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## **Decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Did it really fall or change into something else?**

The great Roman Empire existed as an important power for about 1000 years. During its existence, the Romans are credited for having brought order, prosperity, and stability, thus creating a civilized society. The empire had well maintained roads built originally for military purposes that connected the vast regions of the empire with the capital at Rome. The decline and fall of Roman Empire is a historiographical debate first introduced by the influential English historian Edward Gibbon. The Roman Empire is thought to have started 753 B. C. and began crumbling a millennium later around 476 A. D (Gibbon 23). During the rise of the Roman Empire, the inhabitants of the city of Rome fought with surrounding neighbors to expand the empire's territories. Hundreds of years of battle saw the Empire succeed in expanding towards the Far East, encompassing the Middle East, today's modern Europe, and North Africa. Notably, as the Roman territory kept expanding, conquest succeeded in fueling further conquest. Consequently, this pattern became unsustainable with time because some of the new conquests simply turned out unprofitable. For instance, Emperor Trajan's conquest of Dacia failed to pay for the expenses of the whole expedition (Ott 2). These factors made the emperor begin to stagnate by the mid-third century. The paper will analyze in details other factors too that contributed to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. The other factors that contributed to the decline are poor leadership, establishment of Christianity, political corruption and invasion.

## **How Christianity contributed to the Decline**

When the empire started, Jesus had not been reported to exist and there was no religion such as Christianity. After the execution of Jesus because of treasonous behavior, his followers gained enough influence to win over imperial support of the empire Constantine after the 4th century. The second century was arguably the height of the Empire. The three great emperors who reigned at the time spread peace and prosperity throughout the vast empire. The old Roman religion and gods were dying out, but new Gods were coming in too. Among the soldiers, Mithraism, a Persian religion, and the Egyptian Gods Osiris and Isis were very popular. Judaism also had a great appeal but converts had to undergo circumcision, a painful process that deterred them from joining the religion. This made Christianity more popular because of several reasons among them was the fact it was viewed as an intellectual religion that combined Greek philosophy and mysticism of the Jews (Ermatinger 71). The empire Constantine became actively involved in Christian policy-making. With time, church leaders became influential, for instance, Emperor Theodosius was forced to comply with demands made by Bishop Ambrose because of the threat sacraments would be withheld. By 379 A. D, Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the official religion of Rome and all other religions were considered pagan and illegal. Historians believe the establishment of deep roots of Christianity in the Emperor made the Roman inhabitants into Pacifists, that is they held the belief disputes should be settled through peaceful arbitration and not through war and violence that are unjustifiable. This made it difficult for the Roman Empire to defend itself against attacks by the Barbarians. Furthermore, the money spent on

religious icons such as the pope and on churches could have been used to safeguard the empire but this was not the case.

Another reason that can be cited to have contributed to the decline of the great Roman Empire was excessive military spending. This shifted resources meant for financing vital activities such as providing public housing and maintenance of quality roads towards military conquest expeditions. For instance, the emperors were forced to maintain an army along the empires borders to safeguard against constant attacks by the Barbarians. This drained the government heavily leading to inflation at one point. This inflation of the second half and the third century affected the artisans, the middle class, and even the upper echelons of the Roman society. This was the situation the century before Constantine. For instance, during the time of Claudius II Gothicus, silver in a 100% silver denarius was only 0.02%. This inflation coupled with over taxation pushed the Roman citizens to the extreme. Over taxation resulted to progressive abandonment of lands that produced food for the empire, and eventually resulted to impoverishment. The other factor cited as a cause of decline of the empire is lead poisoning. According to Nriagu, “ the most obvious incontestable fact that led to the rapid decline of the Roman Aristocracy was lead poisoning which led to Aristothanasia. The great men became imbeciles and underachievers.” It is believed lead found its way into water used by the inhabitants through glazes and pipes and eventually came to contact with beverages and food. The substance was also absorbed through the skin pores since it was an ingredient of the cosmetics used by the Romans (Ermatinger 19).

Finally, after the Roman Empire adopted Christianity and the inhabitants

became pacifists, the Germanic tribes called the Visigoths were allowed to move into Rome to pave way for the barbarian huns. While inside Rome, they conquered and destroyed sections of the city. By 453 A. D, the Huns and Attila started attacking the Romans and took their land. Two years later, a Germanic tribe called the Vandals conquered Rome city. Most historians date the final fall of the Western Roman Empire as 476 A. D when the Germanic general called Ocaser overthrew Emperor Augustulus Romulus. The Germanic chieftain henceforth assumed leadership of the empire. Fields were left untilld, the bridges and roads were in despair. Bandits and Pirates invested the trade routes making then unsafe. Consequently, cities did not receive constant supply of goods from upcountry farms and trade and business declined effectively, which symbolized the fall of the once great Roman Empire.

Did it really fall or change into something else?

Before we answer the above question, it is important we first note that during its peak, the Roman Empire had succeeded in expanding eastwards and encompassed today's Europe, the middle east and North Africa. When Emperor Theodosius died in 395 AD, the Roman Empire was divided into two. Arcadius, the eldest Son received the Eastern segment whose capital was Byzantium. The youngest son named Honorius received the Western segment, which is the one that fell on 476AD. The Byzantine Empire (Eastern Roman empire) survived for another millennium and fell on 1453 to Ottoman Turkish onslaughts (Ott 54).

Concisely, we can argue that what fell was the economic power and military prowess of both the Western and Eastern Empire. Features of the Roman

culture have survived while some have faded away. For instance, the Roman culture features that have survived include art, literature, engineering, the field of jurisprudence, road network, city planning, architecture, and language.

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