



No god but God: The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam

By Reza Aslan



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A fascinating, accessible introduction to Islam from the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Zealot*

Though it is the fastest-growing religion in the world, Islam remains shrouded in ignorance and fear for much of the West. In *No god but God*, Reza Aslan, an internationally acclaimed scholar of religions, explains this faith in all its beauty and complexity. Beginning with a vivid account of the social and religious milieu in which the Prophet Muhammad forged his message, Aslan paints a portrait of the first Muslim community as a radical experiment in religious pluralism and social egalitarianism. He demonstrates how, after the Prophet's death, his successors attempted to interpret his message for future generations—an overwhelming task that fractured the Muslim community into competing sects. Finally, Aslan examines how, in the shadow of European colonialism, Muslims developed conflicting strategies to reconcile traditional Islamic values with the realities of the modern world, thus launching what Aslan terms the Islamic Reformation. Timely and persuasive, *No god but God* is an elegantly written account of a magnificent yet misunderstood faith.

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Editorial Review

From [The New Yorker](#)

Aslan, a young Iranian emigrant, lucidly charts the growth of Islam from Muhammad's model community in Medina—depicted as a center of egalitarian social reform—through the chaotic contest to define the faith after the Prophet's death. Within generations, seven hundred thousand hadith—accounts of Muhammad's words and deeds—were in circulation, many "fabricated by individuals who sought to legitimize their own particular beliefs." Out of this muddle was born the primacy of the ulema, Islam's clerical establishment. The ulema, in Aslan's view, foreclosed Koranic interpretation, detoured from the Medinan ideal, and obscured Islam under a thicket of legalistic decrees. Fifteen centuries after Muhammad, Islam has reached the age at which Christianity underwent its reformation; Islam's renewal, Aslan attests, "is already here." However, both modernizers and their "fundamentalist" opposites call themselves reformers, and the victory of the former is not assured.

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From [Booklist](#)

Aslan's introduction to the history of Islam, which also devotes several chapters to the place of Islam in the contemporary world, tackles its subject with serious and well-informed scholarship. But, miracle of miracles, it's actually pretty fun to read. Beginning with an exploration of the religious climate in the years before the Prophet's Revelation, Aslan traces the story of Islam from the Prophet's life and the so-called golden age of the first four caliphs all the way through European colonization and subsequent independence. Aslan sees religion as a story, and he tells it that way, bringing each successive century to life with the kind of vivid details and like-you-were-there, present-tense narration that makes popular history popular. Even so, the depth and breadth here will probably be a bit heavy for some, who might better enjoy Karen Armstrong's shorter, if less authoritative, *Islam* (2000). That said, this is an excellent overview that doubles as an impassioned call to reform. *John Green*

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Review

"Grippingly narrated and thoughtfully examined . . . a literate, accessible introduction to Islam."

—The New York Times

"Aslan offers an invaluable introduction to the forces that have shaped Islam . . . an eloquent, erudite paean to Islam in all of its complicated glory."

—Los Angeles Times Book Review

"Wise and passionate . . . An incisive, scholarly primer in Muslim history and an engaging personal exploration."

—The New York Times Book Review

"Precise . . . acutely perceptive . . . For many troubled Muslims, this book will feel like a revelation, an opening up of knowledge too long buried."

—The Independent (London)

"Thoroughly engaging and excellently written . . . While [Aslan] might claim to be a mere scholar of the Islamic Reformation, he is also one of its most articulate advocates."

-The Oregonian

Users Review

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