

Paul of Tarsus

A significant person in the Christian Tradition

Sources of Information on Paul

- ✧ Paul was a prolific writer and much of what he shared with the early Christian communities gives insight into his own life.
- ✧ Of particular interest to us is knowing Paul and aspects of his early life are:
 - ✧ Galatians
 - ✧ 1 and 2 Corinthians
 - ✧ Acts of the Apostles (secondary source)

Background to Paul of Tarsus

- ✧ From the city of Tarsus
- ✧ A well-educated Hellenistic Jew
 - ✧ His letters indicate an comprehensive education in Jewish traditions as well as Greek literature, philosophy and rhetoric
- ✧ Roman citizen
- ✧ A Pharisee

Early Career

- ✧ Paul was a persecutor of the early Christian community.
- ✧ As a Pharisee, he saw this sect of Judaism as a corruption of the true religion.
- ✧ The Acts of the Apostles places Paul at the stoning of the first Christian martyr, Stephen (Acts 8:1)

Conversion

- ❧ Recorded in the acts of the Apostles and Paul refers to it on occasion in his letters: Acts 9:1 – 19
- ❧ Paul's conversion is great significance because:
 - ❧ It is his encounter with the *risen Christ* that forms the basis of his preaching
 - ❧ This encounter convinces Paul of the need to expand the message of Christ beyond the Jewish communities and to take the message to all peoples (gentiles and pagans included).
 - ❧ Emphasises the centrality of baptism as the means of entry into this believing community.

Paul

What are the key points to discuss in your responses?

Contribution to early Christianity: Missionary Career

- ✧ Historically, Paul was the most important figure in spreading to the wider Roman world the movement that began with Jesus and came to be known as Christianity.
- ✧ Paul's strategy was to go to the Jewish synagogues first to teach the Christian interpretation of the scriptures, particularly the prophets.
- ✧ The groups he formed were *ekklesia* "called out/ together" to be the new covenant people.
 - ✧ 1 Cor 3: 10 – 11 Laid a foundation... and that foundation is Jesus Christ
- ✧ Lastly, Paul established how these communities should see themselves.

Contribution to early Christianity: Hierarchy

- ✧ Whilst more concerned with describing the range of functions appropriate to the church community (such as charity), there are references to a range of offices in Paul's writings:
 - ✧ Deacons/ deaconesses: Phil 1:1, 1 Cor. 16:1, 1 Thess 3:2
 - ✧ Bishops (*episkopos*): Phil 1:1, 1&2 Tim; Titus and in Acts.

Contribution to Christianity: Theology

☞ Really this is linked to his belief in the centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ and encountering the risen Christ however, there are themes in Paul's works which emerge as clear foundations for teachings that were accepted by the early church communities and would be later developed by Christianity as it emerged as a global religious tradition:

☞ Original Sin

☞ Christology

☞ Eschatology

Contribution to Christianity: Essential Ethical Principles

- ✧ Paul's writings continue to be used by Christian ethicists alike in their pursuit of providing guidance to believers.
- ✧ The central themes of Paul's ethical traditions are:
 - ✧ Primacy of love: Galatians 5:14
 - ✧ Christ's call to freedom and responsibility: 1 Corinthians 6:9
 - ✧ The physical self is the temple of the Holy Spirit: 1 Corinthians 6:19

Contribution to Christianity: Worship

- ✧ 1 Cor 11: 23 – 26 emphasises the centrality of the Lord's Supper for the early Christians. The need to come together.
- ✧ 1 Cor 11: 27- 29 Recall's Christ's words at the last supper and remind them of the circumstances in which they should come to the celebration – “examine yourselves”
 - ✧ Parallel this to the Penitential Rite in the Catholic and Orthodox variants and the forgiveness of sins directly before communion for the Anglican church.
- ✧ 1 Cor14: 26ff Refers to orderly worship, to have a hymn, a lesson, a revelation; to “let all things be done for building up”

Contribution to Christianity: Reconciliation

- ✧ 2Cor 16ff everything old has become new, all this from God who has reconciled us to himself through Christ

Significance: Meeting the Risen Christ

- ✧ It is evident in Galatians that the central issue for Paul was the ethical and ritual requirements for participation in the new people of God.
- ✧ As a result of his own conversion, Paul set aside the previous requirements of the apostles and made it clear that there was one requirement for membership in this community. Gal. 2:1 – 10
- ✧ Cor 15: 3 – 5 emphasises Paul's understanding of the centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ as being paramount for membership in the emerging church.
- ✧ It is this understanding that is also picked up in the earliest creeds of the Christian community: Recall the words from the Liturgy and the Nicene and apostles Creed...

Significance: the need to do charity

- ✧ 1Cor 13:5 emphasises that at the root of the Christian community is the common sharing of all things. As such Paul links love which “does not seek its own interests” but leads the faithful to “hold everything in common” (Acts4:32)
- ✧ Further, Paul identifies the link between faith and charity
- ✧ Paul expounds this in greater detail: charity is the virtue by which Christians love God above all things, and neighbour as ourselves. He emphasises that Jesus made charity the new commandment.
- ✧ 1 Cor 16:1 – 4 – Reminds the community to give on the first day of the week

Significance: Influence on future theologians

- ✧ Many attribute the work of Luther to the basic principles found in Paul's writings.
- ✧ One of the main themes that emerges from Paul's writings is *justification by faith* – the concept that humans are saved from sin by believing in Jesus: referred to *sola fides*
- ✧ This was one of the key points of difference raised by Martin Luther and other reformers that lead to the Protestant Reformation and the break with the Church of Rome.
- ✧ In addition, his writings on grace, predestination and free will had profound effects on later theologians including Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Ignatius.



The HSC

Past questions, tips and a framework for answers

Past HSC questions

∞ 2012 HSC Essay question:

Men, women and schools of thought have reformed and/ or revitalised the Christian tradition.

How well does this statement reflect the impact on Christianity of ONE significant person or school of thought, other than Jesus?

Past HSC questions

∞ 2011 HSC Section II Short Response

(a) Outline the contribution of ONE significant person or school of thought other than Jesus to the development and expression of Christianity. **3**

(b) Summarise the impact of the significant person or school of thought chosen in part (a). **4**

(c) *Christianity has always sought to reconnect the faith to its founding roots.*

To what extent does the statement apply to the impact of the significant person or school of thought chosen in part (a)? **8**

Tips for answering questions on Paul

- ☞ Demonstrate an explicit understanding of Christianity
- ☞ Be objective
- ☞ Use judgment
 - ☞ explicitly supported by specific scripture references, other writings and examples
- ☞ Know key contributions (which are the initial examples of change or challenge that Paul brought about)
- ☞ Know key impacts (the lasting changes that Paul brought about – how is his work still relevant?)
- ☞ Correct and relevant terminology
- ☞ If there is a source/ quote/ stimulus provided you need to refer to it throughout your entire response. Don't head and tail with with.

A framework you might use for analysis

- ☞ Once you have begun your response use this framework for analysing key impacts or contributions of St. Paul:
- ☞ Introduction/ background: briefly set the context that led to the teaching.
- ☞ Describe the basic teaching – why is it/ Paul remembered?
- ☞ Explain how Paul interpreted the key beliefs of Christianity
- ☞ Give reasons why they made this interpretation in this particular context.
- ☞ Explain why Paul's interpretation of beliefs was a challenge to the early believers
- ☞ To what extent was Christianity changed by Paul and why?
- ☞ Conclude summarising the points above relating to the question asked.