

PAUL

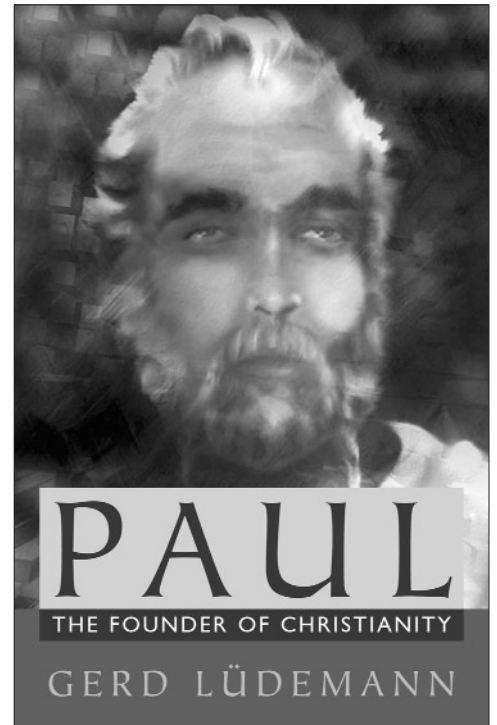
The Founder of Christianity

Gerd Lüdemann

New Testament scholar Gerd Lüdemann continues his exploration of the life and teachings of Paul in this groundbreaking monograph, which synthesizes the research of his four previous books on Christianity's leading apostle. As the subtitle of the present work makes clear, Lüdemann comes to the conclusion that Paul should be considered not only Christianity's most influential proselytizer but in truth deserves the title of founder of the religion that ostensibly originated with Jesus of Nazareth. Though other scholars have previously made the point that Paul's interpretation of the Christian message actually obscured the original teachings of Jesus, Lüdemann goes further. His painstaking historical research shows that Paul created the major tenets of the Christianity we know today and that his theology—an original synthesis of Hebrew and Greek belief systems—differs significantly from what we now know the historical Jesus to have preached.

Based on a life-changing vision of the risen Christ, Paul's belief in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus naturally became the centerpiece of his interpretation of this new religion. But Lüdemann contends that however sincerely motivated he was, in the final analysis we must judge Paul's belief as self-deception. Paul never knew Jesus and he had only a passing acquaintance and a strained relationship with Jesus' immediate disciples. As a result, he was not in a position to give an accurate representation of Jesus' teachings. Still, the combination of his dynamic personality and several fortuitous historical factors led to the success of his efforts to evangelize the non-Jewish population of the Roman Empire, whereas the mission of other leading apostles (for example, Peter and James) to a mainly Jewish audience failed. Thus, Paul's version of Christianity, not Jesus', captured the public imagination and eventually became the dominant religion of the West. In another book, Lüdemann has called this historical phenomenon *The Great Deception*. Here he shows that the deception began as self-deception within the deeply conflicted personality of Paul of Tarsus, the former Pharisee and zealous persecutor of the fledgling Christian sect, whose dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus transformed him into its greatest promoter.

This brilliant exegesis, based on twenty-five years of research, by a leading New Testament scholar with an unwavering commitment to historical accuracy presents a message rarely heard from any pulpit but one that churches can no longer honestly ignore.



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