

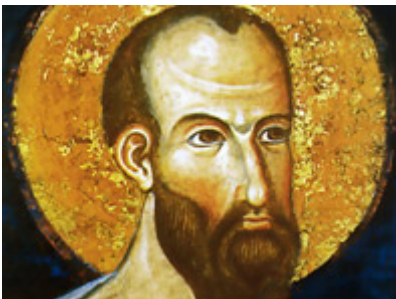
1. FROM SAUL TO PAUL

The Church celebrates the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul on 25 January. Yet, throughout the ages, countless people from many different cultures were also converted to Jesus, moving from sin to a holy life, from atheism to the Christian Faith. Like Paul, some of these individuals were martyred for their fidelity to Christ. But the “conversion” of Saul is very different and has no comparison among the great conversions that have marked the story of the saints. Paul himself did not like to use the word “conversion” to describe his experience. He says that throughout his life, from childhood to adulthood, he sought with all his might to love the God of his fathers and to be faithful to him by observing his laws. Even though Saul was not seeking the crucified and risen Christ, the Lord Jesus, he nevertheless unexpectedly met him and that encounter completely changed his way of relating to God, as well as his way of understanding himself and others.



St. Paul – Church in Bucharest

Before beginning our journey in the footsteps of Paul, let us seek to shed a little light on his two names: Saul and Paul. The *Acts of the Apostles* tells us that the name he received at birth was Saul. It was a typical Jewish name—the name of the first king of Israel. In Acts 13:9ff., where Luke recounts Saul’s meeting with the Roman proconsul Sergius Paulus, he says that Saul was also known as Paul. In those days, it was a Greek-Roman custom for a man to take a second name, so this would have been considered normal. Mark, for example, is also known as John Mark. Nevertheless, from this point on Luke refers to the apostle as Paul, never again as Saul. In his letters, Paul calls himself only and always Paul.



St. Paul – Scala Sancta Chapel, Rome

To recount the story of Saul/Paul by sketching out his personality is not easy because 2000 years of history separate us from him, from his culture, from the religious mentality of the time, and from the customs and language of that era. But it is also a fascinating undertaking because, unlike many other historical figures including Jesus himself, we have an abundance of documentation on Paul: first of all, the information provided by his own letters, as well as that to be found in the letters written by his disciples and admirers. However, all this information cannot be taken at face value. It must be understood correctly, keeping in mind *who* wrote it, *to whom* it was written and *why* it was written in that particular way, using those particular words. In other words, we must get to know the writer, his audience and the situations that prompted Paul to write or that prompted others to write about him.

We know that, after his conversion, Saul astonished everyone with the radical way he lived his faith in Jesus and proclaimed him to others. Everywhere he went, he provoked both admiration and indignation. To some, he was an enemy of the Jewish faith, while to others he was a great apostle and a friend to everyone, like Jesus. His enemies said: “He’s the one who persecuted the Christians”; “He’s a pest”; “He’s a timid person”; “He doesn’t know how to assert himself”; “He’s a puppet”; “He’s a fraud (imposter).” His friends, instead, declared: “He’s our brother”; “He’s a prisoner of Christ”; “He’s a witness to Jesus”; “He’s an apostle of Jesus”; “He’s a teacher of faith”; “He’s an evangelizer.”

As we follow in the footsteps of Paul, let us allow ourselves to be guided by three important sources:

- a) The letters written by Paul himself. We are sure that he is the author of 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Philippians, Romans, Philemon and 1 & 2 Corinthians.
- b) The five letters written by his disciples: Ephesians, Colossians, Titus, 1 & 2 Timothy and 2 Thessalonians.
- c) The Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke.

FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

Interpreting Biblical Citations

The Letters of St. Paul, like the rest of the Bible, are divided into chapters and verses. The standard way of citing an excerpt from the Word of God is as follows:

Acts 13:9. Acts of the Apostles, chapter 13, verse 9.

Acts 24:4-5. Acts of the Apostles, chapter 24, verses 4-5.

Ga. 2:1, 11. Letter to the Galatians, chapter 2, verses 1 and 11.

1 Th. 3:11–4:1. First Letter to the Thessalonians, from chapter 3, verse 11 up to chapter 4, verse 1.

Phil. 1-2. Letter to the Philippians, from the beginning of chapter 1 up to the end of chapter 2.

Sr Filippa Castronovo, fsp