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St. Paul: New and Improved

Maureen Fiedler | Oct. 19, 2009 NCR Today

The renowned scripture scholars, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, have just published a great new book on St. Paul. It's called *The First Paul: Reclaiming the Radical Visionary Behind the Church's Conservative Icon.*

These writers say what New Testament scholars have known for some time: that Paul wrote only seven of the Epistles ascribed to him in the New Testament. Among the other six, they say three (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) are definitely not written by Paul, and three others (Ephesians, Colossians and 1 Thessalonians) are disputed, although the majority of scholars believe that Paul did not write these either.

Borg and Crossan show that the "authentic" Paul was a radical egalitarian, on issues like slavery, patriarchy and obedience to civil authority. The later authors (whoever they were -- and we don't know) tried to "tone down" the radical Paul, making him more acceptable in Roman culture. It's in the six non-Paul letters that we get admonitions about slaves being subject to masters, wives being subject to husbands, and other passages that contradict the egalitarian message of Jesus.

Isn't it about time that the people in the pews heard about this scholarship? We need this message in parish preaching.

There's another book on Paul that is also enlightening. It's called *Paul was Not a Christian*, by Pamela Eisenbaum. She reclaims Paul as a Jew, an identify which he certainly acknowledged himself many times.

I interviewed Marcus Borg, and my producer, Laura Kwerel, interviewed Pamela Eisenbaum, on this week's "Interfaith Voices." If you want to listen, here's the link: www.interfaithradio.org [1]

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