

QUESTION:

Do you consider Reza Aslan to be a recognised scholar of early Christianity? Larry Hurtado described the thesis circulating in lay circles, that Jesus was a military revolutionary, as a “zombie” idea (from what I gather, a key conclusion of Aslan’s 2013 book) which had been debunked over and over again by scholarship in the past century.

RESPONSE:

OK, I need to begin with a very serious disclaimer. I haven’t read Aslan’s book ([Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth](#)) yet. So what I say will not be based on careful observation of his views or the evidence that he cites to support them. My comments will not require any of that, as you’ll see.

His publisher sent me a copy gratis, for which I’m very grateful. He sent it to me before he knew that it was going to be the #1 Bestseller in nonfiction on the New York Times Bestseller list - which it is still this week, I see in this morning’s paper - and when he was interested in drumming up some support for it. That was well before that crazy and now infamous FOX news interview that helped propel it onto the Bestseller list, but who knows, it may have gotten there anyway. To my knowledge - someone correct me if I’m wrong! - this is the first time a book on the historical Jesus, or even ancient Christianity, has been #1 on the NYTimes list. So that’s an amazing milestone. (There will soon be a competitor, however; in a month Bill O’Reilly - another FOX news connection [go figure] - will have published his book [Killing Jesus](#). It will be a follow-up to his two previous bestsellers, [Killing Kennedy](#) and [Killing Lincoln](#). A lot more people are interested in Jesus than in JFK or Abe, so I think this book is going to be BIG. Does O’Reilly actually know anything about historical scholarship on Jesus? I’ll be completely astounded if he does....)

Anyway, the publisher sent me a gratis copy of [Zealot](#), and I haven’t read it yet. I mentioned a couple of times in response to queries - I’ve gotten lots of queries about my views of the book - that I wasn’t planning to read it. That’s because, like most research scholars who spend the vast majority of their waking hours on research scholarship, I simply don’t have the time or inclination to read books written for non-experts, especially when they are written *by* non-experts. There just aren’t enough hours in the day, even to read the books that I *have* to to read for my own work (right now I’m reading massively on early Christian apocrypha).

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