



NIGHT WITH AN AUTHOR PROMPTS REFLECTION ON GREAT BIBLE WRITER, MISSIONARY

Earlier this month, I had the pleasure of attending an evening hosted by a local bookstore. The author who was the focus of this particular evening was an elegant Nigerian woman, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Chimamanda, as she is most commonly known, has already penned two widely regarded novels, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, and has a third now on the shelves – *The Thing Around Your Neck*.

Funnily enough, I haven't read any of these books. My reason for attending was partly personal and partly professional: personally, I've always been drawn to the African continent. I've never been there but it's a place that has exerted a pull over me, ever since I attended Expo '88 and saw the Kenyan pavilion. Professionally I wanted some insights into how Catholic Mission could deepen the connection between our donors and supporters, and the people of Africa.

With those various hats firmly on my head, before, during and after, it's small wonder that during the drive home my thoughts turned to another great author and the message he may have shared if he had ever taken part in an in-store appearance: St Paul, or as he was originally known, Saul of Damascus.

In terms of output, St Paul is the most copious author in the Bible. His various epistles outweigh the work of the other four evangelists, in length, and, it could be argued, impact. Certainly, in terms of taking up the mantle of spreading the word, about Jesus and His teachings, Paul was prolific, passionate and resolute.

When I was working at Wesley Mission in Sydney, Paul was the subject of a number of audio-visual and printed resources produced by the Mission. The then-Superintendent, Reverend Dr Gordon Moyes, was quite passionate about the life of Paul and his legacy to the Christian Church. Many were the sermons he preached where he drew on Paul's writings, courage and convictions to inspire and motivate his congregations.

Paul is a bit like that. Among Christians, he can elicit strong support or surprising indifference. Most people of faith would be familiar with some of his teachings ("Love is patient, Love is kind..." is a case in point) but they may not have much understanding of the man and what inspired him to write, preach and travel.

For Christians today, it is not enough to simply be aware of this giant of the Church. Paul

was probably the greatest missionary who has ever lived. In fact, one of Paul's enduring legacies was that he was able to transcend barriers of culture, language and geography to share a message of faith, hope and love.

Earlier this year, Bishops in South America cited Paul as a "model of a disciple" because of how his life was transformed through "a personal encounter with Jesus Christ and His Church". In a message for us all, the Bishops said then that the world needed more people like Paul, who was willing to go "above and beyond". "We need imitators of Christ, capable of building a new society in which the cultural values are enlightened by the Gospel," the Bishops wrote.

Paul also excelled in his missionary endeavours because he was devoted to forming communities and forming people in Christ. Like Chimamanda, Paul knew the part he had to play. He played it with a zeal and conviction I once found confronting but now appreciate for its strength and depth.

One of the reviews of Chimamanda's work described her as someone who enjoyed "confounding expectations". She was successful, the critic declared, because she took her anger about various aspects of life in Nigeria – colonialism and patriarchy, among them – and used it to inspire her.

You could say that about Paul.

You could say that he was not only inspired but that he inspired others.

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