

In this book, Colleen Conway looks at the construction of masculinity in New Testament depictions of Jesus. She argues that the New Testament writers necessarily engaged the predominant gender ideology of the Roman Empire, whether consciously or unconsciously. Although the notion of what constituted ideal masculinity in Greek and Roman cultures certainly predated the Roman Empire, the emergence of the Principate concentrated this gender ideology on the figure of the emperor. Indeed, critical to the success of the empire was the portrayal of the emperor as the ideal man and the Roman citizen as one who aspired to be the same. Any person who was held up alongside the emperor as another source of authority would be assessed in terms of the cultural values represented in this Roman image of the "manly man."

Conway examines a variety of ancient ideas of masculinity, as found in philosophical discourses, medical treatises, imperial documents, and ancient inscriptions. Manliness, in these accounts, was achieved through self-control over passions such as lust, anger, and greed. It was also gained through manly displays of courage, the endurance of pain, and death on behalf of others. With these texts as a starting point, Conway shows how the New Testament writings approach Jesus' gender identity.

From Paul's early letters, to the Gospels and Acts, to the Book of Revelation, Christian writings in the Bible confront the potentially emasculating scandal of the cross and affirm Jesus as ideally masculine. Conway's study touches on such themes as the relationship between divinity and masculinity; the role of the body in relation to gender identity; and belief in Jesus as a means of achieving a more ideal form of masculinity. This impeccably researched and highly readable book reveals the importance of ancient gender ideology for the interpretation of Christian texts.