



Great Lion of God

Taylor Caldwell

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This novel is about one of the most passionate, intelligent, urbane & dedicated Apostles of early Christianity. Saul Tarshish, or, as the Romans called him, Paul of Tarsus, the intellectual Pharisee, lawyer, theologian & ,finally the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Great Lion of God Details

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From Reader Review Great Lion of God for online ebook

Federico De Obeso says

Excelente libro para conocer la vida de San Pablo más allá de su conversión.
Vale la pena completar esta lectura con el libro: "Médico de cuerpos y almas" escrito también por Taylor Caldwell

Letty says

My two-star rating is purely a visceral reaction to the character and has nothing to do with the quality of the writing.

I read this book when I was a young teen. I'm sure it was well-written; Taylor Caldwell is a fine writer. I only gave it two stars because it caused me to dislike St. Paul. I mean, how bad of an arrogant ##### do you have to be so that the only thing that'll turn you around is to have God himself (in the form of Jesus Christ) appear before you and strike you blind?

I also read Dear and Glorious Physician (twice) by Caldwell and absolutely loved it.

Cami Bledel says

Excelente!!! trata sobre la vida de San Pablo, muy entretenido ver como llego a ser ese hombre santo, y la perspectiva que el tenia sobre Jesus

Erin Miller says

one of my favorites, if not, my favorite. I love the apostle Paul. This is such a wonderfully written fictional story of his life with as much biblical knowledge as possible.

Sindy Castellanos says

El Gran León de Dios presenta la vida de Saulo de Tarso (después convertido en San Pablo), de una forma novelada, y aunque algunos datos se presumen, por no tener evidencia histórica de su veracidad, leerla puede ayudar a comprender el contexto del origen y la vida de la primera comunidad cristiana.

Daniel says

Her best biblical character novel by far! I have read it 3 times!

Laurence says

I didn't particularly appreciate Saint Paul or his writings until I read this book (unabridged). I am not a fan of historical fiction using real persons, but this one is credible and scripturally accurate. I delighted in Taylor's gift of the description (not everyone's cup of tea).

Sarah says

Great Lion of God was in the same haul as *The Robe* and *Dear and Glorious Physician*—in the small but cherished book collection of my grandmother, who died the year after I was born. Grandma might not have read many books, but quality is more important than quantity, and these three novels are some of the finest I've ever read.

Great Lion of God chronicles the life of Saul/Paul of Tarsus, that tempestuous man so vital to the spread of Christianity around the Roman world, and therefore a seminal figure in world history. Born to a somber Pharisee father and a materialistic Sadducee mother, Saul is fearsome even as a child. His mother is so shallow that she fails to bond with her little boy because she thinks him too ugly to be her offspring. Perhaps to irk her on a subliminal level that he does not yet grasp, Saul embraces the devoutness of his paternal family instead, but carries it to an extreme of religiosity that his father, mild-mannered Hillel, finds frightening.

This extremeness of Saul's becomes a fixed part of his character after his crush on Dacyl, the neighbors' Greek slave girl, goes sour. She asks him to have sex when they barely know each other, and being a horny boi he's eager to oblige her. But immediately afterwards he has a panic attack, becoming disgusted and horrified by both his own raging hormones and the girl he found so desirable just a moment ago. From this point forward Saul nurses a deep misogyny, and a loathing for even the most innocuous expressions of affection between men and women. He even mistrusts his own little sister.

Shortly thereafter a plague sweeps through Tarsus, striking down Saul (who eventually recovers) and his mother, Deborah (who does not) among hundreds of others. The boy becomes even harder and angrier, and feels guilty for not bonding with his mother even though *she* was the one to reject *him* in early childhood.

In this dangerous frame of mind, Saul journeys to Jerusalem with his father to prepare for his sister's wedding. Stomping about the city and hating everything he sees, he comes across what he first assumes are a brother and a sister, but turn out to be son and a mother who was very young indeed when She bore Him. These two are peasants from the lowly region of Galilee, yet somehow They have the poise of royalty and a magnetism that goes beyond even a crown. Saul believes the two to be sorcerers and flees from Them, reviling Them.

Saul hates nothing more than the decadent and oppressive Romans, and gleefully follows the exploits of the Zealots who carry out petty terror attacks against Roman soldiers here in Judaea. But he learns quickly that any Zealot victories are short-lived, and their ends unhappy...

In one of the most haunting scenes I've ever read, Saul witnesses a mass crucifixion on the walls of Jerusalem. The condemned are mere boys in their late teens and early twenties, just like Saul—and just like the Romans driving nails into their hands and feet. The brave rebels are coming to an inglorious end, for crucifixion is a death reserved for the most contemptible criminals. They strain to breathe, their pain too much for mortals to bear...

...and yet another young man emerges from the crowd, with the clothing of a redneck and the bearing of a king, and in a quiet but resonating and powerful voice He recites the Shema:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.

The dying youths repeat this phrase after Him, and He walks down the line, reciting Psalms and they echo the sacred words. By the time He has walked from one end of the line to the other, the boys have died, mercifully and peacefully, their faces and bodies eased as if they merely fell asleep. And the young man in the rough clothing—whom it should surprise nobody is one Yeshua of Nazareth—pulls His cloak up over His head and slinks away from the crowd, hunched over as if He has absorbed the pain from the executed youths and taken it into His own Body.

From this day forward Saul's life begins to change, and he will resist that change with every step but will be ultimately powerless against it.

There are plenty of authors still living whom I deeply admire, but I have yet to stumble upon any who write with the majesty of Taylor Caldwell. Her words bring the places she describes—in this case, the many cities of the ancient eastern Mediterranean coast—to such vibrant life that a movie version would almost be redundant. No physical detail of a person, animal, object or place escapes her notice, nor does the most fleeting thought, or movement of a person's soul.

Her saturation of detail can make some parts of the book uncomfortable to read. **CAVEAT EMPTOR: this is Christian fiction, but hardly the feel-good, G-rated stuff that usually gets sold under that name these days.**

The mass crucifixion scene is horribly graphic—the boys, already bleeding profusely from their hands and feet, also have hundreds of small cuts on their backs from the splinters of their rough wooden crosses, which they have to rub against in order to breathe in this position, and some from pain and exhaustion soil themselves.

This also applies for the stoning of St. Stephen, a beautiful youth who by the end of his martyrdom barely appears human, bleeding so profusely from his head that his hair color and facial features can no longer be recognized.

Then there's the sex scene with Saul and Dacyl, which is not explicit but rather graphic all the same, and Caldwell's terminology rapidly veers from sensual to lurid and corrupt, so the reader experiences the same upheaval over the incident that Saul does. This is all brilliantly done, but renders the book highly inappropriate for Sunday school. Squeamish readers are duly advised.

But just as this book explores the pits of human experience, it shows us the highs, too—especially when the Divine intersects with the mundane. The visions of Saul are as searingly described as if Caldwell herself experienced them. The scenes with Jesus are infused with an eerie majesty. The many tempests of Saul's inner life will draw you in and wring you out.

Like *Dear and Glorious Physician*, this book is an immersive and haunting experience that demands and deserves to be savored. Warmly recommended for adults and mature teens of any faith or none.

Mike says

Great Lion of God

Edited & Corrected Review November 21, 2013

Intro/Mea Culpa:

First off, my apologies for having created the original review and incorrectly writing about Caldwell's *Dear and Glorious Physician*! I'm not entirely sure how I managed to write the essay but then create the wrong book when I posted the review. Many thanks to Constanza (see comments below) for reading this review and commenting on my error.

I have created a review for *Dear and Glorious Physician* (DAGP) with the material that was wrongly applied here (with some minor formatting changes). I am also leaving the incorrect essay below so that other readers can make sense of the comment and revel in my bone headedness.

Review of THIS BOOK:

As I wrote originally, I read these two books by Taylor Caldwell back in the dawn of civilization. I probably read DAGP twice since I found that book more rewarding than this one. In fact, I did start this book and then put it aside because I just could not continue. Whether it was 30 pages or 40 or 50 I don't remember and I certainly don't know if it was only 6 months before I picked it up again. I do know that I eventually did read to the end, but as I write this today, I feel it was at least a couple of years later when that happened.

Without going back to the book, I don't even know for certain why I stopped, but I can offer some guesses. Despite the familiarity of the topic, I wasn't that excited by a bureaucrat-turned-Apostle even though he lived during a time that I was heavily in love with and studied. Plus, the book seemed to be more about "stuff" than action. (Remember this is decades-old recollection)

But I have one thing that I can clearly remember and tell you: giving up on reading a book felt bad. Really bad. Not a crime per se, but like a betrayal of the book and by extension of the author and publisher. But I wasn't thinking of them, just of the paperback copy of the book that I had put back in a closet. (Sounds like this should have been about her novel *I, Judas* instead, doesn't it?) And it was that guilt that eventually made me return and read the rest of the book.

I know from other people's reviews and comments that a lot of Goodreaders have "matured" to the point where they discard a book as soon as they know they aren't enjoying (or valuing) the experience. I don't mean hard books that are considered important literary works, but books read more for fun and the sheer pleasure of reading. I envy those people because even today I still wade through a book that I am reading. It hasn't happened very often (maybe because I stick to what I know I'll like) but I haven't hit the cut-and-run phase of my life yet. On the other hand, thanks to Goodreads and some in-person friends, I have read many books in the past decade that I never would have bothered with and am a better reader for it.

Since I wasn't that thrilled with it at the time, I can't in all conscience give this book a higher ranking than

three (3.0) stars – but I won't penalize it with a lower rating unless I do the modern era re-read.

Note: The one book that has been on my "currently reading" status for the last few years I stopped for a very personal reason. Someday I will dig that out and finish it.

Original, review text (Feb 2011) that is NOT about this book:

I read this book (and several others by the author) a long, long time ago. Putting aside the "disciple" aspect of Luke (which wasn't a factor), I read it because a) he was a physician and b) it's set in the early Roman Empire. Since I've always been into science and did lots of Western (i.e. Greco-Roman) Ancient History and took Latin for six years as a teenager, this book hit on all three.

From what I remember, I liked the book for its own sake. Her novels tend to be longish and rich with detail and plot. Of course this is a fictionalized account of Luke's life and I am pretty sure that Caldwell takes some expansive liberties with his life story.

(Minor spoiler alert!)

For example, I don't really think he met one of the Emperors!

(end of minor spoiler.)

I also recall having attempted to read at least one of her other books (I think it was "Great Lion of God") and putting it down 40-50 pages into it for 6 months because I thought it was unreadable. I did eventually read it through, but "Dear and Glorious Physician" was clearly a better book and I recall more details of it even mumblety-mumbelty years ago. It was a pretty decent book: well-written and well plotted.

Now (as I write this review) that I look over her bibliography, I see a few title that I never read and would consider picking up: "The Arm and the Darkness", "A Pillar of Iron", "Glory and the Lightning", and "Dialogues with the Devil". There are probably others that I would like, too.

Given her fairly high level of writing, I hope you decide to pick up this or another of her many books. Even though her last book was written in 1980, her themes are universal and ageless (more or less.) Give one or two a try. I think you will be pleasantly surprised.

Georgia Herod says

Paul the Apostle is the subject of Caldwell's story. She has created a man of "leonine" proportions, one who lived as passionately before his Damascus Road experience as afterward. Because I am also reading through the Bible and have been in the book of Acts, it has been fascinating to read coinciding portions. I admire writers who can envision the gaps and take brief comments and expand them in technicolor. Caldwell does that! Paul becomes larger than life as he wrestles with his faith, his human nature, his cohorts, his fellow believers, his family. Caldwell also does a masterful job of creating the Roman, Hebrew and Christian, and Greek cultures of the day--and amazingly the conflicting philosophies seem not so different than those of the 21st century.

Her descriptions are lush. Her style may seem somewhat stilted in that sentences are long, embedded with sensory detail. A long read--but powerful.

Amy says

My book club picked this book, because this liturgical year is dedicated to St. Paul. As well, we had previously read *Grandmother and the Priests* by Taylor Caldwell and which we all loved. Caldwell's research into biblical times bears fruit in this immense novel, moving from Paul's upper-class upbringing in Tarsus to his traveling to Jerusalem. I enjoyed very much how the author brought in to Paul's life, prior to his conversion, John the Baptist, Joseph of Arimathea, and of course, Jesus and His mother...and Paul(Saul) understood them not.

LemonLinda says

I first wanted to read this book as I was so struck by how aptly Caldwell married the factual and fictional in the book about St. Luke, Dear and Glorious Physician and I really loved that book. Thus, it was logical to me that I would feel similarly about her book on Saul/Paul of Tarsus.

And I did get so much from the book. It did not read as smoothly as the other one had, but I attribute that largely to the subject matter. Paul was a very complicated and at times conflicted person - one who disbelieved and then believed so passionately. But at his core there was always a strong faith and a commitment that God's will be done.

Caldwell was so committed to intense research and thus by reading it is almost as if you are walking and talking the those familiar early Christians over two millenniums ago. I certainly did enjoy and am glad that I made the commitment to read this one. And yes, that talent for finding the facts and creating a believable story around them is clearly the draw for this book as well.

Shelley Alongi says

I have read several of her books. I like the religious themed books better than her politically themed books though politics always gets into her religious theme books. She has been gone 32 years and her books are still very powerful. They all highlight a world dominated by one group of people. Though I'm not sure I see that in this book. It is hard sometimes to tell how much is legend though I do know the Bible accounts and have read all of his letters many times and will still read them. I find her use of what we might call for knowledge or anticipation I'm not sure what the literary term is very interesting. It is especially interesting when Saul glimpses Yeshua in the distance. Her treatment of his character is quite original at least from my perspective. I have read several religious themed novels lately hers is the most original. She does tend to get a bit academic at times as is her character and I do find her there are discussions of philosophy of the time very interesting. It is definitely worth the read

Libby says

This is the first book I ever put away unfinished. I was raised to believe it was a special sort of sin to show disrespect to a book, but I just could not make myself continue reading. I had read over 350 pages and

NOTHING had happened. This was supposed to be the life of one of the most well-traveled, aggressive and strong-willed individuals in Christian history! This, the first of my many sins against literature, occurred in the early 1970's, when I was incredibly young and naive. Perhaps my opinion then was formed by my youth and inexperience? WELLLLLL, no. Recently a tattered paperback copy of this "classic" came into my hands. I decided to give it another try. 150 pages into this interminable tale, I threw it into a wastebasket and said a word which would have distressed my sainted mother. How could St. Paul be this boring? Seriously, it could not be just a matter of the author's lack of skill. I've read many books by Taylor Caldwell and found them all worth my time and effort. Only this one fails to excite and entertain me. Take a tip from me. If Paul is your main man, there are dozens of better books, fiction and non-fiction about the Apostle to the Gentiles. If Rome is your meat and drink, try this author' wonderful Pillar of Iron, about Cicero. If, on the other hand, you are looking for penance for sin, this one will do.

Chris Blocker says

This book review is largely about the author, and contains some opinion. Flag at your discretion.

There's a good chance you've never heard of Taylor Caldwell. She was a popular author once upon a time, but then just "disappeared." If you're a regular at book sales or used bookstores, you've probably come across her books before, but likely didn't pay them much attention. Before I get around to my review of *Great Lion of God*, I'd like to introduce Ms. Caldwell, and spend a few minutes discussing what became of her work.

Who was Taylor Caldwell?

Taylor Caldwell was an English-born American author born in 1900. She began writing as a child, finishing her first novel at the age of twelve. Throughout her life, she published nearly fifty novels and supposedly wrote more than a hundred others. Several of her novels were bestsellers; her most known works include *Captains and the Kings*, *Dynasty of Death*, *Dear and Glorious Physician*, and *This Side of Innocence*. Most of her works were historical in nature. Her name remained relevant throughout her career into the 1980s. In 1979, she signed a book deal for \$3.9 million dollars (that's \$12.5 million dollars in the world of 2013)! She was a respected and well-liked author, a multi-millionaire; yet you've probably not heard of her. By the time I discovered her ten years ago, all her books were out of print. The Internet was largely silent on her. Few libraries owned her books. Multi-volume encyclopedias of significant world authors failed to mention her. It was as if she had been erased. My interest had been piqued.

What happened to Taylor Caldwell?

I don't mean the person herself (she died of heart failure in 1985), but her work. Why was Caldwell wiped from the annals of literary history, a victim of the fifty cent bin at bookstores from coast to coast? Who knows? But I have a few theories.

Perhaps she was a tad too late

Caldwell wrote exceptionally well for the time when she began her career. Influenced by the works of Tolstoy, Dickens, Balzac, and the Brontes, Caldwell's early novels were cutting edge in the time when *Gone with the Wind* was immensely popular. With large, meandering historical works that dipped into romance occasionally and were filled cover-to-cover with the purplest of prose, it is no wonder Caldwell became a superstar. When the style became more minimalistic, however, Caldwell remained true to her earlier writing style. As everything shifted toward postmodernism, Caldwell stayed a favorite of her original readers, the parents and grandparents of Generation X.

Perhaps Caldwell's work died with her fan base. Perhaps she just became irrelevant. Perhaps that style was not meant to last the test of time. Or...

Perhaps she was just too controversial

Caldwell was somewhat of a dichotomy. She was very outspoken about her views and she had many of them. And, because her views were often on opposite ends of what is considered the normal spectrum, Caldwell was all-inclusive in being offensive. See if you can piece all these things together: Caldwell was a very outspoken conservative; she hated welfare; she was Catholic; she believed in reincarnation; she was pro-abortion; she was a conspiracy theorist (more on this later); she believed all religion led to the same god; she hated feminism—was disgusted by women in general; she was an environmentalist; she was anti-Semitic.

Caldwell herself couldn't make up her mind about some of these issues (mostly dealing with reincarnation and religion), but that didn't keep her from being vocal as she flip-flopped from side to side. How vocal was Caldwell? Well, let's look at some of her own words about women taken from various interviews:

There's no doubt about it—women are the inferior sex, in every way. There's never been any woman genius—never. With all the opportunity in the world—all the leisure in the world, all the shelter—if women had any genius, it would've come out. It never did. There's been no woman Michelangelo, or Beethoven, or Mozart.

It's a woman's place to serve a man.

Women shouldn't have the right to vote. In ancient Rome, women had the right to vote and became active in government. That was the end of Rome. The one good thing Mussolini did was to take away the right of women to vote.

Oh, and her thoughts on children struck me as very interesting as well:

“My children never dared enter a room where their father was without permission. And I don't believe they should be allowed to eat with their parents until they're 21.”

Wow, what child would want to eat with their parents after twenty years of being ignored?

Needless to say, it's easy to see why Caldwell could be offensive. And, as the recent debacle concerning Orson Scott Card has shown, a writer's views can alienate readers regardless of the work.

Perhaps she was erased for what she knew

Caldwell was a huge conspiracy theorist. She strongly believed in an international group of bankers who ran the world. She blamed every tragic event that happened around the world on them, giving pretty damning (or coincidental) evidence for the assassination of every American president. She bluntly called out her Syndicate-like group in *Captains and the Kings* and, not surprisingly, was very vocal about the extent of their reach.

Perhaps Caldwell was on to something. Perhaps these all-powerful men (because they were all men, of course), reached back in time and erased Caldwell from history. They forced the publishers to shut down the presses on Caldwell's novels and steered the writer's legacy to the worst possible fate for a writer: obscurity.

Perhaps you don't care

So I've rambled for quite some time about Caldwell, but I think it's all relevant. Personally, I enjoy dynamic personalities like hers regardless of her views. I think she may have been brilliant in some areas, but I also think she was very confused and ignorant in others. What an interesting person. And that's why I read Taylor

Caldwell. That's why I've continued to fish her books out of those fifty cent bins and add them to my to-read shelf. She can ramble on sometimes and bore me, but damn if she's not interesting.

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On to the review...

I didn't love this one. *Great Lion of God* is the story of Saul of Tarsus (otherwise known as Paul, Saint Paul, Apostle Paul, That Jerk That Confused Christianity). The novel's 620 pages tell the whole life of Saul, most of which is, of course, speculative.

Of Caldwell's many books, I'm not sure why I chose the one about the life of Saul? I'm not a fan of the historical figure. His words (told in thirteen New Testament books of the Bible) have confused Christianity more than any others of the time—perhaps ever. Those words that most clearly advocate government and admonish homosexuality come from Saul's pen. No other New Testament author touches these subjects the same way. And yet, there is confusion in these scriptures of Saul, so that everyone claims they know what Saul meant, but no one is really sure. Boo, Saul!

What I liked about *Great Lion of God* is that it provided much historical context to this time. It offered speculation as to why Saul kissed the ass of the Roman government, and it made complete sense. Maybe Saul wasn't a complete douche bag, but a very confused man with too much time to write down his thoughts for history before he really had a chance to ruminate on them. (Much like Caldwell herself.)

Overall, *Great Lion of God* was guilty of Caldwell's diarrhea of the pen, that is to say, Purple Prose abounds. Many of the early years of Saul's life could've been cut, as could much of the philosophical discourse between characters. Aside from this overwriting, the story of the zealous Jew who became Christianity's greatest convert is interesting. Saul's confrontation with the father of Stephen was the highlight of the novel; also fascinating were the many scenes depicting the confusion within Judaism and Christianity in the first century A.D.

Caldwell's writing is not for everyone, especially in today's fast-paced society. Some may not be able to get past her controversial views. It's understandable and I do not look down on anyone who will not give the author a minute of their time. But, if you interested in dynamic personalities like I am, and don't mind spending hours in *the vast and verdant rolling hills of a garden floating in a golden mist where flowers glitter with silvery dew and where sonorous voices come from rosy lips*, then give Caldwell a try. As long as the International Bankers haven't gotten to your local used bookstore yet, you should be able to find her novels in the discount bin.
