

## Conversion of Saint Paul

The *Conversion*, frescoed on the left-hand wall of the Pauline Chapel, was painted from 1542 and 1545, with a number of interruptions due to the artist's poor health. The subject was suggested by the client, Pope Paul III, a devotee of St Paul who had chosen to adopt his name. The iconography is derived faithfully from the Acts of the Apostles: on the road to Damascus Saul, persecutor of the Christians, falls from his horse, blinded by the sudden apparition of Christ, who reproaches him for his actions. The only departure is the depiction of Saul as an old man (identified with the elderly pontiff) instead of a young one. In this work, stylistically still very close to the *Judgment*, Christ is represented in all his dazzling power, while the devastated mortals below reveal the fragility of human nature. The dramatic intensity of the event is accentuated by the contrast between the human sphere and the divine one, marked respectively by a centrifugal composition (the men fleeing or starting at the sudden unseating of St Paul) and by a centripetal composition (the angels gathering around Christ at the moment of the emanation of his grace). The colors used are paler and more delicate than in the *Judgment*, softened by a gentle chiaroscuro that serves to render the psychology of the figures more uneasy. In this work, as in the *Judgment*, «moralizing» drapes have been added to some naked angels.