

God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now

By John Dominic Crossan

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At the heart of the Bible is a moral and ethical call to fight unjust superpowers, whether they are Babylon, Rome, or even America.

From the divine punishment and promise found in Genesis through the revolutionary messages of Jesus and Paul, John Dominic Crossan reveals what the Bible has to say about land and economy, violence and retribution, justice and peace, and, ultimately, redemption. In contrast to the oppressive Roman military occupation of the first century, he examines the meaning of the non-violent Kingdom of God prophesized by Jesus and the equality advocated by Paul to the early Christian churches. Crossan contrasts these messages of peace with the misinterpreted apocalyptic vision from the Book of Revelation, which has been misrepresented by modern right-wing theologians and televangelists to justify U.S. military actions in the Middle East.

In *God and Empire* Crossan surveys the Bible from Genesis to Apocalypse, or the Book of Revelation, and discovers a hopeful message that cannot be ignored in these turbulent times. The first-century Pax Romana, Crossan points out, was in fact a "peace" won through violent military action. Jesus preached a different kind of peace—a peace that surpasses all understanding—and a kingdom not of Caesar but of God.

The Romans executed Jesus because he preached this Kingdom of God, a kingdom based on peace and justice, over the empire of Rome, which ruled by violence and force. For Jesus and Paul, Crossan explains, peace cannot be won the Roman way, through military victory, but only through justice and fair and equal treatment of all people.

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
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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this fine study of civilization, culture and transformation, Father Crossan asks important questions: have those who resort to violence as a means of change succeeded in their quest for empire? Or has nonviolence been more effective in bringing about lasting change? Crossan, professor emeritus at De Paul University and author of several well-received works including *The Historical Jesus*, believes that the solution is not in violent intervention but in the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. But how, and when, will this Kingdom come? In comparing the missions of Jesus and John the Baptist, Crossan states his idea clearly: "Jesus differed precisely from John in emphasizing not the future-presence but the already-presence of God's Kingdom as the Great Divine Cleanup of the world." In other words, Christ saw the Kingdom as a present and active reality. Crossan uses the teachings of Jesus to promote his thesis, and then turns to an unlikely ally—the Apostle Paul—by suggesting that Paul's emphasis on equality and freedom helped carry forward Jesus' program of nonviolent change. Crossan's latest work presents a complex subject in a clear and powerful way, and it merits a wide readership. (*Mar.*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review By Crossan's lights, Jesus proposed the nonviolent kingdom of God to supplant Rome. And not just Rome but civilization per se may be the object of Jesus' revolution, for civilization building was Rome's pretext for imperial aggression and economic as well as physical violence against common people. Fighting Rome was folly, so the kingdom of God movement aimed to liberate ordinary people nonviolently. It threatened Rome because Jesus' proclamation of God defied the Roman emperor's institutional divinity, and because Jesus proposed peace through justice against Rome's conceit that it achieved peace through the violence of conquest. Paul sharpened the concept of equality in the kingdom of God by advocating for slaves and cooperating on equal terms with women; here Crossan goes Garry Wills' *What Paul Meant* (2006) one better by carefully explaining that pro-slavery and anti-women Pauline remarks come from epistles spuriously attributed to him. Later, the Revelation of John promulgated a "pornography of violence" and has malevolently affected Christianity ever since, most recently in rapture theology, whose influence on U.S. neoconservatives' bush-league Rome is the immediate provocation for this book. The opposition of God and empire, of justice and violence, persists. Despite a few rant-lines from the progressives' book of cant, this book makes the best reading for the most readers of any that Crossan has written. *Ray Olson*

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Review

"A dual tribute to intelligent faith and responsible citizenship, this book is as illuminating as it is timely." (James Carroll, author of *House of War: The Pentagon and the Disastrous Rise of American Power*)

"This fine study of civilization, culture and transformation presents a complex subject in a clear and powerful way." (Publishers Weekly)

"This book makes the best reading for the most readers of any that Crossan has written." (Booklist (starred review))

"A wonderfully written and organized treatise... Thoroughly enjoyable and incredibly informative." (Library Journal)

Users Review

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