

# T H E ROMAN AGE

## I. Introduction

- A. Problem: dilemma of social breakdown and violence leading to authoritarianism which limits freedom.
- B. We are, however, not helpless. Why?
- C. Answer approached through consideration of the past.
- D. Any starting point in history would be good; we start with Rome because it is direct ancestor of modern West.

## II. Rome: The Empire Triumphant

- A. Size and military strength of Empire.
- B. Imperial sway evoked by Aventicum (Avenches), Switzerland.

## III. Rome: Cultural Analysis

- A. Greece and Rome: cultural influences and parallels.
  - 1. Society as the absolute, to give meaning to life.
  - 2. Finite gods as ground of accepted values.
- B. Problems arising from Roman culture.
  - 1. No infinite reference point as base for values and society.
  - 2. Collapse of civic ideals therefore inevitable.
- C. Results of collapse of ideals.
  - 1. Dictatorship of Julius Caesar a response to civil disorder.
  - 2. Firmly established authoritarian rule of Augustus.
- D. Characteristics of regime introduced by Augustus.
  - 1. Claim to give peace and the fruits of civilization.
  - 2. Care to maintain facade of republican constitution.
  - 3. People ready to accept absolute power in return for peace and prosperity.
  - 4. Religious sanction for emperor-dictators: the emperor as God.

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- E. Christian persecution
    - 1. Religious toleration in the Empire.
    - 2. Christians persecuted because they would worship only the infinite-personal God and not Caesar also. They had an absolute whereby to judge the Roman state and its actions.
  - F. Viability of presuppositions facing social and political tension.
    - 1. Christians had infinite reference point in God and His revelation in the Old Testament, the revelation through Christ, and the growing New Testament.
    - 2. Christians could confront Roman culture and be untouched by its inner weakness, including its relativism and syncretism.
    - 3. Roman hump-backed bridge, like Roman culture, could only stand if not subjected to overwhelming pressures.

#### **IV. Rome: Eventual Decline and Fall**

- A. Growth of taste for cruelty.
- B. Decadence seen in rampant sexuality and lust for violence.
- C. General apathy, as seen in decline in artistic creativity.
- D. Economic decline, more expensive government, and tighter centralization.
- E. Successful barbarian invasions because of internal rot.

#### **V. Conclusion**

There is no foundation strong enough for society or the individual life within the realm of finiteness and beginning from Man alone as autonomous.

#### **Questions**

- 1. Dr. Schaeffer claims that, through looking at history, we can see how presuppositions determine events. Does his discussion bear this out and, if so, how?
- 2. How can a survey of Roman history in one-half hour be either useful or responsible? Discuss.
- 3. “History does not repeat itself.” —The parallels between the history of Rome and the twentieth century West are many and obvious.” How may these statements be reconciled?

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## Key Events and Persons

Julius Caesar: 100-44 B.C.

Augustus Caesar (Octavian): 63 B.C.-A.D. 14

Declared Pontifex Maximus: 12 B.C.

Diocletian: (Emperor) A.D. 284-305

## Further Study

Here, as in succeeding suggestions for further study, it will be assumed that if you want to devote a great deal of time to a topic you can consult a library or a good bookstore. Suggestions given below are made on the basis of relevance to the text, readability, and availability.

Not all the books will necessarily agree at all—or in all details—with Dr. Schaeffer's presentation. But as in the general conduct of life, so in matters of the mind, one must learn to discriminate. If you avoid reading things with which you disagree, you will be naive about what most of the world thinks. On the other hand, if you read everything—but without a critical mind—you will end up accepting by default all that the world (and especially your own moment of history) thinks.

J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (1969).

E.M. Blaiklock, *The Christian in Pagan Society* (1956).

Samuel Dill, *Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire* (1962).

E.M.B. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (1970).

Plutarch, *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans: A Selection* (1972).

Virgil, *The Aeneid* (1965).

Film: Fellini, *Satyricon* (1969).