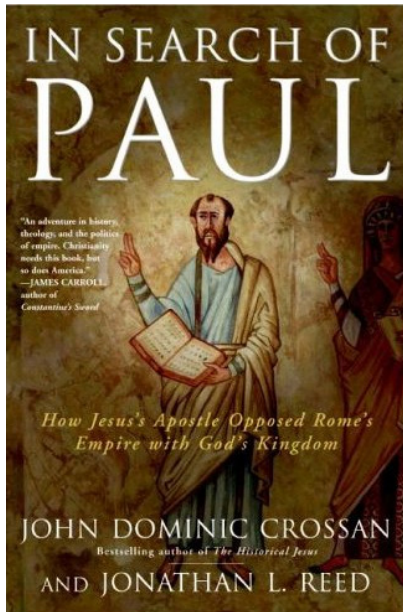


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**Crossan, John Dominic, and Jonathan L. Reed**

*In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom*

San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005. Pp. xiv + 447.  
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John Dominic Crossan has produced another great book, this time on the purpose and accomplishments of St. Paul. As a complement to his great erudition, he has once again enlisted the help of field archeologist Jonathan L. Reed, of LaVerne College, to co-author a remarkable study (as with their *Excavating Jesus* [HarperOne, 2001]). Thus, in addition to the ever-brilliant textual scholarship of Crossan we are treated to full-length, yet not overly technical, archeological presentations of the cultural realities behind the many interesting insights gathered here on the life, theology, and letters of Paul of Tarsus. The authors' overall thesis is that the main goal of Paul, like that of Jesus, was to establish the kingdom of God—a realm of justice and equality—against the dominant, worldly powers of the day, in Paul's case, the Roman Empire.

I have been teaching on Paul for about thirty years and reading him for many more, yet I find this approach to the activity and theology of the great saint new and refreshing. Here we find an innovative examination of the evidence that incorporates many of the tried and true conclusions of Pauline study combined with weighty archeological examinations of the first-century world in which they took place.

The authors claim that their book is new in both form and content: in form, because field archeology and textual exegesis are used equally to explain “the world and word of the apostle Paul” (ix). Their strategy is for the readers to imagine themselves at various key locations, an activity that they feel produces a “special” experience. They feel that the content of their new, integrated approach “breaks *new* ground as it relates the apostle Paul to the Roman imperial world ... the Jewish covenantal religion ... and the Christian faith” (x). Although I am thrilled with the new archeological presentation, I must say that a bit of dialogue with Richard Horsley’s *Paul and Empire* and *Paul and Politics* (1997 and 2001), among many other social-science studies, would have been more than appropriate.

The authors choose seven Pauline topics and in their seven chapters focus on the archeological background and textual data for each. The choices are excellent, and, in my opinion, the data from the excavations are quite enlightening in themselves and help strongly to corroborate the main theses of the exegesis. In chapter 1 some eight pages are devoted to the Roman imperial theology propounded at the archeological site of Aphrodisias in southwest Turkey, with its temple to the *Theoi Sebastoi*, the “Augustan gods” (the emperors Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius). Here we are shown the magnificent friezes and inscriptions that propagandized Roman conquest as proof of the favor of the gods.

The chapter continues with its insightful “major hypothesis,” that it was not the Jews of urban synagogues that Paul tried to convert but the “Godfearers,” the pagan sympathizers there who supported and emulated Jewish piety but did not undergo circumcision to become full members of that religion. This “convert poaching” (xi) of Paul’s explains how he was able to baptize new members so easily, since they readily understood his instruction. The fact that the book of Acts says otherwise brings up the authors’ “*minor* working hypothesis” that Luke has skewed his portrayal of Jesus and the early church as “the only valid heir and continuation of Judaism ... in no way a threat to Roman law and order” (41).

The chapter continues with an imaginative trip to the sanctuary of Apollos at Delphi, where we are treated to a thorough discussion of the voluntary associations called *collegia* in Latin, *thiasoi* and *koina* in Greek (41–53; a note on the Greek word *ekklēsia* would have been helpful here!). Here “[m]embers could rise through the ranks ... take on important-sounding titles ... and earn ... self-importance” (47). Next comes another helpful discussion of the Jewish Diaspora as the result of Jewish slavery or military service and how Rome protected and exempted Jews since they were good taxpayers (53–57). Finally, a discussion of the imported goddess Isis is adduced to show how the rise of this deity “did not directly challenge the Roman imperial theology, whose *peace through victory*

constituted the vaunted Pax Romana” (68). The authors claim that it was otherwise for the Christian community’s “Lord.”

So, in the remaining chapters, the authors adduce relevant archeological investigation as background to their lucid explanations of the Pauline texts that address the problems facing Paul’s communities. Chapter 2 describes for us in detail the tremendous religious reform of the emperor Augustus by describing the Ara Pacis and the Forum of Augustus in Rome. By contrast, the rest of the chapter explores authentic Paul’s egalitarianism along with two post-Pauline trajectories of inequality.

Chapter 3 explores the ideology of the divine victor from Alexander the Great to the Julio-Claudian emperors as establishing a myth of cosmic peace. The imaginary journey is to Thessaloniki, and the exegesis of 1 Thessalonians helps to identify the causes of the oppression of Paul’s assembly there by their compatriots.

In chapter 4 the imaginary journey is to Galatia in central Turkey to contemplate how the Romans so thoroughly colonized foreign peoples. The discussion then moves to consider Paul’s heated controversy with the teachers at Galatia, going into quite some detail on the argumentation and use of Scripture by both sides.

In chapter 5 we are off to Priene and nearby Ephesus to study the great control Rome exhibited over its far-flung empire by the institution of the civic priesthood to serve imperial divinity. A digression takes us into the bawdy territory of the ancient pornography of sex and war. Then back on track we come to a discussion of Paul’s sufferings in an Ephesian jail as he relates existentially his conception of kenotic divinity, the polar opposite of the imperial *Divi filii*.

Chapter 6 takes us to Corinth, where we visit the temple of Asclepius to contemplate the interface between public and private life in the ancient world, the sacrifice and “sacred” consumption of animals. The discussion flows over to banquets at the almost-never-private Roman villa and the social patronage of the extended household that goes with it. Crossan gives a good try at putting in order all the letters (extant or not) and visits that Paul mentions in the Corinthian letters, then tackles the problem of power: who has it and in whose eyes.

The last chapter takes us to imperial Rome, where we are treated to an examination of many of the beautiful monuments there that glorify and deify the emperors. We examine the catacombs, and then Crossan takes a stab at the content of the letter to the Romans as a whole. In some twenty pages we read many fine insights on Paul himself, the unity of Jew and Gentile, the trouble with human civilization, the real transformation that

happens in justification (grace as a “free upload” [385] that you only have to accept), freedom from law, sin, and death, and back to the unity of Jew and Gentile again.

In the brief epilogue the authors finalize their case that “*both Jesus and Paul are ... engaged in establishing [global imperialism’s] positive alternative here below upon this earth*” (409, emphasis original). Using the image of plate tectonics, they image a large central plate of the hierarchical kind of civilization-by-violence (where peace comes only and normally after victory). This plate is abraided constantly by the postcivilization of Paul’s eschatology (peace by justice), on one side, and anticivilization, on the other (peace by death).

It is impossible to comment on the totality of archaeological and exegetical information contained in these pages, so I must single out just a few topics for critique. The reader who is interested only in Pauline exegesis will find the imaginative journeys less than effective and the archeological digs just a bit tedious. I myself judge the length of the latter, however, as necessary for the argument and interesting studies in their own right. I would disagree strongly that the question of *kashrut* at Galatia can be compared in severity to the eating of idol meat at Corinth (219), and I do not think that the idea of twin covenants, Jewish and Christian, is “the only way, *by now*, to reread what Paul called God’s plan” (391, emphasis original). I agree in great measure on the egalitarianism of Paul but see the two post-Pauline trajectories of chapter 2, namely, leadership as that of married, fertile males only and leadership as necessarily celibate, as a bit overdrawn.

Nevertheless, the presentations are, in the main, quite plausible and always laid out with piercing logic and that clarity we used to find in some of the old British scholars such as C. K. Barrett and C. H. Dodd. I recommend this fine study to scholars who want to learn more about the cultural background of Paul’s letters and who want to engage those texts with some fresh insights and, in some cases, with some really new possibilities.