

THE ORIGIN OF PAUL'S RELIGION

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The Origin of Paul's Religion by J. Gresham Machen

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J. GRESHAM MACHEN

**THE ORIGIN OF
PAUL'S RELIGION**

THE ORIGIN OF PAUL'S RELIGION

THE JAMES SPRUNT LECTURES
DELIVERED AT UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN VIRGINIA

BY

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UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

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1884

TO
WILLIAM PARK ARMSTRONG
MY GUIDE
IN THE STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT
AND IN ALL GOOD THINGS

438530

THE JAMES SPRUNT LECTURES

IN 1911 Mr. James Sprunt of Wilmington, North Carolina, gave to The Trustees of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia the sum of thirty thousand dollars, since increased by his generosity to fifty thousand dollars, for the purpose of establishing a perpetual lectureship, which would enable the institution to secure from time to time the services of distinguished ministers and authoritative scholars, outside the regular Faculty, as special lecturers on subjects connected with various departments of Christian thought and Christian work. The lecturers are chosen by the Faculty of the Seminary and a committee of the Board of Trustees, and the lectures are published after their delivery in accordance with a contract between the lecturer and these representatives of the institution. The ninth series of lectures on this foundation is presented in this volume.

W. W. MOORE, *President.*

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE following discussion is intended to deal, from one particular point of view, with the problem of the origin of Christianity. That problem is an important historical problem, and also an important practical problem. It is an important historical problem not only because of the large place which Christianity has occupied in the medieval and modern world, but also because of certain unique features which even the most unsympathetic and superficial examination must detect in the beginnings of the Christian movement. The problem of the origin of Christianity is also an important practical problem. Rightly or wrongly, Christian experience has ordinarily been connected with one particular view of the origin of the Christian movement; where that view has been abandoned, the experience has ceased.

This dependence of Christianity upon a particular conception of its origin and of its Founder is now indeed being made the object of vigorous attack. There are many who maintain that Christianity is the same no matter what its origin was, and that therefore the problem of origin should be kept entirely separate from the present religious interests of the Church. Obviously, however, this indifference to the question as to what the origin of Christianity was depends upon a particular conception of what Christianity now is; it depends upon the conception which makes of Christianity simply a manner of life. That conception is indeed widespread, but it is by no means universal; there are still hosts of earnest Christians who regard Christianity, not simply as a manner of life, but as a manner of life founded upon a message—upon a message with regard to the Founder of the Christian

movement. For such persons the question of the origin of Christianity is rather to be called the question of the truth of Christianity, and that question is to them the most important practical question of their lives. Even if these persons are wrong, the refutation of their supposed error naturally proceeds, and has in recent years almost always proceeded, primarily by means of that very discussion of the origin of the Christian movement which is finally to be shorn of its practical interest. The most important practical question for the modern Church is still the question how Christianity came into being.

In recent years it has become customary to base discussions of the origin of Christianity upon the apostle Paul. Jesus Himself, the author of the Christian movement, wrote nothing—at least no writings of His have been preserved. The record of His words and deeds is the work of others, and the date and authorship and historical value of the documents in which that record is contained are the subject of persistent debate. With regard to the genuineness of the principal epistles of Paul, on the other hand, and with regard to the value of at least part of the outline of his life which is contained in the Book of Acts, all serious historians are agreed. The testimony of Paul, therefore, forms a fixed starting-point in all controversy.

Obviously that testimony has an important bearing upon the question of the origin of Christianity. Paul was a contemporary of Jesus. He attached himself to Jesus' disciples only a very few years after Jesus' death; according to his own words, in one of the universally accepted epistles, he came into early contact with the leader among Jesus' associates; throughout his life he was deeply interested (for one reason or another) in the affairs of the primitive Jerusalem Church; both before his conversion and after it he must have had abundant opportunity for acquainting himself with the facts about Jesus' life and death. His testimony is not, however, limited to what he says in detail about the words and deeds of the Founder of the Christian movement. More important still is the testimony of his experience as a whole. The religion of Paul is a fact which stands in the full light of history. How is it to be explained? What were its presuppositions? Upon what sort of Jesus was it founded? These questions lead into the very heart of the historical problem. Explain the origin