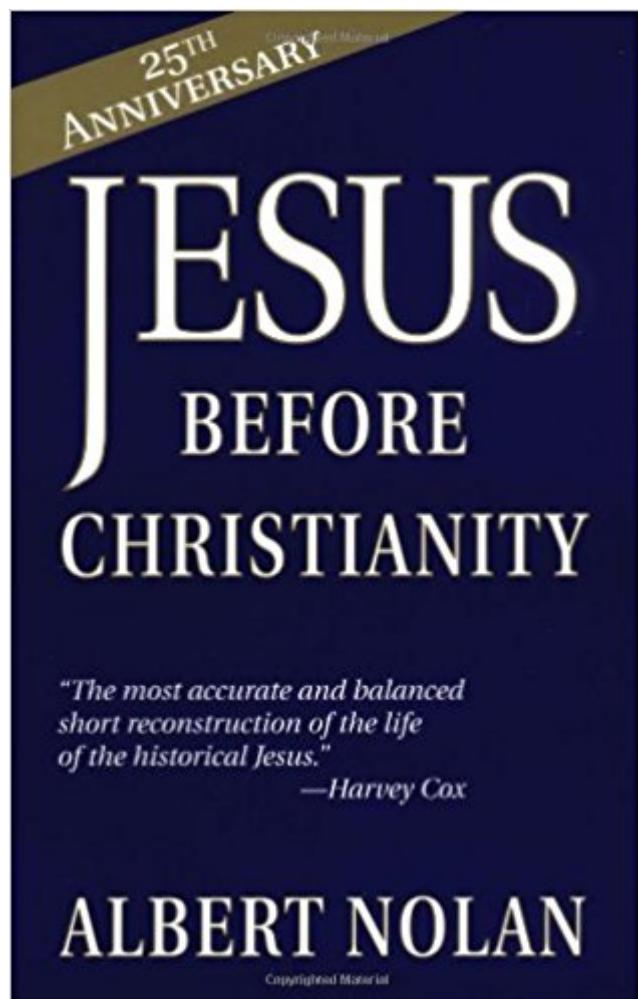


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# Jesus Before Christianity



## **Synopsis**

Nolan's portrait introduces readers to Jesus as He was before He became enshrined in doctrine, dogma, and ritual, a man deeply involved with the real problems of His time, which are the real problems of our time as well. In a new preface, Nolan reflects on recent work in Christology and how a book written in South Africa in 1976 still has a message for people today.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Although this book was written in the 70s, I haven't read a more insightful, inspiring, or convincing portrait of the person Jesus. With a clear explication of the society in which Jesus lived, Nolan allows us to understand how very insightful and courageous he was. Nolan sees Jesus as a cheerful person whose faith was infectious, something that was not taught, but caught, and was based upon a conviction that goodness and truth ultimately can and will triumph over evil and falsehood. Nolan makes it simple to notice when one is not operating from faith. Any expression of fatalism is your clue, i.e., "Nothing can be done about it." "There's no hope." His exposition of the short ministry of Jesus makes it clear how Jesus came to the decision to die and what living like him might mean - something that is generally muddled up in churches that use his name. This book is short, easy to read, and a radical audit of the life of the reader.

Fr. Nolan does not present Jesus with the eyes of faith, but this is not a historical document either. It may be read by Christians and agnostics and both will be satisfied with the content. Without understanding the cultural anthropology of Jesus' time we could hardly establish any dialogue

among cultures and religions. We also tend to overlook certain traits of Christian faith that are obscured by centuries of over interpretation and sometimes manipulation. It is worth reading Nolan to understand why our acceptance of Jesus is all or nothing... "Jesus' divinity is not something totally different from his humanity, something we have to add to his humanity; Jesus' divinity is the transcendent depths of his humanity." The connection of Jesus, God Creator and His Spirit are not openly presented but may be deducted. In this line, Nolan and the most recent work of Fr Richard Rohr, are useful in making our life meaningful, our faith vibrant and healthy for the 21st century.

Albert Nolan is a wonderful writer. His words are carefully chosen, clear, and precise. He combines a love for the Christian tradition at its best with a social conscience that is fully engaged with the problems of this world. In this way he reminds me of Thomas Merton, whose depth of devotion to the life-giving streams of Christian tradition was matched only by his love for this world with its relentless waves of human suffering. Nolan convinces us that Jesus' teachings are infinitely relevant today. -Amos Smith (author of *Healing The Divide: Recovering Christianity's Mystic Roots*)

Forty years is, of course, the biblically long period of time. *Jesus Before Christianity* seems to me even more valuable than it did when I first read it nearly that long ago. If only we would spend the energy on taking Jesus seriously that we spend on taking or not taking Jesus literally, we would be free to follow him more faithfully and effectively. This book is still highly relevant to a world in crisis and is a rich resource.

I wish that I had read this book a long time ago. Seeing how Jesus fit into the culture of his time and a unifying view of how he saw his mission has answered many questions about why various events in the gospels happened and how they all tie together. His overwhelming compassion for the poor is central to his ministry. The cultural background concerning the poor and the sinners in the first century adds a highly useful perspective to the gospel stories. This book also does a good job of showing how Jesus related to the politics of his time. Placing Jesus squarely in the goings on of his time adds great depth and perspective to how we interpret what we read in the scriptures. This is a book that I will be rereading multiple times in order to absorb all that it has to say.

This book, written in the 1970's by a Dominican priest, a Biblical scholar, sets the story of Jesus in the context of his own time on earth, and offered to me a refreshingly new view of him. The book is based on sources that led to the writing of the Gospels 20 to 60 years after Jesus died, and before

the structure of a Christian religion had taken shape. The struggles of Jesus, his decisions, his real temptations, his view of the gift to mankind that his death represented, and his view of the inevitability of Resurrection - all are explored, and persuasive explanations offered. As long as I have lived, and as many books about Jesus as I've read, I had never heard of this book until (which knows all about me, I've come to think) suggested it to me. It turns out that Catholic theologians and preachers have known about it all these years ("Oh yeah! You never read this?") Please read it! Richard Hudgens

Amazing changes came to the message and understanding of Jesus in the centuries after he taught and healed. This book uses the best evidence and studies to recapture what happened when Jesus healed and taught. It then reviews the changes over the centuries. The book has amazing insights and information that helps us to understand Jesus and his times and his disciples.

I really like this book and the approach it takes. Rather than looking at mere historical facts or starting with a lot of assumptions, it starts from scratch. Most importantly, it looks at various points where Jesus had to make a decision and analyzed the meaning based on the decision made. In other words, it looked at what Jesus' behavior meant relative to a particular historical and social context. This is a very psychological approach and one that sheds light on his life by providing a somewhat different lens than most people use habitually to understand Jesus' life. Also, this book is well-written and easy to read. It brings the bible and the figure of Jesus and his time to life. It provoked a lot of inquiry on my part and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The author also follows a good line of reasoning and seems to try very hard to avoid bias. No book is perfect and this book is no exception. However, overall it is well done, scholarly and accessible. If you are a Christian or just someone curious about the historical Jesus, you will find a lot of value here. Many parts of the book read like good fiction and like good fiction this good storytelling is quite compelling.

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