

Church History: The Last Years of St. Paul

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It is possible to measure a person's influence by the amount of attention devoted to their legacy. In this regard, St. Paul must be considered a colossal figure: there is no shortage of literature in the field of Pauline studies. Fittingly, the citation index of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (pp. 709-717) reveals copious references to St. Paul. This type of Magisterial recognition should allow us to review the Apostle with great appreciation.

St. Paul, the great evangelist of the first century, devoted many years “in the trenches” to three extended missionary journeys (cf. Acts 13:4—21:15). After these arduous travels throughout the Roman Empire, the Apostle returned east to Jerusalem to begin his later years (cf. Acts 21:3-17). These events, beginning circa A.D. 57, would lead to martyrdom.

After completing his third missionary crusade, St. Paul arrived in Jerusalem and went to the Temple. Here, the Apostle was accused falsely of bringing a Gentile into a restricted area, thereby violating “the Law” (cf. Acts 21:26-36). Subsequently, St. Paul was arrested and made his defense before the people and the Roman tribune (cf. Acts 21:37—22:24). A trial was held before the Sanhedrin (cf. Acts 23:1-11), resulting in the Apostle's transfer to Caesarea (cf. Acts 23:12-35).

The arrival in Caesarea afforded St. Paul the opportunity to defend himself and the Gospel before a number of key figures: procurator Felix (cf. Acts 24), his successor Festus (cf. Acts 25:6-12), and king Agrippa (cf. Acts 25:23—26:29). Because of an earlier “appeal to Caesar” (cf. Acts 25:12), St. Paul was then sent by ship to Rome (cf. Acts 27:1-26). This was a dangerous voyage, resulting in a harrowing shipwreck at the island of Malta (cf. Acts 27:27—28:10). Eventually, the Apostle would arrive in Rome for his confinement (cf. Acts 28:14-31).

During this Roman imprisonment, circa A.D. 60, St. Paul was placed under a type of house arrest, and providentially given much freedom to proclaim the Gospel (cf. Acts 28:30-31). The book of Acts ends at this juncture, however, other evidence can help us speculate on the remainder of St. Paul's life. The Apostle refers to his eventual prison release (cf. Phm. 22-23), reiterated by the Church historian Eusebius (d. A.D. 340) in *Ecclesiastical History* 2.22. Some have categorized this period as a “fourth missionary trip,” with a possible visit as far west as Spain (cf. Rom. 15:28). Ultimately, the Apostle was beheaded prior to A.D. 68, a few miles outside Rome on the Ostian Way. The renowned “Church of St. Paul's Outside the Walls” sits nearby.

During his extraordinary life, St. Paul composed many inspired writings that occupy the greater part of the New Testament. These divine documents usually had a main point or two that was expounded in it pages. A brief overview of the Pauline corpus will hopefully serve as an incentive for further study.

Romans and *Galatians* explained the doctrine of “Justification” (cf. Rom. 8:1-11; Gal. 3:23-29). *1* and *2 Corinthians* addressed the “Sacred liturgy” (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-32) and “Ecclesiastical discipline” (cf. 2 Cor. 2:5-11). *Ephesians* emphasized the role of the Catholic Church (cf. Eph. 3:7-12). *Philippians* gave a classic treatment on the “Supernatural life” (cf. Phil. 2:12-13). *Colossians* highlighted the primacy of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Col. 3:1-3). *1* and *2 Thessalonians* focused on “Eschatology,” the study of the “Last Things” (cf. 1 Thess. 5:1-11; 2 Thess. 2:1-12). *1 Timothy*, *2 Timothy*, and *Titus*, the “Pastoral Epistles,” discussed the importance of sound doctrine (cf. 1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 4:3; Tit. 2:1). *Philemon* stressed the theological virtue of charity (cf. Phm. 4-7). *Hebrews* compared the Old Covenant with the New (cf. Heb. 8:1-7).

As this third and final installment on St. Paul has shown, the Catholic Church can certainly point to the Apostle as a role model. His intellectual prowess, quest for piety, and love for the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church should be imitated by all Christians. Ecclesiastical personalities and theological novelties may come and go, but St. Paul’s life and writings will last forever.

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