *how* divine is Jesus?”

The debate that was really settled at Nicea was as follows:

The so-called “heretic” was Arius -- a Carthaginian Christian, who studied in Antioch and was ordained to the clergy in Alexandria. He taught that Jesus’ divine nature was subordinate to the divinity of God the Father, but superior to all other natures and beings. He argued with his bishop in Alexandria over the exact nature of the Son of God. Arius asserting that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and indeed the Son of God, but as such was a “creation” of God. His point was simple: there was a time when the Son was not yet existent. He agreed that the Son was more divine than anybody else was -- but not eternally begotten of the Father, sharing the same substance and nature.

The opposition to Arius’ position -- or “orthodox side” -- argued that Jesus was the eternally existing Logos or Word of God. Their view was the Logos, or Word, was not “created” but rather somehow “begotten” -- existing co-eternally and equally as one of the three aspects of the nature of the One God. In other words the orthodox position was “there was no time before the Son existed.”

Most argue that Constantine really didn’t care -- only that he wanted the issue finally settled. Indeed, today, from a distance,

the difference between the Arian perspective and the Orthodox perspective is hard to see – at least for most people who don't have a degree in classical philosophy or theology. And indeed, centuries of subsequent disagreement over one of the phrases in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, "...who proceeds from the Father and the Son," would become the pretext for the Great Schism between the Western and Eastern branches of the Church in 1054.

But regardless, the claim that Constantine invented the Divinity of Jesus in the fourth century is ridiculous. And it is easily disproved – as a quick glance at any modern critical study of the New Testament would confirm. Even modern agnostics agree that the early church believed in the divinity of Jesus – by at least some "primitive" definition. To verify this, one would have only to check with the apparent thinking of the authors of the New Testament, the 27 books of which were written between 49 and 130 AD. Christians have pretty much always revered the Letters of Paul as scripture. Their apostolic authenticity is without question the best attested of all the Christian and Gnostic writings of the First Century. They are clearly the oldest books in the New Testament, being dated by even the most liberal scholars to between 49-62 AD. Even the great Gnostic teacher Marcion revered Paul above all others.

And significantly, Paul's letters *clearly* state that Jesus was the Messiah, and of a stature equal to God. To verify this, one needs only to read Philippians chapter 2 – written by Paul around the year 50 AD – within the lifetime of the first apostles and other witnesses to Jesus:

"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he

humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The Da Vinci Code says that Constantine compiled the Bible in the 300's, but it is a simple fact that the Old Testament was completed seven to eight centuries before Constantine's time. Most scholars believe that the books of the Law were finalized before 500 BC (at the latest), that the books of the Prophets and the Writings were finalized sometime before 250 BC or so. And we possess plenty of ancient manuscripts to prove that Constantine had nothing to do with the creation of the Old Testament – he clearly didn't "burn them all."

Likewise, all reputable scholars agree that the 27 books of the New Testament were written between 49 AD and 130 AD at the absolute latest. And most scholars agree that at least **Matthew, Mark and Luke, and all of Paul** were in circulation among the widespread Christian communities by 90 AD, when the Rabbis of Judaism held the Council of Jamnia, and officially declared the Old Testament to be a "Closed Canon" while expelling all Jews who believed in Jesus from the synagogues. Moreover, the leading bishops of Europe, Africa and Asia recognized the basic core of the New Testament canon by the middle of the 100's.

We know that no single Christian bishop in antiquity – even in Constantine's day – had the authority to speak for the entire church. Neither the bishop of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, nor Rome had singular authority in the first five centuries of the church. In those days, even long after Constantine's death, the bishops of the church had authority only over their own diocese and region. The bishops (the direct descendants of the early "overseers" and "apostles") were in a relationship of brotherhood

with one another, and at best they interacted by letter, and mutual study or conversation from time to time. Obviously, the Roman Empire allowed for a great deal of travel, mobility and communication – provided folks were cautious and secretive when needed.

But we also know that at the council of Nicea, the first really major gathering of Christians from the known world, for the first time Christians could meet in the open, and affirm the core practices and beliefs shared throughout the apostolic churches, as well as settle relatively minor points about the Bible. Things were more or less *settled* at Nicea – not invented.

The Da Vinci Code makes a number of very specific claims about how “nothing in Christianity was original” and how the Church simply incorporated a lot of pagan ideas into a supposedly Constantinian Christianity. Henry Chadwick is the author of the Penguin History of the Church Volume I -- *The Early Church*. It is a standard undergraduate-level text that traces the story of emergent Christianity from the apostolic age through the time of Constantine. Chadwick points out the following:

- “Constantine was not aware of any mutual exclusiveness between Christianity and his faith in the Unconquered Sun. The transition from solar monotheism (the most popular form of contemporary paganism) to Christianity was not difficult. In Old Testament prophecy Christ was entitled ‘the sun of righteousness’. Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 200) speaks of Christ driving his chariot across the sky like the Sun-god. A tomb mosaic recently found at Rome, probably made early in the fourth century, depicts Christ as the Sun-god mounting the heavens with his chariot. Tertullian [b. A.D. 160] says that many pagans imagined the Christians worshipped the sun because they met on Sundays and prayed towards the East. Moreover, early in the fourth century there begins in the West (where first and by whom is not known) the celebration of 25 December, the birthday of the Sun-god at the winter solstice,

as the date for the nativity of Christ. How easy it was for Christianity and solar religion to become entangled at the popular level is strikingly illuminated by a mid-fifth century sermon by Pope Leo the Great, rebuking his over-cautious flock for paying reverence to the Sun on the steps of St. Peter's before turning their back on it to worship inside the westward-facing basilica." [Chadwick, p.127]

- "[Constantine] was not baptized until he lay dying in 337, but this implies no doubt about his Christian belief. It was common at this time (and continued so until about A.D. 400) to postpone baptism to the end of one's life, especially if one's duty as an official included torture and execution of criminals. Part of the reason for postponement lay in the seriousness with which the responsibilities of baptism were taken. [Ibid.]
- "Constantine favoured Christianity among the many religions of his subjects, but did not make it the official or 'established' religion of the empire." [Ibid.]
- "Constantine assigned a fixed proportion of provincial revenues to church charity." [Chadwick, 128]
- "Constantine also endeavored to express Christian ideals in some of his laws, protecting children, slaves, peasants and prisoners. An edict of 316 directs that criminals may not be branded on the face 'because man is made in God's image.'" [Ibid.]
- "A law of Constantine of 321 closed law courts 'on the venerable day of the sun' except for the pious purpose of freeing slaves, and deprecated Sunday labor except where necessary on farms...This is the earliest evidence for the process by which Sunday became not merely the day on which Christians met for worship but also a day of rest...The Christian practice of commemorating the Lord's resurrection on the first day of the week was already traditional before St. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. The Church derived the habit of worship on one day in seven from Judaism, not from Mithraic sun-cult, and they chose Sunday as the day when the Lord rose again." [Ibid, 128]

- *As to the vote of the bishops regarding the divinity of Jesus, “218 out of 220 bishops signed the creed, a unanimity that must certainly have gratified the anxious emperor. It is, however, clear that the crucial terms of the creed were not understood in a precisely identical sense by all the signatories. ‘Of one substance’ affirmed identity. It declared that the Father and the Son are ‘the same.’ But this was ambiguous. To some it meant a personal or specific identity; to many others it meant a much broader, generic identity. The happy accident of this ambiguity enabled Constantine to secure the assent of everyone except two Libyan bishops, whose objections seem to have been less to the creed than to the sixth canon which subjected them to Alexandrian control.” [ibid, 130]*

Something *The Da Vinci Code* neglects is despite the nearly unanimous affirmation of Jesus’ full equality with the Father which came by vote at the Council of Nicea, most of the fourth century still saw a great deal of theological controversy between the orthodox definition of the Son and the slightly-lesser Arian version. There were lots of Arian sympathizers in the Greek and Gothic ends of the Empire – including Constantine’s own mother.

And this fact only goes to undermine *The Da Vinci Code* idea that Constantine’s “stamped out” persons who didn’t believe in the divinity of Jesus. Both the Arians and the orthodox parties believed in Jesus’ divinity – it was simply a question of degree and of defining how the Church would understand the internal nature of the Trinity. The fact that Constantine was baptized himself, at the end of his life, by a known Arian sympathizer says it all.

Chapter 9: Yahweh, Jehovah and Shekinah

The *Da Vinci Code* says

- “The blade and the chalice, fused as one. The Star of David ... the perfect union of male and female ... Solomon’s Seal ... marking the Holy of Holies, where the male and female deities

– Yahweh and Shekinah – were thought to dwell.” – [DVC, 446]

- “Early Jews believed that the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s Temple housed not only God but also His powerful female equal, Shekinah.”
- “The Jewish Tetragrammaton YHWH – the sacred name of God – in fact derived from Jehovah, an androgynous physical union between the masculine Jah and the pre-Hebraic name for Eve, Havah.”

Umm... these statements are completely false.

I offer some basic definitions I’ve adapted from entries in my copy of the *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* – a Protestant standard easily accessed by anyone who lives near a mainline Protestant church or seminary library. Any Roman Catholic, Jewish or Orthodox scholar would likely agree with these definitions – and I would stake my house on that claim.

Yahweh is the vocalization from the four consonants used in Hebrew shorthand to refer to the name of God, which itself cannot be uttered. God used the phrase, “I am what I am, or I will be what I will be,” in the revelation to Moses, when Moses said, “Who is talking to me here?” This phrase in Hebrew was denoted by the consonants YHWH, so as not to speak the name of God profanely – the letters began to be pronounced “Yahweh” – which itself is a made up word.

Jehovah is an artificial form, not Biblical in any way, dating to around 1520, in an effort to offer a way of pronouncing the Tetragrammaton (YHWH).

Shekinah means, “that which dwells.” It is a word not found in the Bible, but it is rooted in the Old Testament tradition, and in Rabbinical writings, in reference to God’s abiding presence on Earth, and is reflected in the New Testament especially in the belief that God became incarnate in human form in the person of Jesus.

Indeed, one of the key notions of the Old Testament theology is “God’s tabernacling presence” with God’s people. The concept of Glory is in fact related to this. Glory really means “the shining light of God’s abiding presence” with someone or on something. Glory is like those rays of light, which sometimes break down through the clouds in the afternoon or morning.

In late Jewish Scripture – the books of wisdom – this notion is given expression in terms of language about God’s breath, wisdom, and word. These understandings of God’s presence in wisdom and spirit very much continued into the early Christian period, as the apostles and their followers began to make some kind of theological sense out of just how God could come to dwell in the Messiah – or the “anointed one.”

The concept of Shekinah clearly informs the apostolic teaching of how God’s presence came to dwell in the person of Jesus – the notion of the Holy Spirit coming over Mary, such that within her womb would be knit the fully present Godhead in form of a human being. As Luke writes: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will come over you.” Luke 1.35

Stoic and Platonic thought greatly influenced Jewish and Early Christian thinkers in the First Century. They taught that the Logos or the WORD of God created the universe. Jewish thinkers began to merge their Biblical notion of Wisdom, or Shekinah, with the notion of the Logos. Indeed, by the time of Jesus’ birth, this understanding was rather well established, and it

informed the early Christian writers who borrowed from the predominant Greek philosophical vocabulary as they explored the meaning of Jesus. The Gospel of John reveals this philosophical terminology in its use of the word “LOGOS,” or “The Word.” As John writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”

The concept of Shekinah has feminine overtones of course -- Wisdom, Sophia, and Holy Spirit. In Christian theology, the whole matter of the incarnation of God’s presence by the Holy Spirit and through the Virgin Mary is rather obviously of great value for those seeking to explore the “feminine qualities of the Godhead.” But, this is very different from the “Male Deity and Female Deity” that Da Vinci Code talks about.

Chapter 10: An exploration of the real role of women in the early Church

Paul wrote, “In Christ there is neither male nor female.” [Galatians 3]

Duke University’s Elizabeth Clark has said that the evidence of women’s roles in the Early Church is “somewhat mixed.” Of course there’s plenty of evidence in the New Testament itself of women doing many things within early Christianity. In Paul’s letters he greets women, calling them “co-workers,” and in Romans, he refers to a deaconess and a woman apostle.

Paul writes in Romans 16:

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church, ...so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the

Gentiles. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was... Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you. I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them. For such people do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded.”

The woman Junia is called “an apostle.” For many years, the Church debated whether or not this could possibly be a woman’s name – many argued that Junias was a man. But the best manuscript traditions support the idea that this is a female name – which makes sense in light of the passage. Paul says Junia became a Christian before he did, which is fascinating, and not debatable. Since Paul was converted within a few years of the Resurrection, a likely conclusion would have to be that Junia was one of the earliest converts to Christianity. Insofar as she is identified as part of the Roman church, and that church was founded before Paul and Peter arrived there, she must have been one of the founding members of the church at Rome. If Paul is referring to her as an “apostle,” it is very possible that she had been in Jerusalem at the time of the passion and resurrection. Following the account of Pentecost in Acts, maybe Junia was one of the “visitors from Rome” who heard the Gospel from those Spirit-filled witnesses.⁴

So what did these early women leaders do in the church? Well, the earliest Christian communities met in people's houses; they didn't have churches yet for quite some time. The New Testament tells us in many places that women owned the houses

⁴ This section follows the logic of Professor Elizabeth Clark of Duke University as presented in the PBS series: “From Jesus to Christ.”

in which the early Christians met. As Professor Clark says, “This is significant because these women weren’t just providing coffee and cookies.”⁵

Clearly, if women owned houses used as churches, then as patrons of the nascent community they would have had great influence. As the *Gospel of Mary confirms*, by the middle of the 2nd century and with the establishment of clerical orders, women did get excluded from the hierarchy of clergy. But it is reasonable to say that the church in the 100’s and 200’s was still very far from being dominated by clergy – as it would become after the time of Constantine and into the Middle Ages.

But as women were increasingly shut out of roles now reserved for “ordained clergy,” the rise of Christian monasticism created another place where early Church women could find great influence over the wider Church. Elizabeth Clark explains that as monasticism developed in Egypt in the 300’s and 400’s, and with the founding of monasteries, “a whole new avenue opens up for women’s activity in the church.” We know quite factually that in the ancient Roman empire, there were many wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of aristocrats or merchant princes who controlled households and vast wealth. During the reign of Constantine, and for centuries thereafter, powerful women founded churches, monasteries and other Christian institutions. In numerous instances, a wealthy Christian woman would endow and then become head of a monastery herself.

Obviously, the most important woman in the church in the 300’s was Constantine’s mother, *Helena*. Helena was a single mother, whose husband Constantius abandoned her upon assuming the purple as “Caesar” of Gaul, Spain and Britain in 292 – a position something like a ‘vice-emperor.’ Constantius married the daughter of his patron, in an effort to better position himself

⁵Clark interview.

politically. Constantine was born to her in 274 AD. Constantine spent many years in the court of Diocletian, and was a military leader during the great persecution of Christians. But when he became emperor himself he recalled his mother, and restored her to her place in the imperial family. After becoming emperor, he declared an edict legalizing Christianity in the Roman Empire. Helena became a Christian in 312, and as the most powerful woman in the Roman Empire that was a very big thing for Christianity. Scholars believe that she had probably been a “secret Christian” for a very long time before then, in order to avoid persecution in the horrible swath of violence against Christians which took place in the reign of Diocletian. With her son as emperor, Helena would zealously guard, protect and empowered the Church.

As an old lady in 326 AD, Helena made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, in part to seek God’s pardon for her son – who had executed his first son Crispus on charges of treason brought by his *second* wife Fausta; and then executed Fausta when it was shown that she falsely accused Crispus. The Hamlet-like tragedy caused Constantine great guilt and grief, and apparently his sin and repentance were called out by his mother.

While on her pilgrimage, Helena asked local Christians to identify the many places associated with Christ’s life, death and resurrection. She founded churches on many of the sites traditionally identified by the Christians of Palestine – who had been there since the days of Jesus – among the more famous are the churches on the Mount of Olives, on Calvary, and in Bethlehem. Helena also made a discovery – *or claimed to have made it* -- that would no doubt establish the pattern from which the Crusaders and their Medieval balladeers would construct their Holy Grail legends: Helena claims to have discovered the true cross

Another prominent woman in the period after Constantine, was Olympias of Constantinople. She was a good friend and confidante of John Chrysostom, one of the greatest Church figures of all time, who was Patriarch of Constantinople in the late 300's and early 400's. She built monasteries, churches and hospitals. Her contributions to the Church of Constantinople and beyond equaled something like 900 million dollars in modern terms.⁶ Her generosity enabled the charity operations of the church, which after Constantine empowered it offered a "social safety net" for the poor, needy, sick, orphaned and widowed.

⁶ Clark interview

Appendix:

Here's a great piece I culled from the Martin Marty Center online by Associate Professor Margaret M. Mitchell of the University of Chicago. Reprinted without permission:

SEPTEMBER 24, 2003

Cracking the Da Vinci Code

— Margaret M. Mitchell

Besieged by requests for my reaction to *The Da Vinci Code*, I finally decided to sit down and read it over the weekend. It was a quick romp, largely fun to read, if rather predictable and preachy. This is a good airplane book, a novelistic thriller that presents a rummage sale of accurate historical nuggets alongside falsehoods and misleading statements. The bottom line: the book should come coded for “black light,” like the pen used by the character Saunier to record his dying words, so that readers could scan pages to see which “facts” are trustworthy and which patently not, and (if a black light could do this!) highlight the gray areas where complex issues are misrepresented and distorted.

Patently inaccurate:

In his own lifetime Jesus “inspired millions to better lives” (p.231); there were “more than eighty gospels” (p.231; the number 80 is factual-sounding, but has no basis); “the earliest Christian records” were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (including gospels) and Nag Hammadi texts (pp.234, 245); the Nag Hammadi texts “speak of Christ’s ministry in very human terms” (p.234); the marriage of Mary Magdalene and Jesus is “a matter of historical record” (p.244); Constantine invented the divinity of Jesus and excluded all gospels but the four canonical ones; Constantine made Christianity “the official religion” of the Roman Empire (p.232); Constantine coined the term “heretic” (p.234); “Rome’s official religion was sun worship” (p.232). There are more.

Gray areas:

“The vestiges of pagan religion in Christian symbology are undeniable” (p.232), but that does not mean “Nothing in Christianity is original.” The relationship between early Christianity and the world around it, the ways in which it was culturally embedded in that world, sometimes unreflectively, sometimes reflexively, sometimes in deliberate accommodation, sometimes in deliberate cooptation, is far more complicated than the simplistic myth of Constantine’s Stalinesque program of cultural totalitarianism. Further, Constantine’s religious life—whether, when, how and by what definition he was Christian and/or “pagan”—is a much debated issue because the literary and non-literary sources (such as coins) are not consistent. That Constantine the emperor had “political” motives (p.234) is hardly news to anyone! The question is how religion and politics (which cannot be separated in the ancient world) were interrelated in him. He is as hard to figure out on this score as Henry VIII, Osama Bin Laden, Tammy Fay Baker and George W. Bush. Brown has turned one of history’s most fascinating figures into a cartoon-ish villain.

“Paganism” is treated throughout *The Da Vinci Code* as though it were a unified phenomenon, which it was not (“pagan” just being the Christian term for “non-Christian”). The religions of the Mediterranean world were multiple and diverse, and cannot all be boiled down to “sun-worshippers” (232). Nor did all “pagans” frequently, eagerly, and with mystical intent participate in the hieros gamos (ritual sex acts). “The Church” is also used throughout the book as though it had a clear, uniform and unitary referent. For early Christian history this is precisely what we do not have, but a much more complex, varied and localized phenomenon. Brown presumes “the Church” is “the Holy Roman Catholic Church” which he thinks had tremendous power always and everywhere, but ecclesiastical history is a lot messier.

Brown propagates the full-dress conspiracy theory for Vatican suppression of women. Feminist scholars and others have been debating different models of the “patriarchalization” of

Christianity for decades. Elisabeth Schuessler Fiorenza's landmark work, *In Memory of Her* (1983), argued that while Jesus and Paul (on his better days) were actually pretty much pro-women, it was the next generations (the authors of letters in Paul's name like 1 and 2 Timothy and others) who betrayed their feminist agenda and sold out to the Aristotelian, patriarchal vision of Greco-Roman society. Others (unfortunately) sought to blame the misogyny on the Jewish roots of Christianity. More recently it has been argued that the picture is more mixed, even for Jesus and Paul. That is, they may have been more liberal than many of their contemporaries about women, but they were not all-out radicals, though they had ideas (such as Gal 3:28) that were even more revolutionary than they realized (in both senses of the term). Alas, no simple story here. And while obsessing over Mary Magdalene, *The Da Vinci Code* ignores completely the rise and incredible durability and power of the other Mary, the mother of Jesus, and devotion to her which follows many patterns of "goddess" veneration (she even gets the Athena's Parthenon dedicated to her in the sixth century).

This list is just a sample. A "black light" edition of *The Da Vinci Code* would, however, be unnecessary if readers would simply take the book as fiction. But there is an obstacle: the first page of the book reads, under the bold print headline "Fact": "all descriptions of ...documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."

Margaret M. Mitchell is Associate Professor of New Testament at the University of Chicago Divinity School and the Chair of the Department of New Testament and Early Christian Literature. Her latest book is The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation (Westminster/John Knox, 2002).