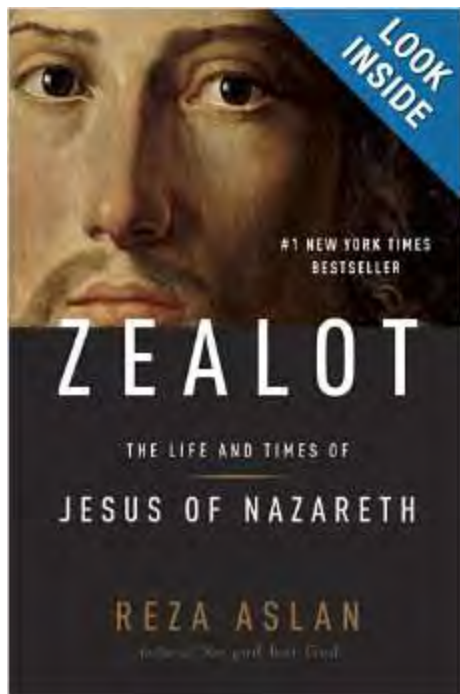


"The Zealot" a book review

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Recently, I noticed that the #1 best-selling non-fiction book in America is *The Zealot*, the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth. Thinking that this would be interesting reading, I downloaded it and began to listen to it on my daily train commute. I anticipated that it might be similar to Nikos Kazantzakis' "The Last Temptation of Christ," which along with his "Saint Francis" were two of the most moving pieces of historical fiction that I have ever read (the latter was the only book that ever caused me to cry— while reading it out loud to Sheri Rueter on our way to go witnessing at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco). But *The Zealot* is quite different.

It is written by Reza Aslan, an internationally acclaimed Iranian author who converted to Christianity when he was thirteen. The first time through I found the book somewhat interesting, but bordering on boredom from time to time. Also, I took offense that the author refuted many Biblical sections that he claimed were fictionalized—including the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist -- stating in fact that John was killed 2 years before Jesus ministry even began. For me, as a Unification theologian, this was unacceptable. Aslan's historical notes

however, are actually quite interesting -- writing about Pilate and Herod and the Chief Rabbis in historical depth.

Upon second listening, my opinion changed quite a bit. I actually went out to the bookstore so I could read the notes (nearly 60 pages) at the end of the book -- to find out where his data was coming from. He compares the texts between the synoptic gospels -- especially from Mark, the first to be written, and Matthew. He explains that Paul's theology, found in his letters, was written wholly for the gentiles, while Matthew was written primarily for the Jewish population. The author talks about the old testament prophecies of Isaiah and Daniel and the Jewish meaning of many of Jesus quotes as found in Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and Ecclesiastes.

When I traveled to Israel on the MEPs, I learned that Jesus ministry was primarily centered in Galilee. He met Peter near Peter's home in Capernaum on the north bank of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus preferred to witness there because the Galileans were more "down home" simple folk, while the educated, elite and arrogant Pharisees and Sadducees were living in Jerusalem.

Aslan tells the story of John the Baptist and Jesus from several different points of view, explaining for instance, that Andrew and Phillip were originally both disciples of John the Baptist. He explains several different possibilities in the relationship between John and Jesus. He uses John Meier's well documented and universally respected, *The Marginal Jew: the Life of Jesus of Nazareth*, as one of his major references.

I am currently listening through the book for the third time (my history teacher background having gotten the best of me). I am finding the book more and more fascinating, as it serves to be an historically detailed analysis of Jesus' life.

The author compares in detail, Jesus the man with Jesus the Christ. He goes into great detail about Paul's influence on the Christian understanding of Jesus, the coming together of the Council at Nicaea and several of the earliest followers of the first theologians under Constantine.

Theologically, Aslan goes into detail about the difference between the historical Jesus and the risen Christ; the different understandings of the meaning of the Kingdom of God; he explains the Sermon on the Mount, especially in terms of the Jewish understanding, as opposed to the modern Christian interpretation. In fact, he makes quite the point of the fact that Jesus was a Jew who was brought up under, lived in and believed totally in the Jewish Law of Moses. He explains that most of the Jewish laws were put down for Jews relating to Jews, rather than to the gentiles.

Interestingly, he explains how terms like, "love your neighbor" meant love your Jewish neighbor. In fact he states the Jesus taught that Jews should not really interact with the gentiles (giving many biblical references) -- and he points out that the parable of the "lost sheep" was talking about only Jews (see

Mark7:27). He states that Jesus worshipped the Jewish God of old testament history exclusively with his fellow Jews.

The author talks about the difference between the terms "Son of God" (a term that Jesus never used) and the term found in the Book Of Daniel, "Son of Man" (which Jesus often used referring to himself).

Finally, using the term in the book's title, "Zealot," the author describes the difference between the historical group of Zealots as opposed to the adjective itself.

He describes in detail, how Jews expected a messiah in the mode of the warrior king of David or Daniel as opposed to a spiritual Messiah. He asks the question, whether Jesus ever considered himself as the Messiah and if so, why he never used this term in public. And he looks at Jesus as a prophet, liberator or king (much like the judges who were prophet, priest and king).

So from starting out reading what I considered a somewhat boring read, I was stimulated into re-reading the book two more times as well as examining the more than 60 pages of notes. I have asked Dr. Frank Kaufman and Dr Tyler Hendricks, both much more theologically expertise than myself to read and comment on the book as well. But I would have to recommend it to any serious Unificationist.

In fact, one Sunday at Belvedere in the mid-1980's Father went into great detail about how important our personal relationship with Jesus actually was. Comparing this importance in much the same way as he always talked about how important it was for us to know how to speak Korean. Father said that it was Jesus that had personally guided his life since he first experienced him on that mountain top in Korea on Easter morning when he was 15 years old. He told us that many of us had little or no relationship with Jesus when we first met the Church. Therefore, he said that it was not enough to just have a relationship with True Parents. Rather he said, if we really wanted to know, understand and love Father, we had to have a very personal relationship with Jesus, just as he did.