



Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church

Michael J. Kruger

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Christianity in the twenty-first century is a global phenomenon. But in the second century, its future was not at all certain. Initially Christianity possessed little social or cultural influence and found itself fighting for its life. While apostolic tradition was emerging as a "rule of faith," factions contested the nature of the gospel, and pagan philosophers found its claims scandalous. And while its pathway was tenuous, Christianity was forming structures of leadership and worship, and a core of apostolic texts was emerging as authoritative. But it was the challenges, obstacles, and transitions faced by Christians in the second century that, in many ways, would determine the future of the church for the next two millennia. It was a time when Christianity stood at a crossroads. Michael Kruger's introductory survey examines how Christianity took root in the second century, how it battled to stay true to the vision of the apostles, and how it developed in ways that would shape both the church and Western culture over the next two thousand years. *Christianity at the Crossroads* provides an accessible and informative look at the complex and foundational issues faced by an infant church still trying to determine its identity. The church's response to the issues of heresy and orthodoxy, the development of the canon, and the transmission of the Christian Scriptures not only determined its survival, but determined the kind of church it would be for generations to come.

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From Reader Review Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church for online ebook

Brance Gillihan says

This is a helpful and enjoyable overview of Christianity in the second century. He discusses the social, economic, political, intellectual, and religious climate that surrounded the church in the 2nd century Roman Empire.

With a particular focus on the “bookish” and intellectual nature of early Christianity, he offers some valuable lessons that 21st century Christians could learn from our spiritual forefathers on how to interact with secular and pagan forces in the surrounding culture. As well, there are important lessons regarding the spread of the faith based on written scriptures, to a largely illiterate populace.

This is an interesting and highly recommended read.

Andrew Petro says

An excellent, brief introduction to a neglected period of Christian history. This book is absolutely essential for anyone anxious to get clear view of the formation of early Christianity.

Daniel Thomas says

Kruger does a great job of highlighting the importance of second-century Christianity in this volume; although, if you’ve read Kruger’s *Canon Revisited*, or *The Heresy of Orthodoxy* (Köstenberger/Kruger), you will recognize some material here and there. Overall, this is an enjoyable read!

Dan says

Recently there has been a tremendous amount of attention drawn to the second century church. Most of the writing on this subject has been done from a highly critical viewpoint. As such it is refreshing to have a scholarly yet conservative voice in the throng. *Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church* written by esteemed scholar Michael J. Kruger is that strong anthem. Kruger is the beloved president of Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, NC and is known for his work on the canonicity of the Word.

The second century was a critical time in the history of the church for the first time in the history of the church, there were no Apostles, no one who had experienced directly the teachings of Jesus, this therefore was a time of transition. The church was taking its first breath and there dangers all around her, and heretics who sought to manipulate the church to their own end, yet the church grew. It is in this growth and controversy that Kruger writes, he takes a look at seven different areas of the Church, looking at how they looked sociologically, how the world saw the church, how they worshiped Jesus, the diversity in the church

itself, the growth, literature used by the church, and how the church saw the New Testament as cannon.

This work is truly a thorough piece of writing, scholarly yet understandable by an educated laymen. It is not surprising due to Kruger's expertise as a communicator, yet the passion he writes with, it what shines through the most, which is something that usually only comes out when hearing him speak. Christianity at the Crossroads is truly a book that you do not want to miss.

This book was provided to me free of charge from IVP Academic in exchange for an unbiased, honest review.

Jim says

Solid survey of second century Christianity. Lots of information, but really dry- reads like a textbook.

Patrick S. says

I don't know if Kruger could even write a bad book. Kruger once again shows himself to be a well balanced scholar and one of the greatest living New Testament scholars out there. This book does cover the essence of what Christians in the 2nd century were dealing with and/or thought. He looks at who made up the church at the time and how radical the make up was. During that discussion he breaks apart some charges leveled at early Christianity like that they were all illiterate, poor slaves. He looks at the start of the heretical groups that were foretold by the Apostles and showed that the core of Christianity had cemented the fact that there was only one path in faith through Jesus Christ. He builds from his work of "Heresy of Orthodoxy" with a discussion on 2nd century unity in Christianity. Finally he takes a look at the books and canon of the church during that time.

I can't say much more than Kruger knocks it out of the park and covers what needs to be covered with this subject. He is fair to present alternative views but does also critique them for the views he espouses. This is a really great book for those who may doubt the rich and unified history of Christianity in its infancy and where it begins to walk - in the 2nd century. Final Grade - A+

Timothy Bertolet says

Michael Kruger offers a reliable introduction to the second century and the issues concerning the rise of the church in that era. The second century is often overlooked in church history but Kruger demonstrates it was a formative age. He discusses relevant topics including how Christian identity was formed, the hostile culture Christianity faced, the emergence of church leadership and governing structure, issues of orthodoxy and heresy, and literature and the rise of the canon.

Some of Kruger's work here builds off of his previous work regarding orthodoxy and heresy (where he demonstrates Walter Bauer's thesis is unsustainable), and regarding the formation of the canon tends to point towards an early rise of a canon or at least works that were regarded as Scripture. He argues that early Christianity was a literary culture and not primarily an oral culture.

Kruger's work is a solid introduction. He is not exhaustive in his citation of secondary literature (nor should this work be) but he clearly introduces the issue and sets for his case. This is a worthwhile read for those familiar with NT scholarship and second century church history scholarship. This is also a good introduction to those interested in the rise of Christianity or for students of the early church. This would be a good place for a student or layperson with such interests to start their reading.

Joan says

I am a layperson writing a review of an academic text. My goal is not a scholarly review but to describe the possible insights laypeople can gather from reading this book about Christianity in the second century.

We may think Christianity in the world has always been as it is now. Kruger reminds us that is not the case. Christianity was frail in the second century. It had little cultural influence in a hostile environment. There was no clearly defined theology and heresies were running rampant. There was no New Testament and there were no longer apostles to lead the church.

Kruger notes this was a time of transition and important decisions for the church. It was the era in which Christianity was clearly recognized as separate from Judaism. Gentiles were being brought into the faith with their intellectual and cultural challenges. Apologetics developed in the midst of a pluralistic environment.

I found that some of the conditions of that century are similar to our contemporary situation. Even though the church had not developed a precise theology and there were heresies popping up, there was a core set of beliefs developing. There was also an interesting exploration by Kruger as to what it meant to be "Christian" at that time. Some designated themselves as such, as today. Their claims were considered with respect to the Apostolic teaching and the rule of faith. That's a wise practice for today too.

Kruger notes, "...it is clear that women played a substantive role in early Christianity..." (36) That's encouraging for this woman to hear. Kruger also notes a distinguishing characteristic of Christianity among religions is that it used books and written texts. We see that today with scores of new books on Christian faith and practice each year.

Kruger notes that his book is an introduction to and not an exhaustive study of Christianity in the second century. (9) It is a scholarly work and laypeople may have difficulty easily reading the text. There are some sections where Kruger concentrates on evaluating the works of other scholars, for example. Nonetheless, I appreciated learning about how Christianity developed in that era and how we can apply principles from it to Christianity today.

Dave says

A very readable and accessible history and apologetic for the importance of the second century in the formation of the Christian church, traditions and the recognition of the canon of Scripture. Interacts and dismantled many of the recent criticisms of Ehrman and others. Highly informative and definitely recommended!

Steve Stanley says

Interviews and reviews: <https://www.michaeljkruger.com/some-random-thoughts-on-the-orthodox-canonical-question/>

Andy Tse says

This was a great intro to second century Christianity. Not too technical, but it's also not a "very easy read". Kruger brought up the challenges Christians faced in the second century and gave a coherent defence for an early canon and an early defined "orthodox" Christian belief. If you've read The Question of Canon and The Heresy of Orthodoxy there will be some overlap. Overall, this was a worthwhile and informative read for history and apologetics.

Jeff Lembke says

Excellent. A great addition to Canon Revisited, Question of Canon, and The Heresy of Orthodoxy.

Justin Effler says

My intentions going into this book was to discover why we have the specific books in the New Testament canon today with the hopes of learning some other important historical points of the influence of the New Testament canon.

This book didn't exactly answer my questions in total, but it didn't really make the claim I was looking for anyways (someone recommended it to me)—that being, why specifically we have these 27 New Testament books and not others. However, I was pleasantly surprised, learned a lot and left encouraged with some of my questions being answered from angles I didn't see prior to reading this.

The 2nd century was absolutely pivotal in how our church today looks. This is because they went through extreme difficulties and trials during a time when they had to learn how to adapt to the surrounding culture and false teaching that they were experiencing after the Apostles had passed. They had to learn how to handle political and intellectual persecution in a Pagan culture that looked upon them negatively, as well as learning how to handle Gnostic Groups like the Marcionites, Valentinians, Basilideans, Ebionites and others who claimed to all be "Apostolic".

Michael Kruger beautifully answers how Walter Bauer's Hypothesis—though partially correct—has significant flaws that while the 2nd century definitely had a lot of opposing Christianities, you can actually trace back the orthodox position as early as you go through the writings of Paul and earlier creeds. He soundly concludes that the orthodoxy we have today is the earliest and original; that there is One God, maker of heaven and earth, Jesus as Messiah, Jesus as God incarnate, born of a virgin, died for sins of mankind, etc. while with the Gnostic groups, you get something quite different that doesn't go back to the first century—at least not that of the Apostles and their writings.

Without going into each chapter, one of the biggest things I took from this that helped me in my curiosity

was the understanding the difference between canon and scripture. Oftentimes in our present day we think of them as the same thing but in actuality they are quite distinct, though closely related. However, Michael Kruger pointed out that scholars of Christian antiquity make clear distinctions of canon: That being ,the **functional canon** vs the **exclusive canon**

The exclusive canon we think of today, where there is a rule or fixed, closed and final set of books. The second century did not have that, at least not *exclusively* but rather they had a **functional canon**. That is, they had a group of books they referred to and utilized as scripture, holy or inspired as you may say. Though the 27 book canon wasn't officially ruled til the 4th century, typically, you can see the main core books within 2nd century Christianity being utilized as scripture. That being, the 4 gospels, the writings of Paul and some other books as well. The main core books. The functional canon as Kruger states it, "is used for books that function as scripture...we would have a canon when books are being referred to as scripture." And just because maybe not ALL the books we have today aren't specifically mentioned doesn't mean that the early church rejected them as non-scriptural. Otherwise, it would be an argument from silence to conclude otherwise.

In all, I found the book very helpful. Though, not answering ALL my questions it did help me understand the early church a lot more in how they viewed scripture, tradition and the trials of the time.

Jamey Hinds says

Excellent source material, well-referenced; easy to read and follow. As a book of church history, I found this to be a page-turner!

Ronnie Nichols says

Dr Kruger gives an excellent overview of the crucial second century in Christian history. This book is very clearly written and you will not be bogged down in technical scholarly terminology or useless facts. This book along with anything else written by Dr. Kruger is a great addition to any Christian's library.
