

CHAPTER 20  
**THE CLEAR MIRROR**



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

**VERDICT**  

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**ON JESUS**

**LESLIE BADHAM WITH PAUL BADHAM**

## About this Extract

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

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## CHAPTER TWENTY

### *The Clear Mirror*

*A Light we can bear to look at ... comes to us from a Light we cannot bear to look at.*

Evelyn Underhill

We come now to the pivotal question on which our main argument swings. Does the character of Jesus commend itself to us as being in keeping with one who claimed to be uniquely related to God? Is what we know of the character of Jesus suggestive of such a relationship?

We may well begin to answer this momentous question by examining our own reactions to the picture that has been unrolled before us. Has it not been, in itself, highly suggestive?

Recall the position we took up at the commencement of our inquiry. 'We are modern people,' we said. 'We are not prepared to take on trust any traditional view of Jesus. We cannot accept large affirmations that we have not checked.' We made an empirical inquiry. We examined what in fact he had done.

But what emerged was more stirring and full of implication than we had realised, or expected it to be. We saw his place in world-history. We measured his impact on the life of humanity as a whole. We saw the width and worth of the work his teaching had done in the moral conscience. We noted the excellence of his contribution to all that was highest in human culture. With a quickening of our own mind and spirit, we saw the imperishable glory of what he had added to the otherwise mediocre, and frequently tragic, story of the human race. Was it merely a young carpenter who had done all this, or was there the suggestion that higher forces were behind him?

Opposing forces from position after position had obstructed, or caused doubt to fall upon the faith. But as a unique phenomenon, Christianity had a foothold in every land, and to many in every age Jesus had proved a catalyst of the pure fire of God in innumerable souls.

But in conducting this inquiry, we were trying to be objective. We were not being swayed by emotional appeals. No emphasis was being laid on his alleged divinity. Our attention was being held by facts. We were hearing the plain testimony of the human conscience, the clear witness of the human soul. Yet, was all this accountable on the rational assumption that Jesus was just a man, merely a human figure? Or did we perhaps catch ourselves saying, 'Of course this is Jesus, he is different'? In short, did we almost unwittingly to ourselves invest Jesus with a strange 'plus-element'?

Yet if the suggestion of his 'difference', an awareness of a strange 'plus-element' attending him, came to us, did it not

come from the facts themselves, and not from any dogmatic supposition arbitrarily introduced?

Further, if we sensed such a 'difference' in Jesus, were we not doing just what the first disciples did? They, too, were conscious of a 'plus-element', the sense of supernatural endowment of which we ourselves have felt aware. But, mark the extraordinary point! While they reached their view by seeing him, we have reached ours by realising what he had done. They had facts to guide them. We have had facts to guide us. But the facts are wholly different ones.

Is not this then in the highest degree curious, that from an accumulation of facts, we begin to think of Jesus as 'different', while his disciples, with wholly dissimilar facts before them thought that he was 'different' too? Why should approaches, from such completely different starting points, converge?

Thus the sense of what, for lack of other terms, we must call the 'Sonship', the 'divinity' of Jesus, comes to humanity from the scrutiny of his life, and the hallowed graciousness of his influence, whereas it came to the disciples from their personal contact with him.

But how can we grapple, in terms amenable to reason, with the problem raised by this recognition of the supernatural in Jesus?

Recall how we have been attempting to do so in recent chapters. We have been exploring the possibility, envisaged alike by religious and philosophical thinkers, that God himself might choose to make himself known. We have,

therefore, been considering what is involved in the thought of an incarnation, of a revelation of God in human terms. And we have found actually that a number of facts and attendant considerations wonderfully suggest that the coming of Jesus was such an incarnation, and not to be explained otherwise.

We have noted, for instance, that such an incarnation could only be reasonably effective if certain preconditions were first satisfied. We have concentrated on three such preconditions in our three last chapters.

We must ask indulgence for repetition, because as Athanasius pointed out, when one is dealing with the Christ it is better to err on the side of repetition, rather than run the risk of something important being left out.

Recall then the three matters we predicted would have to be fulfilled before the Messiah could come.

First, we saw that, preparatory to a Messiah's coming, humankind would have to be raised to a level of moral and spiritual perception that would enable them to grasp and transmit something of the Messiah's teaching. Secondly, we noted that they would have to be acquainted with a matrix of ideas that would enable them to understand and interpret the Messiah's personality and work. Thirdly, we postulated the likelihood that God would make his revelation at a time favourable to its reception and dissemination.

Supposing that such preconditions were fulfilled, then the coming of the Messiah would not be an abrupt intrusion, but in accord with the gradual and evolutionary control of

events that we have come to associate with the normal working of Providence.

Consider, then, the astonishment with which we found that once, and once only, in human history these three conditions were satisfied, and demonstrably satisfied— and that at the time of Christ's coming. In our last three chapters we gave the evidence. Now we but tabulate it:

1. In the Old Testament we found precisely the sort of moral and spiritual preparation that fitted the coming of Christ.
2. In the Wisdom and Messianic literature, and in the philosophical conception of the Greek Logos, was the very matrix of thought that enabled Christ's contemporaries to interpret his person and work.
3. In the first century of our era were present all those propitious circumstances that favoured the rise and growth of Christianity.

Would it not have seemed tantalising and ironical if, when all these three preconditions were fully satisfied, no Messiah had come? On the other hand, how inevitably suggestive of a Higher Hand, if, when the stage was set, when expectation ran high, when every circumstance favoured the appearance of the Messiah, one actually came who both claimed the title and was, in actual fact identified as the Messiah by his contemporaries!

Could the fourth point now be established, that Jesus made his claim to have 'come forth from the Father', in terms worthy of the Father, would we not have to say that the circle of evidence was complete and that there was no reasonable doubt possible about the reality of the

incarnation? Next to being compulsive, would it not be as far as God could go without actually coercing people's minds?

But how can we establish that the revelation brought to this earth by Jesus was 'worthy of the Father'? Which is easier to believe—that the coming of Christ was an accident, or a revelation; that it was a fortuity, or the fulfilment 'of the eternal purpose that God purposed in Christ Jesus'?

Assuredly, Hegel is right. 'The real attestation of the divinity of Christ, is the witness of one's own spirit, for only spirit can recognise spirit.' But, as we have noted elsewhere, spiritual discernment varies greatly between people, and is, by its very nature, impossible to establish by argument as such. What 'argument' establishes, for instance, the claim of a work of art, or literature, or music, to be a classic? Do we not have to enter the sphere of 'appreciation'? Are we not dependent on what is called a 'value-judgment'?

Let us therefore enter that sphere now, taking for the establishment of a value-judgment on Jesus both the considerations we have already dealt with earlier in this chapter, and a number of affirmations by responsible thinkers that may serve to stimulate and confirm 'the witness of our own spirits'.

We shall assume as the background of our thought the stockpile of evidence accumulated throughout our study, but now into the foreground of our thinking we shall bring particular evidence to show that, in moral perfection and absoluteness of his surrender to the Divine Will, Jesus was uniquely fitted to bring into the world of time God's truth from the eternal world. We shall show, too, that in the



experience of people, Jesus has actually had the value of God. He has made them realise God, love God, and enter into a relationship with God with wholly new vividness and reality.

We have already mentioned in Chapter 9 the sinlessness of Jesus, so that neither his friends nor even his foes could convict him of moral blemish. But is not such moral perfection in itself suggestive? Would we not count it a prerequisite in anyone claiming to be a special messenger from God? Could we imagine that for a perfect work God would use an imperfect instrument? Is it not moral excellence that most becomes those who seek to be channels of God's grace? But even in Jesus' case can we sustain the doctrine of moral perfection? Do we like the tone, for instance, of the story of the Syro-phoenician woman? (Mark 7: 24–30). Has it been unduly abbreviated? Or the fierce denunciation of the Pharisees? (Matt. 23). Did the Evangelist make additions? In any case was he not dependent on a memory? Is the story of the cursing of the barren fig-tree (Mark 11: 14) an example of a parable being rendered as a wonder-story?

How far, in short, can we go with J. A. Baker in *The Foolishness of God* in questioning the consensus of New Testament opinion on Jesus' sinlessness? Do we see a rising reticence in the modern mind about affirming anything that may impair Jesus' utter 'oneness with ourselves' in all things? He can only help us as he is like us, they say.

But nowhere does the New Testament present Jesus' moral excellence as meaning his immunity to temptation, but always his complete ability to resist it. 'We have not a high

priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities', says the Epistle to the Hebrews (4: 15) 'for he was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.'

See, then, how the Apostolic writings deeply emphasise this remarkable feature of Christ's character. 'Who did no sin,' says the Epistle of Peter. 'He who knew no sin,' is the kindred expression of Paul. 'In him is no sin,' says John's first Epistle. 'Without sin,' is the similar description of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

In the Gospels, the evidence direct and indirect is convincing. Pilate, after examining Jesus, declared, 'I find no fault in this just man.' His wife, haunted, even in her dreams, lest her husband should have the blood of Jesus upon his hands, speaks of him as 'this just person'. Judas, too, who had known Jesus, as Peter had known him, for three intimate years; Judas the very man who would have been glad to justify his treachery by any flaw he could have pointed to Jesus' character, was forced to declare that the blood which he had betrayed was 'innocent'.

But what of Jesus himself? He presents his sinlessness not as inability to fall, but as an ability to resist the suggestion of evil and to hurl it away. At no time does he see himself to have failed. We note in his life no awareness of moral fault. He never prays for forgiveness, but he directs others to do so; he expresses no need of reconciliation; he has no sense of transgression, no sense of conflict between himself and God.

This fact becomes the more wonderful when we realise that in the case of all other spiritual leaders, a deepening sense of sin is the unvarying accompaniment of their moral growth.

They are conscious of a duel between flesh and spirit, between their own imperfection and God's holiness, that intensifies at every stage of their moral growth, but in Jesus there is nothing of this. The serenity of his vision of God is never clouded. He lives, and everything shows that he lives, in perfect harmony with the divine will. But how shall we account for this save that he realised the completeness of his at-one-ment with the Father?

The earliest heresy, the Docetic, is suggestive. It was not that a man like Jesus could not be God. It was that one so divine as Jesus, so perfect and without fault, could not be man. He was an appearance rather than a reality.

The heresy was thrown out of the Church. The full humanity of Jesus is rooted in the Gospels. He was 'tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin'.

It was no life so hidden in God as to be withdrawn from humanity. He knew that goodness was the reconciliation of extremes. He praised the successful, yet mixed with the failures. He shared the purest, highest thoughts with sinners, and rightly guessed unexpected 'types' could be comprehending. Noblest among others he mixed without harm among the polluted. He identified himself with all knowing God had made them, and he himself would die for them. One with God he was without partiality like God 'making his sun rise on the evil and the good'.

What was his life to look like as the centuries went by? What higher test can there be than to take a life lived out in the first century of our era, and set it alongside the saints and mystics of a later time: men and women who had the

advantage of knowing him and starting from the level he had reached? Of the answer there is no doubt. With one voice they have acclaimed his eminence, like an eagle mounting to heights they could never attain, and for even such excellence as they have achieved they claim to owe everything to his grace.

Of course, it may be said that the world's saints and mystics may have their own particular partialities, and terms of reference. What would the intellectuals of humankind think, the savants? On an international scale they too have spoken.

'There is only one figure in all the world of absolute beauty—Christ,' averred the Russian, Dostoevsky. 'I bow before him as the divine manifestation of the highest principles of morality,' proclaimed Goethe, the German poet and thinker. 'God's eternal wisdom which has manifested itself in all things has done so most in the human mind, and supremely in Christ Jesus,' declared the Jewish philosopher Spinoza. 'Jesus,' testified the sceptical Frenchman Renan, 'is the highest of those who show to man whence he is and whither he ought to tend. In him was condensed all that was good and elevated in our nature.' 'The life of Christ,' declares the British mathematician and scholar A. N. Whitehead, 'has the decisiveness of a supreme ideal, and that is why the history of the world divides at that point of time.'

Such testimonies then from representative and liberal minds, who have some claim to be typical of humanity at his intellectual best, speak of Jesus in startling terms. They say he has presented the world with something 'decisive', 'absolute', 'eternal'. Nor are these overstatements, for it will be recognised that in still higher and more emphatic terms

could be expressed the unequivocal convictions about Jesus that uphold the universal Church.

If we inquire, now, how Jesus has given this sublime impression we discover at least six truths, all of which suggest how pure was the light that shone through him. Let us tabulate them briefly:

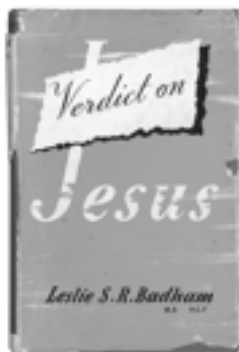
1. Jesus has given the world its loftiest ethical ideals. 'Attempt to reach righteousness by any way except that of Jesus,' cried Matthew Arnold, 'and you will find your mistake.'
2. Jesus has made people believe in the possibility of moral victory and renewal. 'Again and again I have been tempted to give up the struggle,' declared George Tyrrell, 'but always the figure of that strange man upon the Cross, has sent me back to fight again.'
3. Jesus has given the world its most moving and effective instance of love and sacrifice. 'The Cross of Jesus,' says Dr Fosdick, 'is the most subduing, impressive, and significant, fact in the spiritual history of man.'
4. Jesus has immeasurably heightened men and women's estimate of their own worth and possibilities. 'Jesus alone in history,' said Emerson, 'estimated the true greatness of man.'
5. Jesus has, by his historical resurrection, and by the spiritual values which he has made real, lifted unnumbered multitudes out of the fear of death, and has made inviting and meaningful the prospect of a life beyond the grave.
6. Finally, and most important of all, Jesus has given the world its most significant and compelling idea of God. The word 'God' is only a picture frame; all its value depends on the quality of the portrait that the frame encloses. It was the

distinction of Jesus that he lived such a life that the best picture we have of God is to say He is like Jesus.

You can look down on a lake in Switzerland and see a great deal more than the lake. You can see mirrored in its clear waters the dark green forests leading up to snow-capped mountains, and the procession of the clouds, and by night the shining stars. You can, in the same way, look at the man Jesus, and see more than a man, for mirrored in his goodness, and the total mystery of his being, you may be taken above manhood until you wonder if what is reflected in him is God.

## 7 Decades

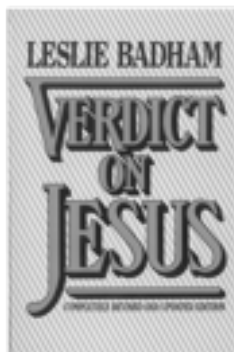
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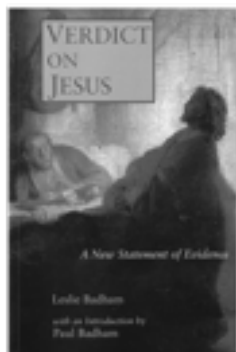
1950



1971



1983



1995



2010



2020

# Leslie Badham

*Author of Verdict on Jesus*



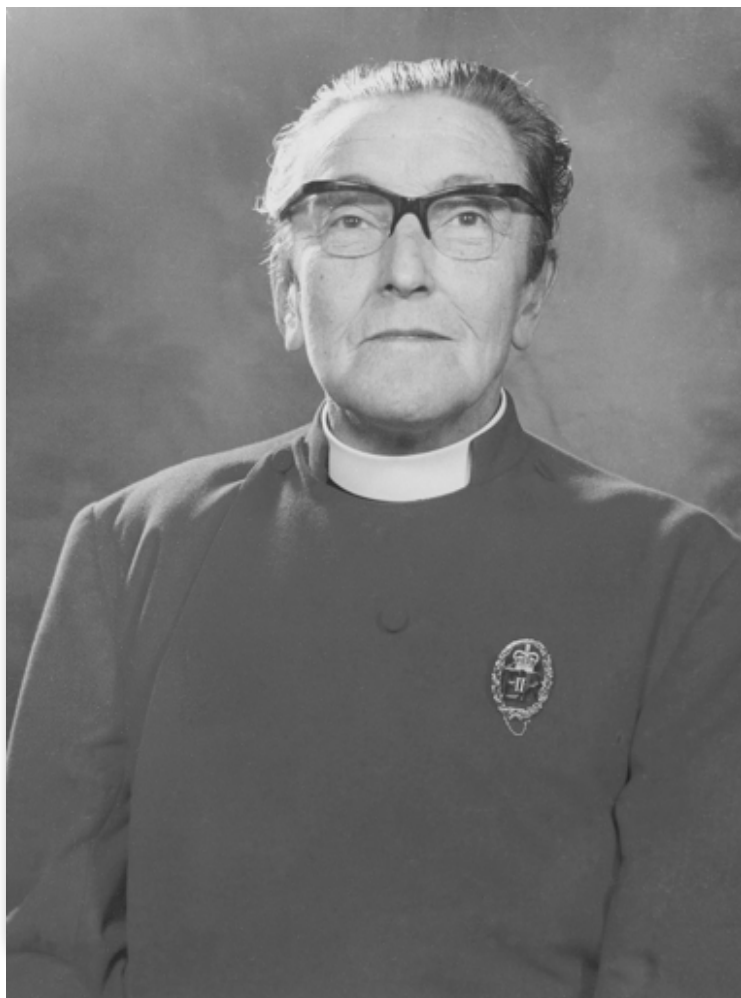
**Top left:** Leslie Badham with Effie, his fiancée, at her graduation from the LSE in 1935

**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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