

**John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed. *In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom. A New Vision of Paul's Words & World.* New York: HarperCollins, 2004. 476 pp. \$29.95.**

Much interest of late has centered on the larger cultural milieu of the ministries of both Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Many *SCJ* readers will, no doubt, be familiar with the “search for the Historical Jesus” studies of the last 25 years or so and their use of the media to manipulate reading audiences. A similar scenario has been playing out with the Apostle Paul over the last decade as well—hence our title: *In Search of Paul*. A growing recognition in the scholarly world is that early Christian identity forged from the contexts of both the historical Jesus and the historical Paul was in many ways worked out in response to the Roman imperial governing authorities.

The first half of this work is one of the best syntheses of the current work being done on Christianity in its imperial environment. It is worthy of use in the classroom or for guided discussions among lay people in the church. The strength and intention of Roman imperial beginnings from Julius Caesar and Octavian forward are introduced, given significance, and richly portrayed from literary, inscriptional, and archaeological evidence. The “itinerary format” that examines cultural mores and imperial persuasion in key cities of Paul’s travels (Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Rome) helps to bring both the background of Paul and his audiences alive. A variety of charts and pictures (27 of which are in color) illustrate the argument in helpful ways.

Augustan imperial ideology is richly portrayed in an analysis of the two marble monuments in the Forum of Augustus. The Temple of Mars the Avenger portrays Octavian’s rise to power with force and finality, his consolidation of kingdoms into a ruled empire, and his divine status attributed through priestly and ruling functions. The Altar of Augustan Peace is a second significant sculpture in which Crossan and Reed’s description keenly locates the motif of lasting peace through military means. This brings to the foreground the *Pax Romana*, the saving peace of Octavian with benefits to the whole world. In analyzing archaeological remains, great emphasis is placed on understanding the artifacts and iconography as “propaganda” for the new imperial program. Our authors are following the important works and perspectives of Simon R. Price and Paul Zanker: namely, cooperation of local elite rulers in propagating Roman imperial ideology was a means of operating and profiting from and within the patron-client culture.

Another engaging aspect of this volume is its enumeration of Pauline communities within a variety of social spaces. By describing a variety of locations and situations in which early Christians might have met, the analysis of archaeological information is thickly interspersed with possible indications of how to understand forms of Pauline communities. Would house churches have met in villas? (if so, of what size?), In tenement (multifloored apartment) dwellings? Or possibly in rooms connected with excavated “shops”? In each case, Reed and Crossan demonstrate the close proximity of persons of differing social strata within a common shared social space. This illuminates certain passages such as the issue of meat sacrificed to idols in 1 Corinthians 8–11.

Having said this, biblical studies books by HarperCollins count heavily on provocative titles and novel perspectives. Crossan and Reed suggest on their basis of correlating Luke’s secondary source writings about Paul with Paul’s own primary sources that Paul was more an Apostle to the God-fearers than an Apostle to the Gentiles (38–40). This theme, weightier at the beginning and almost forgotten by the end, is, to my mind, flawed and unpersuasive. Much contemporary NT scholarship attributes a strong historical core to Luke’s writings amidst his “so-called” tendentiousness in such a way that it can be synthesized with Paul’s perspectives, allowing for minimal disagreement. In sum, this volume has much to offer in relating Paul and his believing communities to the Roman ideology round about and the sociology of households and neighborhoods within it. But it must be read with some care.

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