



By

Mark McGee

Christianity At The Crossroads: How The Second Century Shaped The Future Of The Church (IVP Academic, 2018) will be an excellent addition to anyone's personal, teaching, pastoral or church library.

Written by Dr. Michael J. Kruger (President and Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina), this new book does a wonderful job demonstrating the importance of the 2nd century to the life and future of the Christian Church.

“There was a time, nearly two thousand years ago, when Christianity was in its infancy. It possessed very little cultural influence, was weak and frail, and found itself fighting for its life. Theological formulations were imprecise and undeveloped, factions and ‘heresies’ were dominant, attacks from pagan philosophers were rampant, and the future was altogether uncertain. On top of all this, Christianity was, for the first time, moving forward without the direct guidance

of living apostles and still did not yet have a fully formed New Testament canon.

When was this time? It was the second century. This particular block of time is one of the most critical in the life of the Church – perhaps the moment when it was most vulnerable. It is what we might call the transitional century for the early Christian faith. The Church was out of the apostolic womb and now trying to take its first breath.” *Christianity At The Crossroads*, Introduction, p 1

I have been fascinated as a Christian by how the early Church developed after the Lord’s Apostles died. What would become of the Church that Jesus said He would build?

Christianity (broadly speaking) is currently the world’s largest religion with more than 2.3 billion people. However, it wasn’t always the largest. Estimates about the number of Christians at the beginning of the 2nd century usually fall in the range of 100-thousand to 200-thousand people at the most.

Though the number of Christians was small and the opposition was great, they were very active in carrying out the Lord's command to "make disciples of all nations."

"It was when the Church was still in its infancy, trying to stand on its own after the apostles had passed on and facing serious and sustained opposition from the surrounding culture, that some of the most critical steps were taken. During these 100 years, the fledgling Christian movement made enormous strides – geographically, numerically, demographically, structurally and theologically. So much so that by the end of the second century Christianity was on a path of ascendancy that would eventually culminate in its becoming the dominant force of the Roman Empire just a few generations later." p. 227

I was amazed at how much Dr. Kruger covered in a relatively small book (256 pages). He covered many important topics with surprising depth. He reports on the major Christian leaders across the empire and many of the Church's primary opponents. Kruger also shares great insight into the development of the Canon of Scripture during the 2nd century.

I highly recommend *Christianity At The Crossroads*. It is one of the best new books on the topic of Christianity during the 2nd century.

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Author Bio

“Michael J. Kruger (PhD, University of Edinburgh) is President and the Samuel C. Patterson Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC, and the author of a number of books and articles on early Christianity. He is one of the leading scholars today in the study of the origins of the New Testament, particularly the development of the New Testament canon and the transmission of the New Testament text. He is the author of numerous books including *The Gospel of the Savior* (Brill, 2005), *The Heresy of Orthodoxy* (Crossway, 2010, with Andreas Köstenberger), *Canon Revisited* (Crossway, 2012), and *The Question of Canon* (IVP, 2013). He is also the editor of *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (Crossway, 2016), and co-editor of *The Early Text of the New Testament* (Oxford, 2012), and *Gospel Fragments* (Oxford, 2009). Dr. Kruger is ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America and also serves (part-time) as Pastor of Teaching at Uptown PCA in downtown Charlotte.”

Publisher's Description

“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."

Reviews

“If you’ve ever wondered what happened to the church after the apostles, how the church began to expand and grow, and why it developed its particular beliefs, then Michael Kruger has written the book for you. In this learned volume, Kruger takes readers into the mysterious second century, where he lucidly explains things like the formation of a distinctive Christian identity, pagan responses to Christianity, the rise of certain heresies, and the canonization of the New Testament. This book will open a whole new world that you never knew existed!” (Michael F. Bird, lecturer in theology, Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia)

“This is a good introduction and overview of Christianity in the second century, which was a crucial period of growth, opposition, and development of doctrines and practices. Readable and informed, Kruger’s book is a recommended choice for course readings and for individuals seeking to know more about early Christianity.” (Larry W. Hurtado,

professor emeritus of New Testament language, literature, and theology, School of Divinity (New College), University of Edinburgh)

“Kruger takes us into a world in which ‘Christianity’ is still very much at risk and up for grabs, struggling to find its identity in the midst of forces within and without seeking to define its identity or suppress its existence. His book invites us into the tensions and trajectories that would eventually give shape to what we, in distant retrospect, take for granted as Christian faith, practice, and polity. I recommend it highly, alongside the texts that have richly informed it (the apostolic fathers, the early martyrologies, and the apologists), to all those interested in learning how ‘New Testament faith’ found its footing and began to take root.” (David A. deSilva, trustees’ distinguished professor of New Testament and Greek, Ashland Theological Seminary)

“Though most of us are pretty sure that something happened between the apostolic era and the Council of Nicaea, even professional historians can be pretty foggy on what that ‘something’ was or why it matters; the second century has always been the black box of Christian history. Now with this well-researched yet highly accessible book, Kruger recovers important flight data that shows just how crucial this overlooked trajectory is to understanding Christian history and even Christianity as we know it today.” (Nicholas Perrin, Franklin S. Dyrness Professor of Biblical Studies, Wheaton Graduate School)

“The second century, a sprawling, fascinating, and formative period in the history of Christianity, may be well studied, but it is neither well nor easily comprehended. Mike Kruger’s *Christianity at the Crossroads* is an excellent remedy for that problem! Any reader who wants a better understanding of the situation of the church in that period, its place in the world, its worship, its struggles, and its Scriptures will benefit from this highly informative compendium. Besides being a trustworthy guidebook, it is

also a well-designed source-book for those interested in further study.” (Charles E. Hill, John R. Richardson Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity, Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando)

“Many scholars of early Christianity are pushing beyond the New Testament era, into the second century; however, the complexity of issues magnifies due to the intersection of such a diverse expression of Christian groups interpreting biblical texts and developing their approaches to theology and society. With *Christianity at the Crossroads*, Michael Kruger provides an orientation to the diversity of groups, texts, and practices that students and scholars of Christian origins will find invaluable. He summarizes the best of contemporary research about second century Christianity and provides robust bibliographies for further study. This is definitely a book I wish I had a decade ago, when I began my work in this area.” (Ben C. Blackwell, assistant professor of Christianity, Houston Baptist University)

Christianity At The Crossroads: How The Second Century Shaped The Future Of The Church (Michael J. Kruger, IVP Academic, 2018, 256 pages)

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