

CHAPTER 21  
**FINALITY**



*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 ONE

### *Finality*

*The glory of Christ is for those who can discern it.*

Alfred North Whitehead

We set out to make a fair-minded and objective study of Jesus, but we find ourselves with a number of facts on our hands that do not submit to explanation, and refuse to be honestly explained away. They have to be accounted for. The Church says, 'O God, Thy hand is here.' Can they be accounted for otherwise?

We found a number of facts in the earlier section of this book that related to the impact and influence of Jesus. We examined and tested these facts. We found them very suggestive, certainly undeniable, and plainly, humanly speaking, unaccountable.

In the next section we saw Christianity advancing through storms that might well have been expected to overwhelm it. Repeatedly one thought the faith would founder. But it sailed on, even though with torn sails, decks awash, and mutiny, so to speak, among the crew.

In our last sequence of studies we have had to face the unaccountable. Apart from saying again, 'O God, Thy hand was here,' how can we explain the evidence of the Old Testament that seemed to be preparing the way for Christ? Or how can we explain the build-up of the sense of expectancy that preceded the Messiah's coming? Further, was it merely coincidence that he came at the most opportune time in all history for the planting, rootage, and growth of Christianity?

Can it be imagined that the world will ever look upon such a sequence of facts again? Does it not set Jesus in lonely eminence?

When Jesus actually came, he was a man of flesh and blood like the rest of us. But he lived a human life in a God-like way His life, death, and resurrection was utterly congruent with the New Testament faith that 'God was in him', and that, as far as his humanity could express it, God was manifest in him.

'I will found my Church,' he said, and the most daring of all dreams was carried into effect, and instead of being confined to a faithful few has spread over all the world, and when thus exposed to unequalled strain, has remained remarkably resilient, capable of renewing, and re-shaping itself, and yet obviously utterly dependent on its original Founder at every stage of its ongoing life.

Today if people looks for a viable faith can they do better than choose Christianity? Consider some of the essentials we might look for in an ideal religion.

We would expect it to be free of narrow particularity binding it to time and place. Christianity has this freedom.

A religious leader like Mohammed is plainly the product of a particular age and culture. No one could say this of Jesus. Nothing that he taught depended on special conditions of culture, date, race, or government. His outlook owed little to the circumstances in which he grew up. 'It is more startling,' writes Professor C. F. D. Moule in *Is Christ Unique?*, 'that the outlook of Jesus does not seem to have derived from his upbringing and environment; and what his disciples found in him was contrary to their expectations.'

No one in the Empire of Tiberius Caesar thought as he did and even when he meets with the religious groups of his own race and church, his thoughts are not their thoughts, nor his ways their ways. He dwarfs them.

They were concerned with particularities of ritual, legalism, race. He is concerned with the timeless and the universal. His God loves the whole world. Jesus' family is all humankind. His ethical principles apply to any age or place. He holds time and eternity itself in a total vision.

It was a Jewish scholar, Dr Klausner, who said that Jesus brought a conception of God and of morals applicable to all humankind, and because these clashed with Jewish national peculiarities they rejected him.

In a literal sense Jesus created his own environment. He called it the Kingdom of God. It was a timeless concept, so that people in all generations, and in all lands, and even in the realm beyond time, could belong to it. It was the

Kingdom of his Father. Jesus lived in it, and it lived in him. Therefore, to be 'in him' as the New Testament put it, was to be 'in the Kingdom'. It was a Kingdom that was to be 'an everlasting Kingdom'.

Such a thought challenges an age committed to modernity in all things. Some consider it humiliating for people to exist under the spiritual Lordship of any single person, especially one who walked the earth so long ago. May not the time be coming for him to be superseded and a new Kingdom arise? Granted Jesus was a torch bearer. But torches go out, or pass to other hands!

But there is confusion of thought here. The revelation of God in Christ cannot be repeated. Christ once manifest remains manifest. If the Gospel was God's word to humanity, it remains God's word to humanity. True once, the passage of time does not influence its truth.

When Rodin wanted to represent a Thinker he sculptured a man, apart, alone. He gave him no clothes to denote any period. He gave him no historical setting. He knew thought would go on as long as human beings go on. Still more emphatically Christians believe that 'Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever', and that to believe in him is to be incorporated into his life and into his Kingdom.

It was the liberal critic, Renan, who said in *Vie de*, 'Whatever the expected phenomena of the future, Jesus will not be surprised. His worship will constantly renew its youth. His sufferings will soften the best hearts, and all the ages will proclaim that among the sons of men there is none born greater than Jesus.'

The evolutionary mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, author of *Hymn of the Universe* goes to the ultimate limit, making Jesus the culminating figure of evolution itself. 'Lord Jesus,' he wrote, 'you are the centre towards which all things are moving.' Bishop David Jenkins, puts it, 'The person who is designated Jesus is at the very centre of our understanding of God, man, and the universe.'

A ribbon of film that is once exposed to the sun must keep ever afterwards its decisive encounter with the light, so the rule of God made evident to the world in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, must ever remain, with the terms of it, like mathematical laws, outside chronological change.

A further feature of an ideal religion would surely be its ability to provide spiritual satisfaction so that it would enhance the idea of life's worth and meaning and deepen a sense of God's reality.

Has it not been one of the sublime achievements of Jesus that he has awakened and deepened the spiritual sense of countless multitudes? Millions have had their lives changed by contemplating the cross and meditating on the one who hung and suffered there. The thought that 'He loved me and gave himself for me' has dramatically invested their lives with a new dignity, worth, and value.

Still more life-enriching has been the fact of the resurrection. It is impossible to explain the power of Christianity without it. Not only did it establish people's faith in Christ, but it added a new dimension to human thinking. It hallowed life. It added a new incentive to lives of

sacrifice and service. It has meant for millions 'being steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that their labour was not in vain in Him'. It has meant a decisive change, not in God's love for humanity, but in people's understanding of the divine love, and the eternal purpose, purposed in Christ Jesus.

These matters are not amenable to 'proof. But those who have attested them, undoubtedly believed them true, and there has been an immense weight of 'inner evidence' from those who have perceived them true, and experienced their truth through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, if a country once brought to greatness by Christianity, loses that faith, it may somehow be seen to lose the secret of its greatness. Given the choice then between two philosophies—one that affirmed life's meaning and worth, developed conscience and character, spread love and happiness, and another philosophy that tended to empty life of meaning, increased cynicism, spread greed, and increased stress of every kind, would it not be philosophically sound to choose the former? Even scientifically sound, too, in so far as a positive result is preferable to a negative?

So we come to two important demands we might make on any religion claiming to be ideal. We would look for it to provide both the highest idea of humanity, and the highest idea of God. It is the central affirmation of Christianity that both may be seen in Christ.

While this is a matter that is usually accepted or rejected, in proportion to faith or the lack of it, it is not something that cannot be brought nearer our understanding by reason. To



vindicate its underlying meaning, or at least to get closer to it, let us recall two propositions from a modern thinker, and then consider each of the propositions separately.

‘If, in Jesus Christ, God lived on earth a human life,’ said Dr Temple in *Christus Veritas*, ‘then it must be true that in Jesus Christ we see two things. First, one adequate presentation of God, as far as the human mind is concerned, for it shows us God in terms of our own experience. Secondly, one adequate presentation of man—when glorified by the in-dwelling of God.’

Is it possible that Jesus satisfies both these conditions? Do we, in fact, find that Jesus gives humankind its most adequate presentation of God?

While earlier in our study, in Chapter 9, we found that ‘God had nowhere left Himself without witness,’ did we not also find that this witness seemed to have been stronger and better attested in the Old Testament than in any other Scripture, and that the Hebrews had been brought to a knowledge of God progressively, so that they had a fuller and more satisfying idea of him than any other people? In Chapter 19 we also saw the height to which this revelation attained.

But the conclusion that was forced upon us then was that Jesus crowned and completed the Old Testament idea of God; that he himself was the unique figure in whom the whole history of Hebrew religion culminated, and that, since his coming, Christians have never been able to think of God in higher terms than to say ‘God was in Jesus’.

The importance of the confession 'Jesus is Lord,' says Dr A. M. Ramsey, in *God, Christ and the World*, 'is not only that Jesus is divine, but that God is Christlike, and in him was no un-Christlikeness at all.'

In Rome, a mirror, conveniently placed, reflects perfectly a masterpiece of Michelangelo's that is painted on the ceiling. Visitors no longer have to peer awkwardly to behold the painting above them. The mirror brings it within the natural focus of their eyes.

It is the testimony of Christian experiences that illustrates the truth about Jesus. He is the mirror of God. Can we in fact grasp the thought of God, or envisage him save as we see him reflected in Christ? We may affirm with Paul that 'God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the glory of God in the fact of Christ Jesus' (2 Cor. 4: 6).

We move on to the second proposition, therefore, 'That in Jesus we have one adequate presentation of humanity—when man is glorified by the indwelling of God.'

Again, there is a powerful consensus of opinion that Jesus is the supreme revelation who presents us with ideals of character that cannot be bettered. Here is what Tertullian meant by saying 'the soul of man is by nature "Christian"'. It is what all people at their best might wish to achieve. This is strongly confirmed in experience, for as we approximate to Jesus we have inward persuasions that we are becoming the sort of people God himself wishes us to be. In short Jesus presents us with humanity in finest definition.

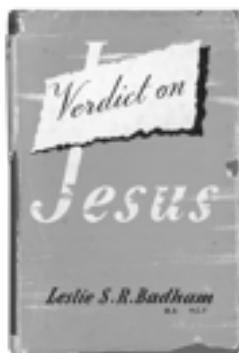
Nor has this view been confined to those of orthodox belief. There is a widespread human conscience that in the Christian character lies the answer to most human problems, as in the absence of it we find their cause. 'Not even an unbeliever,' said John Stuart Mill, 'could find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract to the concrete, than so to live that Christ would approve his life.'

Acceptance of these facts, then, logically establishes the finality of Christianity. If we have been given an adequate knowledge of God what more do we need? What would be the use of asking for a fuller knowledge of God than we could receive? Similarly, if we find in Jesus the highest conceivable definition of humanity, what more again could we look for?

When a religion offers us the purest idea of God that we can receive, and the highest pattern of virtue that we can envisage, its finality seems established. And how could this have been made available save by an Incarnation?

## 7 Decades

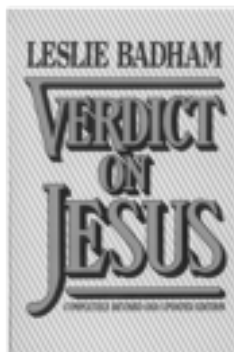
### *Verdict on Jesus through the years*



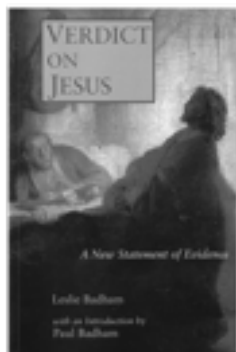
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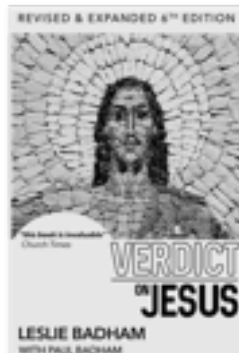
1983



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2010



2020

# Leslie Badham

*Author of Verdict on Jesus*

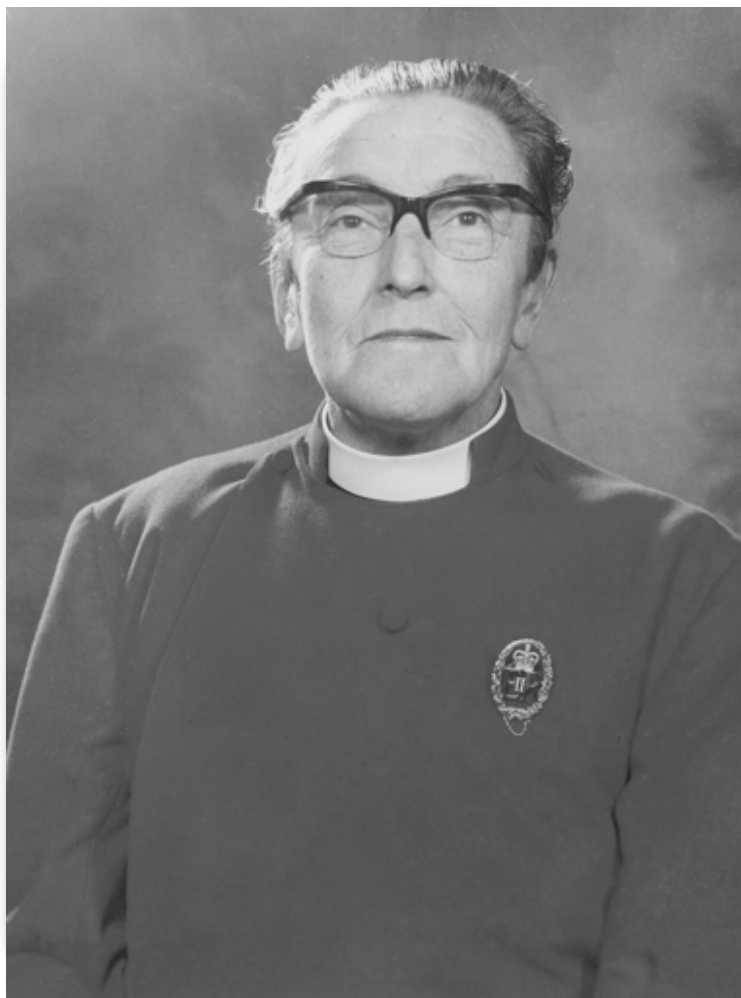


**Top left:** Leslie Badham with Effie, his fiancée, at her graduation from the LSE in 1935

**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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