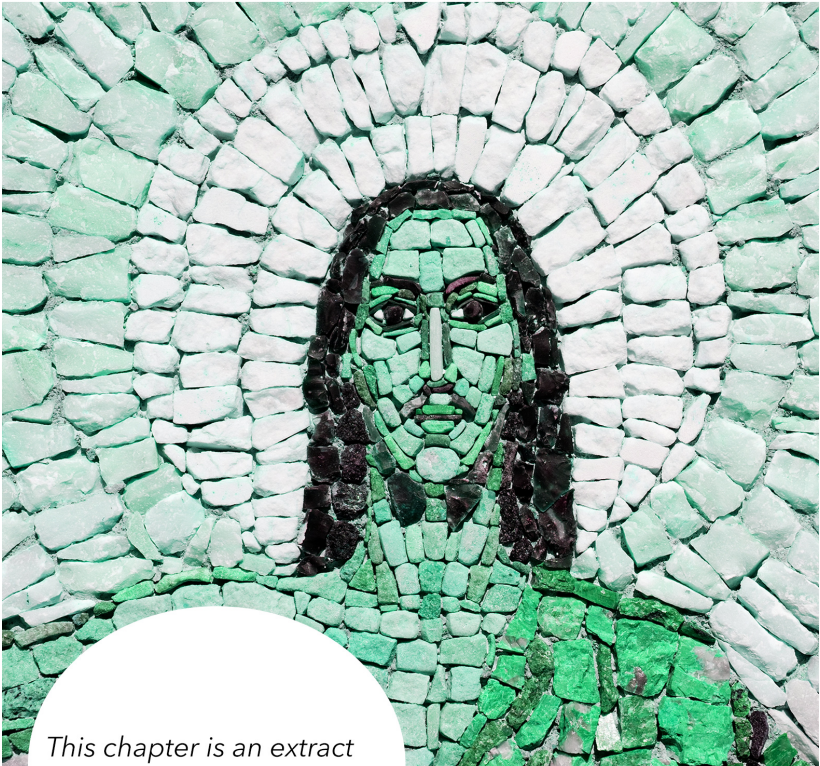


CHAPTER 19
FLOOD-TIDE



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

VERDICT

ON JESUS

LESLIE BADHAM WITH PAUL BADHAM

About this Extract

This is an extract from the 6th edition of Verdict on Jesus.

Print and ebook editions of the full edition are available from Amazon ISBN 978-1-9163862-0-4 (print book) and ISBN 978-1-9163862-1-1 (ebook). To download and read other chapters visit www.verdictonjesus.com

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Flood-tide

When the fullness of time was come God sent forth his son.
Epistle to the Galatians

One of the remarkably fortunate things in history was the extraordinary timeliness of Jesus' coming. Had he come either earlier or later he would have missed the one moment in history that was most likely to favour the reception, the understanding, and the spread of the Gospel.

Let us summarise the evidence.

We have already seen how by the time of Christ's birth the Jews had been progressively raised, through centuries of discipline and enlightenment, to a level at which the teaching of Jesus about God and human duty was broadly intelligible. We have noted also the amount of thought that focused on the arrival of the Messiah.

Granted, that the light of what we must call 'revelation' had filtered through human channels, and had suffered a good deal in transmission, yet it was sufficient to provide a remarkable background, that Jesus and the Apostolic Church used with tremendous effect.

Even outside Judaism a good deal was known of this background. The very Dispersion of the Jews had been a singularly fortunate happening. Wherever they had gone, they had carried with them their characteristic beliefs, and, outside the narrower sects, there was missionary zeal. 'The Pharisees,' said Jesus, 'compassed land and sea to make one proselyte.' Nor was it only spiritual motives that made people take an interest in Judaism. Relief from military service and the sabbath day rest from work rewarded the proselyte.⁴⁴

Thus over most of the ancient world, various factors had aided the spread of Old Testament ideas, including the Messianic hope.

Either by influence from Judaism, or by simultaneous thinking along similar lines, we find the Roman poet, Virgil, anticipating that one would soon be born who would usher in a golden age, while Suetonius, the historian, bears witness that a certain and settled belief prevailed in the East that about this time Judaea would bring forth a personality who would win universal homage.

The atmosphere of the time just before Christ's coming was charged with Messianic excitement. In Palestine there was a remarkable personality, John the Baptist, who had already launched a final campaign, pleading that the clock of destiny was actually about to strike, that 'the Kingdom of heaven was at hand'.

⁴⁴ Juvenal, *Satires*, vi

The reception given to John the Baptist's words, the multitudes that flocked to hear him, the numbers of all classes that were stirred to repentance, all indicate how strong was the conviction of the nearness of the Messiah's advent.

Further, these facts, convincing as they are in themselves, combine with others to show that Christ's entrance into history was timed and ordered in a fashion that invites illustration, not from the annals of religious mysticism so much as from the sphere of mechanical and scientific precision. One thinks of some great mechanism swinging into pre-determined engagement, wheel with wheel, cog with cog, mesh with mesh. One is reminded of something planned and ordered by the good pleasure of God himself.

At no other time in the history of the world was the stage so perfectly set for a divine revelation as it was at the time of Christ's birth. Not only were the Hebrews themselves ripe for the Messiah's coming, but the Graeco-Roman world was also literally at its wit's end for a credible faith. The old polytheisms had had their day. Their confused mythologies alienated the better minds and baffled the simpler. If ever the death of old beliefs opened the doorway to the new, this was the time.

But what religion could seize an opportunity that was hedged round by so many conditions? Consider the varied needs and yearnings of that troubled world. There was a demand for a religion that at one level could meet the exacting demands of philosophy, and at another could free people from the gross superstition and emotionalism of the mystery cults, and at still another level could meet the desire

for an improved moral code, evidenced by the Stoics and the followers of Mithra. Any religion hoping to be all-embracing had thus to satisfy a three-fold demand—the demand of philosophy, the demand of the emotional side of human nature, the demand of rising ethical standards.

The religion of Jesus met every such need. Its doctrine of God was acceptable to philosophy, and by its earliest writers was readily united with it. It even fulfilled the longing for an intermediary between God and humanity that had entered human thinking.

There was the concept of an almost personified Wisdom, standing alongside God as a ‘master-worker’ effecting God’s great purposes, and there was Philo’s handling of the tremendous doctrine of the Logos—the very expression of the divine Reason personified, and even incarnate, and these two wonderful terms were ready for describing the innermost meaning of the Christ.

One can only marvel that it should have happened that, before Jesus came, both Jewish and Greek ideas had glimpsed the possibility of God breaking silence through an intermediary, and that they should have spoken of the intermediary as his ‘well-beloved’, his ‘first-born’, his ‘image’, as one ‘coeternal with him before the worlds were made’. In the fusion of Greek and Jewish thought in cities like Alexandria there ‘tended to be an identification of the Logos of the Greeks with the Messiah of the Jews. Everything, therefore, was ready for the appearance of the Son of God,’ as we find Temple saying in *Mens Creatix*.

At no time before or since have such ideas occupied human thought, and the theory of chance, or coincidence, hardly explains the extraordinary way such ideas gave a background, and even the very language by which Christ's coming could be understood and interpreted. The fitness of current thinking, for an interpretation of the Incarnation, is evidenced by the ready way the author of the Fourth Gospel could speak of Jesus in terms of the Logos (John 1: 1–14) to his Greek readers.

Christianity, however, did more than agree with philosophical trends. It stood on historical facts that were open to examination. The early Church depended on those whose authority rested on their having been eyewitnesses of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. For them it was but incidental that many of the Christian doctrines had become philosophically respectable. One cannot imagine the respectability of the idea of immortality, for instance, weighing greatly with the five hundred eyewitnesses of Christ's resurrection that Paul refers to, or with the Apostles, or with Stephen, the first martyr. But as Christianity moved into the wider world and sought to make its faith articulate, it was immensely fortunate that vivid personal experience, and a chain of historical events, could be expressed in a medium of thought that others, without that experience, could understand and find credible. Without that medium it is not likely that the wider world would ever have been won.

Nor was Christianity merely intellectually and historically respectable. It glowed with life and reality. It exalted human emotions where the mystery cults had debased them. In the purity of Mary, and in the Christian consecration of home life, a new and much needed change of direction was given

to the sex element in life and religion. In the Christian sacraments, the mystic and emotional elements, sought after in the weird practices of the mystery cults, were sublimated, and combined with an ethical emphasis completely absent at the pagan shrines. In the breaking of bread, and in the promise of Christ's spiritual fellowship, there was available precisely that sense of mystic union with the divine which people had sought in vain in the pagan rites. In the teaching of the Cross there was that promise and forgiveness and renewal, that hope of 'salvation' and 'grace' which the ancient world craved.

So Christianity offered people all that they were dimly seeking—and at an entirely new level. The rapid rise and spread of the new faith was itself a testimony to the way in which Christianity fulfilled that 'God-shaped blank' in the heart of the ancient world.

Facts, such as these, deserving, of course, much fuller treatment for an appreciation of their full force and cogency, are coupled with numerous 'practical' considerations that also indicate how timely, in an historical sense, was Christ's arrival on this planet.

Christianity was a world-religion. It sought universality. Yet how could it reach the world? For its expansion it needed a world more or less unified and at peace. It needed roads and systems of communication. It needed a world in which there was at least a semblance of law and order.

Remarkably enough, all these conditions were fulfilled in the first century of our era. In the swift growth of Christianity they played their part.

But these conditions had been ripening over a long time. When Alexander the Great was alleged to have sat down and wept because there were no more worlds to conquer, he little dreamt that his conquests had paved the way for the far-reaching unity that Rome was to bring to the Empire by the time of Jesus.

As though in readiness for the transmission of Christianity, we find in every important district Roman roads providing main arteries of traffic and communication. Sea traffic in the Mediterranean was well organised and protected. There were probably more and better facilities for travel in the eastern Mediterranean and the adjoining lands at this period than at any subsequent time until the nineteenth century. A glimpse of Paul's journeys shows how he made use of them. He seems to have kept deliberately to the main roads connecting the main centres of Graeco-Roman civilisation.

The language problem was solved also. Greek provided the universal language that Christianity needed. Even districts which retained the use of local dialects were largely bilingual. In Jerusalem, Antioch, Colossae, Ephesus, Philippi, Corinth, and Rome alike, the New Testament could be read and comprehended, and for over three hundred years this remained the case.

Roman jurisprudence, too, running to the farthest province, curbed lawlessness and violence, and provided a universal standard of law, to which a man like Paul could appeal, and which, when occasion arose, could even get him, as a Roman citizen, an audience with Caesar.

In short, surveying the general scene, one gets an impression of seeming unity in the ancient world, with the only elements lacking in that unity being the very ones that Christianity seemed precisely fitted to provide.

For the unity imposed by Rome was external and not organic. Within the strong shell of external authority there existed an impossible moral and spiritual diversity. Apart from their common membership in the Empire, there was no idea, moral, social, or religious that was shared by the rustic of Lycaonia, the intellectual of decadent Athens, or the idolator of Ephesus. The Empire enclosed its varied elements without amalgamating them.

In the ancient world no human union was durable without a religious bond. The Emperors tried to provide such a bond by promoting the worship of the State and its visible head, but a living religion is one thing and a political contrivance another.

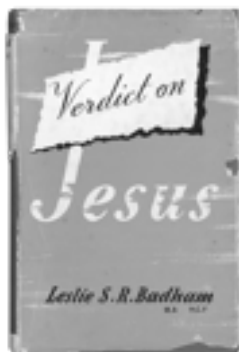
To this world Christianity came with its Gospel of one God, a God towards whom many had been reaching; a Gospel that soon rose above all national qualifications; that could be a force of practical improvement here below, and that looked for its consummation to a world beyond; a Gospel that united the moral and the mystical, the individual and the social sides of life; an historical religion that alone could supply the principles of unity of which the world was in need; and a faith, which, as a matter of historical fact, gave the Empire a new framework of organic unity and which stood not utterly overwhelmed when the Empire went down.

These facts taken in their cumulative force speak for themselves, and, like arrows, point to the truth of Paul's reiterated statements, 'that when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his son' (Gal. 4: 4), or again, that it was God's mysterious purpose 'in the fullness of time to gather together all things in one in Christ' (Eph. 1: 10).

When Jesus announced 'the time is fulfilled', his words were fraught with a sense of destiny.

7 Decades

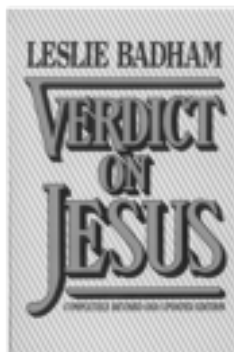
Verdict on Jesus through the years



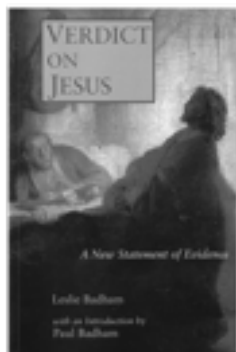
1950



1971



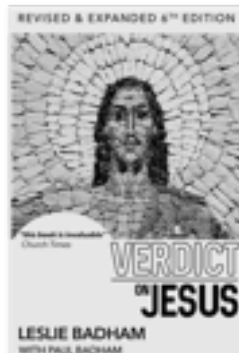
1983



1995



2010



2020

Leslie Badham

Author of Verdict on Jesus

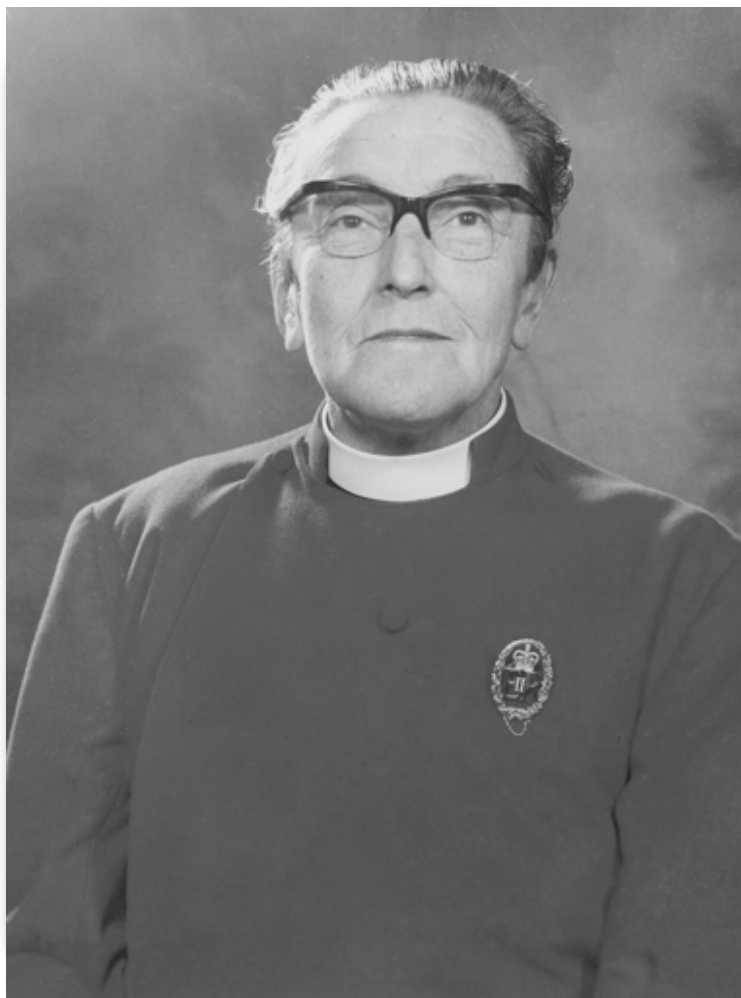


Top left: Leslie Badham with Effie, his fiancée, at her graduation from the LSE in 1935

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)

Originally published in Great Britain in 1950 Second edition published
1971 Third edition published 1983
Fourth edition published 1995 by IKON Productions Ltd
Fifth edition published in Great Britain in 2010 by SPCK

This edition published in Great Britain in 2020 by The Newson Trust

Copyright © Leslie Badham 1950, 1971

Introduction copyright © Paul Badham 2020

‘The Reasonableness of Belief in a Creator God in the Twenty-first Century’
copyright © Paul Badham 2010

‘Jesus in the World’s Religions’ copyright © Gregory A. Barker 2010

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including
photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval
system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

The Newson Trust does not necessarily endorse the individual views
contained in its publications.

The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the
external website and email addresses included in this book are correct and
up to date at the time of going to press. The author and publisher are not
responsible for the content, quality or continuing accessibility of the sites.

Scripture quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version (rsv),
the New Revised Standard Version (nrsv) and the New English Bible (neb).

The Revised Standard Version of the Bible is copyright © 1946,

1952 and 1971 by the Division of Christian Education of the National
Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All
rights reserved. NB The RSV Apocrypha was copyright © 1957.

The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Anglicised Edition, is
copyright © 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by
permission. All rights reserved. Extracts from the New English Bible are
copyright © The Delegates of the Oxford University Press and The Syndics
of Cambridge University Press, 1961, 1970. Used by permission.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-9163862-1-1

Image credit: “A fragment of a stone mosaic of Jesus Christ’s resurrection”
by “giedrius_b” is used through a Shutterstock License.

Cover design: Laurence Hall and Emily Turvey

Visit the Verdict on Jesus Website

www.verdictonjesus.com

The Verdict on Jesus website features short, educational videos for individuals and groups studying the life of Jesus. Videos include

- * 'Historically Reliable Evidence of Jesus'
- * 'Philosophy of Religion & Belief in God'
- * 'Jesus in the World's Religions'
- * 'Was Jesus a Liberal?'
- * ...and many more!

You'll also find essays on historical Jesus research and more information about the authors and the Newson Trust.

The Newson Trust

The Newson Trust exists primarily to ensure that all Anglican clergy in the British Isles receive a copy of Verdict on Jesus, so that, as the Revd S G Newson put it, 'they have the right idea of our Lord Jesus Christ'. The Trust has more recently extended its provision to Methodist and United Reform ministers. However, everyone is welcome to make use of Verdict on Jesus.