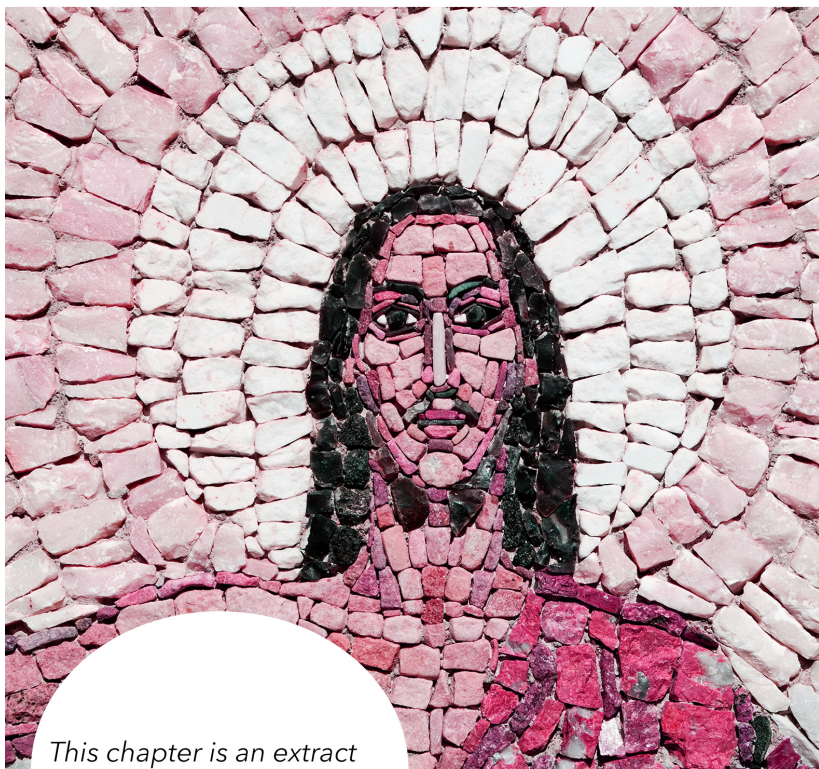


CHAPTER 4
THE TEST OF UNIVERSALITY



*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 FOUR

The Test of Universality

The next fact we come to is even more suggestive. The influence of Jesus has not only been uniquely durable, but it has done an unusual thing. Instead of diminishing with the years it has increased.

One would have thought that the words of a man of Galilee would have had too provincial a sound for global repetition. One would have expected that in the course of centuries he would have been outstripped, surpassed, outmoded, but the opposite has been the case.

One enjoys the writing of a distinguished Chinese philosopher like Dr Lin Yutang, but one is conscious that the author, delightful and wise as he is, could not readily be naturalised among us. In tone and temper of thought he could not imperceptibly capture the West. But Jesus from Palestine has done it.

We may say 'East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet', but Jesus combined the mysticism of the East with the hard-headed practicality of the West, and they meet in him. 'Christianity,' says Bouquet, 'is unique both in

its ability to make converts in any latitude, and in its appeal to human beings of any racial group.¹³

Astonishing as this may seem, Jesus has not only been a foremost influence in the West, he has his followers in every nation and every society throughout the world. ‘That this has been achieved,’ as Dr W. Temple put it, ‘is one of the most astonishing facts of our time.’

The fact is more striking when we realise how often Christianity has been the first outside influence to enter many closed territories. It has been work fraught with difficulty, setback, and minimal human and material resources, but along with the faith have come gifts of education, medicine, social transformation. Other influences have been given a footing too, perhaps not wholly good as when trade opportunities have been exploited to the point of hurting the good name of Christian.

There is a natural holding power about traditional ways of life, and a natural reverence for old sanctities, that has made Christian influence slow to penetrate, slower to establish. Yet, given a chance, the life and teaching of Jesus has proved capable of awakening a response in every variety of human type.

In presenting Jesus to the ancient and higher religions there are difficulties all too seldom realised. There is a point at which all religious teachings, as Bishop Lesslie Newbigin puts it in *The Finality of Christ*, ‘are gropings after a prodigious reality which they cannot compass’. There are

¹³ *Phases of the Christian Church*, Chapter 11.

specific difficulties, too, where Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are concerned.

It may be hard, for example, for Muslims to appreciate Christian teaching about the Sonship of Christ, if their concept of fatherhood does not mean a relationship of love and trust so much as the physical act of generation. Nor does their idea of divine providence allow them to believe God, mighty and merciful, entered into the suffering of the crucifixion. The specific denial in the Quran is well known. Yet typical Muslims have been converted.

Christianity comes to a crunch with Hinduism in the doctrine of Karma that pictures humanity as imprisoned by iron laws of cause and effect. The pessimistic Hindu expectation of endless re-incarnation is in direct conflict with Christian hope of a transformed and renewed life in eternity. Yet typical Hindus have been converted.

Theravada Buddhism is the creed most directly in collision with Jesus' teaching in so far as it teaches that there is no God, that human life is scarcely worth having, and that death means extinction.

It is a strange happening that Buddhism, which is much the farthest from Jesus, in that it denies God, is much the closest in its moral teaching to the Sermon on the Mount. With astonished eyes, therefore, the Buddhist looks at the West with its blatant pursuit of material gain, sensual indulgence, and the arts of 'getting on'.

It is expected, however, that as communication between the faiths of the world increases so direct acquaintance with

what Jesus was and taught will see Christianity grow in influence, 'as a seed growing secretly', ever breaking new ground within the soul of the world.

As it is, those who profess and call themselves Christian are far and away more numerous than those who belong to any other living religion. Statistics are rightly suspect in dealing with spiritual loyalties, but nevertheless they may afford a rough guide to relative proportions.

Doubtless many 'Christians' are purely nominal in their acceptance of the faith, but who would suggest that the purely nominal adherents are to be found only in Christianity? Would they not, at least to an equal degree, be found among those credited to other faiths?

And how has Christ's Gospel managed to go out into all the world? It has depended on volunteers, few in number and many of them unpretentious in ability. 'The missionary movement of the nineteenth century,' writes Professor Latourette in *Missions Tomorrow*, 'has been the most notable out-pouring of life, in the main unselfish, in the service of alien peoples, that the world has known.'

But are we exaggerating the voluntary element? Have there not been times when the faith has been aided by coercion, privilege, by the blessing of political planners? But these have been precisely the times when the durability of Christian influence has been least marked, and when its rootage and power have been most shallow. It is when Christianity has been free from secular interference, and dependent solely on its own appeal, that its expansion has been most rapid and its impact greatest.

If we desire to see people enfranchised from superstition, ignorance, oppression, violence, and ill-will; if we think nobly of the soul, and recognise the unifying power of great religious beliefs, then we must face what Christ has done, is doing, and might, with reasonable expectation, further do, for the advancement and integration of humankind.

One form of words, the Lord's Prayer, grows with the growth of the individual's understanding. 'Say it slowly,' said an officer praying with a companion in a hut on a bleak spur of Iceland, 'Say it slowly, each sentence weighs a ton.' It has been translated into well over a thousand tongues and dialects. It centres the worship of the world-wide Church, but it is capable of still larger use. It is capable of universality. Dr H. D. J. Major, author of *Basic Religion*, used to call it 'the most unifying religious formula in the world. It could be said as it stands by Jews, Muslims, and Theistic Buddhists.'

Only with intelligence and imagination at their highest activity can we grasp what these great shafts of truth, if ever implemented by the heart's desire, could do for the religion of tomorrow.

But what, interjects the critic, has Christianity really done by its expansion? What practical results, if any, follow its numerical and territorial gains?

An answer to such questions would come appropriately from Chinese priests and doctors, from the three and a half million native Christians in India, from the blind in Burma,

from the lepers in Nigeria, and from the native Christians, sons of former slaves, in Africa.

Missionaries have been the schoolmasters of whole races. They have carried with them ideas of justice and medical science. They have fought opium and prostitution, superstition and exploitation. They have set whole peoples on upward paths.

One of my distinguished predecessors at Windsor Parish Church, George Augustus Selwyn, became the first Bishop of New Zealand. For some years he worked among the Maoris at the Samuel Marsden Settlement. The judgment of Charles Darwin is impressive: 'The march of improvement consequent on the introduction of Christianity throughout the South Seas, probably stands by itself in the record of history.' Selwyn's method of evangelising his huge diocese was to visit every part of it in person, and for this purpose he used a steamer given him by his friends. He was often his own pilot navigating uncharted seas. His practice was to get the natives to lend him their sons to be taken to the College in Auckland, to be trained as either clergy or good servants of the Church. The Maoris would have been exterminated but for Christian influence.¹⁴

One cannot chart the working of wide and humanising ideas in all the corners of the earth, nor can one estimate what faith in Jesus, as the mediator of God's love, has meant to unnumbered multitudes newly released from the tyranny of superstition.

¹⁴ Warre- Cornish, *History of the Church of England in the Reign of Victoria*.

We cannot face facts like these without asking a searching question. Who inspired this religion that has gone round the world, who founded this fellowship that has proved so invincible? The answer is so amazing that the mind is humbled. A young man who grew up in a small town in a backward province nearly two thousand years ago. We stand in awe before the world-wide expansion and proven strength of the church that his words called into being.

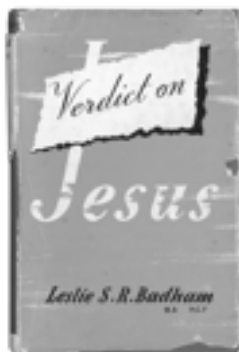
It is almost disconcerting, therefore, to find that what has so strikingly come to pass was calmly anticipated by Jesus: 'You must go out into all the world and preach the Gospel: Go, therefore, and make all nations my disciples: The field is the world.'

What that command meant to the astonished provincials who heard it we shall never know. Even yet, when the literal fulfilment of Christ's command has in a measure taken place, many are content to leave out of their reckoning the one person who holds in his hands the map of the world.

We must not start, this early, to draw together the threads of the main argument, of which this is merely a strand. Later, we must consider what the fact of Christ's universality implies. No thinking mind would wish to evade such a consideration.

7 Decades

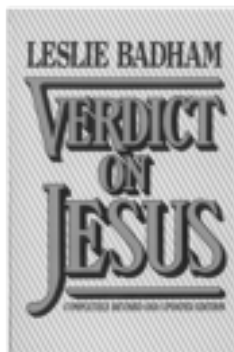
Verdict on Jesus through the years



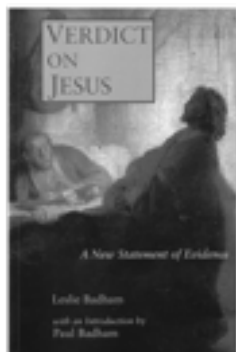
1950



1971



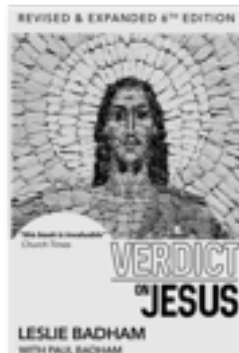
1983



1995



2010



2020

Leslie Badham

Author of Verdict on Jesus

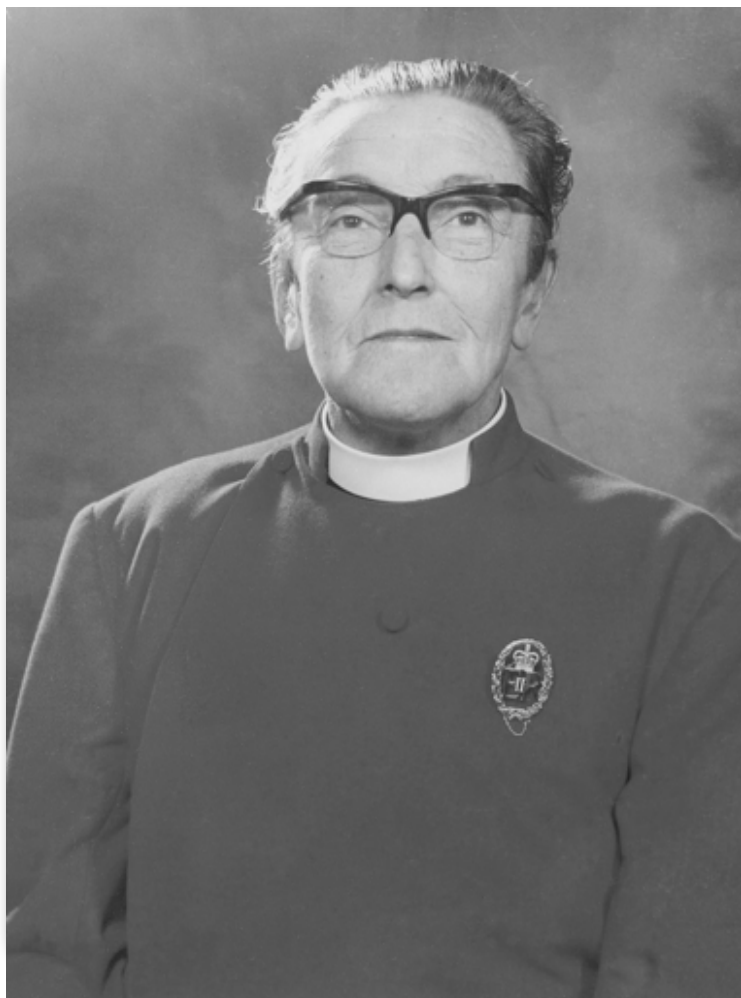


Top left: Leslie Badham with Effie, his fiancée, at her graduation from the LSE in 1935

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

Middle: Leslie Badham with Queen Elizabeth 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.