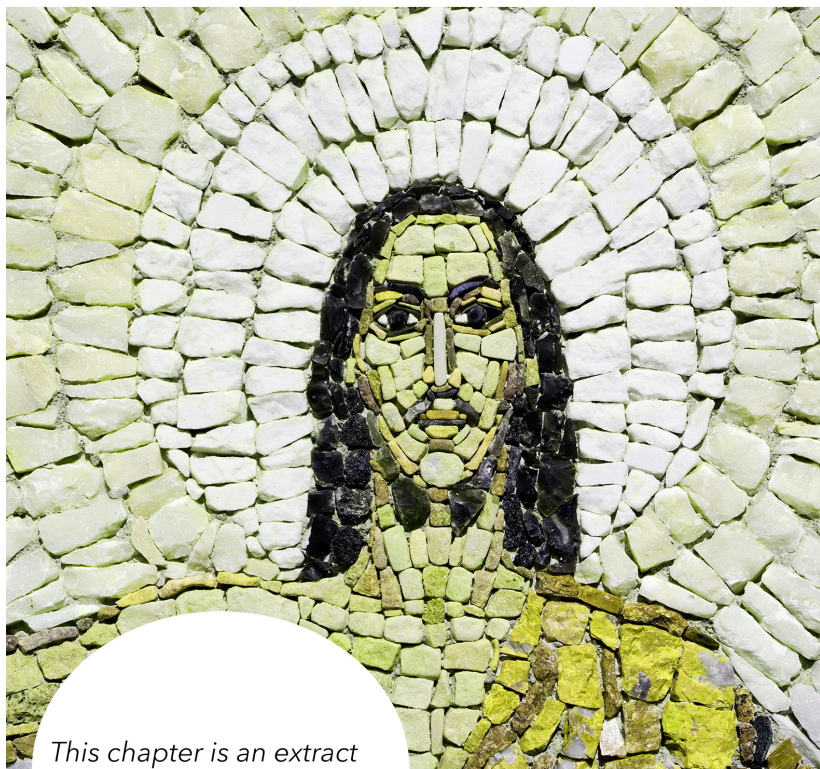


CHAPTER 11
THE TEST OF REVOLUTIONISED LIVES



*This chapter is an extract
from the 6th edition of*

VERDICT

ON JESUS

LESLIE BADHAM WITH PAUL BADHAM

About this Extract

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Test of Revolutionised Lives

Jesus remains the very heart and soul of the Christian movement, still controlling men, still capturing men—against their wills very often—changing men’s lives and using them for ends they never dreamed of. So much is plain to the candid observer whatever the explanation.

Dr T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History*

We now come to a rather startling fact, namely that in the history of Christianity, there is much evidence that if anyone has no wish to become a disciple, would be well advised to keep all thought, both of Jesus and of his ideals, at arm’s length. Closer acquaintance may result in unexpected and overwhelming results.

To the early Church, for example, who seemed more immune than Saul to the fascination of Jesus? Schooled in the strictest sect of the Pharisees, an unswerving monotheist, the very claims made on Christ’s behalf by his followers were blasphemous to him. Little about early Christianity could have fitted into his scheme of things. He could never have thought it possible that Christ would shatter his scheme. He approved the murder of Stephen. He even held the clothes of those who grew hot with the grim

exercise of stoning him. He counted it a stern duty to deal out threatenings and slaughter among Christians, and generally to 'make havoc of the Church'.

It seems unthinkable that Saul himself would be converted. But it happened. Intelligent man that he was, he felt that he could not persecute Christianity effectively without understanding it, but the outcome overwhelmed him. The high-handed persecutor became Christ's devoted bond-servant. The Pharisee became the greatest Christ-mystic of the ages.

Nor has Saul's conversion been an isolated instance. The record of the faith is weighty with evidences of almost similar dramatic changes.

How often, where Christ has been concerned, wholly unexpected things have happened—particularly perhaps to those whose subsequent influence has proved to be of outstanding value to the Christian cause. One thinks of the classic instance of St Augustine, one-time libertine, busily employed in breaking the heart of Monica, his mother, and yet, a few years later, the consecrated Bishop of Hippo and one of the most influential names in Western theology.

There was that day of spiritual struggle and change in the life of John Wesley that began at five in the morning with him opening his New Testament on the words 'There are given unto us exceedingly great and precious promises', and later in the morning reading again at the passage 'Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God'. In the afternoon he was asked to go to St Paul's and was moved by the anthem, 'Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O God'. Finally the

climacteric experience when in the evening ‘I went very unwillingly to a meeting in Aldersgate and about quarter to nine heard the speaker describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ. I felt my heart,’ says Wesley, ‘strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone... I began to pray with all my might.’

Here was an experience decisive in Wesley’s life and, through it, of immense consequence for so many other lives.

Or there comes to mind the name of Toyohiko Kagawa of Japan. How incredible it would have seemed to those who knew him, that he would ever be a humble Christian worker in the wretched slums of Shinkawa, or that his liberated mind and dedicated abilities would have lifted him to a position of national influence in Japan far exceeding anything that he would have experienced had he not given himself to Christ. Perhaps no story brings the reality of the Christian Gospel right into the mid-twentieth century more than *Miracle on the River Kwai* where Captain Gordon of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders describes how the reality of Christian experience was discovered in the hell of unspeakable prisoner of war conditions and the agonising wretchedness of the building of the bridge over the river. Here, sinking into degradation, with countless prisoners dying, or ruthlessly cut down by their captors, life itself was bereft of elementary decency. Then came the virtual resurrection to a new life through the rediscovery of religion:

Through our readings and discussions we gradually came to know Jesus. What he did, what he was, made all sense to us. We understood that the love expressed so supremely in Jesus was God’s love— the same love that we were

experiencing for ourselves. The doctrines we worked out were meaningful to us. We arrived at our understanding of it, not one by one, but together. We found unity. We stopped complaining about our plight. Faith would not save us from it, but it would take us through it.

Later as Dean of the Chapel at Princeton University, Captain Gordon continued his testimony: 'Jesus had spoken to me. He had opened me to life, and life to me. The grace we had experienced is the same in every generation and must be received afresh in every age. The Great Debate continues, and the answers depend on the quality of response we are prepared to make.'

Very naturally, perhaps, in view of the change that came to their lives, people like Paul, Augustine, Kagawa, Wesley, the prisoners on the River Kwai, have seen the matter, not so much in terms of their finding Christ, as of Christ finding them. They have looked back on their lives and come to the amazing conclusion that long before they themselves were aware of it, the path to their conversion was being cut.

For many, it seems that faith is incompatible with informed thinking. Yet we find very able people who come to faith in spite of doubt. It would be hard to think of a brighter mind than Dag Hammarskjöld's. He was a man of the world, a sophisticate, a friend of avant-garde intellectuals in the arts, literature, and philosophy, mercilessly honest with himself, and he knew the torturing loss of early faith. His book *Markings* is a sensitive exposure of his inner experiences to the time when as Secretary General of the United Nations he lost his life in an air crash.

At what was the turning point he writes: ‘At some moment I answered “Yes” to Someone—or Something—and from that hour I was certain that existence was meaningful, and that therefore, my life in self-surrender had a goal.’ Through Schweitzer’s teaching and example of ‘reverence for life’ he found the key to the world of the Gospels, and to One almost too wonderful for him to name. ‘I don’t ask Who the Lord is,’ he said, ‘so much as what His Will is. He asks service of me, not comprehension.’

Through years of mounting strain and public service it was Scripture that guided him and steadied him. ‘He who puts himself into the hands of God,’ he said, ‘how strong he is!’ Certainly this strength none could mistake, nor his steel-like devotion to duty. His *Road Marks*, like his life, speak for themselves... ‘that a living relationship to God is the necessary pre-condition which enables us to follow a straight path, and yield character fit for leadership in this tortured, frantic, unhappy age’.

Sometimes tremendous inner conflict is set up before long-established prejudices, or cherished pride of mind or will, have allowed a man or woman to surrender to Christ. One thinks of the Sikh aristocrat, Sundar Singh, who before he became known as ‘The St Francis of India’, was so torn between his New Testament and his old associations, that he laid his head on a railway line, only to determine, at the last moment, to be a Christian Sadhu, a friend of the poor, the leprous, the outcast.

To be sure, Paul on the road to Damascus, felt very sorry for himself. Another personality had cut across his own. But later, from the vantage point of his great apostleship, he

looked back on his conversion, not as the end of his career but as its radiant beginning, not as one thwarted in a conflict, but as one immeasurably enlarged and completed by it.

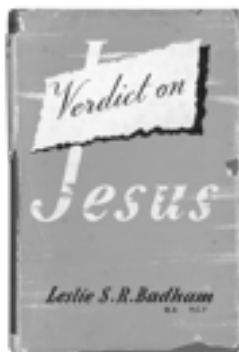
Nothing in Christianity encourages contentment with some spiritual experience already attained. Rather it challenges us to surpass all customary criteria of effort and excellence, that a fuller experience and more fruitful forms of service might grace the future. 'Not as though I had already attained, or were already made perfect,' cries Paul, 'but this one thing I do, I press on to the prize of the high calling which I have in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 3: 12).

'Let every sincere man remember well his whole life,' said Tolstoy in *What I Believe*, 'and he will see that never once has he suffered from obeying the teaching of Christ, but that most of the misfortunes of his life have come about because he has followed the world's teaching.'

What Jesus left to grow, then, in the souls of those who have sought the truth of things, has been a knowledge of himself. A knowledge that has brought its own persuasions and that has resulted not in mere intellectual assent only, but in the entire and joyous commitment of the whole personality. A knowledge that, for those who have attained it, has seemed to grow more and not less cogent, with passage of time and the accumulation of experience.

7 Decades

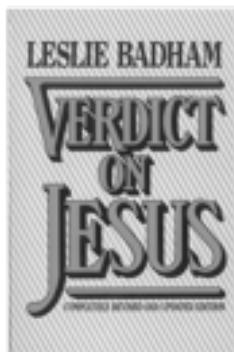
Verdict on Jesus through the years



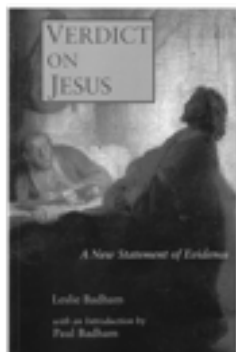
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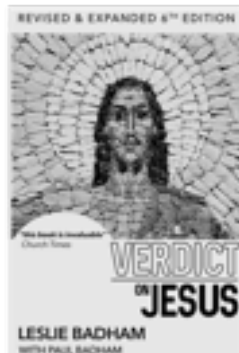
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Leslie Badham

Author of Verdict on Jesus

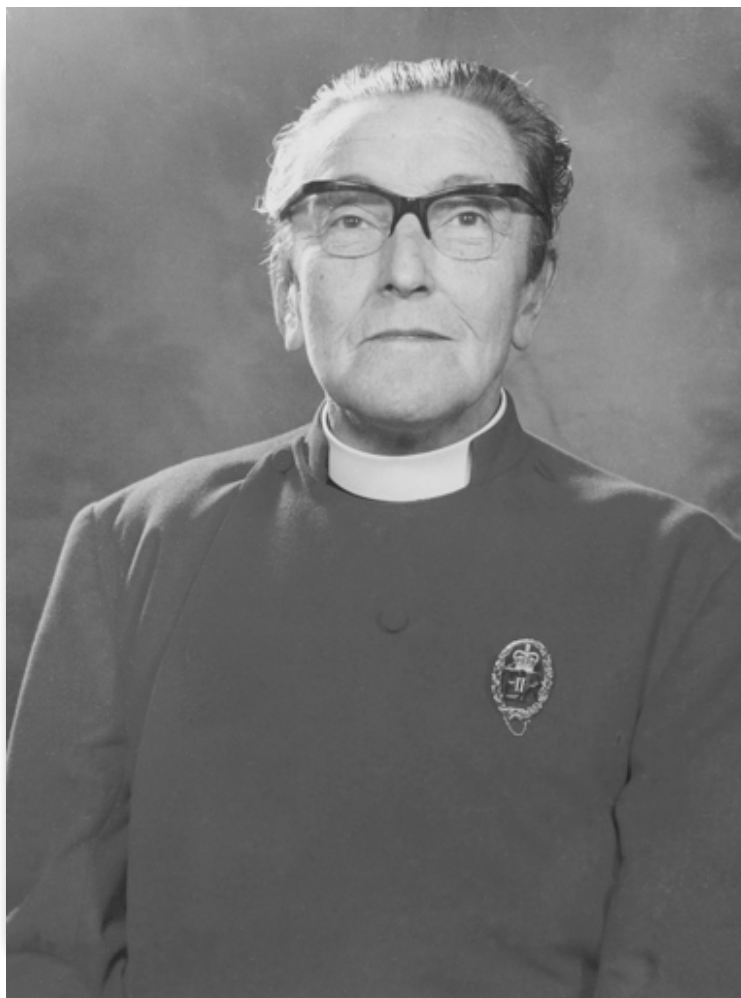


Top left: Leslie Badham with Effie, his fiancée, at her graduation from the LSE in 1935

Top right: Leslie and Effie Badham with their children David, Christine, Clare and Paul in 1963

Middle: Leslie Badham with Queen Elizabeth at Windsor Parish Church in 1965

Bottom left: Leslie Badham RAF Chaplain 1940-45



Leslie Badham (1908–75)

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