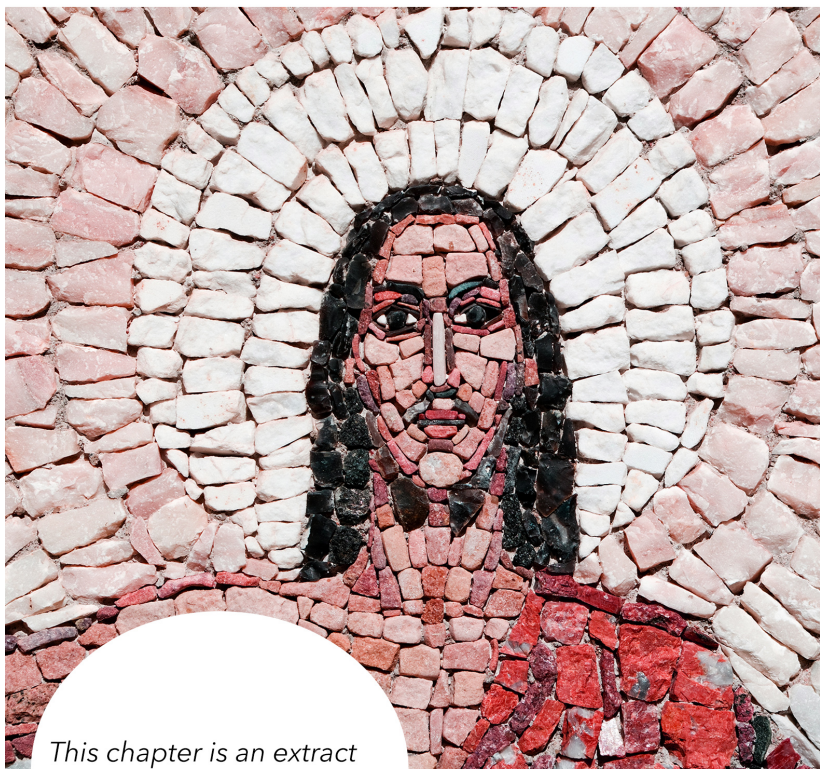


CHAPTER 6
THE TEST OF FRUITFULNESS



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

VERDICT

ON JESUS

LESLIE BADHAM WITH PAUL BADHAM

About this Extract

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CHAPTER SIX

The Test of Fruitfulness: The Church

A sure way of testing people's greatness is to ask, What did they leave to grow? Did they start people thinking along fresh lines with a vigour and boldness that persisted after him? Did they set up any new standards? Did they leave any mark on posterity worth calling indelible?

Such questions have only to be asked to make awe-inspiring the pre-eminence of Jesus over all who have ever lived.

Men and women of rare and distinguished abilities have competed for the elusive prize of fame after death. But they have failed in one way or another, to meet the test of fruitfulness. Strong and gracious spirits have over-topped their fellows in moral stature and spiritual insight, but when time brought them into judgment they were found to have made no lasting contribution.

One thinks, for example, of Marcus Aurelius, the author of *Meditations*, who, with the title of Emperor to lend him prestige, and with loftiness of personal vision, struck no chord that strongly vibrated in the conscience of those around him. The harsh candour of Renan is painful but hard to refute. 'Marcus Aurelius,' said Renan, 'left delightful

books, an execrable son and an Empire in decay.' Then he draws a striking contrast, 'Jesus remains an inexhaustible principle of moral regeneration for humanity.'¹⁶ What a strange disparity between relative opportunity on the one hand, and relative effectiveness on the other!

It is appropriate that we should judge Jesus by what he left grow, for he set up as the standard of human worth the test of fruitfulness. In words too plain to be misunderstood, he rebuked the empty life. How purposeless, he said, the hand to the plough if no furrow was to be cut! How pointless the long prayer if the life contradicted it! How futile the nurture of trees if they brought no fruit to perfection! With hard-headed realism he looked for positive results. 'You shall recognise men by their fruits.'

Many an idealist have dreaded being weighed in their own scales, but not so Jesus. No life compares with his when measured by the test of fruitfulness.

Jesus left to grow a massive movement that has seen empires rise and fall, that has survived political frameworks and seen social orders crumble, that has been transplanted far from its native soil, and that has succeeded everywhere, in producing spiritual and moral growth.

One thing is certain, the more we know of the influence of Jesus, as it has impinged on history and shaped it, the more we shall appreciate what it has meant to humankind. His stature is such that it can only be seen in its true dimensions

¹⁶ *Vie de Jesus*, p.289.

when it is thrown into its true perspective against the life of the race as a whole.

* * * *

We are not averse to a fresh approach, but where Christianity is concerned where can we begin? Let us begin with ourselves as we took our first glimpse of Christianity.

We found the Church in working order when we were born. In a world that contained pubs and clubs, schools and universities, law courts and hospitals, and all the varied amenities of a civilised community, we found also an institution called the Church. Doubtless we took it for granted and judged it either by hearsay or by its local embodiment. In short, we took it out of its impressive context.

But the Church was immeasurably older than anything else we faced. It had retained a recognisable shape for twenty centuries. It had been attacked by enemies without and betrayed by foes within.

It had become the mother of all kinds of offspring. Some of its offspring, by the time we saw them, had reached such a vigorous maturity that we barely connected them with the Church at all. But the Church had known them in their cradle days and had held them up until they could stand up. Many of the ideals and values we accept today would not have been ours at all if the Church had not cherished them and kept them alive when no one else cared.

To do the Church justice, then, and to get an idea of what it has done for humankind, let us turn our attention to a movement that has shaped the pattern of much of our thinking and that, despite many grievous failures, has not ceased to hold before successive generations, the message of Jesus.

* * * *

We have greatly over-simplified the picture of life in New Testament times. Palestine was then heavily timbered, fruitful, beautiful. It had a population of between five and six million. Galilee was a choice area, and the most populated.

When in Luke's account of the ministry we read 'he went through the cities and villages of the Decapolis, preaching and teaching and bringing the good news of the Kingdom' (Luke 8: 1) we do well to remember that those ten cities included Gerasa, Sebaste, and Caesarea Philippi, magnificently built with wide streets, colonnades, race-courses, amphitheatres. There was sophistication and worldly glory in the world Jesus knew. There was also tension, political unrest, and the spirit of insurrection between Jew and Roman. In ad 70 the armies of Titus laid Jerusalem level with the ground. While the Gospels were being written some two and a half million people were probably killed.

Humankind was old, deeply entrenched in evil, when the Church was born. Passages in Herodotus, or a glimpse at the Epistle to the Romans, show us the sort of world it faced. Could some 'time machine' take us back to the days of the

Caesars, we should feel lost and alien, with many of our accepted standards outraged and many of our ideals not even granted a hearing.

We would be surprised not only at the material competence of Rome—its fine roads, amphitheatres, its far-flung systems of justice and administration, but we would note the lack of reverence for life, the callousness that enjoyed the butchery in the arenas, the cheap estimates of womanhood, the strange excesses and perversions of sex.

We would notice how bewilderingly varied were the ideas that jostled each other throughout the empire. Old gods and goddesses stood in the Pantheon, Greek and Roman mixed, the left-overs of a mythology that was empty of further significance, yet superstition was widespread and no one was free from it. A noble and ennobling minority turned for comfort to the worthwhile philosophy of the Greeks, and the austere moral code of the Stoics. But there was a general feeling that life was played out. The winds of pessimism cut through the once proud togas of the Stoics. 'What mortal,' they said, 'achieves more of happiness than the mere appearance of it? Short as life is, no man is so happy that he would not wish many times to be dead.' It was an age suffering from failure of nerve.

Into this world there broke, as the incontestable result of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, a small minority with a new hope, dauntless spirit, and a great faith.

In the New Testament we have the actual documents of what these first Christians believed and taught. The writings cover from about ad 50 to the era of persecution.¹⁷

They believe themselves to be the new people of God, more than fulfilling the hopes of the Old Testament Church. They make, for their number, an extraordinary impact. Their enemies credit them with ‘turning the world upside down.’

We see happenings remarkable for the time. Widows, for example, get practical care (Acts 6). Greeks in Macedonia raise funds for hunger-stricken Jews in Jerusalem. Corinthian dissolutes get so changed that Paul can ‘never stop thanking God for all the graces they have received through Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 1: 4). There is a caring and a sharing previously unknown. ‘Ideals of virtue,’ wrote Augustine of Hippo, ‘once considered attainable only by a few philosophers, are now attained by innumerable ordinary men.’¹⁸

Yet in this promising field there are tares among the wheat. From the start we witness the paradoxical character of the Church. It is God’s agency in the world, but it is also an assortment of fallible humans. The widows who are receiving help, grumble. Leaders argue who is to be top. There can be a contentious party spirit. But there is evidence of a lively conscience. Ananias and Sapphira are so scared at being caught lying and cheating that they both get seizures.

¹⁷ Dr. C. H. Dodd, *History and the Gospels*, pp. 47-74.

¹⁸ *De Vera Religione*, 111. 5. The second century pagan physician Galen says much the same thing. Harnack, *Expansion*, p. 266.

People accept rebukes, try to do better, and love their teacher. There is convincing preaching and the faith spreads.

As early as ad 195 the historian Tertullian can report that ‘places of the Britons unreached by the Romans are nevertheless obedient to the laws of Christ.’¹⁹ In ad 314 three British bishops, a priest and a deacon are signatories at the council of Arles. The evidence is striking that the faith brought to Britain when she was a Roman province was still strong when Augustine made his famous landing in Kent in ad 597.²⁰ By ad 350 Christianity had spread to Arabia, Abyssinia, Afghanistan, and Ceylon.

The first three centuries suffered capricious and cruel persecution. Even an unyielding stand for the faith was to risk it, while Tertullian says any affliction could cause a mob to cry ‘Christians to the lions’. But a change came in ad 312 when Constantine the Emperor adopted the cross with the monogram of Christ as his imperial standard. A year later, with the Edict of Milan, Christianity was not only tolerated but some of the property filched from Christians was returned to them. The incredible had happened. The Empire was professedly Christian.

But the great Empire itself was not long to survive. A series of invasions by Teutonic tribes brought down the weakening giant, and the very ground which the Church had won in the Empire menaced its life, but the Church disentangled itself to survive.

¹⁹ Adv. Jud., c.vii.

²⁰ *The Christian Island*, Beram Saklavala, 1970.

In adverse environments Christians created little social islands where Christian ideals could be lived out. Gregory the Great devoted the whole of his inherited wealth, for example, to the poor and to the subsidy of the famous monk missionaries who came to Britain. Benedict was the founder of Western monasticism and his noble rule is one of the sanest products of the human mind. When the Kentish Princess Ethelburga went to Northumbria to marry King Edwin she took the scholarly Paulinus with her and the court was converted. Columba founded Iona and a centre of Celtic Christianity for four centuries. Christianity kept Western civilisation alive. Bede of Jarrow knew Latin, and then learnt Greek because Theodore of Tarsus was a Greek. An African, Hadrian, came here with Theodore who brought a library with him making the Benedictine monastery at Canterbury a centre of Greek and Latin studies. Boniface turned his back on ecclesiastical preferment in England to create and organise the Church in the Rhine valley. In the early days Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and France all drew on English teachers.

* * * *

But another picture comes to mind. Not only invasion and barbarism broke in on the faith. The Arab invasion of the sixth and seventh centuries was of a different kind. Islam, with its particular appeal in some lands, strode over some half of the territory that the Church had won.

The history of the Church has been one of advance and recession, with 'each recession', as Latourette points out, 'tending to be less deadly and of shorter duration than the last'. So it happened now. By ad 950 Christianity was

established over a wider area than before the Muslim advance.

Monasticism was a force to be reckoned with from the sixth century. Houses dedicated to Benedict's rule of work and worship were hives of wholesome influence over Europe for centuries. 'It was chiefly through the Church and its monasteries,' writes Latourette in *The Unquenchable Light*, 'that such education and learning as survived was handed down to later generations, that the poor were succoured, that the marriage tie was given sanctity, that the sick were cared for, that travellers were sheltered, and that morality was inculcated.' In long ages of violence and unrest, the bishops stood for law and order and were the protectors of the weak.

The two Great Orders of Preaching Friars—the Dominican and the Franciscan—were somewhat complementary in their activities, the one characterised by high thinking and the other by kindly service to the sick and poor. As we see an outstanding Dominican, like Thomas Aquinas for example, takes his place in the long line of Christian thinkers who from the Apostolic Fathers to luminaries of our own day, have given God their brains.

The Franciscans, on the other hand, have a secure place among those who have taken upon themselves 'for Christ's sake' something of the burden of the world's pain, poverty, and hardship. They shared to the full the grim conditions of those among whom they worked, and in their lives of simplicity and single-hearted service the spirit of Jesus lived again before their eyes. For such as Francis not one gesture of Jesus could be overlooked. Had he laid compassionate

hands upon a leper? Then Francis, too, must kneel in the dust beside one and do him service, even as nameless medical missionaries since, in Nigeria, China, Africa, and India, have sought to staunch some of the world's sore pain. Long after the sun has gone down, its reflection remains in the sky, and for centuries from religious houses the inspiration and rule of Benedict, Francis, and Dominic, shone over Europe.

* * * *

By 1350 the faith that Jesus left grow was spread over more of the earth's surface than any faith had conquered before. Christians were to be found from Greenland to China, from Iceland to Ethiopia, while every aspect of European life felt its influence.

Frequently Christians had to be content with partial successes. We find them mitigating evils they could not remove, curtailing things that they could not cure, realising with Gregory that 'one must ascend step by step to a height, and that everything cannot be cut off at once from rough natures'. All the same their successes were not insignificant. Educating peoples that delighted in war, some monks gave themselves to the arts of peace. They drained fens, cleared forests, encouraged agriculture, fostered craftsmanship, developed architecture. The monks, nuns and Church leaders of the Dark and Middle Ages had no knowledge of the false distinction that time has drawn between secular and sacred affairs, so we find them very logically attempting to quicken and uplift every aspect of life—to fix and enforce, for example, a just price in business, and to forbid the exploitation of the poor by usury.

With skill and ingenuity the Church tried to keep outbreaking wars within bounds by imposing on countries that professed the faith 'the Truce of God', forbidding fighting on such days as could be called the fasts, vigils, and feasts of the Church. Where possible, tribal warriors were groomed into knights, and fighting passions were sublimated by codes of chivalry. Brotherhoods and guilds were formed, and a deepening sense of a common community in Christ was preparing the way for what later became International Law.

* * * *

Many times in history it has seemed as if the Church was likely to go down in ignominious decay. But never did the danger seem so close as in the period from the middle of the fourteenth to the close of the fifteenth century. Christianity was both feeling the pressure of an aggressive Islam and torn internally by scandal and papal schism. Nor was this all. A new movement, the Renaissance, to which the Church had greatly contributed, had awakened people's minds and made it restive of the Church's authority and intellectual leadership. Was what Jesus left to grow able to survive these three-fold perils?

The answer is a surprising 'Yes'. Territorial losses in some places were offset by gains elsewhere. Geographical discoveries were opening up the world. Within Europe new movements were stirring. Expansion and revival lay ahead.

In Europe, hasty and impulsive surgeons were preparing to deal with anything that they considered outgrown or

diseased in the organisation and faith of the Church. In England, Wycliffe, the morning star of the Reformation, agitated for reforms, and handed the country its first full translation of the Bible.

To take the place perhaps of the monastic orders of the Middle Ages, numerous Protestant bodies began to grow. There was too much vitality in the faith of Jesus for his followers to be content with one traditional mode of faith and life.

* * * *

The period from the beginning of the sixteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century was one of enormous geographic expansion. The mariner's compass unlocked fast-closed seas. Settlers and their descendants established Christianity in the Western Hemisphere. The faith passed swiftly to many Native and African Americans. There were Christians, too, along the shores of Africa, in India and Sri Lanka, in Burma and Thailand, in Indo-China and in the East Indies.

Everywhere it exerted its characteristic power to change conditions and to shape culture. It advanced education and stimulated care for the sick, the poor, the orphaned, and the aged. Practically all the education which existed in colonial America was the result of Christian effort, while the faith of the early settlers did much to mould the ideals of the future United States.

In this period Christianity inspired some of the greatest sculpture, painting, architecture, and music that has ever enriched humankind.

Many leading minds, like Newton, were Christian, while writers of genius, like Milton and Bunyan, took from the Bible their themes and inspiration.

* * * *

The eighteenth century saw a surge of material and industrial expansion that aided the advance of rationalism. Wars and revolutions in America and France upset the political and social scene. Writers like Voltaire and Rousseau captured human thought. For a brief time Christianity was 'abolished' in France, and the attitude of the time expressed itself in the enthronement of the 'goddess of Reason'. Bishop Godet and a number of clergymen were forced to join in a procession that marched to Notre Dame Cathedral to place a harlot from the Paris theatre on the high altar.

Church-going was strong in England during the Tudor and Stuart period, but the industrial revolution took multitudes from rural life into the monstrous growth of unplanned factory towns where the workers were exploited by greed in an industrial system divorced from ethics, and where there was scarcely a church to indicate a Christian presence. As a rough generalisation one can say that new churches and parishes were not provided for the urban areas of industrial Britain until approximately two generations after the communities had established themselves and a tradition of non-churchgoing had become a seemingly irreversible part of their inherited culture pattern.

Ironically enough outstanding theologians like Bishop Butler and Paley were writing brilliantly in support of the

faith, but they knew nothing of the factory workers, and the factory workers knew nothing of them. The Christian social conscience was slow to awake, but there was not lacking boldness and vision in other directions.

While Holland was under the French heel the Netherlands Missionary Society was formed. New vigour had arisen among the Protestants of Germany, Bohemia, and Moravia since the end of the Thirty Years War. While Napoleon threatened Egypt, the London Missionary Society was formed. While he waited to invade England, the British and Foreign Bible Society was launched. In the middle of the war with France, the slave trade was abolished.

* * * *

The Methodist and Evangelical Revivals and the Oxford Movement all had large-scale effect. The revival associated with Wesley created a profound impression in the British Isles, the British West Indies, and in the United States. In Britain, thanks to Wesley, and the Evangelical party in the Church of England, there was a resurgence of the national conscience that led to no less than five major applications of Christian principles to current evils—the abolition of the slave trade, the reform of the prison system, the passing of the humane Factory Acts, the beginning of the ideas that led to trade unionism, and last, but not least, the marshalling of Christian opinion to the wider support of missionary endeavour, ‘to make the best reparation in our power for the manifold wrong inflicted by the slave trade’.

At home awakening after awakening stirred Protestant Christianity, and many new denominations and literally

hundreds of societies with Christian aims were born. More than at any other time in its history, impulses deriving from Jesus were being transmitted to humankind as a whole.

These impulses poured through varied channels and touched human well-being at many points. It was due to Christian intervention, for instance, that modern education reached China and the outcaste of India, that scientific medicine was introduced to many nations and tribes, that protest was made against the debauchery resulting from the sale of liquor and against the introduction of firearms.

Much of the Christian effort was not so much aimed at conversion as to the application of Gospel principles to the whole society, and in this work sectarianism did not intrude. 'High Churchmen and Low Churchmen, Nonconformists and Roman Catholics,' says Walpole in his *History of England*, 'have all made such an effort as was never before made to infuse religious activity into national life.'

Once more the faith of Jesus shattered rationalist calculations.

In formative times of settlement it had been built into the rising communities in the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and North and South Africa. The Church was established in Hawaii and Madagascar, in Indo-China and Burma.

From the Battle of Waterloo to 1914 Christianity surpassed all previous records in the extent of its geographical spread.

* * * *

The Victorian age was by no means as complacent as it is sometimes supposed to be. Large-scale movements of thought and feeling were changing England. 'Under the pressure of money-making,' declared Sir Arthur Bryant, 'the character of the English middle-class was changing. They were growing sterner and narrower in sympathy.'²¹

Eloquent and informed speakers, like Disraeli, realised that the Church, and the traditions she carried forward, represented all that was best in our heritage. He spoke of the Church as 'broadly and deeply planted in our land, mixed with our manners and customs, one of the prime securities of our common liberties'. He laughed at a society which, having mastered a few scientific principles, mistook material competence for civilisation, and left out of account a Church that was 'part of our history, part of our life, part of England itself'.²²

The great historian, Lecky, wrote in 1865, about the Church:

What institution is there on earth which is doing so much to furnish ideals and motives for the individual life by its moral appeal; to guide and purify the emotions through its well-appointed worship; to promote those habits of thought and desire which rise above the things of earth; to bestow comfort in old age, in sorrow, in disappointment; to keep alive a sense of that higher and further world to which we go, as is the Christian Church?

²¹ *English Saga*, p. 157.

²² Money Penny and Buckle, 11, 96

Being a Christian became much more a matter of individual choice and spiritual experience, and a very diverse picture emerges.

On one hand, we see grinding economic theories coming to power and giving rise to what Froude described as 'miles and miles of squalid lanes, each house the duplicate of its neighbour; the dirty street in front, the dirty yard behind, the ill-made sewers, the public house on the corner'. On the other hand we find the sweeter and the slum landlord being met by the Christian socialist. We see the Oxford Movement deepening the spiritual life of thousands. We mark the impact of Jesus mediated through a galaxy of gifted and indignant Christians.

In literature the novels of Dickens, Charles Kingsley, the pamphlets of Carlyle, the essays of Ruskin, the poems of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, all stirred the reading classes to various aspects of reform. In education Dr Arnold, dreading a secular state, built strong Christian principles into the Public Schools. In social action the Reverend F. D. Maurice's 'Working Men's College' endeavoured to equip the working person with a sufficiency of knowledge to state the case for social betterment. In philanthropy, men like Lord Shaftesbury and Dr Barnardo fought apathy, prejudice, and avarice, to provide some answer to 'the cry that rose with ever-increasing urgency from bewildered and unhappy people and from destitute children.' Meanwhile, two women of profound Christian conviction were doing great work: Florence Nightingale, in the mud and blood of the shamble-hospitals of Scutari, was revolutionising medical nursing; while Elizabeth Fry was influencing prison reform on an international scale. Nothing is more remarkable than the

religiousness of the early leaders of the Labour Movement. Professor Owen Chadwick tells us in *The Victorian Crisis of Faith* that when the TUC met at Norwich in 1894 Keir Hardie led the Congress into the Cathedral for Evensong.

If religion was given a small place in the new State-aided schools, it underlay every ragged school and orphanage. If there was widespread ignorance of the worth and relevance of the Christian heritage, the Oxford Movement fought for better education for the clergy, achieved closer co-operation with the universities, and built more schools.

* * * *

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Christian thinking received a number of severe jolts—from developments in Biblical criticism in Germany; from the controversy about evolution which followed the publication of Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, and from the fresh approach to traditional doctrine typified by such works as *Essays and Reviews* and *Lux Mundi*. However, although at the time many found these developments hard to accept, subsequent Christian understanding has found its faith in Christ enhanced rather than diminished by the new learning, provided of course that this learning continues to be interpreted within a spiritual rather than a secular framework of thinking. For as Dr William Temple argued:

Our task with the world is not to explain it, but to convert it. Its need can be met not by the discovery of its own immanent principle in signal manifestation through Jesus Christ, but only by the shattering impact upon its self-sufficiency and arrogance of the Son of God, crucified and

risen and ascended, pouring forth that explosive and disruptive energy of the Holy Spirit.

He stressed the need for a deeper awareness of the Church as an historic institution and the scandal of its divided state. He urged a better equipment in social studies, so that the Church might play its proper role in shaping society. 'One day,' said Temple, 'theology will take up again its larger and serener task, and offer to a new Christendom its Christian map of life, its Christ-centred theology.' It was to be a longer, tougher road than Temple foresaw; and all the longer, perhaps, because he died prematurely.

Both world wars brought padres from different Churches who were serving with the armed forces. They had learnt to achieve an easy relationship, too, with men of different denominations, and of none. It boosted the new ecumenical spirit.

Commissioning some five hundred padres recalled for the great RAF Mission of 1953, Archbishop Fisher declared: 'It will give you strength before men, as Church of England and Free Church missionaries, stand shoulder to shoulder, in proclaiming your agreements in a common faith.'

What timidly began in the first World Conference of Churches in 1910, and in successive Conferences since, has now become the great feature of this century, with adventures in understanding, freedom of dialogue, and warmth of spirit, that would not have been credible even a few years ago. Here in manifest form is evidence of the activity of the Holy Spirit.

The same Spirit is undoubtedly inspiring the international scholarship that is cutting across ecclesiastical and geographical frontiers in the study of the Bible. A succession of fine translations are now readily available.

But a counter attack commenced in the mid-1960s. A new alliance between agnostics and humanists commenced a vigorous campaign to 'liberate' society from religious beliefs.

Since the mid-sixties, particularly in Europe, a widening gap has opened between religion and culture, causing a falling away from the churches. They have been able to take advantage also of the literature of protest that has been provided even from within the Church.

The Church itself has been much preoccupied with its own maintenance, organisation, legislation, and liturgical experiments, but it has also given generously of its energies to meet the rightful challenge of the social gospel. Christology has been subordinated to sociology. Dr Moorman, one time Bishop of Ripon said: 'The Church is becoming so occupied with secondary matters that it has neither the time nor the energy to preach the gospel, to teach people about God, to persuade them to love him, and to inspire them to do his will.'

But the Church does not live for itself alone. It is called to be a leaven at work in all parts of our society. As Prince Philip the Duke of Edinburgh said in an address to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1970:

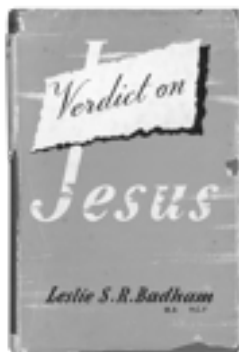
For over a thousand years every aspect of our national, family, and individual lives, has been influenced by the

Christian Gospel, and all the major institutions are based upon, at least nominally, the Christian ethic.

Christianity has provided the inspiration for all that is best in our achievements and institutions, and I believe that most thinking people would like this inspiration to continue into the future. Either way, whether people like it or not, the influence of the Churches, positive or negative, in this process of reform, is absolutely crucial.

7 Decades

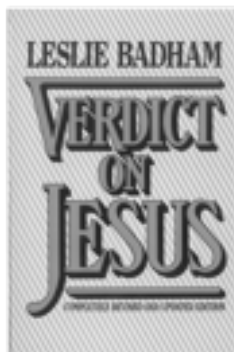
Verdict on Jesus through the years



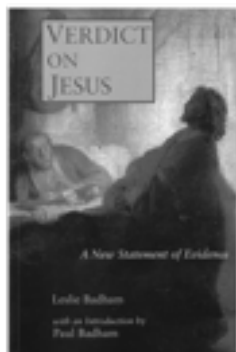
1950



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Leslie Badham

Author of Verdict on Jesus

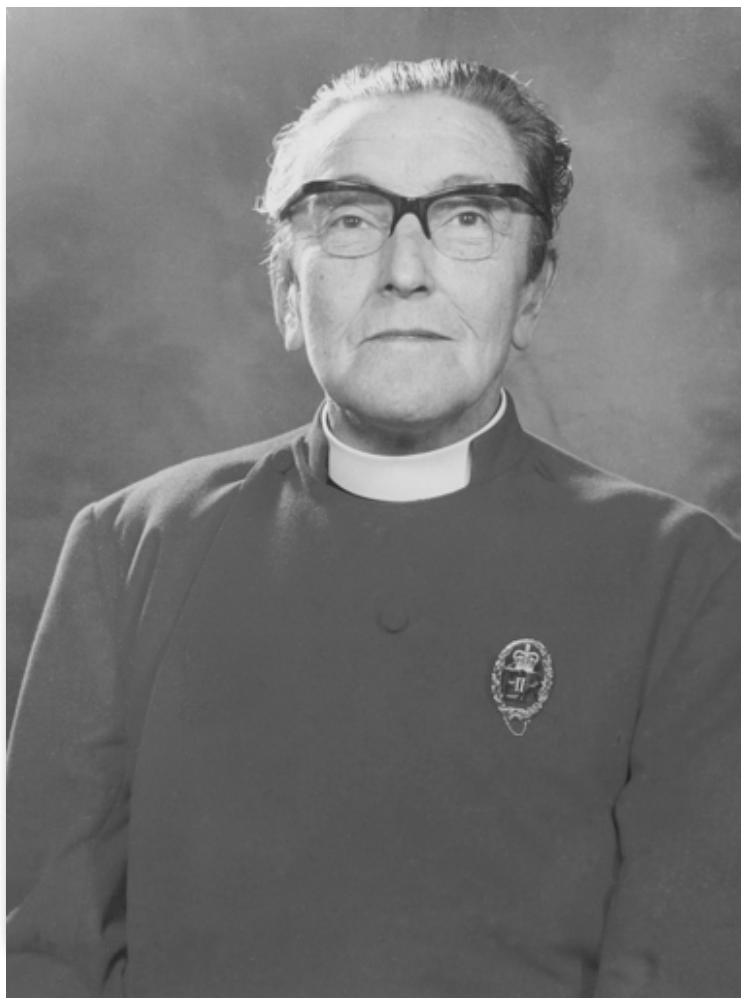


Top left: Leslie Badham with Effie, his fiancée, at her graduation from the LSE in 1935

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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