

THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH

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The Founding of the Church by Benjamin Wisner Bacon

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BENJAMIN WISNER BACON

**THE FOUNDING
OF THE CHURCH**

Modern Religious Problems

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THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH

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THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH

I

WHEN WAS THE CHURCH FOUNDED?

Does Christianity consist of the gospel preached *by* Jesus; or of the gospel preached *about* Jesus? The religious world of to-day is hotly debating this question, under such captions as "Jesus, or Paul?" "The Gospel of Peter, or the Gospel of Paul?" Much depends on the answer; and a satisfying answer is not easy. Jesus brought new light and hope to the religiously disinherited man by stripping religion of its artificialities and non-essentials, and reducing it to ultimate simplicity — the filial relation toward God, the brotherly relation toward man. This one principle

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involved everything vital in the whole realm of duty and destiny. Its "easy yoke" was glad tidings to men heavy laden with the legalism of the scribes. Its filial confidence in a Father in heaven was "rest to the soul" for men obsessed with priestcraft and magic. Jesus perished as the champion of the plain men — the wage-earners, to whose class he belonged, the fishermen of Galilee, the "publicans and sinners" who followed and trusted him; of the plain man's "right to be called a son of God." He was dubbed by the orthodox "a friend of publicans and sinners," and he was crucified in the attempt to vindicate for the common people the full right of "sons" on the terms, and only on the terms, which the Father himself prescribes in the eternally living law "written on fleshly tables of the heart."¹

¹ Matt. 11: 25-30. The knowing and being known of God as sons should be understood in the light of Paul's use of the same phraseology, Gal. 4: 6-9; I Cor. 1: 20-21. Cf. also II Tim. 2: 19.

WHEN WAS THE CHURCH FOUNDED?

The battle was fought in the arena of Judaism. Its issues were drawn between the petty sects and cliques and castes of that race, which but for its religious genius and literature would be rated only as one of the lesser peoples of Syria. If Jesus ever thought of it as concerning all humanity in its issues, save as humanity might become a penumbra—an adjunct—of the Jewish empire to which the nation then looked forward, it certainly was not till after his death that his disciples extended their view to this broader horizon.¹ Even then it was only after a struggle that threatened to disrupt the brotherhood, that the last limitations of a nationalistic view were broken down, and Christianity became “a world religion.” This was the work of Paul.

¹ The Gospel of Matthew still remains nationalistic. Matt. 7: 6; 10: 5, 6, 23; 15: 24. Its universalism (28: 19, 20) must be understood in consonance with these earlier passages.