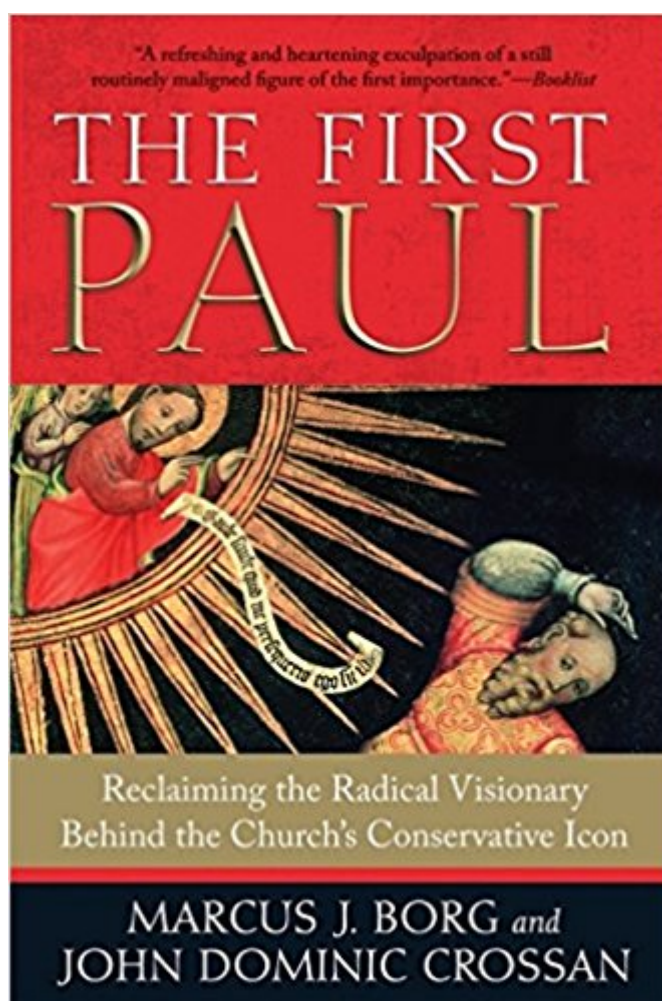


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# The First Paul: Reclaiming The Radical Visionary Behind The Church's Conservative Icon



## Synopsis

Meet Paul Again . . . for the First Time Continuing in the tradition of *The Last Week* and *The First Christmas*, world-renowned New Testament scholars Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan use the best of biblical and historical scholarship to expose the church's conspiracy to silence Jesus's most faithful disciple, the apostle Paul.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“A refreshing and heartening exculpation of a still routinely maligned figure of the first importance to culture and civilization.” (Booklist (starred review))  
“Paul is one of the most controversial figures in Christian history—and one of the most misunderstood. . . . Many will be thrilled with this fresh, erudite portrait of the man.” (Publishers Weekly)  
“In this scholarly and engaging account . . . Borg and Crossan successfully argue that we must separate the genuine writings of the apostle from the writings attributed to him . . . This well-researched and highly readable account is recommended for all students of Paul [and] interested lay readers.” (Library Journal)

Bestselling authors of *The Last Week* and *The First Christmas*, Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan join once again to present a new understanding of early Christianity—this time to reveal a radical Paul who has been suppressed by the church. Paul is second only to Jesus as the most important person in the birth of Christianity, and yet he continues to be controversial, even

among Christians. How could the letters of Paul be used both to inspire radical grace and to endorse systems of oppression—condoning slavery, subordinating women, condemning homosexual behavior? Borg and Crossan use the best of biblical and historical scholarship to explain the reasons for Paul's mixed reputation and reveal to us what scholars have known for decades: that the later letters of Paul were created by the early church to dilute Paul's egalitarian message and transform him into something more "acceptable." They argue there are actually "Three Pauls" in the New Testament: "The Radical Paul" (of the seven genuine letters), "The Conservative Paul" (of the three disputed epistles), and "The Reactionary Paul" (of the three inauthentic letters). By closely examining this progression of Paul's letters—from the authentic to the inauthentic—the authors show how the apostle was slowly but steadily "deradicalized" to fit Roman social norms in regards to slavery, patriarchy, and patronage. In truth, Paul was an appealing apostle of Jesus whose vision of life "in Christ"—one of his favored phrases—is remarkably faithful to the message of Jesus himself. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

My attempts to read Paul always began with his Epistle to the Romans and usually halted part way through with the impression that I was trying to chew gravel. There were good bits (Paul on love) that I'd heard in sermons and equally horrible contradictory bits used to shore up prejudice and disrespect (Paul on women, slaves, homosexuals, docility). It never occurred to me that the revolutionary and the reactionary Paul were not the same person. Borg and Crossan's book provided an excellent solution to my perennial difficulties. They provide a clear background as to which texts are authentic and what world they came from. They also provide a thematically guided reading of the epistles. They turned on the light for me as far as Paul is concerned. This is a book I shall re-read as I come through the epistles again. Readers who are die-hard conservatives looking for validations of prejudice and closed minds will not take kindly to Borg and Crossan's scholarship and the freshness of their approach. Those seeking more openness and awe for all that surrounds them will be well stimulated. I came away with the sense that I was seeing through a glass less darkly.

this book is all too short. It begins by explaining that modern scholarship has identified three Pauls: the radical Paul (to about 50 E), the Conservative Paul (about 60 CE), and the Reactionary Paul (about 110 CE), and distinguishes their works. The analysis of the original and true Paul is original and somewhat mind-boggling. I had some real doubts about whether Paul had a real conversion

prior to reading this. It seemed to me that only too many of Paul's opinions were "of the time" and did not contain timeless truths. I personally now believe that the original Paul was indeed sincere, and that his message and the message of Christianity was subsumed into first century culture and subverted by subsequent authors styling themselves as "Paul." I wish more time had been spent on how the conservative Paul and the reactionary Paul subverted the original message. However, the discussion of the radical Paul's letters was incredibly enlightening, and I'd suggest this to anyone who has suspicions that the message of Jesus Christ was subverted to serve the status quo. I think watching the changes in the various "Paul"'s messages really indicates this...sadly.

This is a relatively uncontroversial book - for Borg. He focuses on the letters of Paul that are generally accepted as genuine and stresses the contrast, especially, with the letters that were almost certainly written in his name by other people after his death. Borg's view that the genuine letters conform well with the message of Jesus as presented in the gospels is quite convincing and, in a sense, very reassuring about the foundations of Christianity.

As with their previous books, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan have a winner in this book on Paul. Looking at the development of Christianity in relation to the parallel development of Roman Imperial Theology helps to explain how the teachings of Jesus grew and flourished in the first century of the Common Era (aka A.D.) The book also explains how these simple messages and the lifestyle begun by followers of The Way (of Jesus) soon became corrupted and distorted by human error, desire, mendacity, ego, and organization. By explaining what the religion that came to be called Christianity was at first - and how Paul supported and wrote to individual congregations about their development, disagreements, and direction - this book allows us to bring the church in our times back to the future. This is true for Catholic or Protestant, large church or small, and is particularly helpful for house churches.

Indispensable. If you think you know Paul as a misogynist, think again. Just as Christ, we tend to make Paul and the other Disciples into our own image.

Just when you thought you knew everything there was to know about St. Paul, Harper Collins publishes a scholarly yet readable volume about Paul, his life, beliefs, and historical context. We know Paul, one of the two most influential historical figures in the history of Christianity after Jesus himself, mainly through his letters. But wait, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan (two of the

best-known modern New Testament scholars) have a different take on Paul's epistles. It is probable, they say, that only seven of more than a dozen of Paul's letters were actually written by him. Thus, the questionable concepts may well be those of a more conservative nature, supporting slavery, for example. Paul, according to the authors, was really a radical thinker among Jews in his outreach to Gentiles and consideration of peace and justice issues at a time when many Jews in the Temple were actually collaborating with the repressive and violent Roman empire to survive. This volume brings these issues alive for readers. In our Tuesday morning Women's Study Group (Protestant in nature), the ten of us meeting weekly really enjoyed our eight-week journey into Borg and Crossan's "The First Paul." Divided into seven chapters of about 20 to 25 pages each, the book requires a half hour or more of reading at home before our meetings. (We usually suggest underlining and making marginal notes on significant ideas in the book before coming to the discussion.) Several of us assumed leadership for separate chapters, which works well for us because we just jump right in and discuss ideas that leap out at us. None of us are biblical scholars; yet we are amazed at how much we can pull from the text of such a book. This volume would work well in both Catholic and Protestant study groups as the authors collaborate in both traditions. It is actually most exciting to understand how much we, as both Catholics and Protestants, share in the Christian tradition. We all liked the book very much and recommend it to others, especially to groups for discussion. And it's really nice to know that you don't have to be a biblical scholar to lead the group for it to function well.

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