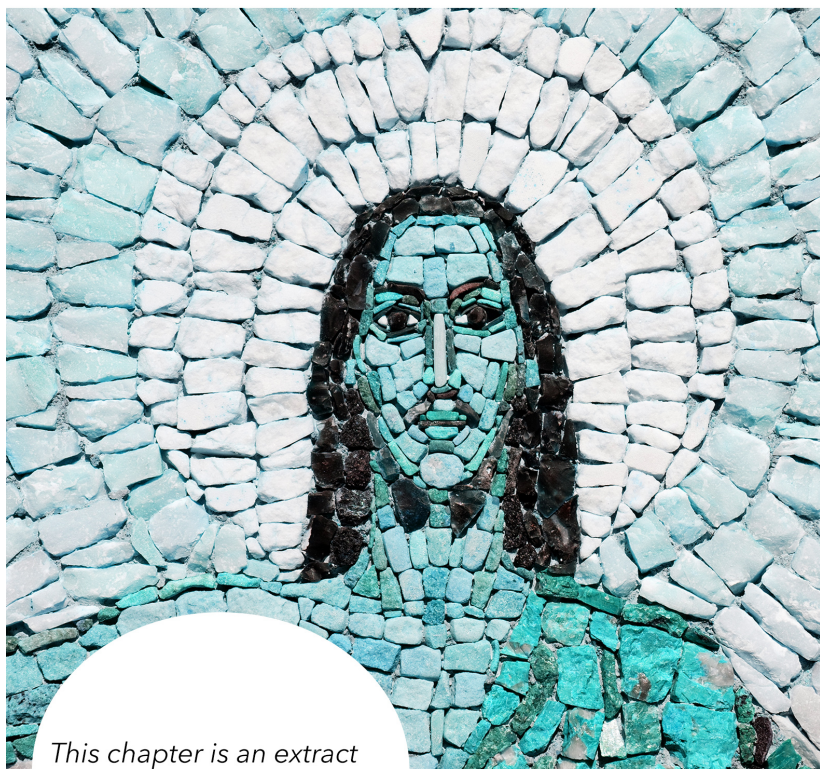


CHAPTER 22
JESUS SPEAKS FOR HIMSELF



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

VERDICT

ON JESUS

LESLIE BADHAM WITH PAUL BADHAM

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CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Jesus Speaks for Himself

Better to rend our clothes with a great cry of 'Blasphemy' as Caiaphas did in the Judgment Hall, or to lay hands on him as his kinsmen did, and try and get him away quietly, than to stupidly tone it down.

G. K. Chesterton

No words have been studied so deeply, or have affected people so powerfully, as the words of Jesus. To come to them now, after industriously tracing their influence and exploring other's views of them, is like coming up from a subway to the freshness of the open sky.

There is a power in these words by which one's whole attitude to living and dying may be changed. To study the records of the Bible Society, or simply to arrange, as the Gideons do, to leave the Gospels about in hotel bedrooms, or in the wards of hospitals, is to learn that they have their own eloquence and their own way of changing human lives.

To concentrate on the words of Jesus in a life-time's preaching, or to work on them over many years as translators do, is to feel their spirit and life. 'The whole material is extraordinarily alive,' says J. B. Phillips, 'it has

the ring of truth.' 'My work changed me,' says Dr E. V. Rieu, 'I came to the conclusion that these documents bear the seal of the Son of Man and of God. They are the Magna Carta of the human spirit.'

Yet Jesus was a man. The New Testament never attempts to treat his humanity as unreal. How could we be expected to 'follow in his steps' if he had not experienced the challenge of life to the full?

We see him in the world of his day. Individuals, groups, and crowds are drawn to life. Here is the topography of first-century Palestine. Here the political, social, and religious milieu of his time is authentically portrayed. To suppose that such verisimilitude was ever concocted is incredible.

It is the very realism of Jesus' humanity that has caused a variety of writers to look at him with fresh eyes and to seek to interpret him differently. Uninhibited by Christian beliefs, they have featured him as a purely ethical teacher, as a mistaken apocalyptist, as a model for successful businessmen, as the mouthpiece of the Church of the second century, as a myth, as a champion of social reform, and so on.

Such reconstructions have their own interest. But their variety indicates the impossibility of accounting for Jesus on naturalistic lines. They turn back the quest for the meaning of Jesus to the evidences of the Gospels themselves.

It is easy to assume that since Jesus was a man, he was someone like ourselves. 'Jesus reached his high excellence as a man,' said Stopford Brooke, 'and by a man's power alone,

and it is a clear disclosure that our nature is capable of reaching such a height.' A direct approach to the Gospels themselves makes us less confident. Jesus is far ahead of human nature as we know it.

The way people react to him in itself sets him apart. Perhaps long familiarity with the Gospels has taken the edge off our surprise at the way he is approached, spoken to, regarded. Is it just literary skill that gives Jesus always the central place, and causes people to react to him as though he were different, special, holy? Or is the most reasonable, and natural, conclusion that Jesus was just such a person as would create this impression, and make this impact? Has anyone else lifted such a variety of people to such experiences, feelings, and aliveness to God?

Astonishing things are expected of him. Astonishing things are said of him, still more astonishing things are said by him.

When he is but an infant being presented like any other baby in the Temple, the aged Simeon takes him in his arms and says, 'This child is to be a sign that men reject. Many in Israel shall stand or fall because of him, and thus the secret thoughts of many hearts will be laid bare.' Strange words that a child should grow up not only to read the secrets of human hearts, but to cause them to read their own. Yet he did grow up to cause people such deep heart-searchings as they never expected to experience. So we find Peter drew back from him so astonished that he said, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord'; and Zacchaeus was called down from his perch in the sycamore tree so shaken in

conscience as to give half his goods to feed the poor, and to restore money taken by false accusation four times over.

At the age of twelve, when others thought him 'lost', he had been entirely at home in the Temple, 'both hearing the scholars and asking them questions so that they marvelled at his understanding and answers'.

'What made you search?' he asked his mother. 'Did you not know that I was bound to be in my Father's house?' Even so, he went back with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them.

What was the mystery of the hidden years that followed of which we know nothing, save that the Father claimed them. When at about thirty years of age Jesus came to be baptised by John the Baptist, he heard the call of approval that sealed his destiny: 'Thou art my Beloved Son. With thee I am well pleased.'

The account of the Temptations must have come direct from the lips of Jesus. If he had not told us we might not have suspected that he knew persuasions so alluring that he personified their force in the graphic phrase 'tempted of the Devil'. What was to be the nature of his Messiahship? To satisfy with God-given powers humanity's material wants? To claim heaven's might for the protection and advancement of heaven's cause? Or to take the path of the conqueror as young Alexander had done, and win the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them by military might? He chose instead to inaugurate God's Kingdom by a complete surrender to God's will, and trust that a slow diffusion of his spirit would cause others to seek it as the supreme good.

What makes the Temptations remarkable is the level of possibility they imply. Was there anything Christ could not have achieved if he had made it his heart's desire? Who then, save Jesus, would have seen the Kingdom of God as the one thing worth living and dying for, and, knowing his own powers, have chosen the path of sacrifice rather than ambition and unflinchingly kept to it to the end?

In the familiar synagogue of Nazareth he opened the scroll of the prophet Isaiah at a passage that described the Messiah's mission of saviourhood: 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me; he has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim liberation for prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind; to let the broken victims go free.' Then, with all eyes fixed upon him, he says, 'Today in your very hearing this text has come true' (Luke 4: 21).

There was a general stir of admiration, we read, and they wondered at his gracious words. His teaching was acceptable enough. But could they accept 'the scandal of particularity' and his lowly origin, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' they asked.

In essence that dilemma is with us yet. Many accept the compelling wisdom of Jesus' moral teaching, but impatiently reject his transcendent status. But was Jesus unerringly right in his moral teaching, and hopelessly mistaken about his divine call? We must be guided by our views of the teaching, and still more by our views of the Teacher.

'His word was with power.' He does not depend on the Scripture's absolute authority as the Rabbis did. When he

chooses, he questions it, amends it. He does not refer back to his original call as the prophets did, to say with delegated authority, 'Thus saith the Lord'. He speaks in his own name, 'I say unto you'. This emphatic personal authority is a significant feature of Jesus' ministry both as healer and as teacher. He approaches the bedside of Jairus' little daughter, and takes her by the hand and says with infinite tenderness, 'Little girl, I say to you, arise.' He takes his position on the Mount to declare with greater authority than Moses the new laws of the Kingdom, and the 'I say unto you' has the force of finality.

Those who speak of the 'simple' ethics of the Sermon on the Mount have hardly taken the measure of that teaching, of the momentous claims implicit in it.

The commandments of Moses were to the Hebrew nation the final summary of the moral Law. Upon them their faith centred, and they were sure that only in keeping them could their nation find blessing. Yet Jesus stood before his countrymen and declared that it had, in a measure, served its purpose, and must take its place under a higher law of which he himself was the legislator, so that he could establish one part of it, and supplement, or abrogate, another, giving no authority, save that of his own word.

Take but a few instances: 'You have heard that it was said to the men of old, "You shall not kill: and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment," but I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.' 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery," but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.' 'You have

heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy,” but I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust’ (Matt. 5).

During the Maccabean wars thousands of pious Jewish soldiers allowed themselves to be cut to pieces on the Sabbath day rather than break the Law by fighting. But Jesus declared ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.’ Nor in his legislating did Jesus consider he was destroying the Law but rather expressing its highest intention. Far past Laws of the outward, visible act, went his probing of the secret thoughts and motives of the mind and heart.

Who is this, we ask, who claims such authority, and compares those who obey him to the wise who build on rock, and those who reject him to the fools who build on sand?

The startling thing is that when we submit the judgments of Jesus to the tribunal of our own hearts and consciences, we know he is ineffably right. But who is this who so unhesitatingly and unerringly can appeal from himself to us, and whose reference is to no God of the past, but to the ever-present Father who gives authority to the Son? ‘He must have regarded himself,’ says Ernst Kasemann, ‘as the very instrument of that living spirit of God.’

Let us consider further aspects of this teaching.

It seems clear that the mournful pictures of Jesus in mediaeval art do not capture Jesus' victorious spirit. The Beatitudes, or, as we may describe them, the beautiful attitudes, do that more accurately. Time and again the words 'grace', 'wisdom', and 'authority' are used to describe his teaching, and one of the reasons must be that the teaching puts into words the very attitudes that graced the character of the Teacher. He knew the joy of the humble, the happiness of the merciful, the reward of the pure in heart, the bittersweet of saviourhood. He was ready to 'go the second mile'. He was always the volunteer of whom the stern centurion, Life, could never ask too much.

It was the joy of his life to win people for God. There was never so radiant a leader. The faces of the disciples light up at his approach. The description of John is like a snapshot that could have been taken on many occasions, 'Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord.' He delights in his work as a shepherd who calls his friends and neighbours to rejoice with him over a sheep that is rescued, or as a father who throws open his arms to welcome home an erring son.

It was the distinction of Jesus to discern the inmost secret of life itself. That secret was love. Not love as a passion, not love as an emotion, but love as the creative force in the universe radiating from the very nature of God. He was himself the embodiment in history of the love of the one Father of all. None loved like this one. With every characteristic of an heroic leader, he was yet gifted with a love that embraced the whole human family.

It was love that accounted alike for the tenderness and the severity of his teaching, for as he taught with loving patience

the truths of the Kingdom, so he spoke with utmost sternness to those who disregarded that Kingdom, despised his little ones, and deserted the weak and broken.

It is a mark of rank in human nature when such teaching and attitudes awaken a response, and sometimes considerable numbers were drawn by the magnetism of Jesus to come back for more. We read of those who were prepared, on at least one occasion, to go as long as three days without food to share the privilege of Jesus' teaching. In the Gospel phrase 'to what can we compare it?'

Some music is transitory, the passing expression of a trend. Other music lasts, and repetition only increases the taste for it. Some thoughts are ephemeral. They have their headline and cease to matter. Other thoughts touch that which is immortal in the human spirit. Such were certainly the thoughts of Jesus. Of any teaching of his William Watson's words are true,

*This savours not of death
It has the relish of immortality.*

Is it possible to be taken beyond the teaching to the Teacher? 'Studying the earliest biographies and interpreters of Jesus,' says Evelyn Underhill, 'we find it was neither his moral transcendence, nor his special teaching which struck men most. It was rather the growing certainty that something was here expressed, in and through humanity which was yet other than humanity.'

There is the suggestion of power and of limitless resources implicit in every reference to him. He dwarfs strong

personalities into insignificance. 'He goes before his disciples and they are amazed, and as they follow they are afraid.' Even those who opposed him bitterly had to acknowledge his mighty works, and unable to say—without looking absurd for opposing him—that his power was from above, they said 'he was in league with the mightiest powers of darkness, the Prince of Devils' (Mark 3: 22).

If, as Harnack pointed out, 'a great personality is to be understood, not only by his words and deeds, but by the impression he creates on those who come under his influence', we may well ask what must have been the force and elevation of personality that are reflected in the fact that some loved Jesus so deeply they were ready to die for him, and others hated him so bitterly that they killed him?

Such was his holiness and power that his disciples saw him as the perfect channel for the divine love, a Revealer who was one with the Reality Revealed. He irradiated love and it found natural expression in works of love. The Kingdom of God was manifest in Jesus both in word and in power.

'Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee,' writes Matthew, 'and Jesus went up into the hills and sat down there. And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they laid them down at his feet, and he healed them, so that the throng wondered ... and glorified God. There were evenings, long after the sun had gone down, when it seemed the whole city was gathered at the door, and he healed many'.

Such unsparing demands drained Jesus of power, but if power flowed from him it equally flowed to him. 'Rising a

great while before dawn,' says Mark, 'he went to a lonely place and there prayed.' No one has ever prayed with such intensity. It revitalised him. On one occasion his observing disciples commented that his very face was changed. On another the disciples saw Jesus suffused in a nimbus of awe inspiring light. On another occasion one of his disciples heard him say, 'Father, I thank Thee that Thou hearest me at all times'. His disciples longed to pray in the same way, 'Lord,' they said to him, 'teach us to pray.' So clearly they prayed as humanity to God, while he prayed as Son.

In the light of such experiences we understand Matthew Arnold's question:

*Was Christ a man,
Then let us see
If we can be
Such men as he?*

Mark (2: 1–12) records the healing of a paralysed man, but it was not the physical cure that astounded the onlookers but the deeper psychosomatic healing, 'My son your sins are forgiven.'

Here was a claim that, as his opponents immediately saw, was tantamount to a divine claim. 'Who can forgive sins,' they asked, 'except God only?' But this was no chance utterance, we need to link it with Jesus' still more astounding claim to be the veritable Judge of the quick and the dead (Matt. 21: 42–45; Luke 12: 8–9; Luke 20: 7–18; Matt. 24: 31). Claims of such awe-inspiring magnitude exceed all Messianic ideas, and place Jesus at the right hand of God himself.

Who is this, we have to ask, who in the most accredited documentary records sets aside the accepted authorities of his Church; who claims for his words a final authority; who asserts that on our love and obedience to him depends their final destiny; who looks into the future and sees all the nations of the world gathered before his judgment seat and who presents himself as humanity's Judge and Saviour?

These are no statements that we can take or leave as we please. They are his terms. He concentrates humanity's gaze upon himself. He expects obedience. For his sake, if necessary, they are to sever the sacred ties of home and kinship. He asks, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, that they must live for him alone. They must be like a merchant who having found one shimmering, priceless pearl, gives all that he has to possess it.

Is it possible to read these Gospel evidences without seeing that we face in Jesus a Person in whom the relationship of human to God, and of God to human, appears to be distinct from anything to be found even in saints and prophets?

We seem presented with a figure that is both human and more than human. If we imagine ourselves at the Crucifixion knowing nothing but the dread drama before us, we see a man whose life-blood is ebbing away in agony. A mission that promised so much has ended in this. He had hoped to reorientate humankind to the divine will. He had sublimely led the way. But all he had come to do and be, and even the Kingdom of God on earth was a shattered dream. Rejected, forsaken, spat upon, crowned with thorns, was there any sorrow like his sorrow? Yet this is the moment he chose to

pray: 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' Does this quality of forgiving, pleading, love, belong to the rest of us? Does the frame of humanity accommodate Jesus, or is this the spirit of God?

We cannot portray Jesus as other than he is. Portraiture has to be true to scale. Michelangelo visited the studio of Raphael when the younger painter was absent. On the easel was a picture of Christ that Raphael was painting. Michelangelo made his comment. He took a brush and wrote '*Amplius—Larger*'.

Is this what the New Testament compels us to do? One school of scholars (represented by Wellhausen and Weiss and their varied successors) insists on Jesus' humanity. He was an ethical teacher. The transcendental is cut out. Another (represented by Schweitzer and his followers) fastens on the very elements the others discard. They concentrate on the supernatural, apocalyptic elements of his divine nature.

Plainly both groups cannot be right. They cancel each other out, or perhaps we should say they supplement each other, and together secure what the Gospels present, namely the mystery of the divine and the human both meeting in Christ.

Go back to the disciples at Caesarea Philippi. Calvary was hidden in the future. There was no knowledge of God's verdict on his Suffering Servant supplied by the resurrection. In that Greek city Jesus asked his disciples, 'Who do you say that I am?' Peter gave the answer of the apostolic group, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God,' and Jesus answered him, 'Blessed art thou Simon

Baqona, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father who is in heaven' (Matt. 16: 17).

Humanly speaking what facts had the disciples to go on? The supreme fact that into the here and now had come a man who lived totally for God, whose belief in God determined all he said and did, and who daily made the power of God and the wisdom of God a reality to their own souls.

Without some such relationship of Sonship they could not account for the Person before them. Did not his very prayers use that particular family word 'Abba—Father' with undertones of affection not employed by any other lips?⁴⁵

After Caesarea Philippi,⁴⁶ Jesus increasingly speaks of God as Father, but always the word is used with a vivid and sacred sense of reality and revelation, either in prayer, or directly to his disciples. It means too much to be lightly used.

Such awareness of direct filial relationship finds expression in one of the most accredited passages in the whole of the New Testament. 'All things,' says Jesus, 'have been delivered unto me of my Father, and no one knoweth the Son save the Father; neither doth any know the Father save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him' (Matt. 11: 27; Luke 10: 22). Here the word translated 'knoweth' bears

⁴⁵ See C. F. D. Moule, *The Phenomenon of the New Testament*, pp. 48, 67.

⁴⁶ See T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*.

an intense meaning such as 'knows fully' or 'understands wholly'. But what of the august solemnity of such a claim?

This passage gives us the most important and characteristic thought of Jesus concerning his own relationship to God. It suggests a range of consciousness limitless in its extension, a mutuality of love and knowledge, a sense of affinity and oneness that none other could share.

Such an utterance could only have fallen from the lips of one who had passed through the highest and most wonderful spiritual experiences; who had seen veil after veil between God and himself going down, until he stood in the immediate presence of the Most High, knowing that it was God's will that was done by him, God's word that was spoken by him. Realising, in short, that the kinship was so close, the identity so real, that in human language only the word 'Sonship' could describe it.

In the Fourth Gospel we get this, the deepest and most sacred faith of Jesus, receiving the ampler exposition that he most naturally gave to his most spiritual followers. It is the unveiling of the most vivid truth in the inner consciousness of Jesus, and with compelling emphasis the relationship is stressed. 'He that hath known me hath known my Father also; I came out from the Father into the world, again I leave the world and go unto the Father.' Certain passages make explicit the astounding claim to have pre-existed with the Father from all time. 'Verily I say unto you, before Abraham was I am.' 'Father, glorify me with the glory that I had with Thee before the world began.'

Truly the more the uniqueness of Jesus' personality is perceived, the more it baffles analysis.

So our quest into the mystery of mysteries draws to its conclusion. But what is that conclusion to be? In our first chapter we asked, 'What can modern people believe about Jesus?' In all subsequent chapters we have been accumulating the evidence on which an answer can be based. Now certain conclusions seem inescapable.

Jesus is the one transcendent figure who has given humankind its highest interpretation of life's significance, here and hereafter. The best we know of humanity and the best we know of God are alike revealed in him.

A life like his, followed by an influence so hallowed and eternal, must be either an incredible fortuity or a divinely intended revelation. Was he an intruder or a messenger? Did Jesus 'just happen'? Was he the product of a blind, chance happening in a world that never purposed him, and that cared nothing for him? Or were the disciples on the trail of a tremendous truth when they accepted the Old Testament revelation of God, as the Creator of the world and the Lord of history, and then went on to acclaim Jesus as his supreme revealer?

If they were right then, their verdict is right still, although we ourselves may seek to state the meaning of Jesus in different categories of thought—provided we could find them.

Meanwhile, the thought-forms of the New Testament have timeless significance, as frameworks of thought, from which

the truth they enclose is separable. Phraseology has sometimes to be decoded before we can arrive at its abiding meaning.

Recall then some of the categories of thought that the New Testament writers use to express their convictions about Jesus. He is the long promised Messiah, the supernatural figure in whom the whole story of revealed religion culminates, say the Synoptic Gospels. He is the Logos, the divine Reason of Greek thought, says the Fourth Gospel, 'full of grace and truth'. He is the incarnate Wisdom says the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'reflecting the glory of God and bearing the very stamp of his nature'. The Epistles of Paul speak of him 'who is the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1: 15), who was 'equal with God, but emptied himself to become as men are, and being as all men are, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death on the Cross. But God raised him on high and gave him the name that is above every name so that all beings in the heavens, the earth, and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus, and every tongue should acclaim Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. 2: 7–11).

Here the changing categories of thought do not mean changes of underlying conviction. They are attempts to make plain a truth too big for one mode of expression, and all point to one historic figure through whom, as through a prism, there shone the authentic radiance of the Eternal to spread and become the light of the world.

But how true are these statements to what Jesus would himself have said, and did, in fact, say? We ask, as the disciples once did: 'If you are the Christ, tell us plainly'. We

are people of secular cities and not at home with the terms of mysticism and theology found in sanctuaries and studies, but rather with the terms of the workshop floor, the laboratory, the courtroom, the atmosphere of fact and precise statement.

Even at such a level the Gospels meet us. We find Jesus after a brief, but completely unique ministry, standing in a courtroom at Jerusalem on trial for his life. He is arraigned on a charge of alleged blasphemy, of claiming to be the Messiah, of being so knowledgeable of God's mind and will that he could claim a filial relationship and speak of himself as God's 'Son'.

In the centre of the court stands the highest representative of the Jewish Church, Caiaphas, the High Priest. To Jesus he applies the solemn Oath of the Testimony: 'I adjure you by the living God.' 'Now if,' says the Mishna, the Jewish Law, 'one shall adjure you by one of the Divine titles, behold, you are bound to answer.'

Consider, therefore, what the three Synoptic Gospels record: 'And the High Priest said unto him, "I adjure you by the Living God, that thou tell us plainly if thou art the Christ the Son of God?"

'And Jesus affirmed, "Thou has spoken it. Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." Then the High Priest rent his clothes, saying, "Ye have heard the blasphemy! What need have we for any further witnesses?" ' (Matt. 26: 63-65).

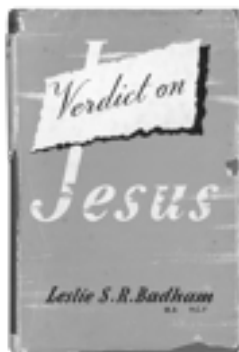
By his own testimony under oath that he was the Messiah, Jesus was passed from the High Priest to Pilate, and thence to crucifixion.

Nineteen troubled centuries, lit by the gleams of the Gospels, have passed since that claim was made and that verdict delivered. We now know that Caiaphas had his own reasons for engineering a verdict that would result in a capital sentence. Despite his words, therefore, we have called 'further witnesses'. As time goes on they still come forward and evidence accumulates. Even as this is written, over one-third of the inhabitants of the globe believe that Caiaphas was wrong and that Jesus was right. What are we to think? Should the verdict of Caiaphas stand, or should it be wiped out?

No one can answer for another. Taking the evidence as a whole: What is your Verdict?

7 Decades

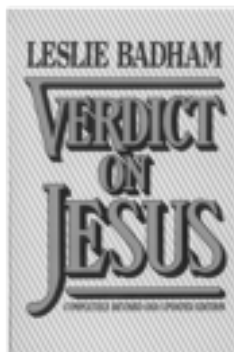
Verdict on Jesus through the years



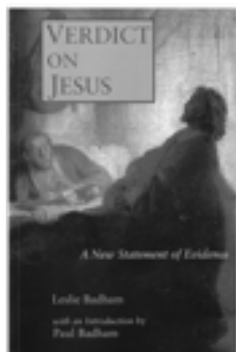
1950



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Leslie Badham

Author of Verdict on Jesus

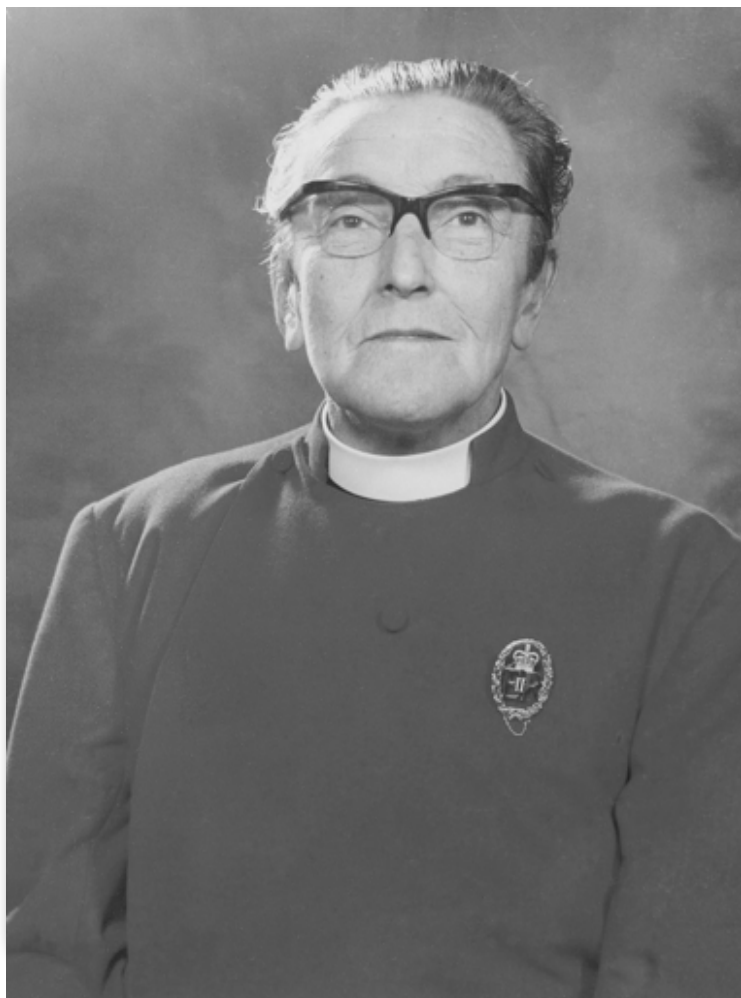


Top left: Leslie Badham with Effie, his fiancée, at her graduation from the LSE in 1935

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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