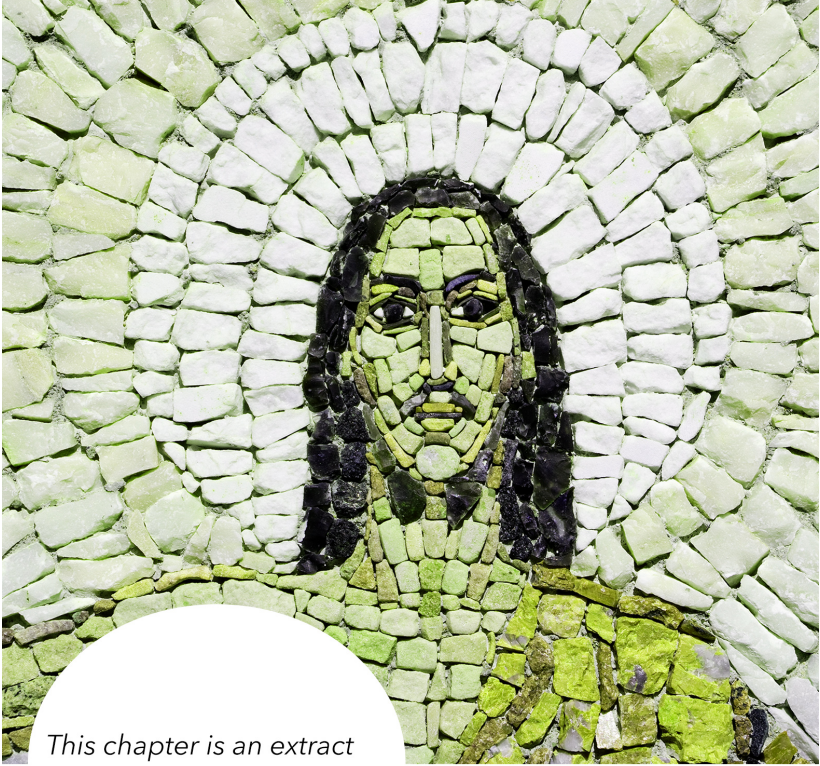


CHAPTER 12
ADVANCE THROUGH STORM



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from the 6th edition of*

VERDICT

ON JESUS

LESLIE BADHAM WITH PAUL BADHAM

About this Extract

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CHAPTER TWELVE

Advance Through Storm

I know of no study which is so unutterably saddening as the evolution of humankind as it is set forth in the annals of history.

Thomas Huxley

*O smitten mouth!
O forehead crowned with thorn!
O chalice of all common mysteries!
Thou for our sakes who loved thee not,
hast borne
An agony of endless centuries;
But we were vain and ignorant, nor knew
That when we stabbed thy heart,
it was our own
Real hearts we slew.*

Oscar Wilde

Any victory rises in our estimation if it happens to have been won in defiance of difficulty. The Fifth Symphony of Beethoven, remarkable enough in itself, is heard with enhanced wonder when we remember that the composer was deaf when he set it down.

The Battle of Britain, again, will have a timeless place in our annals, because it was won by pilots outnumbered but undaunted, who snatched victory from seemingly certain defeat.

Similarly, does not the growth and splendour of Christ's influence gain in impressiveness when we remember the appalling odds that it has encountered, and the varied stubborn resistance it has worn down?

With an accuracy that time has vindicated, Jesus described himself as a sower of seed (Matt. 13: 3), facing not only clean and fertile tilth, but stony ground, superficial soils, and land overrun with ancient growths. Elsewhere, too (Matt. 13: 24), he anticipated the sinister hand of the Evil One, busily engaged in sowing tares among the wholesome wheat. The whole story of the faith offers a running commentary on the realism of those parables.

If we cry out impatiently, 'Christianity has been two thousand years in the world, and what has it done?' we must appraise realistically the opposition, the evasive action, the deeply entrenched evils with which it has had to deal.

This is a world where the victory of all ideals is partial, where even the bare survival of truth, justice, and beauty is precarious, and where they must fight afresh for recognition in every age. What would we expect, then, to be the prospects of a massive movement of the spirit, like Christianity, that seeks to establish all the known virtues in their highest form?

Let us glance, therefore, at a few of the difficulties that Christianity has encountered.

The path of reformers is notoriously rough. 'In the country of the blind they kill the man who "sees".' Outside the city walls they hammered in the nails. But the disciples took up the challenge. In Jerusalem, in the most intractable of all places, they commenced preaching the very truths for which Jesus had been crucified.

Opposition came swiftly, and from powerful quarters. Judaism, the cradle of Christianity, nearly provided its grave.

For two thousand years Jewish faith had spoken of an exclusive covenant between God and his chosen people Israel. Yet now Christianity spoke of a new covenant between God and all humankind and claimed that 'God has no favourites, but in every nation the man who is God-fearing and does what is right is acceptable to him' (Acts 10: 34). Even worse, Christianity ventured to supplement and even supersede the long-venerated and hallowed Law given by God through Moses. The very Sabbath day itself was to be overshadowed by the day of Christ's resurrection 'the first day of the week'. An imaginative appreciation of first-century Judaism makes us marvel that any of them became converts. But conversions were made, and despite intense hostility Christianity was able to build on its Jewish foundations and yet universalise its message of God's loving concern for humankind.

Opposition came even more bitterly from the pagan world. It came from trade. The silversmiths of Ephesus, for

example, saw their trade in idols threatened and eventually brought to nothing. It came from the State. It was tantamount to treason to refuse, as the Christians did, a formal recognition of the Emperor's 'divinity'. It came from Roman Law. Were not secret and closed societies suspect and forbidden? Obviously, too, opposition came from all who stood for 'broad-mindedness'. The Graeco-Roman world thought that Christian intolerance of other religions was itself a crime.

A long line of emperors with varying severity sought to uproot the faith, and for three hundred years to be a Christian was to run the risk of martyrdom. The Emperors Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Decius, and Diocletian, all shed the blood of the martyrs, and yet there were probably thousands to whom loyalty to Christ was worth the sword, the woodpile, the lions, stoning, and crucifixion.

But surely, we feel, the Christians must have merited in some way their heavy lot. So thought Pliny, historian and proconsul in Asia. Yet having examined Christians by torture, he affirmed to Trajan, the Emperor, that 'the whole of their error lay in this, that they were wont to meet together on a certain day, before it was light, and sing among themselves a hymn to Christ as God, and to bind themselves by an oath (*sacramentum*) not to commit any wickedness, nor to be guilty of theft, robbery, or adultery, and never to falsify their word or deny a pledge.' Then he adds, 'great numbers must be involved in these

persecutions, which have already extended, and are likely to extend, to persons of all ranks and ages, and of both sexes.’³⁴ With candour Jesus had spoken of the danger of pursuing ideals like his in a world like this. ‘If they have persecuted me,’ he said, ‘they will also persecute you.’

Let us hear what the persecution could amount to. ‘Nero,’ writes Tacitus the Roman historian in his *Annals*, ‘punished with the most exquisite tortures those who called themselves Christians. They were covered with hides of wild beasts, and worried by dogs, or nailed to crosses and set fire to, and when day declined burnt to serve for nocturnal illumination.’ Yet despite persecutions, the faith of Jesus persisted and, in numbers and weight of influence, the Church grew.

The example of the first witnesses, their dauntless faith, standing as they did in the near light of the first evidences, has been a steadying power to the Church in all subsequent ages. However, much of compromise and caricature, feebleness and shamefulness have figured in the story since, those of whom Cyprian speaks have a fame that cannot be effaced:

*The glorious company of apostles,
the noble fellowship of prophets,
the white-robed army of martyrs...*

We have mentioned the centuries of crimson malice, but what of the persistent obstruction that has come from grey negligence? In all ages this has impeded the work of Jesus.

³⁴ *Plinii et Trajani Epistulae*, 96, 97.

Inertia, apathy, slovenliness of thinking, conscienceless caricature, sheer indifference—what can survive these damnable things? Great is the farce of much that has passed in the world for the faith of Jesus.

Direct opposition can be invigorating. While the faith was struggling to find its feet, for example, various heresies arose. Christian thinking was incisively challenged. But the conflict was creative. It forced the Church to clarify its thinking. It drew out the intellectual implications of the Gospel. It imposed upon Christians the wholesome discipline of closer study.

Similarly, even persecution served a salutary purpose. It sifted the wheat from the chaff, it closed loose ranks. In a sense, as Tertullian said, ‘the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church.’

But what good ever came from dumb apathy, from professing but listless followers? They debilitate. They destroy a cause from within. Teachers of all creeds and in all lands have spoken down the ages, and humanity has answered not with defiance but with that serene, intractable negligence that in the end defeats all higher law.

Even high-minded appreciation of a great cause may not be enough to move one to follow it without deviation. Paul knew the difficulty: ‘I cordially agree with God’s law, so far as my inner self is concerned, but then I find quite another law that resides in my members, and that makes me a prisoner of sin. Miserable man that I am!’ (Rom. 7: 23–24).

If one wonders why, after two thousand years, Christianity has not conquered the world, you can find part of the answer here—in the shirking of allegiance, the refusal of costly commitment, the ‘quite different law’ that resides in one’s mortal nature. When we bemoan the failure of the Church we must take this fact into account, together with the charitable realisation that how costly the good life is, only those understand who have attempted to pay the price.

Pilate washing his hands of responsibility; the Rich Young Ruler going sorrowfully away; Peter weeping at cockcrow when it was too late; Demas loving this present world— such types are by no means only to be found in the New Testament. They have, in all ages, taken a large and tragic place in the history of the Church.

So far, then, we have seen Christianity clashing with things long established. We have found it opposed by individual and State. We have seen it weakened by apathy and inertia, and, in one guise or another, these factors have always been recurring. But the list is by no means complete.

Christianity has lost momentum—as when Rome fell. It has experienced set-backs—as when Muslim invasion severed its path. It has lost intellectual prestige—as when seemingly rival fields of ideas have been opened up, or when writers like Shelley have written *On the Necessity of Atheism* protesting against lifeless religions. Nor is such damage undone when, as in Shelley’s case, his own soul testified to:

*The light whose smile kindles the Universe
That Beauty in which all things work and move.*

Christianity, too, has been sorely wounded by the rapacity, intolerance, and bloody-mindedness of some of its followers, and who can say that the case is relieved when over-anxious apologists have tried to extenuate things like the bitter spirit of schism, or the horrors of the Inquisition?

Plainly one cannot compress such matters into a light resume like this, particularly as there is interplay between one factor and another. We will make brief reference, however, to a few further matters that have deflected some from Christianity in modern times.

In the early centuries some Christians wholly repudiated war. It belonged to the realms of Caesar. Compromises began to enter in when 'Caesar' professed himself to be converted, when right and wrong could be presented as overlapping, when war, in certain instances, could be called 'holy'. Relativity in ethics long anticipated the enunciation of it in physics.

In the twentieth century many Christians have been forced to choose war as the lesser of two evils, but its moral 'rightness' has not minimised the wholesale material waste and destruction, the diversion of thought and energy from constructive and peaceful ends, nor made less tragic the loss of thousands, who were, on any assessment, the choicest of human stock.

One item of war's expenditure people are slow to appreciate —what Shakespeare called 'expense of spirit'. This has come from the conditioning of millions, in formative periods of their lives, to sub-Christian standards of thought and conduct. It has come from the break-up of home life, the

weakening of married loyalties, the loosening of parental control.

We have now had generations of industrial employment, with people's hearts and heads becoming increasingly conditioned by technical and material preoccupations, by the secularity of the media, and by commercialised entertainment. Such things, while not necessarily evil in themselves, combine together to produce an atmosphere not conducive to spiritual development. Then, almost inevitably, the facile logic of the materialist becomes more compelling than the high witness of the saint, and the deep argument of the theologian. The superficial is always more easy to grasp than the profound.

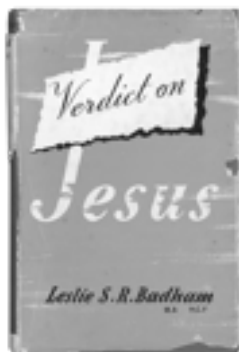
Does material competence then, and the artificiality of modern life, explain the spiritual dryness that increasingly obstructs the faith of Jesus? Assuredly, not completely. Material competence itself might have been an unmitigated blessing, had moral and spiritual competence kept pace with it. Why this has not happened we shall be discussing in Chapters 14 and 15, when we speak of the turning and twisting theories that have made people doubt the basic truth of their historic faith.

As we link up this brief sketch with what has gone before, and with what follows, the old question reasserts itself: Why has the Church not succumbed to all this? Why has it had the vitality and resilience not only to survive, but to see in each recessive factor, not the grounds of defeat, but the call to greater endeavour? Why is it, that after measuring all that has obstructed Christianity, and then assessing its present position, Professor Latourette is able to entitle his last

volume on the expansion of Christianity, *Advance through Storm?*

7 Decades

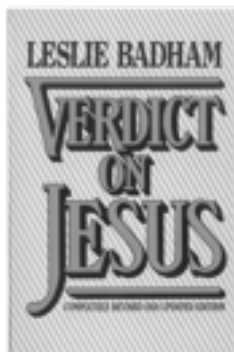
Verdict on Jesus through the years



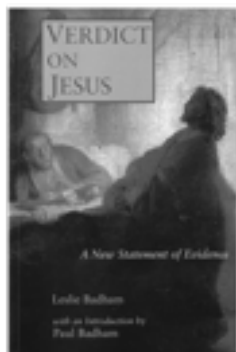
1950



1971



1983



1995



2010



2020

Leslie Badham

Author of Verdict on Jesus

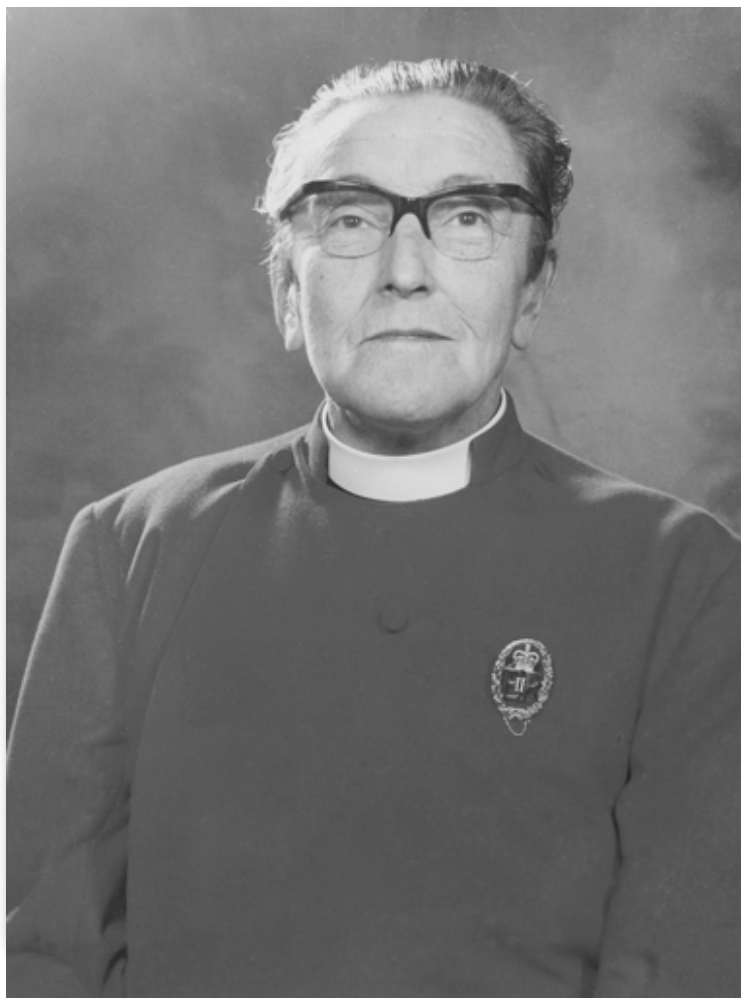


Top left: Leslie Badham with Effie, his fiancée, at her graduation from the LSE in 1935

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

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

Bottom left: Leslie Badham RAF Chaplain 1940-45



Leslie Badham (1908–75)

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