

Saint Paul

Pope Benedict XVI

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St. Paul is one of the most important figures in Christian history. As Saul of Tarsus he vigorously persecuted Christianity, even collaborating in the death of Christianity's first martyr, Stephen. His encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus changed Paul's life, the Christian Church, and world history. More than anyone else in the early Church, Paul saw the universal nature of the Christian message. He became the "Apostle to the Gentiles" and the "Teacher of the Nations." As the human author of half of the New Testament, Paul is a figure who cannot be overlooked by anyone who wants to understand Jesus Christ and Christianity.

In this book, Pope Benedict XVI, a profound spiritual leader in his own right and a first-rate theologian and Bible commentator, explores the legacy of Paul. Pope Benedict follows the course of the Apostle's life, including his missionary journeys and his relationship with the other apostles of Jesus such as St. Peter and St. James, and Paul's martyrdom in Rome. Benedict also examines such questions as: Did Paul know Jesus during his earthly life and how much of Jesus' teaching and ministry did he know of? Did Paul distort the teachings of Jesus? What role did Jesus' death and resurrection play in Paul's teaching? What are we to make of Paul's teaching about the end of the world? What does Paul's teaching say about the differences between Catholic and Protestant Christians over salvation and the roles of faith and works in the Christian life? How have modern Catholic and Protestant scholars come together in their understanding of Paul? What does Paul have to teach us today about living a spiritual life?

These and other important issues are addressed in this masterful, inspirational, and highly-readable presentation of St. Paul and his writings by one of today's great spiritual teachers, Pope Benedict XVI.

"The Apostle Paul, an outstanding and almost inimitable yet stimulating figure, stands before us as an example of total dedication to the Lord and to his Church, as well as of great openness to humanity and its cultures."

--Pope Benedict XVI

Saint Paul Details

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From Reader Review Saint Paul for online ebook

Anastasia Abboud says

Wonderful! Every chapter is a meditation and confirmation of our faith.

Patrick says

This is not the book that I hoped it would be, meaning an extended meditation on the life and ministry of Saint Paul, in the same vein as Pope Benedict's earlier (and superlative) two-volume look at Jesus. That said, the book is still worth reading, and sometimes poetic in its theological power.

Ignatius Press transcribed and published a collection of the talks on Saint Paul that were given by Pope Benedict between 2008 and 2009 in "general audiences" associated with the celebration of the jubilee year honoring the Apostle to the Gentiles. Speeches originally delivered in Italian were translated into English by staffers at the Vatican newspaper. Reading each talk in succession is like sitting in a darkened theater while a wise old man at the control board shines a spotlight on different aspects of Paul's thought as it has come down to us through Scripture. Every talk is profound, but some are more memorable than others.

Among the nuggets that I found especially interesting is the pope's contention that Paul never regarded his famous unhorsing-by-Jesus experience on the road to Damascus as a "conversion," per se. That is because "this turning point in his life, this transformation of his whole being was not the fruit of a psychological process, of a maturation or intellectual and moral development. Rather it came from the outside: it was the fruit, not of his thought, but of his encounter with Jesus Christ."

That's our pope: a stickler for grammatical and theological precision.

Pope Benedict is predictably diplomatic when addressing the aspects of Pauline thought that Christians have argued with each other about, most notably Paul's teaching on faith and works. My takeaway from that talk is that (*pace* Martin Luther and the more zealous of the Reformers) there is no conflict between faith and works, or -- in the canon of New Testament letters -- between the theology of Saint Paul and the theology of Saint James. Each must be understood rightly. Pope Benedict puts it this way: "...while Paul is primarily concerned to show that faith in Christ is necessary and sufficient, James emphasizes the consequential relations between faith and works (cf Jas 2:24). Therefore, for both Paul and James, faith that is active in love testifies to the freely given gift of justification in Christ."

You won't find bon mots or sound bites in what this pope says in 132 dense pages, but you will find deep learning and trustworthy food for thought, even if you're not Catholic.

booklady says

June 1-17, 2017: This was my second time to listen to this audio rendition of Pope (Emeritus) Benedict XVI's book, *Saint Paul*. The first time was five years ago. It was published in 2009 following the 'Year of St. Paul' to coincide with the estimated year of his birth and consisted of a series of weekly audiences given

by the then pontiff. My reason for returning to it now was as a basis of comparison with Luke Timothy Johnson's *The Apostle Paul* and because there was so much I did not remember.

It's always interesting to see what stands (jumps?) out at me – and others in texts like this. Last time it was the pope's definition of 'an apostle'. Perhaps that was something I was trying to pin down in my own life at the time. I don't really remember, but my review (below) is taken up with it.

This time, my mind glommed on to the word 'mystery' and the several times it cropped up. If you were raised Catholic, you are familiar with the expression, "It's a mystery!" as an answer to any number of questions you might want to ask. For example, "But how can God be three persons in one God?" And, "How can the Holy Spirit 'overshadow' Mary?" And, "How can a GOOD God allow evil?" You can see how, "It's a mystery!" is multi-purpose.

Later, though, it doesn't work so well. Inquiring minds, as they say, want to know. And yet, it is still true that there are in Christianity undeniably impenetrable and unanswerable mysteries. Recently I was led by the book, *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise to The Mysteries of Christianity*, a brick. I have just peaked into it and though I doubt I will understand ¼ of it even *if* by some miracle I manage to read ½ of it, it looks fascinating. It will soon go on a brand new shelf, called, books-I-plan-to-be-reading-until-I-die.

In *Saint Paul* Pope Benedict XVI talks about what we learn from St. Paul on the Mystery of Evil:

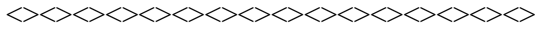
"Faith tells us that there are not two principles, one good and one evil, but there is only one single principle, God the Creator, and this principle is good, only good, without a shadow of evil. And therefore, being too is not a mixture of good and evil; being as such is good and therefore it is good to be, it is good to live. This is the good news of the faith: only one good source exists, the Creator. Therefore living is a good, it is a good thing to be a man or a woman. Life is good. Then follows a mystery of darkness, or night. Evil does not come from the source of being itself, it is not equally primal. Evil comes from a freedom created, from a freedom abused.

How was it possible, how did it happen? This remains obscure. Evil is not logical. Only God and good are logical, are light. Evil remains mysterious. It is presented as such in great images, as it is in chapter 3 of Genesis, with that scene of the two trees, of the serpent, of sinful man: a great image that makes us guess but cannot explain what is itself illogical. We may guess, not explain; nor may we recount it as one fact beside another, because it is a deeper reality. It remains a mystery of darkness, of night. But a mystery of light is immediately added. Evil comes from a subordinate source. God with his light is stronger. And therefore evil can be overcome. Thus the creature, man, can be healed."

There was also information about the Mystery of Christ and the Incarnation—another of the 10 Big Mysteries discussed in Scheeben's book—in one of the Pope's later audiences. Sadly, including that would make this review impossibly long.

Time/age have given me an appreciation for Mystery, with a capital 'M'. Now rather than seeing them as dead-ends, they appear as open doors to yet unexplored worlds. So I offer the above quote and indeed the entire mystery of our Christian faith as a starting point for contemplative and compassionate living out of the Gospel message.

That would seem to be the ultimate use for St. Paul's corpus of writing.



February 22, 2012: There were many things I enjoyed about *Saint Paul* by Pope Benedict XVI but probably my favorite chapter was the fourth, entitled 'Saint Paul's Concept of Apostolate'. It can be read on-line here. As everyone familiar with the Holy Scriptures knows, St. Paul is often referred to as the 'Apostle of the Gentiles', although he was not one of the original twelve, nor did he know or follow Jesus while Our Lord lived and taught during his years of active ministry. Nevertheless, Paul is considered an apostle; some would even call him The Apostle. The Catholic Church honors him in a joint feast day with St. Peter, fellow martyr in Rome. However it is his three part definition of an apostle, which Pope Benedict culls from the Apostle's own writings, which I would like to draw attention to.

'...according to St Paul's conception, what is it that makes him and others apostles? In his Letters three principal characteristics of the true apostle appear. The first is to have "seen Jesus our Lord" (cf. 1 Cor 9: 1), that is, to have had a life-changing encounter with him. Similarly, in his Letter to the Galatians (cf. 1: 15-16) Paul was to say that he had been called or chosen, almost, through God's grace with the revelation of his Son, in view of proclaiming the Good News to the Gentiles. In short, it is the Lord who appoints to the apostolate and not one's own presumption. ...

The second characteristic is "to have been sent". The same Greek term *apostolos* means, precisely, "sent, dispatched", that is as ambassador and bearer of a message; he must therefore act as having been charged and as representing a sender. It is for this reason that Paul describes himself as an "apostle of Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1: 1; 2 Cor 1: 1), that is, his delegate, placed totally at his service, even to the point that he also calls himself "a servant of Christ Jesus" (Rm 1: 1). ...

The third requisite is the task of "proclaiming the Gospel", with the consequent foundation of Churches. Indeed, the title of "apostle" is not and cannot be honorary. It involves concretely and even dramatically the entire life of the person concerned. In his First Letter to the Corinthians Paul exclaims: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?" (9: 1). Similarly in the Second Letter to the Corinthians he says: "You yourselves are our letters of recommendation... a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God" (3: 2-3). ... This remains the mission of all Christ's apostles in all times: to be his fellow workers in true joy.

To have encountered Him, to have been sent by Him and to devote your entire life to proclaiming the Gospel—*that* is to be an apostle of Christ, according to St. Paul.

Derek Emerson says

Pope Benedict XVI is a brilliant man, but someone who also has the ability to translate complex thoughts into a message of faith. These short homilies on Paul are both scholarly and faith building -- it is great to find people who do not see intelligence and faith as mutually exclusive. He also speaks positively of Luther's interpretations and deals with one of the main reasons for the Reformation in a caring and thoughtful manner.

Lori says

The reader of this audio version really bothers me, so I feel as though I didn't get as much out of this as I would have if I had read it, instead of listened to it. Many great thoughts on Saint Paul here, I may come back to read this again at some point. Definitely wouldn't listen again.

Loretta says

Excellent insight into Saint Paul through scripture and Pope Benedict's eyes.

Julie Davis says

As with many of the other collections of Pope Benedict's homilies, these are brilliant for simply explaining many basic concepts of the faith through the lens of the great people who have gone before us. In this case, of course, it is St. Paul and his conversion, life, and letters (which became much of the New Testament). Benedict keeps our personal involvement by continually relating all this to each reader and our struggles to live a Christian life in modern days. Being as this is about Paul, these homilies are a bit denser than some others (such as holy women, for example), but Pope Benedict is an expert at making them understandable and accessible.

Bob says

Pope Benedict's treatment of St. Paul's contribution to Christianity is an extremely well thought out presentation of the key elements of St. Paul's teachings that emphasizes in a clear way the importance of his writings and the centrality of Paul's works. Pope Benedict surrounds Paul's writings with the historical environment in which they were written and the social situations that existed at that time, thus giving a deeper insight to the man and his work. This book is the next best thing to having some one-on-one time with Pope Benedict XVI.

Rich says

Good book to use for daily meditations on the life/ministry/teaching of St. Paul. I liked it, but I think I was hoping for more. That being said, I learned more about Paul and his theological themes and enjoyed reading the book so, overall a success.

Randi says

Fascinating illumination of St. Paul, his life and his teaching. Sometimes our dear Pope Emeritus writes a little over my head, but other times his insights delight me -- and I love him for it. I really ought to have

underlined things as I went along, but I couldn't bear to ruin the book.
