



## 6 ST. PAUL c. 4 A.D. - c. 64 A.D.

The apostle Paul, who was a younger contemporary of Jesus, became the foremost proselytizer of the new religion of Christianity. His influence on Christian theology proved to be the most permanent and far-reaching of all Christian writers and thinkers.

Paul, also known as Saul, was born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia (in present-day Turkey), a few years into the Christian era. Although a Roman citizen, he was of Jewish birth, and in his youth he learned Hebrew and received a thorough Jewish education. He also learned the trade of tentmaking. As a young man, he went to Jerusalem to study under Rabbi Gamaliel, an eminent Jewish teacher. Though Paul was in Jerusalem at the same time as Jesus, it is doubtful whether the two men ever met.

After the death of Jesus, the early Christians were regarded as heretics and suffered persecution. For a while, Paul himself participated in this persecution. However, during a journey to Damascus he had a vision in which Jesus spoke to him, and he was converted to the new faith. It was the turning point of his life. The one-time opponent of Christianity became the most vigorous and influential proponent of the new religion.

Paul spent the rest of his life thinking and writing about Christianity, and winning converts to the new religion. During his missionary activities, he traveled extensively in Asia Minor, Greece, Syria, and Palestine. Paul was not as successful in preaching to the Jews as some of the other early Christians. Indeed, his manner often aroused great antagonism, and on several occasions his life was endangered. In preaching to non-Jews, however, Paul was outstandingly successful, so much so that he is often referred to as the "Apostle to the Gentiles." No other man played so large a role in the propagation of Christianity.

After three long missionary trips within the eastern part of the Roman Empire, Paul returned to Jerusalem. He was arrested there, and was eventually sent to Rome to stand trial. It is unclear how that trial ended, or if he ever left Rome. Eventually, however (most likely about 64 A.D.), he was executed near Rome.

Paul's immense influence on the development of Christianity rests upon three things: (1) his great success as a missionary; (2) his writings, which constitute an important part of the New Testament; and (3) his role in the development of Christian theology.

Of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, no fewer than fourteen are attributed to Paul. Even though modern scholars believe that four or five of those books were actually written by other people, it is clear that Paul is the most important single author of the New Testament.

Paul's influence on Christian theology has been incalculable. His ideas include the following: Jesus was not merely

*Detail of Michelangelo's fresco,  
"The Conversion of Saint Paul," in the Vatican.*



an inspired human prophet, but was actually divine. Christ died for our sins, and his suffering can redeem us. Man cannot achieve salvation by attempting to conform to biblical injunctions, but only by accepting Christ; conversely, if one accepts Christ, his sins will be forgiven. Paul also enunciated the doctrine of original sin (see Romans 5:12-19).

Since obedience to the law alone cannot provide salvation, Paul insisted that there was no need for converts to Christianity to accept Jewish dietary restrictions, or to conform to the rituals of the Mosaic Code, or even to be circumcised. Several of the other early Christian leaders disagreed strongly with Paul on this point, and if their views had prevailed, it seems doubtful that Christianity would have spread so rapidly throughout the Roman Empire.

Paul never married, and though there seems to be no way of proving it, he apparently never had sexual relations with a woman. His views on sex and on women, because of their incorporation into Holy Scripture, have had a marked influence upon later attitudes. His most famous dictum on the subject (I Corinthians 7:8-9) is: "I say therefore to the unmarried and the widows, it is good for them if they can abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn."

Paul also had rather strong ideas on the proper status of women: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed then Eve" (I Timothy 2:11-13). Similar ideas are expressed perhaps even more forcefully in I Corinthians 11:7-9. Doubtless, in such passages Paul was expressing a view already held by many of his contemporaries; it is noteworthy, though, that Jesus does not appear to have made similar statements.

Paul, more than any other man, was responsible for the transformation of Christianity from a Jewish sect into a world religion. His central ideas of the divinity of Christ and of justification by faith alone have remained basic to Christian

thought throughout all the intervening centuries. All subsequent Christian theologians, including Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin, have been profoundly influenced by his writings. Indeed, the influence of Paul's ideas has been so great that some scholars have claimed that he, rather than Jesus, should be regarded as the principal founder of the Christian religion. Such a view seems too extreme. However, even if Paul's influence has not been on a par with Jesus', it has been vastly greater than that of any other Christian thinker.



*Christian pilgrims march in a Good Friday procession on the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem.*