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**Bruce Barton – Apostle of Christian
Capitalism**

Lead: A preacher's son in awe of his father's philosophy, Bruce Barton combined hard work, consumer based advertising, liberal Protestantism and liberal Republican politics into the gospel of Christian Capitalism.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts

Content: From his father Barton learned the value of hard work. Though his family

was a prosperous one, he was expected to work his way through college, first Berea, and then graduation from Amherst. He first tried journalism, but soon moved into advertising and became the founder of one of the most successful and prominent agencies, BBDO, with his partners Alex Osborn, Roy Durstine, and George Batten. Barton brought his clergyman father's values of individual hard work and the virtue of prosperity. Consumers were encouraged to purchase more of their desires because it stimulated in them diligence and ambition.

This approach inevitably led to a direct combination of his religious upbringing and his conviction about the life of the consumer. In 1925 he and his father collaborated on the best seller, *The Man Nobody Knows*, which portrayed Jesus as the founder of big business. Instead of the effete victim hanging on the cross, Barton introduced his readers

to the people's Jesus, a brawny, aggressive man's man who worked hard as a skilled tradesman, loved the outdoors, and was popular at parties, turning water into wine just to help a group of friends have a good time on their special day.

It would not be long before Barton began to apply his inclinations to the world of politics, first as a supporter of fellow Amherst graduate, Calvin Coolidge, whom he served as speech writer and advisor on political marketing. He got into politics himself, serving two terms in the House of Representatives and gained a reputation as a liberal Republican and isolationist who opposed American flirtation with the war in Europe. His political career came to an end when his isolationism attracted the attention of President Roosevelt who caricatured Barton and his colleagues, Hamilton Fish

and Joseph Martin, as the irredeemably stubborn trio, “Martin, Barton, and Fish.”

At the end of his career Barton would be best known for *The Man Nobody Knows*, that perfect exposition of Christian capitalism, and for being the butt of Franklin Roosevelt’s biting political satire, but his true impact would be in leading the advertising world to embrace the idea of a culture of consumerism.

At the University of Richmond’s School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I’m Dan Roberts.

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