

People continue to misunderstand St. Paul

By Father Paul Cuddy

Courier columnist

Phyllis McGinley, who received the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1961, wrote a gem of a book, entitled *Saint-Watching*, that same year.

Anne Morrow Lindbergh once wrote of the book: "Phyllis McGinley has managed here to combine scholarship, wit, and wisdom in her humanly oriented accounts of the saints, both inside and outside the Christian calendar."

After its first printing in 1961, the book was reprinted in 1962, 1965, 1967, 1969 and again in 1988.

A charming woman, she has not been a favorite among man-bashing feminists since her comment about equality of the sexes. She once said, "Men and women are equal — but different."

Saint-Watching has a chapter called "In Defense of Saint Paul." No saint has been bashed as much as St. Paul has over time. Not that the bashers are always ill-willed in their shrill indignation, but most of them are quite hard to understand and willful. The supreme example with the feminists is

Ephesians, Chapter 25.

"But what about this moralizing on the subservience of woman to her husband?" asks the outraged feminine contingent of his detractors? "What about the man being the head, even as Christ is the head of the church? What, particularly, about the injunction that the women cover their heads and remain silent in the churches? Has it not been such Pauline teaching which kept women in purdah for so many centuries?"

What his opponents forget is that Paul was a first-century man, not an Ashley Montagu arguing the superiority of the feminine gender. Rather than lowering the position of women of his time he elevated it.

Among the citizens of such towns as Antioch and Corinth and Philippi, for instance, the Greek idea of marriage was anything but ideal. The wife was of little account, divorce was easy, and husbands sought their diversions not at home but among the local Aspasia or Alcibiades.

Paul taught the vastly Jewish ideal of a proper family life where — if the husband

was master and provider — the wife was to be cherished and eternally respected as a person not a chattel. "Let the husband render unto his wife due benevolence," he wrote.

How touching are the personal notes, tucked away at the end of his epistles. "I commend unto you Phebe, our sister," he says. Or "greet Mary, who bestowed much labor on us." Beneath the shifting translations one can still hear the authentic voice of gratitude to the good women who not only believed his message but also saw to it that when he returned from his wanderings he had clean sheets and a hot dinner waiting for him.

Regarding women covering their heads, McGinley observes: "Respectable women all went covered in those days and Paul wanted no irresponsible behavior among his flock to scandalize the communities where he was trying to build his enclaves of the faithful. To attend services bareheaded was then rather as if one would go to church in a bikini."

When Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen came to Rochester in December, 1966, one of



ON THE RIGHT SIDE

his first recommendations to his priests was to buy a set of Dr. William Barclay's *Daily Study Bible Series*. The set contains 20 compact books offering a clear interpretation of the New Testament.

A bit of heresy intrudes in some places, e.g. he is queasy about the Virgin Birth. Most Catholics would recognize them. Few commentaries give better illustrations and explanation of the New Testament, and especially the Pauline epistles.

McGinley gives aspects of St. Paul and many other saints, different from Barclay in method, but with scholarship and feminine intuition and humor to make the book a delight. Most public libraries should have a copy of the book, which is published by the Crossroad Publishing Company.

Saul becomes an example of the saving power of God

By Cindy Bassett

Courier columnist

"Are you certain that you want to undertake such a journey?" the high priest asked the young man who stood before him. "It could take you nearly a week to get to Damascus. The road is a dangerous one. You may be ambushed en route by robbers."

Saul was not the least bit deterred by the advice. These followers of the Way had to be stopped. What they were preaching about was blasphemy against the Scriptures. He nodded, but before he could give voice to his feelings, the high priest continued.

"What you have done here in Jerusalem is admirable," he said. "I think you have single-handedly arrested most of the ringleaders of the movement."

"Not nearly enough have been arrested!" Saul's voice rose with emotion. "Many of these ringleaders have fled and will spread their lies in other cities. Cities, some of which, are under your jurisdiction."

Saul had succeeded in appealing to the high priest's vanity. "When do you want to leave?" the high priest asked.

"Tomorrow morning," Saul replied. Then he added with a great deal of satisfaction, "The sight of their leaders being led away in chains will serve as a powerful example to these followers of what their own fate will be if they continue with their blasphemy."

"I'll have the necessary paperwork in

order for the synagogues in Damascus," the high priest said. "And you may take two of our best temple guards with you."

Saul was not concerned with robbers on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus. He feared that these followers of the Way would send some of their group to ambush them en route. Saul left the city as soon as the sun rose and the road was relatively uncrowded.

Meanwhile, the followers of the Way in Damascus had already heard about Saul's plans. They went to one of their leaders, Ananias, to talk about the matter. "What will we do about Saul? We have heard that he will stop at nothing until all of us have been arrested!" they cried.

"Stay calm and pray," Ananias told them. "Our God will never abandon us."

It was midday on the seventh day of travel when Saul and his two companions saw the outlines of the city on the horizon. "We shall reach Damascus before nightfall," Saul said.

But suddenly a light flashed in the sky directly overhead. It surrounded them on the road with its brilliance. Saul fell off his horse and heard a voice speak to him. "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" the voice cried out.

"Who are you?" Saul's voice trembled in reply.

"I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. Get up and continue on into the city. I will tell you what to do."

Saul's companions were still reeling



from what had occurred. One of them pulled him up from the ground where he still knelt. "I can't see," Saul stammered.

It was nearly dark when they finally arrived at a house in the city where they left Saul. He lay on a bed, dumbfounded for three days, not eating or drinking.

While Saul waited, the Lord spoke to Ananias about him.

"I want you to go see a man who is at the house of Judas on Straight Street," the Lord told him. "Ask for Saul. I will give you the power to restore his sight."

"But, Lord, I've heard about Saul and his reasons for being here!" Ananias cried. "He has come to Damascus to persecute your own people!"

"Go, Ananias," the Lord said again. "I have chosen Saul to tell the Gentiles about me. And he is going to suffer much for his

obedience to me."

When Ananias came into the room where he was lying, he placed his hands on Saul's eyes, saying, "The Lord Jesus who appeared to you has sent me." And Saul was immediately given back his sight.

From that day onward, Saul became known as Paul. He told people all over Damascus about Jesus Christ and what had happened to him. The leaders of the synagogues were shocked at his words and said, "He's been in the sun too long."

But when Paul gained a large following of new believers, these leaders made plans to arrest him and execute him. "What a shameful example he makes!" they cried.

Some of the very followers whom Paul had planned to arrest heard about these plans. They hid Paul in a basket and lowered him over the city walls at night so that he could escape.

Scripture reference: Acts, Chapter 9:1-25.

Meditation: What does my example tell others about what I believe in?

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