

I have decided not to provide a full and detailed review of O'Reilly's Killing Jesus. It doesn't really deserve it, and much more of what I have indicated before - on which see my previous posts. I will say that the book is extremely well written and easy on the eyes. It is entertaining. A lot of human-interest material, which is both its strength and its very great weakness, as almost all of this, as I've mentioned before, is simply MADE UP, even though it is presented as if were historical fact. There is page after page after page of that kind of thing. This is not a research book written by a scholar and his writing buddy - with, for example, footnotes indicating where they got their information from. It can't be that, since almost all of the details didn't come from ancient sources but from their own fertile imaginations. And since that is the main source for the Gospel according to Bill, and since most of us know what Bill's imagination spends its time thinking about you may not be surprised to find out what he understands Jesus' principle interests to be (on which see below).

Albert Schweitzer wrote arguably the most famous book about the historical Jesus, and he claimed - and demonstrated - that each generation of biblical scholars managed to paint Jesus in its own image. We have continued to see that since Schweitzer's times, and it applies not only to biblical scholars who should, but apparently do not, know better, but to popular writers about Jesus who don't know better and so do, in fact, even worse.

And so biblical scholars who embrace good liberal values of social justice (often) portray Jesus as a proponent of good liberal values of social justice; those who do not believe in miracles (often) portray Jesus as a great teacher who did not (because he could not) do miracles; those who are children of the 60s (often) portray Jesus as a counter-cultural opponent of the status quo; those who are fundamentalists (often) portray Jesus as an early proponent of the Nicene Creed; and so on and so on. It is often enlightening to read how an author portrays Jesus and then to look at the biography of the author. It can often tell you a lot.

So what about Bill O'Reilly? What's his Jesus like? I won't lay out all the details here, but give a couple of examples and more important give you a link to the book review by my friend Candida Moss, who, on the basis of this review, was asked onto O'Reilly's show, presumably so he could grill her. She argues in this review that what Jesus was most concerned about - in fact, this was ultimately his mission on earth - in O'Reilly's presentation was ... get ready for it ... TAXES!!! They were TOO HIGH. Jesus was opposed to HIGH TAXES, and, the corollary, (Roman) government involvement with the Jewish people, forcing itself up on them at every turn.

Here's the link to read the review.

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/09/27/the-gospel-according-to-bill-o-reilly-s-new-book-killing-jesus.html>

In case you don't want to read the review, here's the kind of thing O'Reilly tells us, in his own passionate words.

Joseph and Mary, as do most other Jews, live in fear of Herod Antipas [the ruler of Galilee in Jesus' day]...a callow man who has never known want and who always expected to be given a kingdom....He pays homage to Caesar Augustus not only by taxing the Jews blind but also by ordering a Roman-style form of execution for any who would dare defy him.... Galilean outrage against Rome has been building for decades. The people have been levied with tax after tax after tax. Antipas is

nothing if not a “lover of luxury,” ...and the more luxury he needs, the higher the taxes climb.... Actual money is scarce... No men are more despised than the tax collectors, who do not only extort funds from people with very little but also publicly abuse and even torture those who fall behind on their payments. There is no leeway. Those who can't pay must borrow grain or oil from the storage silos manned by Antipas's men. The interest rates are exorbitant — 100% on oil and 25% on grain. And falling behind on these debts means ruin. Peasants are often forced to sell their children to creditors as debt slaves or to sell their home and work the land as sharecroppers.....

And so it goes, on and on. The problem was HIGH TAXES. (I can't read this without thinking of Monty Python's "Life of Brian": "What have the Romans ever done for *us*????")
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If there were something other than a historical novel (a work of fiction) - that is, if it was anything like a book on Jesus written by someone with historical interest - the authors would provide *evidence* for their claims, at least in footnotes. They would indicate that this is what our sources indicate about taxes on Jews in Galilee. This is how they compare with taxes elsewhere. This is the percentage of income that went into taxes as a rule. Here are some examples of public protests against them, as documented in this source or that source. Here is some actual *evidence* that Joseph and Mary were concerned about taxes. Or that Jesus was. Or that this concern had anything to do with his message. That it had anything to do with his death.

But no, there is no evidence cited here. So how is a person supposed to evaluate these claims that the big problem Jesus had to deal with was - like our republican House of Representatives - TAXES THAT WERE TOO HIGH? Well, there's no way to evaluate the claim unless you happen to be an expert in the period and know the sources yourself.

If you want to read a portrayal of Jesus as a card-carrying member of the Tea Party, this is the book for you.

If, on the other hand, you want a serious historical treatment of Jesus - and of Palestine in his time - I would suggest you read the books about Jesus by scholars who actually know what they're talking about, including such figures as Geza Vermes, E. P. Sanders, Dale Allison, and Paula Fredriksen - for starters. Some modern scholars have indeed managed to paint Jesus in some image other than their own. These scholars are among those who have: their views of Jesus are not all the same, but they are at least *argued* and *documented* and are not simply the result of a person's fertile imagination that truly wishes that the Son of God shared his own personal beliefs and prejudices. These are not scholars who have written a book to advance their own political agendas or to make millions of dollars. They are serious. This book by Bill-and-Buddy is not.



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