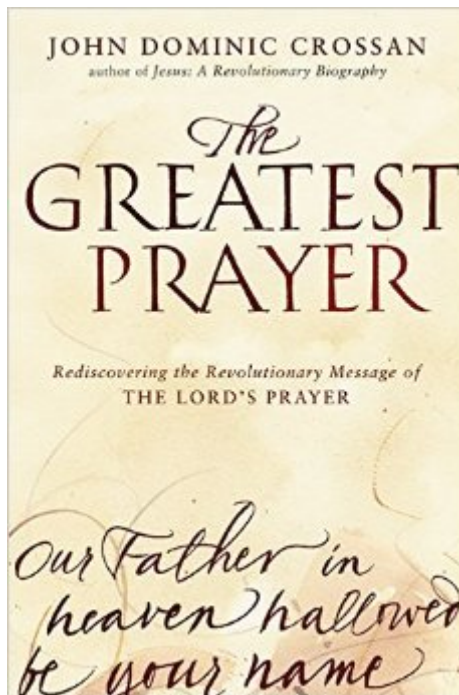


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The Greatest Prayer: Rediscovering The Revolutionary Message Of The Lord's Prayer



Synopsis

In *The Greatest Prayer*, foremost historical Jesus scholar John Dominic Crossan, bestselling author of *Historical Jesus* and *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, intimately explores the revolutionary meaning of the cornerstone of Christian faith: The Lord's Prayer.

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Customer Reviews

Dr. Crossan's profound and revelatory little book on the meaning of The Lord's Prayer is, for those of us who pray this prayer daily, a spellbinding journey. It is a trek of faith through the labyrinthine passageways of ancient scripture, its sacred memory, and its profane history. It is a meditation on the ways we choose to approach one another, with a flailing sword or a proffered loaf of bread. It is finally a bracing analysis of the strange prayer that was Jesus' answer to the simple request, "Lord, teach us to pray." There are three ancient versions of the Lord's Prayer, which Crossan calls the "Abba Prayer," for good reason. Renditions appear in Matthew, Luke, and the Didache ("The Teaching [of the Twelve Apostles]") a very early little catechism rediscovered in the 19th century). Matthew, the most "Jewish" of the evangelists, preserved seven petitions, a number that alerts Hebrew readers of the holiness and importance of what they are reciting. Luke has five petitions. Crossan perceives six tropes in Matthew; he combines the last two: "And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." Thus he constructs a nicely balanced poetic sensibility, with a crescendo of three petitions orienting us to God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will, followed by a second crescendo making that orientation clear for us on earth: (1) all of us get the

sustenance we need on a daily basis; (2) all of us are awarded a debt-free future inasmuch as we free our debtors; and (3) we are preserved from the temptation to slip into violence to promote God's reign and therefore saved from the grasp of the evil one. The key to this analysis is the Exodus story, the central memory of the children of Abraham.

I read this book because I am writing a PhD dissertation on the Lord's Prayer. As an evangelical Anglican, I was a bit apprehensive about reading a book by John Dominic Crossan. The experience was not as painful as I anticipated, and there were sections of the book that I really enjoyed. But overall, my feelings are a bit ambivalent. At the outset, Crossan explains, "I have been thinking about Jesus in his first-century Jewish and Roman matrix for about forty years. One obvious way to test my conclusions about him was to see how they compared with the Lord's Prayer itself." (p 7) Thus, Crossan's interpretation of the Lord's Prayer is inextricably bound to his framing of the person of Jesus. This is not, therefore, a rigorously exegetical work. Rather, it is a reflection on the message and ministry of Jesus as seen through the Lord's Prayer. In Crossan's eyes, Jesus was a champion of distributive justice, restorative righteousness, and the rejection of violence in all forms. The Lord's Prayer is about upholding the honor of God. As the supreme Householder of Creation, his name and reputation are honored when we on earth choose to do his will and follow his ways; thus collaborating with him to establish his leadership on earth. This is good stuff. However, there are many ways in which Crossan's theology differs from orthodox doctrine. For example, in Crossan's eyes Jesus was (and is) not, the only way to God. Nor was his death a vicarious sacrifice for the sins of the world. (I must comment that in his defense of this latter point, Crossan's scholarship was surprisingly faulty. He suggests that our traditional doctrine of the Atonement was largely formulated by Anselm around the year 1098.

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