

## IN ST. PAUL'S FOOTSTEPS

### Interview With Stephen Ray

SAN FRANCISCO, California, SEPT. 19, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://Zenit.org)).- Following in the footsteps of St. Paul of Tarsus, one realizes what a manly man he was, according to the director of a documentary on the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Stephen Ray and his crew traveled through six countries to film "Paul: Contending for the Faith," from the 10-part video series "[Footprints of God](#)," produced by Ignatius Press.

"Paul was no weakling," Ray told ZENIT in this interview, in which he discusses the making of his documentary, and how to better get to know the Apostle to the Gentiles during the Year of St. Paul.

Q: You are the narrator of a DVD on the life of St. Paul, visiting the places where he lived. What do you hope people will take away from it?

Ray: The night our plane landed in Damascus, Syria, to begin work, the first bomb of the war fell on Baghdad. That got an exciting project off to an exciting start.

We traveled through six countries to film this documentary and covered all the major locations associated with St. Paul.

Why do all this? Because we have a target audience we want to reach and I don't think they just want another "talking head." The Catholic faith is real, exciting, full of adventure and, most of all, rooted in real history.

Our target audience is the Catholic family -- which includes educated adults, young people, children, college age -- and even Protestants in many cases. We try to reach a wide audience. From the letters and emails I receive, I think we have exceeded our expectations.

I want my viewers to be rooted in the historical truth and theology of the Catholic Church. I don't want to see Catholic kids leaving the Church. I want them to stay and love the rich history and truth of our Church.

Bottom line: I started this project to help Catholic kids stay Catholic especially when they hit college age. I also wanted adults to learn their faith and also for Protestants to have a fun and informative explanation of why we Catholics believe what we do.

I also know it is being used by troops in Iraq, girls' schools in Australia, seminaries, schools, and Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, and Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, CCD, classes, and parish Bible studies across the country and in countries around the world.

Q: As a former evangelical Protestant, how important was St. Paul to you? Did his importance change when you became a Catholic?

Ray: We used to joke around -- somewhat seriously -- that Peter was the Catholic apostle and Paul was the Protestant apostle. We felt Paul was a "lone ranger," so to speak, and set out to establish his own churches, emphasizing a message of salvation by "faith alone."

We thought Catholics had institutionalized Christianity and ignored the true way of salvation. My hero had been Martin Luther who had supposedly "rediscovered the truth" and Protestants had the teachings of Paul to thank for it.

I was wrong back in those days, of course, not only that Paul was the Protestant apostle, but also about what he taught. Paul was certainly not a Protestant, but richly faithful to the Catholic idea of the Church, and the Church in turn has been richly faithful to Paul's teaching.

Paul was exciting and important to me back then, but far more so today. I liken my Protestant days to living in a house with one wall filled with windows. Light came in and I could see.

But when I entered the Catholic Church it was like the other three walls blew out and light was now pouring in from all four sides. The writings of Paul took on a whole new and deeper aspect.

I had to start reading Paul again with the context in place, and I discovered Paul's life and theology was far richer than I had ever imagined. And then to walk in his sandals through the original sites ... what can I say!

Q: People often speak of a specific kind of theology related to apostles or saints. What do you think are St. Paul's unique contributions to theology?

Ray: When I give talks about Paul or the New Testament, I like to start by holding up an ancient flint knife. I tell people that in a certain sense, the whole New Testament is about this knife. After I get the shocked reaction, I explain.

The God of Israel had required circumcision that marked the Jewish people -- no pun intended -- for centuries. But God wanted Jews and Gentiles to be in one flock, in one Church.

How does he accomplish this? Answering that question was at the heart of Paul's life and writings. The Gentiles could now become children of God too, not by circumcision and slavish obedience to the Mosaic law and ceremonies -- but by faith in Christ and all that went along with that, like repentance, baptism, good works and more.

Though Peter brought the first Gentile convert into the Church, to a great degree it was Paul who really broke down the barriers and took the good news to the Gentile nations and he did so without the flint knife.

Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, and as a Gentile myself, Paul is significant beyond measure. For me, this is the main significance of the Apostle sent to the uncircumcised.

Q: In your time in the Middle East and Turkey filming the DVD series, were there elements about St. Paul's life that struck you in a new way once you were in the actual places?

Ray: Masculinity has suffered in our modern age. When I traveled along the roads and seas of St. Paul, I realized what a manly man he was.

Paul was no weakling as he traveled the estimated 6,000 miles recorded in Acts. It was surely much more than that during his whole lifetime.

Life was tough back then -- no Nike hiking shoes or Hilton Hotels. Paul was rough and tough and

manly. I found, by the way, that Jesus was too!

One can easily get the vision of Paul the theologian sitting around with scholars, writing and discussing. But the reality is that Paul wrote while in prison, by candlelight, and usually while deprived of many creaturely comforts. He was a tough man and suffered much for Jesus Christ.

I say, "If you wanted to know how much Paul suffered for Jesus Christ, all you had to do was ask him to take off his shirt!"

He had been whipped, flogged, beaten, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked, snake-bitten and much more. His body was a mass of scar tissue.

I was also repeatedly amazed at the distances between cities. We read of Paul going from Tarsus to Antioch, or going from Jerusalem to Damascus, to Sinai and back to Syria.

It is one thing to read this, quite another to go over and travel between these locations. They are a long way apart, hundreds of miles in many cases. Yet Paul never flagged in energy or determination or spirit.

I am impressed by his courage and tenacity -- and more so after following him around through six countries in blistering heat and often with sand in my teeth!

Through it all, Paul maintained a remarkable balance between brilliance and simplicity, toughness and gentleness, joyful hope and righteous indignation.

He was a godly man who lived the faith to the fullest as an example for us, to practice heroic virtue ourselves in this modern age.

Q: St. Paul's life offers many examples of humanness, especially human failure. Can you explain some of these and how he offers hope to those struggling to live a moral life?

Ray: Brothels and bathhouses, sin and vice!

Like today, wickedness abounded and confronted Paul every time he entered a city or disembarked from a ship. He was human and, like us, had to resist temptation and turn from sin.

Just because he was an apostle and is now a saint, does not mean that Paul was immune from problems that the rest of us face daily. He was an example of heroic virtue.

He had physical ailments. To prevent the lurking sin of pride, God gave Paul a "thorn in the flesh" to keep him humble. Paul was not immune to pride.

I think the ailment was with his eyes since they had been affected by the blinding light at his conversion and he said to the Galatians, "I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me."

Q: In the "Year of St. Paul," what ways can people come to know the real person of Paul?

Ray: There are a lot of books I have on St. Paul, but most of them are examining his theology. Some of the best books on St. Paul are out of print. I hope the Year of St. Paul brings them back into the light of day and that new books will appear.

There is one good book I really enjoyed reading, though I think it is out of print, titled "Paul the Apostle" by Giuseppe Ricciotti. It follows Paul's life and ties in the theology at the appropriate places. Another that is in print is "Paul of Tarsus" by Joseph Holzner.

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