

# Ancient Rome And Today's Society

## [Part 2]

Another reason for the fall of the Roman Empire was the religious confusion.

Religion in general has failed to give a clear answer to the most important question:

What is the purpose of human life?

To the vast majority of people, religion is commonly presented as sterile, outmoded, irrelevant to today's needs and problems.

There is no lack of religious form, ceremony and ritual but little is offered to motivate people to change their lives for the better.

Today's religions seem to only bring divisions and conflict between people.

**2 Timothy 3:5** [King James] *“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”*

There seems to be very little power for good in any religion.

Early Roman paganism was full of fatal superstition and ritual but it did support the ideals of religion and state, leading to unified thinking and action.

With the ascent of the Roman Emperor Constantine in the early 300s AD Christianity became the favoured religion of the Roman Empire, but unity of faith eluded the Emperor.

Christianity demanded a higher standard of morality than the ancient paganism, but it had no profound moral effect on the Roman citizen.

*“For the vast majority of ordinary people Christianity caused no fundamental change of attitude.”*  
[*The Later Roman Empire* by A.H.M. Jones, page 1063]

While the adoption of state-endorsed Christianity brought the Empire a step closer to the ideal of unity, its conflict with ancient paganism made it a surface-only unity.

Roman Christianity absorbed more and more pagan traditions and philosophy, many of which have been handed down to us today.

[For more detailed information on this subject, please download and study articles on this website under heading of *'Religion'*]

Quotation from *'Daily Life in Ancient Rome'* by Jerome Carcopino, pages 121-122:

*“The Roman pantheon still persisted, apparently immutable ... but the spirits of men had fled from the old religion, it still commanded their service but no longer their hearts or their belief ... in the motley Rome of this second century it had wholly lost its power over human hearts.”*

Many of the religious trends that affected Rome are with us today, religion is in a state of confusion and turmoil.

The present day Roman Catholic church has been wracked with controversy up to its highest levels of authority.

Protestantism is divided into hundreds of sects is also having its own “*identity crisis*.”

In the midst of pervasive religious and moral confusion, many are today turning to astrology and the occult in hope of finding the answers to the big questions in life.

Who am I?

Where am I going?

Some are attempting to “*expand the mind*” by the use of drugs.

It was this way in Rome, too, at the time when the mighty Empire was crumbling.

*“Predictive astrology, like divination and occultism, generally tends to take hold in times of confusion, uncertainty and the breakdown of religious belief. Astrologers and assorted sorcerers were busy at work in Rome while the Empire was declining and prevalent throughout Europe during the great 17<sup>th</sup> century waves of plague. Today’s young stargazers claim to be responding to a similar sense of disintegration and disenchantment.”* [Quotation from article in ‘Time’ magazine]

Just as Ancient Rome welcomed Eastern mysticism and occult practices, so many in Western world are following suit.

### **Ancient Rome indulged in a pleasure binge –**

With the conquering of many nations, wealth, trade and fortunes were to be made, but wealth became a crucial problem.

Quotation from ‘*The Influence of Wealth in Imperial Rome*’ by William Stearns Davis:

*“... the excessive desire for wealth without regard to methods or to duty towards posterity ... the downright sensuality were accomplishing their perfect work. The economic evil was at the bottom. First Italy, then the vast Empire, devoted itself for centuries to a feverish effort for getting money by any means, and to spend that money on selfish enjoyments. Other things went for little ...”*

*Their fall was great ... while the lesson of their fall lies patent to the twentieth century.”* [pages 314, 317, 330, 334-335]

Quotation from ‘*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*’ by Edward Gibbon:

*“From the morning to the evening, careless of the sun or of the rain, the spectators, who sometimes accounted in number of four hundred thousand [the giant circus Maximus in Rome seated this many], remained in eager attention, their eyes fixed on the horses and charioteers, their minds agitated with hope and fear for the success of the colours which they espoused, and the happiness of Rome appeared to hang on the event of the race.”* [volume 11, page 148]

In the book ‘*Those About To Die*’ by Daniel P. Mannix portrays startling conditions about Roman life. In the following quotation note the interplay between life in Ancient Rome and conditions today in the Western world.

*“In a sense people were trapped. Rome had overextended herself. She had become, as much by accident as design, the dominant nation in the world. The cost of maintaining the ‘Pax Romana’, the Peace of Rome, over most of the known world was proving too great even for the enormous resources of the mighty Empire ...”*

*The cost of the gigantic military programme was only one of Rome’s headaches. To encourage industry in her various satellite nations, Rome attempted a policy of unrestricted trade, but the Roman workingman was unable to compete with the cheap foreign labour and demanded high tariffs ... the government was finally forced to subsidise the Roman working class to make up the difference*

*between their “real wages” [the actual value of what they were producing] and the wages required to keep up their relatively high standard of living. As a result, thousands of workmen lived on this subsidy and did nothing whatever, sacrificing their standard of living for a life of ease.”*

Today, low cost imports threaten home-produced goods and we have high numbers of people living on state welfare, it not being to their advantage to be employed and pay taxes to the state.

Back to the Roman lifestyle, by Daniel P. Mannix:

*“With the economic and military position of the Empire too hopelessly complicated for the crowd to comprehend, they turned more and more towards the only thing they could understand, the arena and its games.”*

These games in the arena were cleverly promoted by the Caesars to keep the people’s minds occupied by something to which they could relate.

### **Rome endowed its professional sports heroes with great glory.**

*“The charioteers knew glory too, though they were low-born origin, mainly slaves emancipated only after recurrent success. They were lifted out of their humble estates by the fame they acquired and the fortunes they rapidly amassed from the gifts of magistrates and emperors and the exorbitant salaries they extracted ... as a price for remaining with the colours.” [‘Daily Life in Ancient Rome’, by Carcopino, page 219]*

Professional athletes today are demanding, and receiving, large salaries that allow them to be financially set up for life.

### **Gambling on sporting activities, thrived in affluent Rome –**

*“But the passionate devotion which they [the charioteers] inspired in a whole people was fed also from more tainted sources. It was related to the passion for gambling ... the victory of one chariot enriched some, impoverished others, the hope of winning unearned money held the Roman crowd all the more tyrannically in its grip in that the larger proportion was unemployed. The rich would stake a fortune, the poor the last penny.” [‘Daily Life in Ancient Rome’ by Carcopino, pages 220-221]*

There are other trends which manifest the growing craze for unrestrained pleasure and thrills.

Television violence and sexual orgies are just like watching the gory spectacles in the Roman arenas and stage.

Young people are learning nothing from this display but contempt for human life and dignity.

*“Almost from the beginning the Roman stage was gross and immoral. It was one of the main agencies to which must be attributed the undermining of the originally sound moral life of Roman society. So absorbed did the people become in the indecent representations of the stage that they lost all thought and care of the affairs of real life.” [Myers, ‘Rome, Its Rise And Fall’, pages 515-516]*

The Christian Bible claims that in the “last days” of society as we know it would be just like what we have seen in Ancient Rome and today’s Western world.

**2 Timothy 3:1-5** [King James] *“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.”*

### **Inflation was part of the downfall of the Roman Empire –**

*“The emperors in their need for money issued a vast quantity of coin. Not possessing enough of the precious metals for these issues, they alloyed the gold with silver, the silver with copper, and the copper with lead, thus debasing the coinage and ruining in the end men who had once been rich. This measure cut at the root of trade and industry ... the government mint in the third century became a vast manufactory of base coin.” [M. Rostovtzeff’s book ‘Rome’ page 276]*

These measures taken by Diocletian in the late third century, struggling to restore quality of the economy, backfired.

Rather than fix prices, it made people afraid to sell. Therefore, demand skyrocketed and so did the prices, utter economic stagnation resulted.

Even with the temporary help of all the reforms put in operation by Diocletian and Constantine, the ultimate economic end of the Empire crept closer and closer.

**Another significant factor that played a part in the decline of the economic base of the Roman Empire was rampant disease epidemics –**

There was a devastating plague under Marcus Aurelius in the second century and several more in the third century.

Also, droughts and famine wrought havoc periodically.

**Another significant factor that contributed to the breakdown of the character of the populace was welfare. State welfare handouts became a way of life. –**

The government could ill-afford to cut down on these welfare services, lest it face a major uprising.

At times the city of Rome had from one third to one half of the population receiving part of its subsistence from public charity.

We face the same burden of welfare in the Western world today.

Quotation from *‘The New Deal in Old Rome’* by H.J. Haskell, pages 228-229:

*“... the history of the dole carries a warning ... even under the Empire it became a permanently demoralising factor in the social and economic life. People were schooled to expect something for nothing. This failure of the old Roman virtues of self-reliance and initiative was conspicuously shown in that part of the population that was on relief. It had far wider aspects. Emergencies that would not have dismayed the men of the republic were too much for the men of the later Empire.”*

**Most of western civilisation is merely repeating the financial and economic mistakes of the Roman Empire.**

The Roman Empire was administered by big central government.

It was a vast machine that awed less-organised and less-disciplined nations. But over time it developed alarming weaknesses we need to be warned of today.

Quotation from *‘Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire’* by Samuel Dill, page 277:

*“... long before the [Barbarian] invasions of the reign of Honorius, AD 395-423, the fabric of Roman society and administration was honeycombed by moral and economic vices, which made the belief in the eternity of Rome a vain delusion.”*

Rome possibly could have “fallen” several times in its history. But the leadership of strong men, despite other personal vices and shortcomings, delayed the breakdown of the Empire by the institution of strong administrative reforms.

Following on the heels of Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar more perfectly welded together the unity of the Empire, saving it from the corruption and civil war of the later Republic. Diocletian and Constantine delayed the “end” again by certain reforms in administration and economics in the late third and fourth centuries.

Theodosius and a few other emperors tried desperately to put a stop to rampant corruption and injustices towards the end of the fourth century. But in spite of such leaders, the end of the Western Empire finally came.

A few struggling and concerned men at the top couldn't alter the course of a largely apathetic and morally decadent populace which combined disastrously with the politically corrupt maladministration of underlings.

With the death of Theodosius [AD 395] the decay of the Roman Empire in the West was rapidly accelerated.

Following emperors were appreciably weaker and incompetent.

They became the puppets of scheming advisers, administrators and military commanders, the latter being largely of Barbarian stock.

As the Empire grew, a gigantic bureaucracy developed, but in true form, with this rapid expansion of civil service came a downgrading in the quality of the administrators.

By the days of Constantine, administrative corruption was rampant.

Quotation from ‘*The Later Roman Empire*’ by A.H.M. Jones, page 1054]

*“It is clear from Constantine’s legislation that he was shocked by the corruption and extortion which prevailed among provincial governors, but he was unable to restore respectable standards of probity ... excessive centralisation involved an immense volume of clerical labour and slowed up the processes of government. Nor did it achieve its object of checking corruption.”* [pages 1056-1057]

Just like today, “red tape” didn't help.

The paradox is clear. The very institution of law after law is evidence that order was breaking down.

Quotation from ‘*Roman Society in the Last Century of the Western Empire*’ by Samuel Dill, page 229:

*“The last and deepest impression which the inquirer will carry with him, as he rises from a study of the Theodosian Code [issued AD 438] is that fraud and greed are everywhere triumphant, that the rich are growing richer and more powerful while the poor are becoming poorer and more helpless, and that the imperial government, inspired with the best intentions, had lost control of the vast machine of government.”*

But it wasn't just the bureaucracy which was often criminal.

The whole society was infected with the same corrupt spirit, as a result of seeing such corruption in the administration.

Quotation from ‘*The End of the Ancient World and the Beginning of the Middle Ages*’ by Ferdinand Lot:

*“Everyone stole. In the army, the clerks stole the pay, the Navicularii [commercial tradesmen] charged with the service of the Annona [crop supply], stole from the corn, they themselves were exploited by those set over the ports. The recruiters accepted for conscripts the refuse of the colonial areas. The postal administration exploited travellers. Public servants took bribes for judicial audiences ... the State failed in its role of protector. It was ill served and betrayed by its own agents*

*... this aristocracy was disloyal in its service to the government, while cowering before it. It secretly thwarted it, not so much for hatred as from a spirit of opposition and from selfishness ... the ruling class lost all spontaneity and initiative, and in its case also character fell very low ... the Empire had become too vast, too cunning and too complicated a mechanism.*" [pages 176, 185]

Quotation from '*History of the Later Roman Empire*' by J.B. Bury:

*"In the same years in which Barbarians were actively harrying the Roman provinces, mutual assistance and concord between the Eastern and Western divisions of the Empire was urgently needed. Unfortunately, the reins of government were in the hands of men who for different reasons were unpopular and in all their political actions were influenced chiefly by the consideration of their own fortunes."* [page 126]

**Today, there is a growing consciousness of a credibility gap between what politicians and administrators say and what they actually do.**

Today government and administration, large and small, is held in ever-lowering esteem by growing numbers of the public.