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Two Cheers for *Ancient Rome*!!
A Christian Reappraisal of the *Evil* Empire...

Fall, 2017, Eric Wright, Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church

“History as the historians practice it is in constant motion, but history as the general reader remembers it is held down by inertia.”

– James O’Donnell

“Rome seems more familiar to us moderns than does the middle ages.”

– Dale Van Kley

“Roman history is always being rewritten, and always has been.”

– Mary Beard

Three Sessions:

I. *Introduction to Roman culture, historical approach, general questions and issues.* (October 15, 2017).

II. **Rome in its Historical context.** (October 22, 2017).

III. *Christianity in the Roman world.* (October 29, 2017).

IV. *urther questions and our current assessment of ancient Rome!* (November 5, 2017).



SECOND SESSION, October 22, 2017

✂ *Rome in its Historical Context.*



Where did the Romans fit in the ancient world?
What set them apart? **What was their unique contribution?**
How can we view Rome in its time and place,
in its *context*?

A Procession of Particulars...





(From last week): XXVIII. **Biggest killer of young women:** 1 in 50 women died in *childbirth* (hemorrhage, obstruction, infection) in ancient Rome. [Based largely on records of the time.] Caesarians usually only removed fetus from dead mother. Julius Caesar not born by caesarian!



IXXX. One-half of children born would be dead by 10. If alive by 10, life expectancy was equal to our own. [Based on stats from later populations.] Each woman needed about 9 children to *maintain* the population!

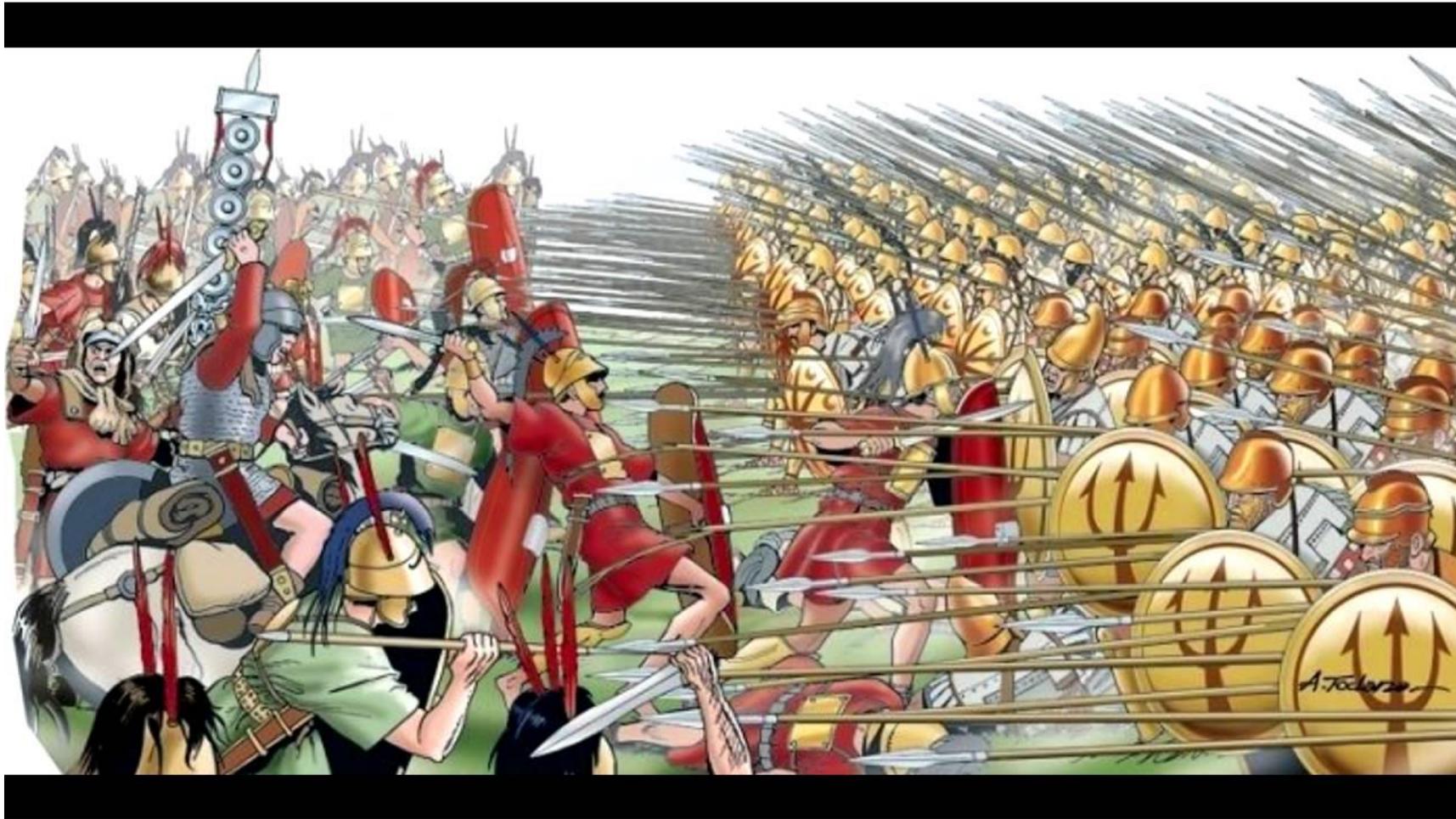


XXX. The notorious brutal childrearing practices of the Romans is at odds with a variety of touching tomb epitaphs of their children. The inscription under this portrait reads: “To the dearest Martial, a slave child, who lived two years, ten months and eight days. [For him] well deserving, Tiberius Claudius Vitalis provided [this monument].” 98 - 117 A.D.

Rome's Contemporaries

Egyptians: Nile, bread basket of Rome. Battle of Actium, Siege of Alexandria.
Cleopatra, Caesar, Antony – (*See the movie: it's more exciting than the history, and it's just as informative...*) ☺





Greeks: Had early colonies in southern Italy and Sicily; (earliest Greek language fragments found in Italy); Greek was more widely spoken throughout the Roman Empire than Latin (!) Romans conquered Greeks in Macedonia in 230 B.C.E. and Greece in 146 B.C.E. (Corinth destroyed).



Etruscans: *Very little known about, no writing extant.* Less sexually “inhibited” than the conservative Romans... Gladiatorial combat borrowed from Etruscans; Roman law inspired by Etruscan law. This was the culture that ended before Romulus, the first Roman king, began his reign, 753 B.C.E.



Carthaginians: Phoenician traders, builders (1st massive scale apartment buildings), engineers. Elaborate harbor, cisterns, domestic plumbing, and unified sewage systems were in use years *before* they were in Rome. City of Carthage was at least 300,000, huge by ancient standards.



Rome fought 3 wars with Carthage (**Punic Wars**);
Baal; human sacrifice; Carthaginians flayed and tortured prisoners;
crucifixion borrowed from Carthaginians.
(Roman description of enemies is often propaganda.)



Gauls: Sacked Rome in 390 B.C.E.; were “ethnically cleansed” (1 M dead) by Caesar in 58 – 50 B.C.E. Eventually, eventually, some Gauls became members of Roman senate. Greek visitor to Gaul in 1st Century B.C.E. describes severed heads of slain enemy warriors hanging outside of their hut doors.



Dacians: North of the Danube, in what is present day Romania. Brutal stories of abused captured Romans by Dacian women; mass quantities of looted **gold**; lengthy victory celebrations in the city of Rome.



Persians (Parthians and Sassanian Empires): Beginning with a dramatic defeat of Crassus at the Battle of Carrhae conflicts continued for over 600 years, which effectively limited Rome's eastern expansion.



Goths: Due to migration changes, Goths crossed Danube River into northern Italy. In 4th Century, due to various broken promises on the part of corrupt Roman generals, the Goths, who initially wanted to become Roman, defeated them at Adrianople, 378 C.E.



Visigoths: *Alaric*, sack of Rome, 410 C.E.



Huns: “The origin of all evils: the people of the Huns who dwell beyond the Sea of Azov near the frozen ocean, and are quite abnormally savage.” – Ammianus, (historian). A confederation of nomadic tribes. 4th Century invasions led to widespread migration of various Germanic tribes throughout Europe, leading to violent contact with the Roman Empire.



“The Huns considered the Romans to be paying them tribute, whereas the Romans preferred to view this as payment for services rendered.” – Wikipedia.

(“They have become both masters and slaves of the Romans.” – Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople) [We do not know what language the Huns spoke!]



The
image
works

EHIP5102431 'Pope Leo I, Repulsing Attila', (detail), 1511-14. Vatican Museums and Galleries, Vatican City, Italy. Attila, Pope Julius II, Pope Leo I, Raphael (creator)k. © Art Media / HIP / The Image Works

Attila's *near* sack of Rome, 452 C.E.: Pope Leo persuades Attila not to attack.
(Ancient city of Aquileia, however, utterly destroyed).



Teutones: Tribe from Germany, pushed from Baltic region into central Europe.



Cimbris: Another of the many iron-age Celtic tribes that joined with the Teutones in migration south into France, intending to push into Italy. Many Germanic tribes had violent encounters with Rome.



Vandals: Genseric, 455 C.E. (“...by the standards of the age,
[the sack was] restrained.”)

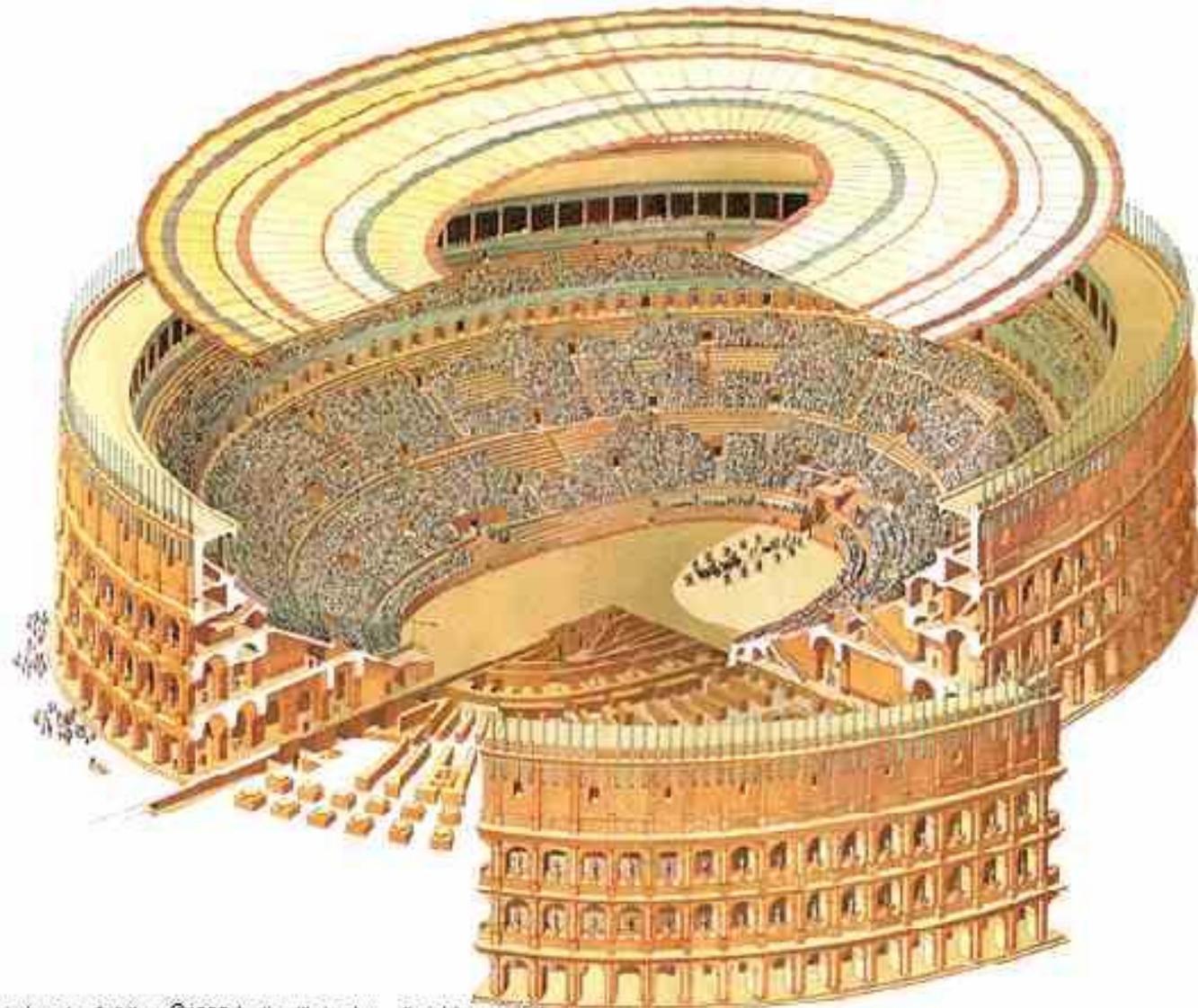


Barbarian invasions *did* contribute mightily to the overall “Fall of Rome,” unlike thesis of many post W.W. II historians and Francis Schaeffer, (*How Should We Then Live.*) Rome didn’t decline because of “decadence:” if that’s a historian’s thesis, it says more about their moral concerns than about what the evidence supports. If Rome declined due to moral decay, why do we not also attribute the decline of virtually *every other ancient civilization* to the same cause?



Rome *Qua* **European** (“barbarian”) tribes: **tribes gradually (over centuries) adopted and matched Roman military tactics.** (Roman military paradoxically weakened by Marian reforms as generals promised land to their soldiers; this motivated generals into unscrupulous campaigns.) **In later Empire, “barbarians” were often previous members of the Roman army who had become increasingly “Romanized,” acquiring Roman military tactics and training.**

Rome at its Worst...



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COLOSSEUM

A giant torture chamber? (Y / N)



Nero: Murderous, grandiose, capricious – eventually stabbed himself to death rather than face trial and certain death at the hands of his opponents.

Caligula: His reign started off fairly well, but he began to exhibit increasingly erratic behavior. (Possibly suffered from mental illness, E.g. temporal lobe epilepsy, hyperthyroidism, or Wilson's disease. Eventually murdered by officers of the Praetorian Guard.

Elagabalus: Disregarded Roman religious traditions and sexual taboos, murdered in a plot orchestrated by his mother.



Sexual scandals: A sport of the wealthy; some descriptions are propaganda from subsequent rulers. In ancient Rome, a strongly patriarchal culture, men had more “freedom” than women. **Women were expected to be faithful.**

vomitoria

(Latin pl.; sing. vomitorium. English sing.: vomitory) Theatre entrances or exits for audience; vaulted passageways leading to or from the **cavea**; entrances piercing the banks of seats of theatres or amphitheatres.

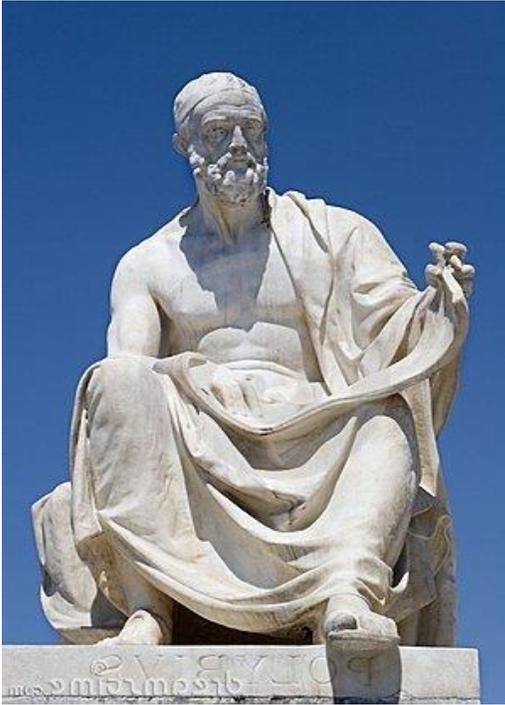




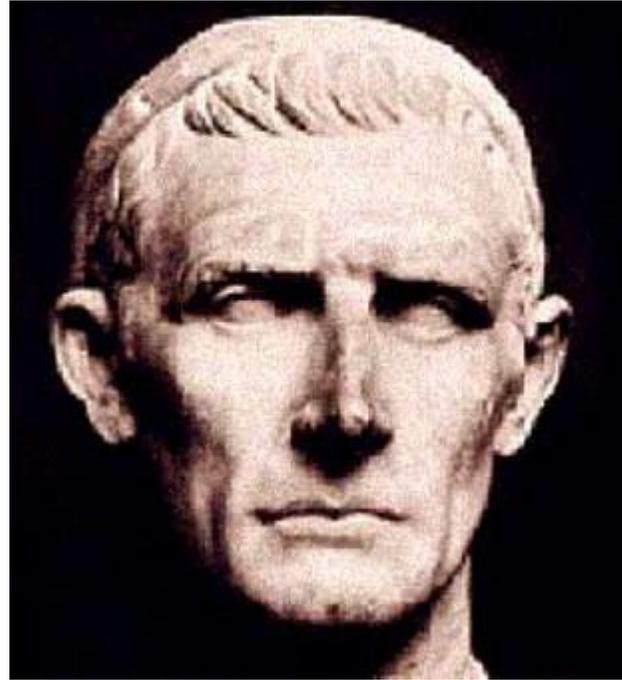
Themed banquets of gluttony:
“Never really (or *rarely*) happened!” – Beard



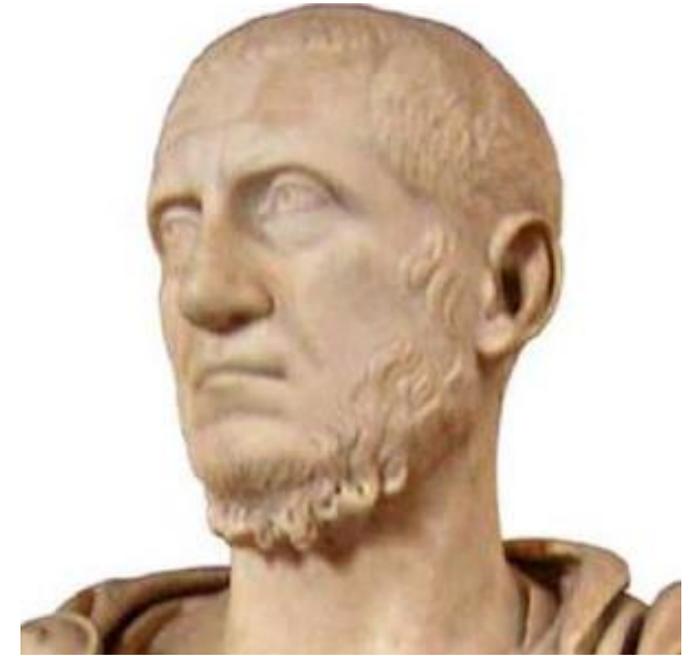
*ON THE *OTHER* HAND...*



POLYBIUS



LIVY



TACITUS

Romans would be first to admit their faults. In fact, many excesses are known precisely *because* of them.
(A fascinating noble effort to achieve virtue through stoicism and emulation of the Greeks.)

- Another historian, Tacitus, wrote bitterly about Augustus and his successors, who, he felt, had destroyed Roman liberty. He admired the simple culture of the Germans who lived on Rome's northern frontier and would later invade the empire.



The line, “*Solitudinem fecerunt, pacem appellant,*” (“They made it a desert and called it peace”) by Tacitus embodies *Roman* criticism of the project of empire itself. It was *not*, as one historian posits, the Enlightenment that gave us the tools to criticize ancient Rome – it merely gave us more specialized tools.



“Oath of the Horatii,” “celebrates patriotism and questions its cost.”



Contemporary citizens of Rome were ambivalent about Caesar's genocidal conquest of Gaul (1 million dead). Some charged him with precisely the crime of "genocide," or a historically equivalent version of that term.



PEACE IN ROME MEANT:

A strong army posted in areas where enemies would cause trouble

Pax Romana!

(27 B.C.E. – 180 C.E.)



Rome's genius: assimilating citizen recruits from conquered lands and letting people become what they *weren't*.

Fin,
Session 2
(of IV)

Next Week's Questions...

- How did ancient Rome influence – and get influenced *by* – the Christian church? (Christ & Culture model in framing this question...)
- Christianity and Rome in conflict and communion
- It was Romans who persecuted *Roman* Christians!
- Constantine's conversion – and conversion of empire
- Roman Christians persecuted *pagan Romans*! (Shoe on other foot...)
O'Donnel's book, *Pagans*
- Paul benefited Roman infrastructure to spread the gospel