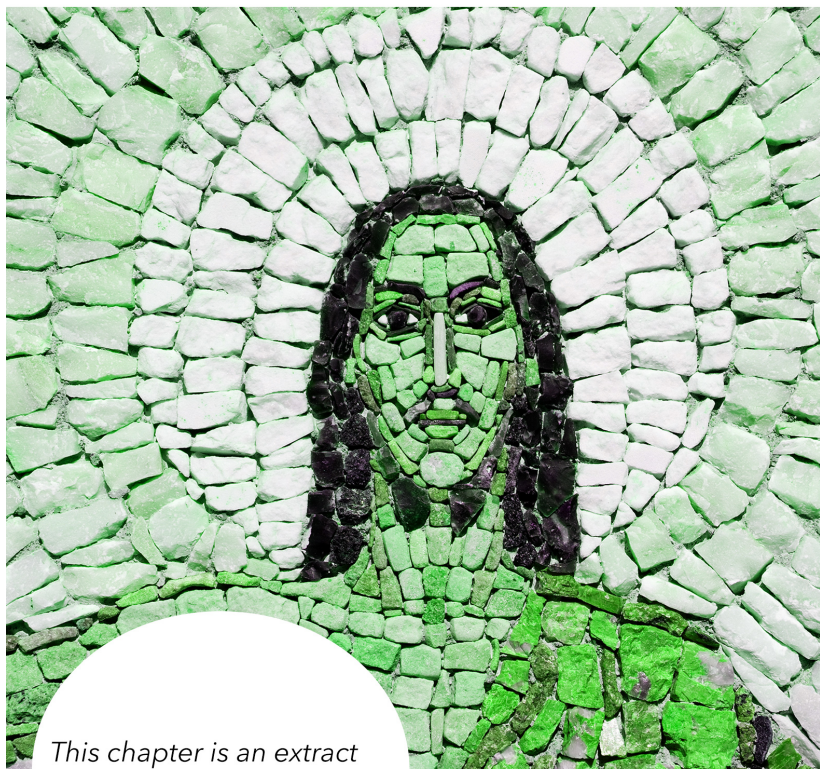


CHAPTER 16
THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE



*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 SIXTEEN

The Nature of the Universe

I was delighted with this idea—that Mind was the disposer and cause of all, and I said to myself, If this be so—if Mind is the orderer, it will have all things in order and put every single thing in the place that is best for it.

Plato

It is not Mind we should want to know. We should want to know the Thinker.

Kaushitaki Upanishad

Before we can take our argument further, we must decide something, not so much about Jesus, as about the nature of the universe, and the character of the Being behind it. Is this universe the result of blind chance, or is it the product of a supreme creative Mind? A positive answer may enable us to continue the consideration of Jesus' significance at a new level.

Numerous and weighty arguments, on which a belief in God may be reasonably based, are readily accessible, and the reader will be aware of their cumulative force.

At this point, however, we are satisfied with the way the modern physicist concurs with the view of the classical Greek philosophers, that the Ultimate Reality behind the flux of visible phenomena is to be understood in terms of mind. For if there is a Mind behind the universe, it is plain that a whole world of theological and philosophical speculation is opened up. What kind of Mind is meant? Some physicists throw out a clue when they speak of God as 'a consummate mathematician'. But plainly we cannot stop there. If reason is to be satisfied, we must see what more is implied.

The idea of 'a consummate mathematician' is itself unintelligible apart from conceptions of what we call personality. Do the physicists believe in a personal God? By definition, a consummate mathematician would have a supreme intelligence and a precise regard for mathematical truth. But 'truth' is variously apprehended. It has protean qualities. Who would argue that God would not be also interested in scientific truth, artistic truth, moral truth, spiritual truth? Would the God of the physicists be as interested in a peacock's tail as in a calculus, as jealous of the integrity of a person as of the integrity of a formula?

We are not seeking a scientific opinion to vindicate Christianity, we are, however, pointing out that when science refers to God in terms of Mind, it is coming close to Natural Religion—that God is religiously apprehended through his works.

Scientists, like other people, show the polarisation of thought that afflicts the contemporary world. Some are militantly anti-God, others are Christians, or represent the

great theistic religions, are convinced believers in God. Dr E. H. Leach, for instance, of the Cambridge Humanist Society, 'takes the line,' as he says, 'that in these scientific days all religions are out of date'. Professor C. A. Coulson, in *Science and Christian Belief* on the other hand, finds science a spur to faith. 'I find myself,' he says, 'confronted in some utterly personal way with the spiritual quality of the whole universe. I receive the revelation of science and rejoice to call it the work of the Holy Spirit... All life is sacramental; all nature is needed that Christ should be understood; Christ is needed that all nature should be seen as holy.'

The issue of belief in God is of profoundest importance. When Nietzsche (1844–1900) said 'God is dead', he said it with intensity of anguish strikingly absent from those who have complacently revived the phrase in recent years. Nietzsche was an atheist in a profound sense, and faced, until madness came upon him, what it meant to live without God. He did not merely push his unbelief to a point where it ceased to be convenient. He did not say it lightly to be slightly shocking, as though 'the death of God' left everything where it stood. He saw it as meaning the disappearance of everything for which God was responsible. It was the end of all moral judgment, of all sense that science looked for in the universe, of all basis for reason and truth. Meaning dropped out of life leaving only a cold despair.

This is something very different from the casual dismissal of God which is frequently a pose that seems to bolster up and justify an irresponsible society. Attempts to consider it in depth, and logically carry it to its stark philosophical conclusion are strangely shirked. True, in an early essay,

Mysticism and Logic, Bertrand Russell wrote the deeply moving, and frequently quoted passage:

That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocation of atoms; that no fire of heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noon-day brightness of human genius, are destined to end in extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy that rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of such truths, only on the first foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

In Russell's case, having rendered this shattering statement, he continued to live within the framework of a very different philosophy, like protesting against the atomic bomb, and in *The Impact of Science on Society* saying 'the root of the matter was a thing so simple that he was almost ashamed to mention it, for fear of the derisive smile with which wise cynics will greet my words. The thing I mean—please forgive me for mentioning it—is love, Christian love or compassion.'

Why, one wonders, did so great a mind not see the irrationality of a universe producing within itself a human being so obviously beyond itself in sensitivity, integrity, and compassion? Or why did he not question the very purpose of

continuing beyond the bomb, a universe so productive of feelings of ‘unyielding despair’?

Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre made no attempt to take the edge off the despair. They carry atheism to its bleak conclusion, and in so doing they produce an impact from which a healthy mind instinctively recoils. As D. E. Roberts, Professor of Philosophy and Religion, New York, makes plain, ‘They offer us the strongest possible argument FOR God that can possibly be conceived.’

We all have to choose. The issue is simply, whether, with Jesus, we are to believe in a universe that makes sense, or, with Nietzsche, in a universe, that makes no sense at all.

We ask ourselves, therefore, if the general consensus of human opinion is true—that there is a God, or whether the universe as it is now revealed makes it an absurdity to believe in a Divine Creator, a Cosmic Mind. What impression comes to us as we consider, as far as we can, the totality of our environment, and the interpretation that seems valid to great scientific minds?

We turn to Sir James Jeans who says, ‘We discover that the universe shows evidence of a designing and controlling power that has something in common with our own individual minds.’ Or to the words of the physicist, Sir Ambrose Fleming:

There are unquestionably in the physical universe things that stimulate our appreciation of order, beauty, adaptation, numerical relation, and purpose in our minds—we who are thinking, feeling persons—and hence these

*qualities which excite these psychic reactions must have been bestowed on the universe by a sentient intelligence at least as personal as ourselves.*⁴⁰

Now it is an easy step to believe that a Mind capable of creating the infinities of the universe, and human rationality, would take an interest in human beings. It would be unreasonable to suppose otherwise. No consummate Mind would be likely to withdraw interest from his handiwork. One would anticipate the likelihood of Mind making contact with mind. This, long ago, was the thought of Greek philosophers like Plato and Philo, who envisaged Reason as the intermediary, or bridge, spanning the gulf between God and human beings.

And by what means could the mind of God, using the bridge of Reason, communicate with humanity? In the first instance the Reason of God could display itself in the very structure of the universe. Further, it could be of such a kind that human reason, observing it, could know that the world was not the result of a blind chance, but the product of supreme intelligence, and from that fact, could realise that people were not due to some fortuitous accident, but had their place in the Creator's plan.

In point of fact, is not this the very thing that has happened? People have arrived at ideas of the Creator by scrutinising his work, by observing its orders, its laws, its beauty, its evidences of Mind.

⁴⁰ Sir Ambrose Fleming, quoted in *The Miracle of Man* by Dr. Harold Wheeler.

Looking at us from his wide observations, Charles Darwin exclaimed, 'The grand sequence of events cannot be the result of blind chance. The mind revolts against such a conclusion.'

But what is the alternative to 'blind chance'? Is it not meaning and purpose? So Paul thought when he framed these words: 'Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly apparent in the things that have been made' (Rom. 1: 20).

By way of simplest philosophical illustration, one imagines a mountainside in Wales. It is strewn with boulders and stones of all sizes and shapes, flung there by centuries of cosmic weathering. But by contrast the eye catches a few score of stones that trace a definite pattern. Just a coincidence, we say, that out of such tens of thousands upon the hillside, this tiny number might by chance fall into a pattern. But this pattern in fact spells out the word 'Welcome', and happens to be of stones all about the same size, all spaced regularly in precise letters. The idea of chance recedes. The idea of purpose is inescapable. This word too, we note, is just at the place where it would catch the eye of anyone about to cross into the Principality from England by road and is the word used in the current song being broadcast to Wales' exiles and visitors, 'We'll keep a Welcome in the hillside'. The design is intentional. The mind would revolt from any other conclusion. There is design corresponding with purpose, and as such is meant to be understood.⁴¹

⁴¹ cf. Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics*.

This casual illustration, however, is as nothing, when we think of the myriad evidences of Mind in the order and design everywhere displayed in the physical world. Some controlling Mind, through infinite evidences of intelligent purpose, caused Kepler to cry out, 'O God we read Thy laws after Thee.'

But once we realise that 'Mind is the Orderer' and 'all things have their place', we have to ask if such a Mind would leave humanity entirely dependent on deductions from the physical world, or would it be reasonable that God would contact human beings more directly, placing in the human heart some inner knowledge of himself and of his will?

At least three lines of thought suggest that God has, in fact, done this. We cite the universality of religious experience; the phenomenon of conscience, found at varying levels in all humankind; and, thirdly, the argument for God presented by our highest ideals. We will look briefly at each of these lines of thought in turn.

Religious experience has been universal. One of the oldest and widespread human ideas is that of God. At least since the time of Plato, Seneca, and Cicero, arguments for God have been based on the fact that 'man is incurably religious'. Professor Eddington testifies in *The Nature of the Physical World*, to 'regions of the human spirit untrammelled by the world of physics. In the mystic sense of the creation around us,' he said, 'in the expression of art, in the yearning towards God, the soul grows upward, and finds fulfilment of something implanted in its nature. The sanction of this development is within us, a striving born of our

consciousness of an Inner Light proceeding from a Power greater than ourselves.’

As architecture bears the impress of the style and mind of the architect, so human beings have felt that they were not made to be out of harmony, or beyond the possibility of harmony, with the Mind that created them. All the highest and purest forms of philosophy and religion have conceived of God as a personal and spiritual Being, with whom we are related, and to whom we had a sense of responsibility.

Is this evidence subjective, due to illusion or self-deception? It might be considered so, if only a few individuals had such ideas, but when one realises that in all ages, people have associated their highest experiences and thoughts with the idea of God, the evidence is so universal and consistent that it has an *objective* quality.

The phenomenon of conscience points directly to the existence of a Supreme Being, who has placed this monitor in the human heart. A thinker, like Immanuel Kant, thought conscience the strongest argument for belief in God; while C. S. Lewis, in his book called *Right and Wrong*, described our sense of right and wrong as a ‘clue to the meaning of the universe’.

Conscience is something that all human beings are aware of. It is the basis of our sense of moral responsibility. It explains why we have a sense of conviction that, regardless of pleasure or profit, we ‘ought’ to do this or that.

The prayer called the General Confession, expresses the well-nigh universal feeling of those whose natural

conscience has not been choked. 'We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us.'

The more one ponders the implication of that word 'ought', the more one sees the impossibility of explaining it, except in terms of a personal God who has placed this inner voice in the centre of our being.

A third evidence that God has not made the human soul without placing in it some witness of himself, is given by the considerations evoked by the study of our ideals.

The very 'reasonableness' of God would lead us to expect that human beings, his chief creation, would not be made impervious to those ideals and principles which God himself cherished. When we scrutinise our ideals we find that this is exactly the case.

Whenever people have tried to come to terms with their highest perceptions they have tended to become metaphysical. They have asked, 'What is the Mind behind all things, which has given us an appreciation of beauty, an apprehension of truth, and a sense of justice?'

We cannot, as Professor T. E. Jessop points out in *Science and the Spiritual*, question the validity of ideals without becoming less than human. To deny their validity is to come perilously near denying the validity of thought itself. Yet once we admit their validity, we have to believe in a universe that makes sense of them, that 'takes sides', for instance, with us as we contend for harmony against discord, for truth

against lies, for love against hate, that gives us backing in our belief that the foundations of the earth are laid in righteousness, and that in consequence it is 'better' to be pure than licentious, brave than cowardly, good than bad.

From such considerations we see that if we contemplate our ideals, they are able to lead us forward to a clearer apprehension of what the character of God must be.

If we put the argument in another form, this point appears more vividly. Since the lesser does not create the greater, nor surpass it, whatever ideals and values we apprehend, must, *a fortiori*, be more perfectly apprehended by their Creator, who is both their source, and the ultimate ground of their truth.

The alternative is untenable. The stream does not rise higher than its source. What I derive from God, I cannot possibly possess more fully than he. If I am capable of hungering and thirsting after righteousness, much more intensely must God love justice and hate iniquity. If I know love, so much more unfathomed must be his love who bestowed it on me. If I perceive beauty how much greater must be his perception of it?

Plainly this line of thought links up with what we are discussing—that God would be likely to communicate with people. For if earthly parents would leave their children bereft of guidance and help when they asked for it, is it conceivable that the one great Father of all would leave human beings destitute in a universe otherwise so bewilderingly mysterious?

Thus, by the argument from analogy, we connect with the sublime idea that glows in the Old Testament, and that reaches full explicitness on the lips of Jesus—God’s Fatherly attitude to humankind.

But we have not said all. Reason and analogy have carried us to a point where God becomes conceivable in terms of Fatherhood. But who could feel deeply convinced about it while it remains on a theoretical level? To have confidence in the Fatherhood of God we need some practical evidence that he has shown towards the human family some Fatherly care. Failing that, God’s Fatherhood falls short of the love and guidance that a normal human parent shows to their offspring.

What earthly parents leave their children entirely dependent on their own unaided reason, or upon their own brief experience? Do they not directly, and by teachers, supplement their unsure gropings after knowledge and wisdom? Do they not take pains to see that they are clearly warned against what is wrong and unhelpful?

Do they not steady and encourage them along every right path by a sense of their love and encouragement? Certainly nothing less than this could we expect from him whom we believe to be the one great Father of all.

It is the claim of Christianity that, within the sphere of history, these expectations have been abundantly fulfilled. Christianity faces us with a mass of evidence accumulated over many centuries, that God has in remarkable fashion supplemented human reason and experience. The evidence is recorded in the Old Testament, where the Hebrew people

claim that their probings after God had been met by direct revelations; that a long line of prophets had declared God's character and will; that, in the commandments to Moses, God had provided precisely those warnings and admonitions to his children which, in the analogy of human parenthood, we felt should be their due; and, further, that God had steadied and encouraged them throughout a long history by practical evidence of his love and guidance, and that eventually, after a period of progressive enlightenment covering some two thousand years, he had crowned his revelation by sending to humanity one long foreshadowed as the Messiah.

Here is a tremendous chain of testimony and events that precisely satisfies all that we considered essential if God was to be understood on the analogy of human fatherhood.

We are aware, however, that the argument from analogy can be exceedingly deceptive. It can readily carry us beyond what the evidence warrants, or it can prevail upon us to swing the evidence in its direction. If, therefore, numerous lines of thought converge to support the idea of God's Fatherhood we must weigh the evidence by that Reason 'that lighteth every man that cometh into the world'.

Reason can investigate the lines of probability and state, as it were, in advance, certain principles to which any revelation calling itself Divine would be likely to conform. For while the ways of God would almost certainly transcend human reason, they would not be likely to be at variance with it.

Naturally, we could believe in no revelation that did not fulfil certain conditions. It would have to be wholly in keeping with our highest possible idea of God. It would, also, have to be distinguished by considerations that ruled out the possibility of it being mere chance or coincidence. If it were of God, some indications of the fact would have to be reasonably certain.

We say 'reasonably certain' rather than absolutely certain, because an absolutely certain revelation would be a kind of threat to humanity, depriving them of that freedom of choice which, we believe, characterises us, and makes possible individuality. It is the distinctive mark of people that they are free agents, endowed, indeed, as we have seen, with a sense of moral responsibility, but, nevertheless, free to do what they choose.

Now earthly parents, not wishing to crush their child's freedom of development, do not tyrannise them, but temper authority and coercion, by appealing to the child's own reason and experience. Similarly, if God gave humanity an overpowering revelation of himself, they would be bound to obey it, and God would forfeit Fatherhood for dictatorship, and change children into slaves. This affronts our highest idea of God. We would expect him to be courteous to the souls he has made, and that having made people free, he would not wish to see them bound.

From such considerations, we would expect God to reveal himself in a way that would awaken reason and tend to encourage free response and yet not remove the human beings' power to disbelieve it, if they choose.

We shall see that Christianity fulfils this condition. It appeals to nobility in people. It can meet their intellects by its reasonableness, their souls by its spiritual quality, and, when put to the test, it can be verified by personal experience. It does not compel allegiance, however. If people are victims of self-deception or mental pride, or if they are so absorbed with the material that they refuse to explore the spiritual, then nothing that God can do will be invincible enough to convince them.

In the Old Testament we are told that God is not found in uproar and turbulence but in the still small voice that speaks to the human heart. In the New Testament Jesus speaks of God as one who stands at the door of the heart and knocks. He does not overpower human free will. He does not invade or coerce. As is his love, so is his courtesy and restraint. While he would call all people unto him, he compels none.

Now plainly this attitude on the part of God—nobler than any other and full of the highest possibilities for the fullest development of human personality—can readily be abused.

Many a human parent, extending freedom to a child, has seen that child abuse its freedom, misunderstand the ends for which it was given, and move from the standards set in the home, to a life wasteful and prodigal in a far country. Similarly, God by his very gift of free will has made it possible for people to spurn his fatherly guidance and to bring ruin upon themselves and others.

That this has happened time and again is one of the unchallengeable facts of history. The whole tragedy of human history could be written in terms of high insights

scorned, great principles forsaken, of people's fatal tendency to make the worse appear the better reason, of their abandonment of the God of truth and love, for the idolatries of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Seeing the resultant chaos what more could God do? How could God more fully reveal himself? Many a religion has wistfully spoken of the need of an incarnation, of the necessity of God entering the human scene, and meeting personality through personality. Philosophy, too, has envisaged, precisely what Christianity has affirmed has happened, that God should himself find means of entering the human drama. Plato spoke of the reasonableness of the Author of the Universe, on beholding it tempest-tossed and in peril of going down to the place of chaos, taking his seat at the helm of the soul, and coming to the rescue to correct all calamities, as quoted in Athanasius' *On the Incarnation*.

Athanasius gives a further helpful analogy. He speaks of a kind teacher caring for his pupils, and finding some of them unable to profit by indirect instruction, taking it upon himself to come nearer the pupils' level by giving them personal help and encouragement.

It is the belief of Christendom that such an idea did in actual fact commend itself to God, and that in the Incarnation we see God expressing himself in terms of human personality, and that, as St John phrased it, Jesus came forth from the Father into the world' (John 16: 28), or as Paul said, 'When the fullness of time was come God sent forth his Son born of a woman (Gal. 4: 4).

The rationale of Christ's coming, we find in the Messianic passages of the Old Testament, where the prophets set forth their belief that only direct supernatural intervention could save humankind; or we find it on the lips of Jesus, in a parable that would be luminously direct in its implication to anyone familiar with the story of Israel—the Parable of the Vineyard (Mark 12). After long entreaty with his people through prophetic messengers, God chooses to make a final appeal through his Son.

Certainly there is nothing philosophically difficult in believing that God, the creator of humanity, should, out of love for people, send an ambassador to them. Indeed, we have seen that human intuition had already anticipated such an action, and that a mind like Plato's counted it both intellectually acceptable and morally commendable.

Let us, therefore, for the furtherance of our argument, assume the possibility of a divine Incarnation. Let us imagine that the Divine Mind should choose to make himself known through a human personality. Can we now suggest any considerations that might commend themselves to him? Would God, for instance, allow the coming of the Messiah to go unheralded and to arrive unexpectedly? Or would he prepare the stage of history and allow people to have some intimation of the Messiah's coming?

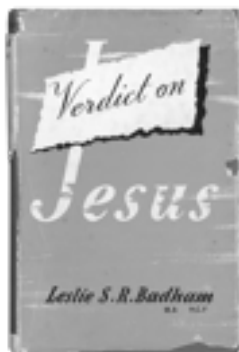
Can we venture to postulate the conditions that might reasonably be fulfilled before the Messiah came? At least five anticipations suggest themselves, three of which are obvious preconditions.

1. We would expect God to prepare people's minds by raising them to a level at which the teaching of the Messiah would be intelligible;
2. We would expect God to give humankind some ideas by which they could, if they were true to the best insights that they had received, recognise the Messiah when they saw him;
3. We would expect God to choose an opportune time for the Messiah's birth and for the fruitful planting of his teaching;
4. We would anticipate, also, a fourth attendant consideration, namely, that the character of the Messiah, when he came, would be such as to commend itself to people as fitting one who was indeed bearing a message of august and sublime significance;
5. Finally, it would be reasonable to suppose that the coming of a transcendent figure who could say, 'The Father and I are one' would result in a religion viable for all, everywhere, in all ages. Evidence of its reality would be manifest: (a) in the spiritual satisfaction it would give; (b) in the way it enhanced the human sense of life's meaning and purpose; (c) in the new standard of humanity it would supply; (d) in the highest possible idea of God it would reveal.

Could it possibly happen that all five of these logical anticipations were met in Christ, would we not be filled with amazement and awe? We discover that, in fact, every single one of these anticipations became luminously evident in the first century of our era. We will naturally deal with the evidence, point by point.

7 Decades

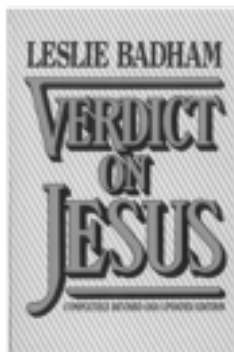
Verdict on Jesus through the years



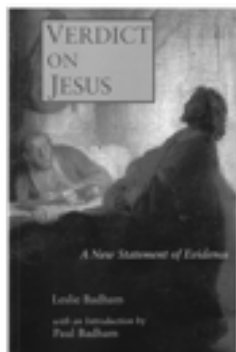
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Leslie Badham

Author of Verdict on Jesus

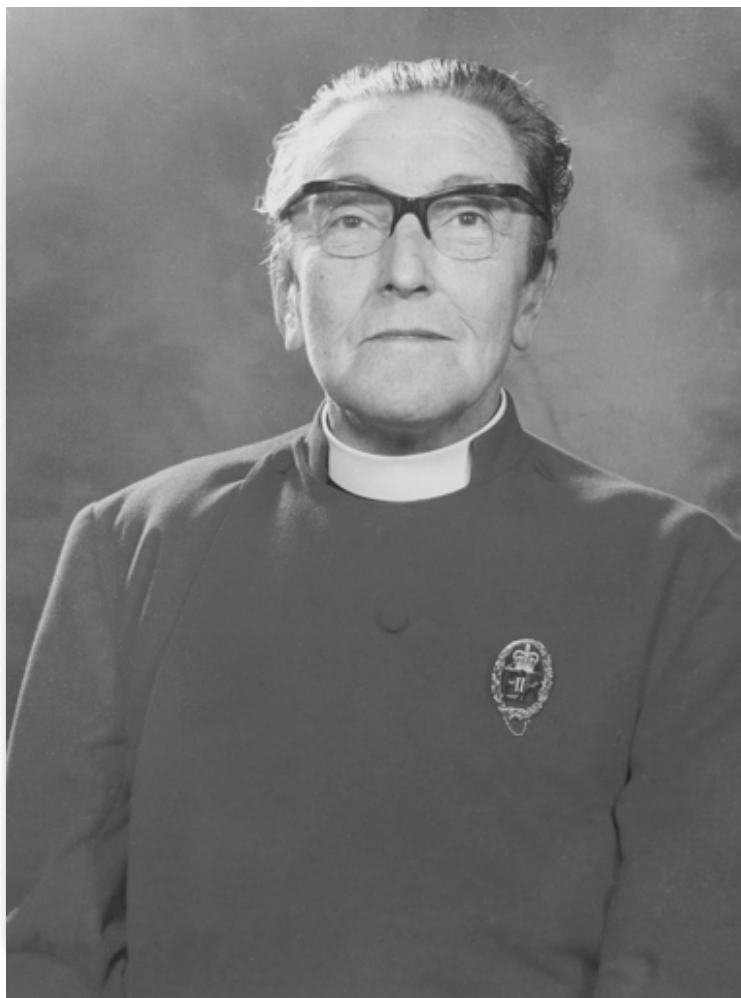


Top left: Leslie Badham with Effie, his fiancée, at her graduation from the LSE in 1935

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

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

Bottom left: Leslie Badham RAF Chaplain 1940-45



Leslie Badham (1908–75)

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