

The Significance of the Roman, Germanic and Christian Foundations: How Gibbon
Misunderstood the Fall of the Roman West

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis deals with how eighteenth-century English historian Edward Gibbon approached the issues of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. After a historical presentation of the western Roman Empire until 476 CE (the year of its alleged demise), this thesis presents Gibbon's arguments in order to counter them with examples from the Ostrogothic and Frankish kingdoms. Against Gibbon's argument that Christianity causes the empires decline and fall, the thesis argues for a series of transformations and a certain degree of continuity in the Ostrogothic and Frankish kingdoms. New Germanic kings fused Roman culture and Christian customs with their own traditions to give themselves legitimacy and continue the traditions of the past.

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For my mother and sisters
Thanks for your constant support

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Introduction

The fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE marked an end, at least in the West, to a powerful state structure that had been around for about 1000 years. What caused the downfall of such a powerful empire? The Roman world, which had begun as a Republic around 500 BCE, was then transformed into the Roman Empire after the battle of Actium in 31 BCE.¹ During the first century, the Roman Empire expanded its territory and controlled most of the Mediterranean Basin. At the same time, there was a split happening in the East within the Judaic traditions of the past. This split came in the person of Jesus Christ who was born during the reign of Augustus, which marked the beginning of the Christian movement.²

During the second century, the Roman territory had reached its largest expansion and now it concentrated on defending its borders. The empire had grown too fast and that represented one of the main problems it faced. The large territory became difficult to defend against Germanic tribes.³ Add to this issue the emergence of Christianity, an increasingly problematic religion for the Roman authorities which was becoming more and more popular. The emperors during the third and fourth centuries persecuted Christians to persuade them to turn away from their faith and follow pagan Roman traditions. It was not until Constantine the Great that Christianity became a major force in the history of the Roman Empire. With Constantine's support, the Christian faith reached new heights and became the dominant religion of the empire. With the Roman world having turned to Christianity, it still faced the problems of the Germanic tribes that were migrating into the Roman territory. This had some dire consequences that led to the sack of Rome in 410 CE. Pagans blamed Christians for this punishment on Rome for having the empire turn its back on the old gods and this was the punishment the old gods sent on Rome.⁴ By 476 CE the last Roman Emperor was forced to abdicate his position and this became

¹ See Mary T. Boatwright, Daniel J. Gargola, and Richard J. A. Talbert, *A Brief History of the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 25.

² Jesus was born sometime between 6 BCE —1 CE, see John Vidmar, *The Catholic Church Through the Ages: A History* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 11.

³ For most of this paper, the term Germanic tribes will be used, however, in some cases for consistency with Gibbon the term barbarians will be applied.

⁴ Augustine of Hippo's *the City of God's* main purpose was to respond against the pagan belief that Christianity was the cause of the sack of Rome in 410 CE and to blame for the decline of the Roman Empire, see Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. and ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 1998).

known as the end of the Western Roman Empire. The questions brought by the pagans about Christianity causing the sack of Rome did not go away and the perceptions that Christianity caused the fall of the empire often resurfaced during the following centuries. Did Christianity cause the decline and then fall of the Roman Empire? Another important question was whether or not the Germanic migrations also caused the empire's decline. One eighteenth-century scholar, Edward Gibbon, did believe these were the primary cause for the empire's collapse.

The objective of this thesis is to test Edward Gibbon's thesis in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which argues that Christianity and Germanic culture brought the decline to the Roman West.⁵ As this thesis will demonstrate, Gibbon underestimated the constructive results that Christian and Germanic culture brought to a declining empire and thus a transformation—as opposed to an outright fall—appears to have been the most likely result of what happened in the Western Roman Empire between the fifth and seventh centuries. This thesis will be developed by considering the history of the Roman West and the arguments brought forth by Gibbon. The thesis will also question the notion that a dark age existed between the collapse of the Roman West and the emergence and flourishing of the medieval kingdoms. It will demonstrate that the Roman Empire did face a decline but was far from a fall, since the new political realities in fact continued traditions that were established by the Roman Empire along with Christianity re-enforcing the unity between the peoples and helped the Germanic culture transform itself in the process.

According to Gibbon, there were two main causes that allegedly led the decline and fall of the Western Roman Empire. The first cause argues that Christianity, as the new religion, weakened the political, social and economic structures of the empire.⁶ He blames Christians for infecting the empire with its ideology—projecting a reward in the afterlife—in order to corrupt the political structure of the empire, which led to its decline and eventual collapse. Christianity's lack of participation within the social and economic life of the empire was also seen as a cause for decline. The second main cause is that the Roman Empire faced exterior problems with the

⁵ From this point forward, the text will be mostly referred to *Decline and Fall*. The edition that is being used for this thesis is Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. ed. David Womersley, 3 Vol, (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995). When referencing the text, I will reference the volume and page number of the Womersley edition.

⁶ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley, vol. I. (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995), 447. Volume 1 originally published in 1776 and volume 2 originally published in 1781 here collected in one volume. For a more modern approach, see J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Germanic tribes. By causing inner issues of governments, Christianity left the empire open to the attacking migrating Germanic tribes. Once the Germanic tribes had entered the Roman Territory, they further caused internal strife that the empire was unable to deal with.

Edward Gibbon, a Protestant historian, wrote three massive volumes which constituted an important work on Roman history during the 18th century. Gibbon was a historian at a time, the Age of Enlightenment, when modern historical scholarship was in its infancy and that is why his arguments should be closely scrutinized. Like many others of his contemporaries, he viewed the medieval age, also called the age of faith, as being a very superstitious time and negative for human flourishing. During the time that Gibbon wrote his histories, England was fighting a war with its American colony and France was going through a revolution. The Age of Enlightenment began to ask questions of the role that faith played in history and society. Against this background, Gibbon was heavily influenced by his views on Christianity, the result of which was negativity towards the religion.

This thesis will demonstrate how Gibbon disregarded the positive effects that Christianity along with Germanic culture had for the West. It is because of these positive effects that the Roman Empire was transformed into something new.⁷ Christianity continued Roman traditions and helped it merge with the Germanic culture to form medieval Europe.⁸ Christianity owes a debt of gratitude to the Roman Empire for having helped it expand under the reign of Emperor Constantine. Living side-by-side with the Roman world meant that Christians had become accustomed to the Roman culture. They even borrowed aspects from the Roman religion and became—in a way—Roman because it had appropriated much of the culture. It is thanks to the way that Christianity appropriated the Roman tradition that it helped the Germanic tribes,

⁷ The 20th-century Catholic historian Christopher Dawson believed that Christianity prolonged the life of the Roman Empire. To further push his statement, he also believes that it was Christianity, by the ways of the monks spreading the faith, that helped the Germanic kingdoms merge Christianity into their pagan cultures and affected their identity and how they were living, see Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932), 177. A more recent scholar, Peter Brown tends to agree with Dawson about the role that Christianity had at the end of the Roman Empire in the West. Brown argues that the Germanic tribes tried to imitate the Roman way of life and by doing so merged their pagan culture with Christianity. Christianity then helped change pagan worshippers and turn them towards the Christian faith. Brown also suggests that there was an exchange of culture that was very instrumental for the Germanic tribes. By doing this they were better able to learn from one another. This might have sped the process of creating medieval Europe, see Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1971), 118.

⁸ Gibbon, 447. Gibbon argues for a short medieval period, from the eighth to the fourteenth century. This means that he dismisses two centuries that were critical to the formation of medieval Europe. Unlike Gibbon, Jacques Le Goff argues for a very long medieval period starting somewhere between the third and seventh century up until the middle of the eighteenth century, see Jacques Le Goff, *Faut-il vraiment découper l'histoire en tranches ?* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2014).

assimilate the remains of the empire and become powerful kingdoms. With the Germanic groups accepting the Christian faith, we see a new world emerging from the ruins of the Roman Empire. These new Christian kingdoms became prosperous and eventually evolved into successful medieval states like France and England, proving that Christianity helped create lasting kingdoms and did not contribute to the destruction of the Roman Empire.⁹

Methodologies

The thesis will employ different historical methods. The first of these is the “Great Thinker” method combined with the “Synchronic” method.¹⁰ Using the “Great Thinker’s” model, we will look at Edward Gibbon. This will give us an advantage when looking at his view of the Roman world. One of the weaknesses of this method is the possible biases of the author. Gibbon writes from the point of view that he believes is right. By acknowledging Gibbon’s biases right from the beginning, this thesis will be better able to see alternative viewpoints which might help shed light about when he is writing and avoid the problems that this method could present. The “Synchronic” method will help us balance the problems of the “Great Thinker’s” method by looking at the broader dialogue that was taking place in the Roman world. The weakness of the “Synchronic” method is that it is broad and covers a vast period. These two methods complement each other because they counterbalance each other’s weaknesses.

A Christian Historiography method will also be used for this thesis paper.¹¹ The method looks at the meaning of the Christian world and how theology might have influenced the writer of history. The Christian Historiographer sees the world as linear and will generally write about events that happened before to put everything into context.

Another method that will be used in this thesis is Source Criticism. This method will become useful when looking at the background of a primary source to verify its validity.¹² The advantage to doing Source Criticism is that we can analyze why, who, and what is the purpose of

⁹ It is outside the scope of this thesis, but it should be noted that these kingdoms have eventually evolved into prominent modern, democratic European states.

¹⁰ James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 30–31.

¹¹ The Oxford Dictionary defines historiographer as someone who studies historical writings. In this context it means someone who studies Christian writings in history, see <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/historiography>

¹² Pauline A. Viviano, “Source Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning*, ed. Stephen R. Haynes and Steven L. Mckenzie (Westminister: John Knox Press, 1993), 36.

a text? By looking at the primary sources, we will be better able to see a general picture of the time and how it was governed.

Division of Thesis

This thesis will be divided into four chapters. The first chapter will briefly examine the history of the Roman West in three parts. The first part will look at the Roman Empire from Augustus (r. 27 BCE - 14 CE) to its fall in 476 CE, with an emphasis on the importance Constantine the Great had for Christianity. This leads us to the second part which looks at the rise of Christianity. The third part will look at the early Germanic migrations. The consequences of the fall are numerous, some argued that Christianity was involved in weakening the Roman Empire which then made it easy for Odoacer to bring down the empire in 476 CE. With the rise of Christianity, we will be able to understand a Christian perspective of what was happening at the time. Looking briefly at the Germanic migrations, we will see if the argument about them being aggressive was true.¹³ By analyzing the patterns of migration, we will be better able to understand in what way the Germanic tribes entered the empire, whether it was by civil invitation which promoted an exchange of culture or by aggressive takeover which caused tensions between peoples. The final part of this chapter will look at the possible reasons for the fall of the Roman Empire.

The second chapter will concentrate on Gibbon's argument concerning Christianity causing the decline and eventual fall of the Roman Empire. To understand his argument, we will have to look briefly at the life of Edward Gibbon, seeing his experiences that influenced his ideas on the Roman Empire. This will help us understand his perspective and see why he believed religion was a cause of decline. This chapter will also look extensively at Gibbon's arguments towards Christianity. The arguments are placed throughout *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, but this thesis will concentrate on chapters XV and XVI of his work, because this is where he argues five causes of Christian progress within the empire. Along with this argument the chapter will look at his ideas on the Germanic migrations and the role that they played in the decline of the Roman West.

¹³ Dawson argues that migrations were not aggressive but progressive over centuries, see Dawson, *The Making of Europe*, 82, see also Walter Goffart, "Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians," *The American Historical Review* 86 (1981): 275–306.

Chapter Three will look at the aftermath of the Roman Empire, with the emphasis put on the Frankish and Ostrogothic kingdoms. These two kingdoms will be used to demonstrate a continuation with the Roman Empire, although Gibbon said it had fallen. The two kingdoms will also act as a comparison to one another, to see how one more successfully unified its people in a common faith. The Ostrogoths under Theodoric the Great were divided between the different types of Christianity and Germanic pagans. Theodoric created a political system that segregated his people and this led to complications in Theodoric's reign. Unlike the Ostrogoths, the Franks under Clovis I (r. 481-511) accepted the Christian culture that was present in Gaul. Clovis and the Franks merged their Germanic culture with that of the Roman traditions of the past. Christianity helped solidify this union into a successful and powerful force in the Mediterranean Basin.

The final chapter will look at three case studies that demonstrate that Gibbon was wrong in his views that Christianity and Germanic culture brought the end of the Western Roman Empire. The first case study to be looked at will be the mythological origins of the Franks. This demonstrates a continuation with the Greco-Roman world mythology. The Franks, having understood the importance of continuing the traditions of Rome, created an origin story for themselves to show that they are as great as the oldest Roman civilization. This also demonstrates a fusion of older Roman traditions with Germanic culture. The next case study will look at the cult of the saints in the fifth century. The cult of the saints shows the importance that the Christian faith had at the time when the Roman Empire was declining. Christianity used some Roman traditions and transformed them into a tool that could be used for themselves. The society benefited from the cult of the saints on many levels whether it be to unify the peoples under one faith or use the saints to get closer to God. The cults of the saints were also a useful tool for the conversion of Germanic peoples. By being able to associate with a saint this facilitated their conversion. The final part of this chapter looks at the role of the bishop in the newly formed Germanic kingdoms. The bishop is a key figure because they act as the keepers of the Roman past and help the new kings administer laws and legislation. This relationship between king and bishop was always to be treated carefully, as seen in Gregory of Tour's *History of the Franks*. It was important that both these leaders cooperated with one another for the success of the new kingdom.

To have a good understanding of Gibbon's thesis, we must look briefly at the history of the Roman Empire. The next chapter will demonstrate how Christianity became great in the time of the Roman Empire and will also look at the brief history of the Germanic migrations and their interactions with the Romans.

Chapter 1: Foundations of the Roman West to the Fall (476 CE)

This chapter will begin with a brief examination of the Roman Empire from its foundations with Augustus (r. 27 BCE-14 CE) until the end of the age of Theodosius I (r. 379–395 CE). During this time, the Roman Empire succeeded in becoming the most powerful empire in the Mediterranean Basin. Next we will take a brief look at the Christian movement and how it was affected by the political climate of the empire. It was not until Constantine, who legalized Christianity in 312 CE, that the Christian movement began to be a key player in the empire. By 380 CE, Christianity had expanded to become a powerful unifying force for the people in the Roman Empire. Defeating paganism, Christianity became the official religion of the state. This chapter will also look at the rise of the Germanic tribes and the role they played in possibly weakening the Roman Empire. The interactions between the barbarians and the Romans are an important part of the history of the collapse of the empire in the West. Mostly ignored in the first and second centuries, it was not until the Aurelian dynasty in the third century that many Germanic tribes became a problem for the empire. The Germanic tribes eventually came to settle down into Roman Territory because of external pressure from the Huns. The final part of this chapter will briefly discuss three possible reasons for the collapse of the Roman Empire.

The Roman Empire in the First Three Centuries (27 BCE - 300 CE)

The Roman Republic ended in a chaotic way. Civil wars and power struggles were common to gain control of the Roman Territory. The wars between Octavian (63-27 BCE) and Mark Antony (83-30 BCE) lasted from 36 to 30 BCE, with the decisive battle of Actium, deciding the fate of the Republic in 31 BCE.¹⁴ The battle brought Octavian, adopted son of Julius Caesar (100 BCE-44 BCE), against Mark Antony, which by this time had fallen in love with Cleopatra VII (r. 51-30 BCE). This clash is considered as a metaphor for West vs East, where the West represented by Octavian signifies order and liberty and the East represented by Mark

¹⁴Mary T. Boatwright, Daniel J. Gargola and Richard J. A Talbert, *A Brief History of the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 178.

Antony is viewed as Eastern despotism.¹⁵ Ultimately, Octavian became the victor and led Rome on a path that changed it from a Republic to an Empire.

Octavian created the illusion that he was restoring the Republic, but in reality, he was beginning to seize power for himself and create something new. The old structures of the Roman Republic were still visible, but did not amount to much without his consent. He designed a way that made the people elect him to become *imperator*, and, once made imperator, he had all the power.¹⁶ During this time Octavian changed his name to Augustus (r. 27 BCE-14 CE). Suetonius states that he transformed “Rome from a city of bricks to a city of marble.”¹⁷ Augustus expanded the empire as far north west as the Danube River and in the east he added the region of Galatia, and in Asia minor he added Judea. Both these regions had previously been client kingdoms¹⁸ but now were part of the empire.¹⁹ The urbanization of the Roman Empire was very successful in helping expansion.²⁰ Bringing the city to rural cultures also meant that the Romans brought citizenship and new civic traditions to the added territories. This created a link from city to city leading all the way back to Rome. “Client states were converted into provinces, provincial cities into colonies, and citizen rights were granted to provincials.”²¹

The following emperors tried to mimic Augustus in helping the empire expand but some, like Caligula (r.37-41 CE) and Nero (r. 54–68 CE), were concerned with personal pleasures.²² It was with the good emperors that the expansion of Rome came to its epitome.²³ Under these emperors there was rapid development and urbanization but mostly there was peace and prosperity. The profits made from the urbanization of provinces was put back into the system and help population growth.²⁴ This process helped the empire expand and become powerful within a relatively short period of time, about 150 years. But once the empire’s population grew too

¹⁵ Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe: An Introduction to the History of European Unity* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932), 19.

¹⁶ Boatwright et al., 184.

¹⁷ see Suetonius “Augustus,” in *The Lives of Caesars*, trans. J. C. Rolfe (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), XXVIII: 22–24.

¹⁸ Client kingdoms are not to be confused with the later Germanic kingdoms. The word is here used as a province that belongs to the Roman Empire but were left to govern itself.

¹⁹ Boatwright et al., 194.

²⁰ Dawson, 20.

²¹ Dawson, 21.

²² The Julio-Claudians are related to Augustus by his wife, Livia. Augustus never had any children; hence the reason the successive power transferred to those of Livia’s bloodline.

²³ The five good emperors: Nerva (r. 96–98 CE), Trajan (r. 98–117 CE), Hadrian (r. 117–138 CE), Antoninus Pius (r. 138-161 CE) and Marcus Aurelius (r. 161–180 CE).

²⁴ Dawson, 21.

much, this system of expansion showed flaws. Its biggest flaw was the need to keep expanding, in order for everything to run smoothly. After the heavy expansion, the system started to break down and weaken the military's might.²⁵ With the military not being used to conquer new land, it became weak and had trouble protecting the borders of the empire.²⁶

During the end of the second and most of the third centuries, emperors were men of military rank who sacrificed their time and energy to protect the frontiers of the Roman Empire.²⁷ Under the reign of Severus Septimius (r. 193–211 CE), the Roman army gained new privileges. That ultimately cost a lot for the Roman Empire to maintain. This led to heavy taxation on the population.²⁸

The Roman Empire was in a free-fall until Emperor Diocletian (r. 284–305 CE) came to rule and re-establish a structure to an empire that had expanded massively. Diocletian, seeing a time of civil strife and economic crisis, decided that if the Roman Empire was to survive he must bureaucratize it.²⁹ He created the Tetrarchy which was comprised of two Augusti and two Caesars, that is, two co-emperors and their sub-emperors.³⁰ This means that the emperor's power was to be shared with the others. This also acted as a check system, so that none of the leaders will have too much authority. Having the Roman Empire divided into four sections made it easier to defend its vast territory and avoided having one emperor running from one side of the empire to the other.³¹ From a bureaucratic point of view, this system worked because each member of the Tetrarchy solved some of the issues from his own area. The Tetrarchy also caused the city of Rome to lose its importance because the capitals for each sitting Tetrarch were not in Rome.³² In fact, Rome never became the middle of the empire again. Although this division functioned during Diocletian's time, it quickly fell apart after his retirement in 305 CE. The army once again began to be emperor-makers and, on Constantius' (r. 293–306 CE) death, backed his son—Constantine I (r. 306–337 CE)—as Augustus of the Western part of the empire.³³

²⁵ Dawson, 23.

²⁶ Dawson, 23.

²⁷ Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1971), 61.

²⁸ Dawson, 25.

²⁹ Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395–700* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 12.

³⁰ Cameron, 12.

³¹ Peter Brown, *The Rise of the Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity 200 – 1000* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 56.

³² This gave the new capitals more power than Rome as we will see with Ambrose of Milan's conflict with Theodosius I. The four capitals are Nicomedia, Sirmium, Mediolanum and Augusta Treverorum.

³³ Constantine I was Emperor from 307–337 CE. He becomes sole Emperor in 324 CE.

However the position had already been offered to another by the Eastern Augustus.³⁴ This then caused a civil war that ended the Tetrarchy. In the end, Constantine defeated Maxentius (r. 306–312 CE) in 312 CE at the battle of the Milvian Bridge. It was not until after his battle at the Milvian Bridge where Constantine’s conversion becomes more apparent. Constantine told Eusebius that while planning the campaign against Maxentius, he and his soldiers saw what appeared like a cross of light superimposed upon the sun with the words “in this you will conquer” and that Christ appeared to him in a vision on the following night telling him to use the sign as his standard.³⁵ With this sign, he did defeat Maxentius.³⁶ Constantine won the battle even if the odds were against him. Constantine along with his co-emperors, Licinius (r. 308–324 CE), began to transform the Roman Empire.

The Rise of Christianity (30 CE- 300 CE)

As the Roman Empire was flourishing under Augustus, there was a split happening in the East within the Judaic religion traditions of the past. This split came in the person of Jesus Christ who was born during the reign of Augustus.³⁷ He was then crucified by the Romans³⁸ and was said to be resurrected from the dead three days later.³⁹ This marked the origins of the Christian movement. Jesus’s acts and words about the kingdom of heaven went on to be spread by his Apostles. Thanks to the Apostle Paul the movement had reached the West. Paul had a proper understanding of both the Roman and Jewish worlds and knew how to navigate through both cultures.⁴⁰ This helped him when spreading the message of Christ and Christianity. He talked both to those who were familiar with old Jewish traditions and those who were more familiar with the Greco-Roman traditions, the Gentiles.⁴¹ Paul’s first writings are dated around the year 51 CE in Corinth, which shows us that about 20 years after the death of Christ, the Christian

³⁴ Boatwright et al., 285.

³⁵ A.H.M. Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World* (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd., 1966), 85.

³⁶ This story is told to us by Eusebius and Lactantius, not Constantine himself, which has us wonder if he really did see a heavenly cross. There is a theory that states that what Constantine actually saw was a “phenomenon” which created a circle of light reflected off ice or rain, see A.H.M. Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World* (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd., 1966), 85.

³⁷ Jesus was born sometime between 6 BCE —1 CE, see. John Vidmar, *The Catholic Church Through the Ages: A History* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 11.

³⁸ Between 30–33CE.

³⁹ Lk 24:7. *NRSV*.

⁴⁰ John Vidmar, *The Catholic Church Through the Ages: A History* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 22.

⁴¹ Gentiles are non-Jewish people.

movement was beginning to expand and it is thanks to Paul who was reaching communities outside of Jerusalem.⁴²

Christianity being a new religious movement in the first century was bound to have difficulties because of its doctrines which were difficult to understand. The Romans viewed Christianity as an odd cousin of the Judaic faith. The Roman Empire could accept to a certain degree the many different religions that were emerging around the empire.⁴³ It was not something that was rare. The problem that the Roman Empire had with the Christians was that Christians refused to sacrifice to the Roman state and to honour the pagan gods of Rome. The Roman people saw Christian practices as an abomination and strongly urged them to stop.

In a letter to the Emperor Trajan at the end of the first century, Pliny discusses the problems with the Christians. Pliny does not know what exactly about the Christians should be punished, whether it be that they were causing a commotion or to punish only those who did not repent their Christian ways. Trajan's answer to this problem was simple, "avoid witch-hunts and punish only those who refused to make their abhorrence of Christianity public by sacrificing to our gods"⁴⁴. This statement demonstrates that the Romans did not really care about Christians if they sacrificed for the good of the Roman Empire. Against these persecutions, the Christians grew bolder and began defending their faith. Doing this only led to more persecution and showed a clear divide between Christians and the pagan Romans. Thus, by being easily identifiable, it became possible for Christians to be persecuted again and again.

As time passed, membership in the Christian Church grew.⁴⁵ With the many difficulties the Roman state faced in the second century, the emperors blamed Christianity for all their problems. Yet that did not stop Christianity from proselytizing and expanding. Between the years 260–304 CE, Christianity had used the problems of the frontier to their advantage and expanded more of their membership. When Diocletian finally established his palace in Nicomedia in 287 CE, on the opposite hill from his palace, the Christians had built a basilica.⁴⁶ This demonstrates how fast Christian expansion occurred to the point that even within Roman cities basilicas were being constructed right next to imperial palaces.

⁴² Marie Françoise Baslez, *Comment notre monde est devenu chrétien* (Paris: Edition Cld., 2008), 41.

⁴³ James J. O'Donnell, "The Demise of Paganism," *Traditio* 35 (1979): 48.

⁴⁴ O'Donnell, 49.

⁴⁵ Rodney Stark, "Conversion and Christian Growth," in *The Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1977), 7.

⁴⁶ Brown, *Late Antiquity*, 68.

By the beginning of the fourth century, under the reign of Diocletian, Christianity entered a period of great darkness when it was to be persecuted for a long time; this period is known as the “great persecution.”⁴⁷ Christians were starting to be everywhere within the ranks of the empire, even in the army.⁴⁸ This demonstrates that there was a significant number of members in Christian churches and that they were represented in different social classes from the poor to the rich. Romans being superstitious still wanted everyone in the empire to sacrifice to the state and their gods, but Christians were still not partaking in any of the Roman religious traditions. This belief caused the Romans to be angry and afraid of the repercussions that this Christian lack of respect for other gods brought to them, having just re-settled the Roman Empire under Diocletian and stopping the imperial decline. During these persecutions, churches and Christian scriptures were burned and destroyed, property was confiscated, the civil rights of Christians were cancelled and, if they did not sacrifice to the state, they received the death penalty.⁴⁹ Many Christians died because they did not want to renounce their faith. The persecutions worsened to the point that some Christians believed that this was the apocalypse. This meant that they were close to the kingdom of God and that after much suffering; they finally entered the kingdom that was promised to them three centuries ago.⁵⁰ This was not the case, however, but maybe there was a little truth in such a statement because after these great persecutions, Christianity finally began to flourish under the reign of Constantine the great, turning the tables on paganism and the Roman Empire.⁵¹

Christianity from Constantine I (r. 306–337 CE) to Theodosius I (r. 379- 395 CE)

After a period of great persecution, Christianity finally became a religion that was tolerated in the empire. Constantine along with his co-emperor, Licinius passed the Edict of Milan in 313 CE.⁵² This edict was for religious freedom and toleration, which made Christianity legal; hence, Christians could no longer be persecuted and killed. Politically it was an ideal

⁴⁷ The great persecution lasted from 303 to 311 CE.

⁴⁸ Gérard Vallée, *The Shaping of Christianity: The History and Literature of its Formative Centuries (100–800)* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 104.

⁴⁹ Vallée, 104.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Rise of Western Christianity*, 62.

⁵¹ Paulus Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 324.

⁵² Willis G. Swartz, “The Early Church Persecution of Paganism and Heresy,” *Social Science* 2.2 (1927): 135.

method to unify the empire and merge both the pagan and Christian worlds in order to have peace within the empire.⁵³ Christians could practice their religion, which during the great persecution was illegal, without the risk of being persecuted for their religious beliefs. By becoming legal, Christianity began attracting more people who were no longer afraid to be punished or lose important social and financial resources.⁵⁴ With the Edict of Milan, Constantine put an end to chaos within his realm, which ushered in a time of peace amongst the people in his empire. Along with this peace, Constantine also passed decrees that favoured the Church, giving grants and tax exemptions.⁵⁵ After the Edict of Milan, Constantine could be considered more of a patron to Christianity than an actual Christian. A great example of this is seen on the minted coins of the time. For the following years after the Edict of Milan, Constantine continued to mint coins of pagan gods, most notably Hercules and the sun (Mithras) deity that he was accustomed to worshipping in his family.⁵⁶

Constantine continued to rule with his co-emperor, Licinius, but that was rather short-lived, because the two continued to quarrel and clash over ideas.⁵⁷ In 320 CE, Licinius broke the Edict of Milan and began a brief persecution of Christians. The result was another war that ended with Licinius's death at the hands of Constantine in 324 CE.⁵⁸ This meant that Constantine became sole emperor in 324 CE.⁵⁹ During this time, Christianity remained prominent within the Roman Empire but faced some difficulties. Constantine wanted to unify his empire under one belief but realized that there were issues amongst the Christians because of the different interpretations of who Jesus Christ was and what was his role in the Godhead. Christianity had many councils debating what should be considered the proper orthodox faith.⁶⁰ Constantine

⁵³ Paul Veyne, *When Our World Became Christian 312–394*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 50.

⁵⁴ Stark, 7.

⁵⁵ Eusebius, *The Church History*, trans. Paul Maier (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 326.

⁵⁶ Jones, 84.

⁵⁷ Boatwright et al., 287.

⁵⁸ Boatwright et al., 287.

⁵⁹ Eusebius, 331.

⁶⁰ “Orthodoxy” in this thesis defines the body of theological doctrines established by the first ecumenical councils and accepted by both the Churches of the East (Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem) and the Western Church (with its headquarters in Rome). Orthodoxy is opposed to heresy, the latter being ideas that have not been commonly accepted or accepted by mainstream churches, see Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, ed. Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971). Bauer argues that what once might have been true in one generation was then outdated by the next. This means that we must be careful when labelling something orthodox or heretical because it constantly changes from one generation to the next. These days, scholars tend to avoid the label's orthodox/heretic. I use “heterodox” as a more neutral category to describe what happened to those who were not following the standards of orthodoxy at the time. There was a lot of nuances concerning Christian doctrine between different

convened the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. The purpose of the council was to sort out whether or not Jesus was God and most notably to counter the theories of Arius and his group called the Arians.⁶¹ Arius, a priest from Alexandria in Egypt, believed that Jesus was not a god but a perfect creature created by God the Father at the beginning of his creation, in accordance with Proverbs 8:22.⁶² The verdict reached at the end of the council established that Jesus was one and the same with the Father, “God from God, true God from true God,” consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father.⁶³ After debating the nature of Jesus and rejecting the Arian view, Christianity had solved in theory part of its issues of Christian doctrine.⁶⁴ In practice, Arianism gained the upper hand. Although Arianism was rejected at Nicaea, the Nicene Christianity was not mentioned for about fifteen years.⁶⁵ The idea of one creed functioning as a universal formula was still way off.⁶⁶ Arius himself was re-admitted into communion after 2–3 years and the Arians had regained lost favour. Even one of their own baptized Constantine on his deathbed in 337 CE.⁶⁷ Arianism remained a problem until 370 CE when Ambrose, bishop of Milan (337-397 CE) and his peers, the Cappadocian Fathers, gave Nicene Christianity a proper victory and finally began to be the dominant creed.⁶⁸ Although defeated by this time, Arianism remained a problem for Germanic tribes when some of them converted in the fifth century because they misunderstood the Father and Son as two divine gods and not only as one as stated by the Nicene creed.⁶⁹

factions which caused a lot of problems in the Roman empire for emperors like Constantine. To solve these issues of doctrine Constantine called a council of bishops to try and establish a common rule of faith between them, see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–4. This book explains all the issues that the language and use of heresiological categories caused in the fourth century.

⁶¹ Vallée, 87.

⁶² Vallée, 87.

⁶³ Vallée, 87. This became part of the Nicene creed.

⁶⁴ Although solved it left its impact. Orosius is a priest in the early fifth century criticized Arius and his view saying that it created many problems for Christianity because it led possibly good Christians astray from the right faith. See Paulus Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 331.

⁶⁵ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 101.

⁶⁶ Ayres, 101.

⁶⁷ Ayres, 101. Not all scholars agree that Constantine was baptized.

⁶⁸ See Daniel H. Williams, *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁶⁹ The Arian statement caused many problems for those in the Christian faith, most notably the Germanic tribes’ understanding of the Christian religion. The reason for the problem was that it caused the Germanic tribes to believe that Jesus was subordinate to God the Father. Although this idea was refuted at the council of Nicaea in 325 CE, which stated that God and Jesus are of the same substance, it continued as a major problem for orthodox Christianity

Constantine supported Christianity and gave it many more privileges. With new resources acquired, Christianity continued to grow into a force to be reckoned with. It is not hard to understand why Eusebius ultimately believed that this state of affairs was to continue for eternity. He believed that it mimicked the kingdom of God. Under Constantine and his successors, Christianity was finally at the forefront of life in the Roman Empire. But it was not alone, nor was it the official religion of the empire, but it was simply accepted and given privileges it did not have before. From this point on, Christianity was to compete against paganism for dominance over the empire. The emperors that followed Constantine are called the Christian Emperors, apart from Julian.⁷⁰ They are so named because they helped Christianity flourish and were for the most part all baptized into the Christian religion at one point in their lives.⁷¹

The Roman Emperor Gratian (r. 367- 383 CE), who reigned in the Roman West from 375–383 CE, was pro-Nicene and is one of the emperors in addition to Theodosius I to make big changes that crippled paganism and helped Christianity prosper. The reign of Gratian is known to have increased violence against paganism because of his anti-pagan policies.⁷² Gratian removed the altar of victory that was in the senate house.⁷³ This proved to be problematic for Roman pagans because they believed that by sacrificing to this altar, Rome remained victorious in its wars and continued to be protected by the gods. Gratian was one of the first emperors to reject the title *Pontifex Maximus*.⁷⁴ The title was associated with the emperors since Augustus's time and meant that it was the emperor that had the duty to perform the acts of the high priest, like sacrificing to the gods for the good of the state. By rejecting this title, Gratian was sending a message, saying he did not want to have anything to do with the old traditions of the Roman Empire. The laws that were passed under Gratian caused numerous confiscations of income from

for another fifty years. To address the issue of the subordination of Jesus to the Father, the church in Spain introduced the filioque in the creed in the sixth century.

⁷⁰ There were eight emperors in the West and three emperors in the East in the same time frame (337–379 CE). Emperor Julian also known as Julian the Apostate, which means one who rejected his religion, reigned between 361–363 CE. Julian is an odd emperor because although raised in the Christian faith, he was disgusted with the pro-Christian policies from Constantine and his sons. Julian tried to return the Roman Empire to its past glory as a pagan worshipping society, by giving paganism more privileges and taking some of these privileges away from Christianity. This emperor did not last long and the following emperors undid the laws that Julian had put into effect. See. Paulus Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1964), 47; 53; 334.

⁷¹ Orosius, 328.

⁷² Swartz, 136.

⁷³ O'Donnell, 56.

⁷⁴ Swartz, 136.

temples.⁷⁵ These laws essentially bankrupted the temples, making them unable to pay for festivals or other honours that they owed to the gods. Gratian had reduced paganism to a private cult.⁷⁶ This meant that pagans had to practice at home privately and could not practice out in the public, a similar situation that Christianity had faced in the past.⁷⁷ They too had practiced Christianity at the beginning in secret and in private. It is possible that Christians did not tolerate paganism because of some sort of retribution for the past.⁷⁸ The situation had changed between paganism and Christianity. Gratian began to cripple paganism in the West, but what about the East? That is where I turn my attention next.

Theodosius I (r. 379- 395 CE) and the End of Paganism

Theodosius I was appointed emperor in the East by Gratian in 379 CE.⁷⁹ One year into his reign, He was baptized into the Christian faith like other Christian emperors before him.⁸⁰ Under Theodosius the Roman East changed dramatically and persecutions against pagans began similar to the West.⁸¹ He had a strong belief that the church was connected to the state and only together could they govern successfully.⁸² For this type of ruling to function he had to unify all of his citizens under one creed.⁸³ The uniformity that eventually brought unity, in his view, made it easier to advance towards a goal that helped all of the subjects in his empire prosper. In 380 CE, he passed the Edict of Thessalonica (also known as *Cunctos populos*).⁸⁴ This edict states that Nicene Christianity is the official religion of the Roman Empire, meaning that paganism was to be pushed aside completely.

Around the same time there were still some theological debates going on about the Holy Spirit's relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. To solve this issue Theodosius convened the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE.⁸⁵ This council was made up of bishops who

⁷⁵ Henry Hart Milman, "Theodosius- Abolition of Paganism," in *History of Christianity: From the Birth of Christ to the Abolition of Paganism in the Roman Empire*, vol. 3 (New York: Ams press, 1978), 84.

⁷⁶ Swartz, 137.

⁷⁷ During the great persecution.

⁷⁸ Brown, *Rise of Western Christianity*, 73.

⁷⁹ Charles Freeman, *A New History of Early Christianity* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 248.

⁸⁰ Freeman, *A New History*, 248.

⁸¹ O'Donnell, 54.

⁸² N.Q. King, *The Emperor Theodosius and The Establishment of Christianity* (London: Scm Press Ltd., 1961), 53.

⁸³ Freeman, *A New History*, 248.

⁸⁴ Freeman, *A New History*, 249.

⁸⁵ Freeman, *A New History*, 249–250.

followed the Nicene Creed, but it also brought to condemnation newer Arians such as Eunomius of Cyzicus (d. 393 CE). The result of the council clarified the Nicene creed, that Christ had both a human soul and human body as well as being divine⁸⁶. Additionally, once the issue of the Holy Spirit was dealt with and the Nicene creed was reaffirmed, Theodosius used the new creed to fight against heretics. This caused all other Christian views to become heretical.⁸⁷

In the beginning of his reign, Theodosius did not want to support any one religion.⁸⁸ Politically, Theodosius had to remain neutral between paganism and Christianity, even if he believed Christianity to be superior. Even with his neutrality Theodosius said: “the only permissible faith is Christianity.”⁸⁹ Yet he remained kind towards paganism initially; it was not until after the massacre at Thessalonica (390 CE) that he began showing signs of severity towards paganism. After hearing about a revolt in Thessalonica, Theodosius is said to have given the order to kill all those who were causing the chaos. In the end, the death toll may have reached seven thousand people.⁹⁰ A key player in this event was Ambrose, bishop of Milan. After hearing of the horrible actions taken by Theodosius on the people of Thessalonica, Ambrose is said to have told the emperor to repent for his sins.⁹¹ This demonstrates how much power the church had gained at the time. The bishop had a lot of power because he ruled the faithful from an important capital, Milan, of the Roman Empire. It was the church that seemed to rule over the emperors when they made morally wrong choices.⁹² Ambrose threatened Theodosius with excommunication if he did not repent and suspended him from the church. After eight months, Theodosius was accepted back into the church’s good graces.⁹³ It is during this time that the emperor seemed to change his outlook against paganism. Ambrose being a very strong-minded bishop might have influenced Theodosius.⁹⁴ The bishop of Milan was known to be very anti-pagan, like most clergymen of the time. Theodosius’s severity towards paganism may thus be

⁸⁶ Vallée, 88.

⁸⁷ Freeman, *A New History*, 252.

⁸⁸ Stephen Williams and Gerard Friell, *Theodosius The Empire at Bay* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 123.

⁸⁹ Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, “The Roman Empire,” in *A History of Pagan Europe* (London: Routledge, 1995), 71.

⁹⁰ See Charles Freeman, *AD 381: Heretics, Pagans and the Christian State* (London: Pimlico, 2008), 121–123.

⁹¹ King, 69.

⁹² Freeman, *A New History*, 256.

⁹³ Swartz, 121.

⁹⁴ Swartz, 140.

attributed to Ambrose, bishop of Milan.⁹⁵ The anti-pagan laws passed between 391–392 CE crippled and led to paganism’s downfall in the empire.

In the West, the empire was ruled by Valentinian II (r. 375–392 CE) after Gratian had died in 383 CE.⁹⁶ Valentinian because of his young age was considered a puppet ruler. He had no military training like Gratian and Theodosius. This led the boy to be governed by his advisors. At the outset, he generally deferred to Theodosius for advice about how to rule the West. Theodosius sent a trusted advisor to help him with governing the West.⁹⁷ Arbogast (d. 394 CE) was a man who came from France and was given the title *magister militum in praesenti*, who is the commander of the armies in attendance on the emperor.⁹⁸ This was a very powerful position and believed to be only subordinate to the one who had elected him to the post, Theodosius. In general, Arbogast was to assist the young emperor in his decisions. A fatal mistake committed by Arbogast was pushing the emperor to the side until he truly felt useless. When the young emperor gave Arbogast a letter of dismissal from his functions, Arbogast retaliated saying that it was Theodosius who elected him to the position, hence the young emperor was unable to dismiss him.⁹⁹ This ended with Valentinian being humiliated in public. Shortly after the dispute Valentinian was found hung in his room in 392 CE.¹⁰⁰ With his death, a new ruler in the West was elected, Eugenius (r. 393–394 CE).

Eugenius became emperor in the West in August of 392 CE.¹⁰¹ This caused many problems for Theodosius because he wanted the rule to go to his sons to form a dynasty. Eugenius is said to have been a decent fellow and tried to pay homage to Theodosius, hoping to be accepted as the ruler of the West. It is obvious by the way that Theodosius acted, that he wanted nothing to do with this supposedly new ruler. The clearest example of Theodosius’s not wanting Eugenius to rule the West was that he raised his son, Honorius (r. 393–423 CE), to the rank of full Augustus. This meant that Eugenius had usurped the crown and that his reign was

⁹⁵ For a better understanding about Ambrose and church politics, see. Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁹⁶ Milman, 85.

⁹⁷ Williams and Friell, 126.

⁹⁸ Williams and Friell, 126.

⁹⁹ Williams and Friell, 127.

¹⁰⁰ Williams and Friell, 127.

¹⁰¹ Williams and Friell, 129.

illegal.¹⁰² With the reign of Eugenius considered invalid, Eugenius stopped trying to please Theodosius and turned to pagans for support.

By 393 CE, Eugenius, being Christian, had twice refused to allow pagan restoration of the altar of victory, finally relented and accepted the restoration. During this time, Eugenius gathered followers for a war that was to eventually happen with Theodosius. Theodosius, on the other hand, had support from the Christians. Finally, Theodosius and Eugenius met and fought in 394 CE at Frigidus. Both men believed they were fighting for the future of religion. The battle of Frigidus where the two armies clashed was considered a very close battle. Both armies were equal in strength, and either one of them could have won. In the end, Theodosius won the fight and ended pagan revival. According to Ambrose of Milan the reason that Theodosius was victorious in the battle was because of divine intervention. Apparently during the battle there was a cold bora wind that blew against Eugenius and his army.¹⁰³ This was seen by some as a message from God that he was watching and favoured Theodosius to win.¹⁰⁴ The propaganda about how this battle was won is quite similar to Constantine's battle at the Milvian Bridge, thus connecting Theodosius with Constantine in Christian propaganda. This connection helped the Christian cause because like Constantine, Theodosius ushered the final victory of Christianity over paganism.

In the aftermath of the battle, Theodosius and Christianity had crushed paganism. During the last five years of his life, Theodosius had succeeded at stopping paganism from being revived and had crippled it with his laws. The Theodosian codes had helped in keeping paganism downcast by forbidding access to shrines and pagan Temples, which impacted the ability of pagan sacrifice to the gods.¹⁰⁵ These codes also removed privileges that ancient worshipping cities, like Rome, were accustomed to have. These cities had been given special privileges which ignored the anti-pagan laws up to date, meaning they were able to keep practicing paganism out in the open.¹⁰⁶ The biggest hit to paganism came with the law that forbade the keeping of pagan holy days and vernacular traditions.¹⁰⁷ This caused paganism to become a private and secret practice. The Theodosian codes made it very difficult for paganism to survive

¹⁰² Williams and Friell, 129.

¹⁰³ Freeman, *A New History*, 258.

¹⁰⁴ Orosius, 344.

¹⁰⁵ Williams and Friell, 119.

¹⁰⁶ Williams and Friell, 121.

¹⁰⁷ Williams and Friell, 123.

as a main religion, very similar to how paganism made Christianity difficult to survive in the first and second centuries. The Olympic Games were ended in 393 CE and even the reading and interpretation of Egyptian hieroglyphs ended in 394 CE.¹⁰⁸ The interpretation of hieroglyphs became a lost art and the Olympic Games took a long time to be re-established, but never like in ancient times, as a festival to the pagan gods. Theodosius had brought order to the chaos with the pagans and died in 395 CE.¹⁰⁹ He divided the empire between his two sons, Honorius in the West and Arcadius in the East.¹¹⁰ At Theodosius's funeral, Ambrose praised the work done by Theodosius.¹¹¹ This established Theodosius as a Christian hero and was always seen in that light when looking at how paganism ended. Paganism was crushed by Theodosius but it was not until Honorius, in 408 CE, made laws that made paganism illegal and buried the religion into further obscurity.¹¹² Christianity had turned the table on paganism during the fourth century and like the pagans in the second and third century became the assailant.¹¹³ From Constantine I to Theodosius I Christianity kept gaining privileges thanks to the Christian emperors and this made them more powerful. This was the state of the Roman Empire at the beginning of the fifth century. Throughout this period, the influence of the Germanic tribes has also become more prominent.

Early Germanic Culture and Roman Interaction

The word “barbarian” has come to mean savage or uncivilized according to the Roman view but the Germanic tribes were far from being as uncivilized as the Romans believed. Although the Germanic tribes have a complex history, it remains a myth to be debunked that they were savage compared to the Romans. The Roman point of view comes from their own interactions with these Germanic tribes. Who were the barbarians to the Romans? The Roman borders “reached as far north—broadly speaking—as the river Danube and as far east as the Rhine. Beyond these lines lay Europe’s barbarians...”¹¹⁴ All those who were on the outside of

¹⁰⁸ Freeman, *A New History*, 257.

¹⁰⁹ Freeman, *A New History*, 340.

¹¹⁰ Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Europe*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 15.

¹¹¹ Williams and Friell, 124.

¹¹² Milman, 94.

¹¹³ Swartz, 142.

¹¹⁴ Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.

these borders were considered barbarians, and to the Romans these peoples were uncivilized and savage. It is possible that this idea developed because these Germanic tribes were far away from central civilization.¹¹⁵ The further away they were from a city the more likely they were uneducated in the Roman way of life and hence a stranger to the traditions of the empire. Being a barbarian meant that you were at the bottom of the civilized world and therefore below people like the Romans.¹¹⁶ Not all Romans believed that the Germanic tribes had faults. Tacitus's (58–120 CE) description of the Germanic world is at times favourable when explaining the tribes. It seems that the Germanic peoples have a complex history but this does not translate into them being savages.¹¹⁷ The Germanic tribes are mainly divided into two groups at the beginning of the first century.¹¹⁸ The tribes in the west seem to be more concerned with agriculture.¹¹⁹ As for the tribes in East, They seem to be more concerned with pastoral care.¹²⁰ The nomadic tribes, especially from the north, were the ones that were feared by the Romans because they moved around and needed more agricultural land.¹²¹ These Northern tribes had farmers amongst them but for the most part were made up of warriors.¹²² Tacitus tells us of how hard the land was to farm:

“Their country, though somewhat various in appearance, yet generally either bristles with forests or reeks with swamps; it is rainier on the side of Gaul, bleaker on that of Noricum and Pannonia. It is productive of grain, but unfavorable to fruit-bearing trees; it is rich in flocks and herds, but these are for the most part undersized, and even the cattle have not their usual beauty or noble head.”¹²³

¹¹⁵ Patrick Geary, *Before France and Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 39–40.

¹¹⁶ Brown, *The Rise of the Western Christendom*, 43.

¹¹⁷ J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West 400-1000* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 21.

¹¹⁸ John B. Bury, *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians* (New York: Russel & Russel Inc., 1963), 8.

¹¹⁹ The tribes of the West included the Franks, Alamans, Saxons, see J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West 400-1000* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 21.

¹²⁰ This included tribes like Goths, Vandals, Lombards and Burgundians, see John B. Bury, *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians* (New York: Russel & Russel Inc., 1963), 8.

¹²¹ Brown, *The Rise of the Western Christendom*, 44.

¹²² Brown, *The Rise of the Western Christendom*, 43.

¹²³ See Tacitus, *The Agricola and Germania*, trans. A. J. Church and W. J. Brodribb (London: Macmillan, 1877), 87-100.

The Romans tended to view different groups of Germanic tribes as similar to one another.¹²⁴ The reality was that these groups were very diverse and most probably had many mixed traditions.¹²⁵ This meant that these groups did not have a shared identity and that they functioned for their own little group or clan.¹²⁶ The collective notions of belonging ethnically together did not exist in the Germanic tribes' ideology; hence, the idea that they all decided to invade the Roman Empire on a certain day could not be possible.¹²⁷ These groups were relatively small and unorganized.¹²⁸ The system by which the Germanic tribes lived was based on kinship.¹²⁹ This kinship system usually included about fifty households. The group had a leader who acted more as a general.¹³⁰ Violence with other members of the group was seen as a crime this made conflicts within the group rare.¹³¹ These nomadic kinship groups were the ones who transform the barbarian world because members changed from group to group. This caused instability and a shift within the older groups.¹³² The problem was that social structures between these groups were different. For example, if one group moved from point A to point B, this did not mean that they kept the same group culture. The ones that stayed behind remained the same. The ones that migrated to point B, brought traditions that it had with group A but at the same time created a new culture.¹³³ The fracturing of group's new and old was the reason that it was difficult for Germanic tribes to remain organized.¹³⁴ The Romans noticed this happening and concluded that they were uncivilized because they lacked the organization skills that the Romans had acquired.

The Roman interaction with these Germanic tribes was limited in the first two centuries. The main transaction between Germanic tribes and Romans was trade. The border was protected

¹²⁴ Walter Goffart, "Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians," *The American Historical Review* 86, no. 2 (1981): 278.

¹²⁵ Dawson, 70.

¹²⁶ Goffart, 285.

¹²⁷ Goffart, 278.

¹²⁸ Susan Reynold, "Our Forefathers? Tribes, Peoples, and Nations in the Historiography of the Ages of Migrations," in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History; Essays Presented to Walter Goffart*, ed. Alexander Callander Murray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 18.

¹²⁹ Dawson, 69.

¹³⁰ Geary, 55.

¹³¹ Geary, 52.

¹³² Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, 7.

¹³³ Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, 27. A good example of a group that did this is the Goths. The Goths were divided into two sub groups after the battle of Adrianople (378 CE), the Visigoths and the Ostrogoth. They had some similar traditions but some of their practices differed, see John B. Bury, *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians* (New York: Russel & Russel Inc., 1963), 61.

¹³⁴ Geary, 53.

by the Roman military hence all the merchants that traded with these Germanic tribes were in no danger.¹³⁵ For the first century the frontier was generally a safe place, no major wars broke out between the Germanic tribes and the Romans.¹³⁶ It was not until the second century that we see some major incursion from the Germanic tribes into the Roman Empire. Around the year 161 CE Emperor Marcus Aurelius (r.161-180 CE) moved his defenses from the Western Roman frontier to fight the Parthians in the East.¹³⁷ These movements of troops left most of the Western Roman frontier undefended except for a few garrisons that were left behind. At this point, some of the Germanic tribes crossed the Danube and started settling inside the empire. By 166 CE, the Romans went to war with the Sarmatians.¹³⁸ During these wars, Marcus Aurelius employed Germanic mercenaries to attack other Germanic groups with promises. The promises made were that they could get land to settle in Roman Territory, gold and possibly citizenship in the empire.¹³⁹ Using Germanic forces made them easier to manage and least likely to co-operate with one another against the empire.¹⁴⁰ It also helped fill the ranks of the Roman military because the Roman Empire had a low population birthrate.¹⁴¹ These wars destroyed the centers of Germanic tribes, and with their centers gone, they began to lose their stability. This is why they began moving south towards the Roman Empire.¹⁴² The relationship between the Germanic tribes and the Romans became complicated because some of these tribes fought for the Romans and others were fighting against the Romans.¹⁴³ It is through the experiences of trading and battling with the Romans that induced the Germanic tribes to begin to learn and change social and political aspects of their culture.¹⁴⁴ The most valued experience they learned from the Romans was the empire's military strategy. By the end of the second century, they used the strategies that they learned from the Romans to fight against other tribes and the Romans themselves.¹⁴⁵ The Germanic tribes came to believe that the Roman way of life equaled a good

¹³⁵ Geary, 8.

¹³⁶ Geary, 5.

¹³⁷ Geary, 9.

¹³⁸ This war will be called the Macromannic wars and they lasted from 166 CE to 180 CE.

¹³⁹ Geary, 21.

¹⁴⁰ Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West 376- 568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 147–149.

¹⁴¹ Goffart, 297.

¹⁴² Dawson, 75.

¹⁴³ Goffart, 282.

¹⁴⁴ Philip Rousseau, "Visigothic Migration and Settlement, 376–418: Some Hypotheses," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 41, no. 3 (1992): 345.

¹⁴⁵ Dawson, 75.

life, and it was a good place to have a career.¹⁴⁶ Under Constantine the Great, the Germanic threat continued to be a problem. Constantine made a treaty with them, stopping the fight with the empire and settling them within the borders. The Germanic tribes went on to become the Federates of the empire.¹⁴⁷ This was one of the military positions that they had under the Roman Empire.

The great migrations or *Völkerwanderungen*¹⁴⁸ of the Germanic tribes happened in the fourth century with the rise of the Hunnic confederacy led by Attila (r.434-453 CE). The Hun rising scared the Eastern Germanic tribes and it pushed them into the Roman Empire in 376 CE. Both the Goths and the Vandals travelled great distances.¹⁴⁹ In 376 CE, Emperor Valens (r. 364–378 CE) allowed the Visigoths to move from the Dacia into the Roman Empire on the south bank of the Danube. This had consequences for the Roman Empire, because there was such a massive influx of people.¹⁵⁰ The empire was not experienced enough or prepared to deal with this situation.¹⁵¹ The inexperience on the side of the Roman Empire led to abuse and exploitation towards these Germanic tribes.¹⁵² By 378 CE, there was an uprising against Emperor Valens and a battle at Adrianople, which the Germanic forces won.¹⁵³ By 380 CE, Alaric I (r. 395–410 CE) was leading these Visigoths.¹⁵⁴

Emperor Theodosius (r. 379–395 CE) made a treaty with the Visigoths in 382 CE which did not last long. Under Emperor Honorius (r. 393–423 CE), Alaric still had trouble establishing a Visigothic kingdom within the Roman Empire. It was often rejected by the emperor and this

¹⁴⁶ Geary, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Federate undertook the protection of the frontier and to supply soldiers if war broke out, see. John B. Bury, *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians* (New York: Russel & Russel Inc., 1963), 24.

¹⁴⁸ The movements of the Germanic tribes further into the Roman Empire should not be seen as an invasion. Peter Heather states in his book *Empire and Barbarians* that the hypothesis of a barbarian invasion of the Roman Empire is “dead and buried.” He argues for two different models that applied to the great migrations of the Germanic tribes. The first he calls “wave of advance model” which stipulates that the tribes took over certain parts of Roman territory without war but by having a big influx of population, hence a type of assimilation. The second model is called the “Elite Transfer Model”. This model is a more aggressive takeover but the Germanic Tribes keep all of the old social and political structures intact, see Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 22–23.

¹⁴⁹ Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, 9.

¹⁵⁰ Some 80,000 people, see John B. Bury, *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians* (New York: Russel & Russel Inc., 1963), 56.

¹⁵¹ Bury, 56.

¹⁵² Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 48.

¹⁵³ Geary, 24.

¹⁵⁴ Alaric’ name did not appear in sources before 380 CE. When his name appears, he seems to be a king of the Visigoths following a royal line of leaders, see Philip Rousseau, “Visigothic Migration and Settlement, 376–418: Some Hypotheses,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 41, no. 3 (1992): 351–355.

further pushed Alaric and the Visigoths to want to create a kingdom of their own.¹⁵⁵ Alaric marched on Rome and held it hostage on two separate occasions to try and have the emperor accept his demand, a kingdom for his people.¹⁵⁶ This did not work and by the third time, 410 CE, he sacked Rome, the former capital, though he did not plunder it for treasure but for food.¹⁵⁷ Alaric showed restraint in destroying the culture of the Roman City,¹⁵⁸ unlike the Vandals who were not so restrained.¹⁵⁹ Wanting to gain political strength, Alaric decided to go to North Africa to control the grain supply; he died of fever on the crossing in 411 CE.¹⁶⁰ Continuing problems of political intrigue plagued the Western Empire until the deposition of the last Emperor Romulus Augustus (r.475-476 CE). The Emperor in the East, Zeno (r. 474–475 CE, r. 476–491 CE), sent his representative, Julius Nepos (r. 474–480 CE), to rule the West.¹⁶¹ In 475 CE, Nepos, unable to gain enough support in Italy was forced to flee to Dalmatia.¹⁶² Orestes (d.476 CE), who had repelled Nepos from Italy, put his son on the imperial throne in the Western Empire. By this time, the Hunnic confederacy had been disassembled and the Ostrogoths had moved into the empire. Like Alaric and the Visigoths before, the Ostrogoths were asking for a kingdom inside the empire which was refused by the emperor.¹⁶³ A rebellion ensued in August of 476 CE, Orestes was killed and a Gothic leader named Odoacer (r. 476–493) took power.¹⁶⁴ Romulus Augustus was placed under house arrest.¹⁶⁵ Odoacer sent ambassadors to the Emperor in the East and said that they no longer needed an Emperor in the West. Odoacer simply asked for a Patrician rank. Zeno asked Odoacer to invite Nepos back to Rome and only if Nepos wanted to bestow him the patriciate then Odoacer would be accepted as a leader of the West.

¹⁵⁵ Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, 25.

¹⁵⁶ Bury, 94.

¹⁵⁷ Geary, 70.

¹⁵⁸ Hadrill, 23.

¹⁵⁹ The Vandals went on to sack Rome in 455 CE and plundered more than Alaric. They took anything of value that was not nailed down, including Valentinian's two daughters and widow, see Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West 376- 568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 255–256.

¹⁶⁰ Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 216.

¹⁶¹ Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 279.

¹⁶² Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 280.

¹⁶³ Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 280.

¹⁶⁴ Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 280–281.

¹⁶⁵ The young emperor went on to found a monastery and was still apparently living in it in the sixth century, see Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West 376-568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 280.

Unhappy with this answer, Odoacer declared himself king.¹⁶⁶ This indicated a break from the Roman Empire and caused the collapse of the Roman West.

Discussions on the Fall

The general accepted date of the collapse of the Roman West is 476 CE.¹⁶⁷ There are some problems with this date, however, as it has for the most part no social or economic significance.¹⁶⁸ It is believed that most of the people of the empire at the time did not notice any change between the ruling factions. Some, like Sidonius Apollinaris (c. 430 CE-c. 489 CE), did notice the change as is demonstrated in a letter he sent to a friend: “One might almost speak of her [the Roman Empire] as dead and buried; it is your glory to have revived, supported and championed her, and in this tempest of war which has wrecked the Roman power...”¹⁶⁹ The tempest of war that Sidonius speaks about is the state of the Western Roman Empire. The changes that happened were gradual and took a long time; the people living in the empire had not noticed them all that much.¹⁷⁰ It is also important to note that this collapse only seems to affect Italy.¹⁷¹ The other areas of the Roman Empire were not as affected by what was happening in Rome and the Italian Peninsula. By 476 CE, other Germanic tribes had settled around the Mediterranean Sea. The Western Roman Empire was divided into little kingdoms which were ruled by Germanic tribes. The Vandals ruled Africa, Sardinia, and Corsica.¹⁷² The Visigoths controlled the Loire, the Saone and the Rhone; they also had parts of Spain except for the northwest, where the Sueves and natives held their independence.¹⁷³ The Burgundians held all

¹⁶⁶ Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 281.

¹⁶⁷ Most historians use this date as the end of the Roman West, but there are others that argued that the assassination of Nepos in 480 CE was the true end of the Western Empire. Nepos was the final connecting thread of rulership between emperors in the West. There’s also the fact that there was still an emperor in the East. This meant that the emperor, in this case Zeno, was the sole emperor for the whole empire, East and West. When an emperor in the West died, in the past, then that meant that the Eastern emperor filled the vacant seat until a successor was found. Odoacer was not supported by Zeno hence he became a usurper to the empire. By naming himself king he took that position by force, see Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West 376- 568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 281–284.

¹⁶⁸ Cameron, 41.

¹⁶⁹ Sidonius Apollinaris, *The Letters of Sidonius*, trans. O.M. Dalton, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915): IX:ii:2.

¹⁷⁰ Cameron, 41.

¹⁷¹ John B. Bury, *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians* (New York: Russel & Russel Inc, 1963), 170.

¹⁷² Jones, 92.

¹⁷³ Jones, 92.

the country east of the Saone and the Rhone.¹⁷⁴ The Franks had control of the lower Rhine area. This meant that there were a lot of changes happening in the West. The continuation of Roman culture was not affected by the new rulers, which is why the people did not see this as a fall but as a new division of the empire under new rulership.¹⁷⁵

Three main factors can be discussed when looking at the fall of the Roman West. They are the following: the Germanic migrations, economic factors, and political governance. When looking at the migrations, we can see this as a big change for the Roman West. The vast movements of the Germanic tribes created a lot of problems that Romans had never experienced. It is important to note, however, that the Germanic migrations were not a conspiracy invented to bring down the Roman Empire.¹⁷⁶ The Germanic tribes did not intend to destroy the Roman West, but to inhabit it. They wanted to participate in the empire and were happy to fight against Rome's external enemies. The Huns could be said to be a major cause to the fall of the Roman West. They caused a lot of movement as a result to their raids and conquering of lands in the East.¹⁷⁷ There are some scholars who believe that the moment the Germanic tribes started to integrate and settle in Roman Territory, the empire in the West was fated to fall, because it lost control over its own life.¹⁷⁸

Economically, since the Roman Empire stopped expanding in the second century, it was starting to have problems with its finances and territory. This problem found a small solution in Diocletian's Tetrarchy, but this did not help it indefinitely. Other economic issues were at play, like taxation. Citizens of the Roman Empire were heavily taxed between the second and fourth centuries. The reason that they were taxed so heavily was because the Romans played up the Germanic threat. For fear of not being able to defend the Roman territories, citizens had to pay more taxes for the security and military expulsion of the enemy.¹⁷⁹ Along with this taxation, there were also issues of the debasement of coins and the metals' worth.¹⁸⁰ Neither of these worked with the money gained from taxes. The rulers of the Roman Empire at this time were

¹⁷⁴ The Burgundians were defeated by Clovis and the Franks, giving a bigger acquisition to the Franks.

¹⁷⁵ Cameron states this as the most famous non-event in history, meaning nothing really happened to make it feel like the West had fallen, see Averil Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity AD 395–700* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 40.

¹⁷⁶ Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, 335.

¹⁷⁷ Heather, *Empires and Barbarians*, 383.

¹⁷⁸ Lucien Musset, *The Germanic Invasions*, trans. Edward and Columba James (London: Eleks books Ltd., 1975), 24.

¹⁷⁹ Cameron, 87.

¹⁸⁰ Cameron, 86.

more concerned with their personal pleasures than the well-being of the state. “The late Roman administrative and economic system was certainly cumbersome and had many defects... The government resorted all too easily to empty and hectoring legislation; officials did what they could, and often enriched themselves; the people learned how to cheat the system.”¹⁸¹ This statement evidently points to the corruption that was happening in the empire and was caused by both individuals and the government. Roman authorities used the Germanic threat to increase their wealth from taxes that were supposed to go to the military effort. It is surprising that this complex but corrupt society managed to survive for so long.¹⁸²

Roman governance is sometimes blamed for the empire’s collapse. This is due to the division of the empire under the Tetrarchy that Diocletian formed. The Tetrarchy created two new city capitals for the empire: Constantinople in the East, while in the West the capital was moved from Rome to Milan and later to Ravenna. This essentially removed the power from Rome which was the center of the Roman Empire for a long time. Rome was the most important place in the first century, but over the years it lost its prominence.¹⁸³ But over time the most important cultural and economic centers were in the East, in cities like Alexandria, Antioch, Ephesus and Constantinople.¹⁸⁴ This shift of center forced the empire to divide its resources and created two entities that were trying to do the same job.¹⁸⁵ Another big problem was the abandonment of legal governance to Christians and military duties to Germanic tribes, which caused an issue with civil virtues.

The Roman Empire in the West did not go down as easily as it is believed, but caused its own demise. The collapse was inevitable and began from the time when Germanic tribes entered the Western part of the empire. The West was unable to manage and organize a way to successfully integrate the Germanic tribes into their empire which led to many conflicts. Every Emperor who took control really wanted to bring the West back to its golden age of the first century but because of personal endeavors they failed.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Cameron, 103.

¹⁸² Cameron, 103. Some scholars like Prieune argue that the Roman Empire’s economy survived the Germanic migrations and did not collapse until the Arab conquest in the seventh century, see Henri Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (Paris: Libraires de France, 1937).

¹⁸³ Geary, 9.

¹⁸⁴ Geary, 9.

¹⁸⁵ Jacques Le Goff, *Medieval Civilization 400 - 1500*, trans. Julia Barrow (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 21.

¹⁸⁶ Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 281.

The problem seems to be rooted in Christianity's rise. Edward Gibbon, an eighteenth century scholar, had some strong views about how Christianity had weakened the empire with its ideology. In a weakened state the Germanic tribes easily defeated the Romans and took over. The next chapter will look at Gibbon's arguments against Christianity and why he believed it to be a cause of the fall.

Chapter 2: Edward Gibbon's Argument of Decline and Fall

To understand how Christianity became instrumental for the Roman Empire after its fall in the West, in 476 CE, we must first look at Edward Gibbon who was one of the harshest critics of Christianity. This chapter will look at the life and arguments of Edward Gibbon to help us understand his views of how Christianity and Germanic tribes could have caused the fall of the Roman West.

Gibbon became famous after writing *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. These books became a monumental piece for anyone who was interested in the history of the Roman Empire. Born in the eighteenth century, Gibbon lived in the age of Enlightenment, which impacted his writing and ideas. The age of Enlightenment was skeptical about the part that religion had to play with the history of humankind. Although religion began with an original message of faith and devotion for living a good moral life and a future promise of a better afterlife, Gibbon was influenced to challenge religion and came to see it as superstitious nonsense. Gibbon believed that it was easily corruptible and that it did in fact become, overtime, corrupted by humankind. Christianity caused stagnation in the population and did not create any human flourishing that is important to society to change and become better. It was not until the eighteenth century that human progress came to society under the age of Enlightenment's help.

According to Gibbon the Christian religion is one of the many causes of the decline of the Roman Empire. He believes that Christian ideology caused division within the empire. The progression of the Christian religion after the fourth century was compared to a declining of the Roman Empire. Christianity began to be more universally accepted and even came to replace paganism. This created issues such as Christians refusing to partake in civil affairs of the pagan

Romans. According to Gibbon, Christian doctrines also caused problems in the empire: for example, a doctrine such as immortality made people seek gratification in the afterlife, instead of trying to do something to change their present condition. Gibbon also blames the active roles that Christians started to take in Roman government for the weakening of the state. Alongside Christianity, Gibbon also blames Germanic tribes for the fall and decline of the Roman West. Although he is not as harsh on the Germanic tribes, he still believes that they were one of the primary causes because of the migrations of these tribes and how they were slowly implemented into Roman civilization.

Gibbon's Life (1737–1794)

Edward Gibbon was born in Putney, England in 1737. The eldest son of the Edward Gibbon senior and Judith Porten, Edward was the only child to survive infancy in the family; his other six siblings died in their infancy.¹⁸⁷ Edward himself could not be considered a strong child and is generally described as sickly. After his mother's death in 1747, he was sent to his aunt Catherine Porten, who took care of the boy and nursed him back to health. It was due to his aunt that Gibbon survived his childhood and through her he discovered his love of books. Gibbon later wrote in his memoirs: "Mrs. Catherine Porten, the true mother of my mind as well as my health."¹⁸⁸ As a young boy, Gibbon missed many classes and remained unable to keep up with the students of his age. Although he missed school often, he went home to his aunt and read the many books that she owned. Gibbon's constant absence from school made it more difficult for the boy to make friends; he grew closer to his aunt.¹⁸⁹ He tells us: "my innate rising curiosity, soon removed all distance between us; like friends of an equal age, we freely conversed on every topic, familiar or abstruse."¹⁹⁰ Gibbon was able to converse with adults more easily because he spent more time with his aunt than with boys his own age.

¹⁸⁷ J.W. Burrow, *Gibbon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 5.

¹⁸⁸ Edward Gibbon, *Autobiography of Edward Gibbon*, ed. Lord Sheffield (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), 26. Sheffield who was a friend of the Late Edward Gibbon originally published his Memoirs in 1795 CE.

¹⁸⁹ Martine Watson Brownley, "Gibbon: The Formation of the Mind and Character," in *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. G.W. Bowersock, John Clive and Stephen R. Graubard (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 16.

¹⁹⁰ Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 26.

At a private school, Westminster, Gibbon tells us that he learned Latin and Greek, with difficulty.¹⁹¹ Gibbon's academics remained undisciplined, as seen with his Latin and Greek translations which were inexact. He was well read but intellectually unguided. After his brief period at Westminster school he enrolled at Magdalen College in Oxford. Gibbon did not have kind words to say about his time at this College: "they proved the fourteen months the most idle and unprofitable of my whole life."¹⁹² During his time at the college Gibbon was admitted into the society of fellows and was surprised that they did not discuss questions about literature, but instead discussed personal and current events: "Their conversation stagnated in a round of college business, Tory politics, personal anecdotes, and private scandal."¹⁹³ This for Gibbon was unacceptable and it lacked the standards that he had believed this institution was to give him. With the silence of these professors, it was his tutor, Dr. Waldegrave, who supplemented the professor's teaching. Dr. Waldegrave is described as a simple but pious man. Gibbon tells us that his tutor was lazy but his mild behavior gained Gibbon's confidence and helped develop Gibbon's curious mind.¹⁹⁴

Gibbon continued his eager intellectual pursuits and became enamored by the subject of religion.¹⁹⁵ Having fallen in love with the Christian faith through the books and doctrine he read, Gibbon converted to Catholicism at the age of sixteen in June 1753.¹⁹⁶ His conversion remained completely bookish, because he knew no Catholics and read himself into the faith. Gibbon wrote later in his memoir that his conversion was a momentary glow of enthusiasm.¹⁹⁷ With his newfound faith, Gibbon was barred from Oxford, which was a closed off Anglican religious body at the time.¹⁹⁸ With Gibbon being barred from Oxford, his father was forced to find another establishment for his son to study. Gibbon was then sent to Lausanne, Switzerland. In Lausanne, Gibbon lived and learned from a Swiss Calvinist minister, Pavillard. Pavillard then handled Gibbon's reconversion to Anglicanism in 1754.¹⁹⁹ It is under Pavillard's tutelage that Gibbon continued his education in France. He became more fluent in Latin and picked up Greek again

¹⁹¹ Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 29, see also J.W. Burrow, *Gibbon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 6.

¹⁹² Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 36.

¹⁹³ Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 40.

¹⁹⁴ Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 41-42.

¹⁹⁵ Burrow, 7.

¹⁹⁶ Burrow, 7.

¹⁹⁷ Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 48.

¹⁹⁸ Burrow, 8.

¹⁹⁹ Burrow, 8.

and worked his way through it painfully. His scholarly work became more grounded at Lausanne. He remained in Lausanne for five years and it is during this time that he became well read in the logic and philosophy of John Locke (1632–1704), and in the historian and jurist of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Pierre Bayle (1647–1706). One of the most influential philosophers was Montesquieu (1689–1755). This philosopher was to influence him in writing his *Decline and Fall*.²⁰⁰ At this time Gibbon, above all else, became well read in Cicero (106-43 BCE). During this time, he also met Voltaire (1694–1778) who was established in Switzerland. Gibbon had offended Voltaire by circulating an unpublished ode, *O Maison d'Aristippe! O Jardin d'Epicure!*, without his permission.²⁰¹ Their relationship from then on was cordial but never great.²⁰²

The years in Lausanne were of an incalculable importance for Gibbon. They were the years that formed a strong scholarly base that was lacking from the previous two institutions that Gibbon had attended. His tutor, Pavillard, Gibbon says had a warm and gentle heart, unlike those from Oxford. It is through his lessons that Gibbon became a better scholar and he is very grateful for his time in Lausanne.²⁰³ The most serious crisis of his time in Lausanne was the love affair with Suzanne Curchod. Gibbon had fallen in love with Suzanne and asked his father if he was allowed to marry her. His father did not consent to this alliance because she had no money, so Gibbon yielded to his fate and his father's will "I sighed as a lover, I obeyed as a son."²⁰⁴ The pain subsided once he went back to England in 1758.

Gibbon's first work *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature* is published in 1761 and was mostly written between 1758 and 1759.²⁰⁵ The *Essai* is written in French.²⁰⁶ Gibbon's first published work was his attempt at studying the literature as well as history of the past. The book

²⁰⁰ Burrow, 8. It is through reading Montesquieu's works that Gibbon acquired a more secular education in relativism. This work held a mirror to the certainties of the Christian civilization and taught Gibbon not to take at face value the manners and the morals of their own society, see Roy Porter, *Edward Gibbon: Making History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1988), 51.

²⁰¹ Burrow, 9.

²⁰² Gibbon in his later life was to become a severe critic of Voltaire's superficial scholarship, see J.W. Burrow, *Gibbon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 9. For Gibbon's remarks about Voltaire and his point of view of the man, see also Edward Gibbon, *Autobiography of Edward Gibbon*, ed. Lord Sheffield (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), 80-81.

²⁰³ Burrow, 9, see also Edward Gibbon, *Autobiography of Edward Gibbon*, ed. Lord Sheffield (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), 59-63.

²⁰⁴ Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 83-84, see also W. Burrow, *Gibbon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 9-10.

²⁰⁵ Edward Gibbon, *Essai sur l'étude de la littérature. A Critical Edition*, ed. Robert Mankin (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010), 1.

²⁰⁶ Not surprising that Gibbon's first published work was written in French after the five formative years he spent in Lausanne, see Roy Porter, *Edward Gibbon: Making History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson limited, 1988), 53.

was written like the classical text. It had no table of contents and Gibbon had a series of eighty-seven chapters. This text shows little signs of a governing intention and his argument is rather episodic with an occasional burst of narrative.²⁰⁷ Gibbon himself says that he was an ambitious youth and remembers the feelings of life as a student writing the work “... when he ventures to reveal the measures of his mind: his hopes and fears are multiplied by the idea of self-importance, and he believes for a while that the eyes of mankind are fixed on his person and performance.”²⁰⁸ This statement demonstrates to us the importance of Gibbon’s views upon publishing his first work. In England, the work was received with cold indifference and was speedily forgotten.²⁰⁹ Gibbon’s inquiry into polytheism in his *Essai* gives us an understanding of the formation of his ideas on religion in *Decline and Fall*. In chapter LVII, he tells us “Nous ne connaissons guère le système du Paganisme que par les Poètes, et par les pères de l’Église ; les uns et les autres très adonnés aux fictions.”²¹⁰ This along with what he said in chapter LVIII: “Il est absurde de consacrer des temples à ceux dont ont voit les sépulchres”²¹¹ shows that he thought it ridiculous. He thought that religion, either pagan or monotheistic, was completely made up by the Church Fathers and classical poets. He further finds it odd that they gave adorations to the dead based on these ideas given to us by religion. This first work hints at what kind of scholar Gibbon was and further become in his mix of religion, philosophy and history. In 1760, Gibbon entered the English military. His *Essai* was published during his time in the English army in 1761.²¹² During this time, he moved from camp to camp which made him worldlier. It is during his time in the English military that Gibbon becomes more versed in English authors and literature, before this time he was well versed in French literature because of his time in Lausanne. The time he served in the English military made him an Englishman again.²¹³ He served for two years after which time he returned to study classical works.

By 1763 the war had ended and Gibbon was once again free to concentrate his time to his studies. With his father’s acceptance, he took a grand tour of France and Italy. This trip proved to

²⁰⁷ Edward Gibbon, *Essai*, 16.

²⁰⁸ Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 100.

²⁰⁹ Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 99.

²¹⁰ Gibbon, *Essai*, 128.

²¹¹ Gibbon, *Essai*, 129. My translation “We only know the system of paganism from classical poets and Church Fathers, both of which are good at fiction” and “It is absurd to dedicate temples to those we see in sepulchers.”

²¹² Gibbon entered into the English military during the seven years’ war (1756-1763). For a survey of the seven years’ war, see Matt Schumann, *The Seven Years War: A Transatlantic History* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

²¹³ Burrow, 11-12.

be very influential for him and his future work, *Decline and Fall*. In Paris, Gibbon had attained a modest reputation because of his *Essai*. This gave him access to the Salons of Paris, where Gibbon met many intellectual leaders of the French enlightenment. Gibbon's interactions with these men further influenced his ideas and he was greatly indebted for their works and advice.²¹⁴ His tour continued to Italy in 1764 at the age of twenty-seven.²¹⁵ Gibbon wrote in his memoirs, "I can neither forget nor express the strong emotions which agitated my mind as I approached and entered the *eternal city* [of Rome]"²¹⁶ The strong emotions that he felt upon entering the city was never forgotten and left a lasting impression on his mind. It is also in Rome that Gibbon came up with the idea of writing the *Decline and Fall*, "... as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter, the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started in my mind."²¹⁷ By 1765, Gibbon had returned to England and the next five years proved difficult for him because he tried to have his independence from his father. His father's financial extravagance threatened his prospects and put a strain on their relationship²¹⁸ In 1770, his father's death saddened him but he did not deny that this was a deliverance from his hold "... my grief was soothed by the conscious satisfaction that I had discharged all the duties of filial piety."²¹⁹

Gibbon began writing the first volume of *Decline and Fall* as he was still thinking of a career in England. Life was expensive in London and his father had not left him a large enough fortune to live on. In 1774, Gibbon entered Parliament as a member of the Liskeard, thanks to a cousin by marriage, Lord Eliot. Although very interested in listening to other members debate over the problems in the American colonies, Gibbon realized that he did not have the talent to become himself a proper orator. "After a fleeting illusive hope, prudence condemned me to acquiesce in the humble station of a mute."²²⁰ His silence in the support of Lord North's government along with his writing a French pamphlet vindicating the English conduct towards France proved to be advantageous for him because he became the Commissioners of Trade and

²¹⁴ Burrow, 12. The Salon is a place of intellectuals gathering and conversations generally were of an academic nature. It was very popular in the eighteenth century.

²¹⁵ Burrow, 2.

²¹⁶ Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 158-159.

²¹⁷ Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 160.

²¹⁸ Burrow, 13.

²¹⁹ Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 175, see also J.W. Burrow, *Gibbon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 13.

²²⁰ Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 178.

Plantation.²²¹ This gave Gibbon a good salary and during this time he published his third and fourth volume of his *Decline and Fall*.²²² By 1783, the Whig movement for economic reform extinguished Gibbon's position and he lost the extra income. He decided to abandon his Parliamentary career as a measure of securing his finances and he went on to settle in Lausanne with a Swiss friend by the name of Deyverdun. During his time in Lausanne he completed his *Decline and Fall*. His stay in Lausanne was only soured by the death of his friend, Deyverdun, and the French Revolution.²²³ Gibbon did not like the French revolutionaries and felt that they were like the new Germanic tribes of the time, who created chaos and infected the happiness of the society.²²⁴ Gibbon returned to England and died a year later of illness in 1794.²²⁵

Gibbon's Argument Against the Cause of Christian Progress in the Decline and Fall: Chapters XV-XVI

The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire is how Gibbon was to be remembered; this major work covered a vast historical period from the age of the Antonine dynasty (138–193 CE) till the fall of the Eastern Roman Empire in 1453 to the Turks. He was among the first historians to relate the church history with those from the history of the Roman Empire.²²⁶ By doing this he was able to narrate both histories together, one from a religious perspective and the other from a secular historical perspective. For Gibbon, it was important for the historian to strive to be as accurate and diligent with the historical facts.²²⁷ This was a very important work because no one had attempted such a long history before that covered the majority of the Roman Empire. The first volume of his work was published in 1776, the second

²²¹ Burrow, 14.

²²² Gibbon, *Autobiography*, 192.

²²³ Burrow, 14.

²²⁴ Burrow, 15.

²²⁵ Burrow, 15.

²²⁶ The history of the church depended on Ecclesiastical authority and different documentations and assumptions. Like many thinkers of his time Gibbon did not treat ecclesiastical and historical sources together. While he narrates Roman history for most of his volume, he only truly looks at ecclesiastical sources in chapter fifteen and sixteen. Gibbon found a way to engage with both histories within his book, see J. G. A. Pocock, "Gibbon and the Invention of Gibbon: Chapter 15 and 16 reconsidered," in *History of European Ideas*, 35 (2009): 209, see also Francois Furet, "Civilization and Barbarism in Gibbon's History," in *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. G.W. Bowersock, John Clive and Stephen R. Graubard (London: Harvard University Press, 1977), 165.

²²⁷ Gibbon believed that all details were important for anyone studying history compared to Voltaire who believed that some details are useless because they lead to nothing, see John Mathews, "Gibbon and the Later Roman Empire: Causes and Circumstances," in *Edward Gibbon and Empire*, ed. Rosamond Mckitterick and Roland Quinault (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 20.

and third in 1781 and the remaining three in 1788. The first three volumes of Gibbon's work concentrate on the declining Roman Empire in the West and at the same time observed the rise of Christianity as a factor to Roman decline. The last three volumes concentrate on events in the Eastern Empire after the Fall of the Roman West.²²⁸

Gibbon argues that there are two major themes that contribute to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. The first is the theme of internal disintegration.²²⁹ He argues that internal strife is mostly caused by the Christianization of the Roman Empire. It is because Christianity is flourishing in the fourth and fifth century that we have a weakened Roman state. The Roman Empire's problems with the Christians lead it to the second theme of the fall, that of external enemies, the Germanic tribes and their culture. Gibbon also argues that the Romans, being weakened by the Christian spirit, allowed the Germanic tribes to conquer Rome and caused its Fall.²³⁰ To further look at Gibbon's argument of Christianity we must look at chapter XV and XVI.

Gibbon's attack on Christianity comes mostly in Chapters XV and XVI. Having established the declining state of the Roman Empire in his first fourteen chapters, Gibbon dedicates the final two chapters in his first volume to the rise of Christianity and its effect on the Roman Empire. It is in these last two chapters that Gibbon elicits the anger of his Christian readers, because of the way he structures and presents the first chapters. By the time we get to the last two chapters on Christianity, the reader feels that Christianity is the ultimate conclusion and reason for the Fall of Rome.²³¹ In Chapter XV Gibbon opens by insinuating that Christianity has used the turmoil of the Roman Empire to grow.²³² Gibbon is well aware that there were difficulties for the early (or "primitive," as he calls them) Christians. Here, Gibbon describes the difference between a historian and a theologian. "The theologian may indulge the pleasing task of describing Religion as she descended from Heaven, arrayed in her native purity. A more melancholic duty is imposed on the historian. He must discover the inevitable mixture of error

²²⁸See J. G. A. Pocock, "Gibbon's Decline and Fall and the World View of the Late Enlightenment," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 10, no. 3 (1977): 287. For the purpose of this thesis we will only look at events in the West, meaning the first three volumes of Gibbon's history and not use the three last volumes of Gibbon's history.

²²⁹ Francois Furet, "Civilization and Barbarism in Gibbon's History," in *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. G.W. Bowersock, John Clive and Stephen R. Graubard (London: Harvard University Press, 1977), 166.

²³⁰ Furet, 166.

²³¹ David Womersley, *The Transformation of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 102.

²³² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 446.

and corruption, which she contracted in a long residence upon earth, among the weak and degenerate race of beings.”²³³ Gibbon does not seem to go into the details about Christianity because he seems to foreshadow many inconsistencies between the historian and the ecclesiastical authority but as a historian he has no choice but to face the problem.

Gibbon gives us five causes that contributed to the growth of Christianity, which he interprets as sufficient to bring down Roman civilization. The first cause was the inflexibility and zeal of the early Christians.²³⁴ Judaism was zealous before Christianity but Jews were accepted by the Roman Empire because their faith was older. Christians tried to use the same type of zeal but the result was different. They caused clear division in the Roman state.²³⁵ A big problem for the first Christians was the pagan pantheon of gods. “But the established religions of Paganism were seen by the primitive Christians in a much more odious and formidable light. It was the universal sentiment of both church and of heretics, that the demons were the authors, the patrons, and the objects of idolatry [among pagans].”²³⁶ The belief in these gods was to be transferred to the belief in demons that came to torture the faithful. These demons corrupted the hearts of the good Christians, which is why they had to remain away from pagan gods for fear that they might be corrupted. With this in mind, Christians had to remain pure and undefiled by the practice of idolatry.²³⁷ This caused Christianity a problem because the Romans sacrificed to their gods and this was generally done in big lavish ceremony. Gibbon criticizes Christians who abandoned their loved ones during ceremonies such as marriages and funeral. “... The Christian on these interesting occasions was compelled to desert the persons who were the dearest to him, rather than contract the guilt inherent to those impious ceremonies.”²³⁸ Gibbon says that Christians might have wanted to stand out because these events offered them an opportunity to show their zeal for their Christian faith opposing the Roman ways.

²³³ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 446.

²³⁴ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 447.

²³⁵ Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527 CE) also make a statement that is similar when talking about the history of the Republic of Rome. While commenting on the history of Rome by Livy, Machiavelli argues for a system of government that put the needs of the state above personal interest, see. Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, trans. Leslie J. Walker, S.J., ed. Bernard Crick (England: Penguin Books, 2003).

²³⁶ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 448. To see an early Christian response to views on paganism as demons corrupting Christians, see Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson. trans. Marcus Dods and George Reith, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1899).

²³⁷ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 460.

²³⁸ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 461.

The second cause of Christian progress within the empire is the doctrine of immortality of the soul. Gibbon understands that Christian progress is due in part to a beautiful afterlife. The primitive Christians had within their faith a resurrection that happened after death which promised eternal life. Gibbon believes that sages from Greece and Rome had come up with a more exalted and just idea of human nature, although, they were guided by their imagination, which had been prompted by vanity.²³⁹ Gibbon argues against the Christian belief of the afterlife but also points to the problems with the Greek and Roman view. The main problem with the pagan religion were that their system of mythology was unsupported by solid proofs causing pagans to disclaimed and usurped authority.²⁴⁰ Another problem of the pagan religion was that it had been abandoned to poets and painters who added so many phantoms and monsters and dispensed rewards and punishment unequally that it made it very difficult to believe in an afterlife.²⁴¹ There was also eagerness with the approaching end times which might have helped the progress of Christianity. The Apostles had predicted that the end time was near and other church fathers like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Lactantius believed it was coming which helped fuel the believers into a state of expectation that motivated them highly to be zealous.²⁴² Along with this beautiful end time, the Christians also obtained some form of retribution on their Roman persecutors. “But it was unanimously affirmed, that those who, since the birth or death of Christ had obstinately persisted in the worship of the demons, neither deserved nor could expect a pardon from the irritated justice of the [Christian] Deity.”²⁴³ And when talking about the Christians, Gibbon writes that they “were sometimes seduced by the resentment and spiritual pride to delight in the prospect of their future triumph.”²⁴⁴ Gibbon believed that this promise of damnation of non-Christians was a tool that Christians used to convert their pagan friends and it involved spreading fear among the pagans. It was a simple solution “The careless polytheist, assailed by new and unexpected terrors, against which neither his priests nor his philosophers could afford him any certain protection, was very frequently terrified and subdued by the menace of eternal tortures. His fears might assist the progress of his faith and reason.”²⁴⁵ This promise of

²³⁹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 463.

²⁴⁰ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 464.

²⁴¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 464.

²⁴² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 468.

²⁴³ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 470.

²⁴⁴ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 470.

²⁴⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 471.

eternal life was a useful tool for Christianity to continue growing in the beginning when the polytheist had no solid answers to support their faith.

The third cause for Christian progress is the miracles of the early church. Miracles play an important aspect in the early Christian faith. It is these miracles that are demonstrating the presence of faith in the world. Gibbon did not like the idea of miracles because there is no proof that they existed, or the only authorities that validate these miracles are ecclesiastical ones.²⁴⁶ Gibbon argues that if we are to believe in miracles we must first take notice of our sentiments when approaching the subject of study and evaluate the proof that we have: “Our different sentiments on this subject will be much less influenced by any particular arguments than by our habits of study and reflection: and above all, by the degree of the evidence which we have accustomed ourselves to require for the proof of a miraculous event.”²⁴⁷ One of these miracles that Gibbon attacks is concerning the darkness during the passion event.²⁴⁸ According to the gospel of Matthew there was reportedly a darkness that happened during the crucifixion of Jesus.²⁴⁹ This for Gibbon is problematic because when we look at the Roman sources during the reign of Tiberius there is no mention of a darkness that covered the empire as some of the Church Fathers had alleged. Gibbon uses Seneca and the elder Pliny, both of whom recorded natural phenomena like earthquakes and eclipses. These philosophers did not record an event that is stated in the crucifixion of Jesus. Gibbon further says that Pliny who even had a distinct chapter on eclipses does not mention such an event.²⁵⁰ This furthers the argument against miracles for Gibbon that if the event is not mentioned in more than one source, then it must have inconsistencies which must be addressed and not followed blindly. Although Gibbon has issues with the miracles, he does credit miracles with the progress of Christianity.

The fourth cause of the rise of Christianity is the virtues of the first Christians.²⁵¹ These virtues were kept intact by two types of motivations. The first is the effects of repentance. No matter how bad a person acted in the past they always had the ability to repent for their crimes. For Gibbon, this is how the population kept good reputations which, in turn, lead to the

²⁴⁶ Gibbon is very sceptical and mistrusts information when they come from Ecclesiastical historians, see Owen Chadwick, “Gibbon and the Church Historians,” in *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. G.W. Bowersock, John Clive and Stephen R. Graubard (London: Harvard University Press, 1977).

²⁴⁷ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 473.

²⁴⁸ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 511.

²⁴⁹ Matthew 27: 45-46. *NRSV*.

²⁵⁰ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 512.

²⁵¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 475.

Christians' moral virtue remaining intact. To violate the Christian virtue was taking a risk of being damned and unable to attain the afterlife: "[t]he desire of perfection became the ruling passion of [the Christian] soul; and it is well known that, while reason embraces a cold mediocrity, our passions hurry us, with rapid violence, over the space which lies between the most opposite extremes."²⁵² The second motive for Christian virtue is the human principle of love of pleasure and love of action.²⁵³ The love of pleasure is all that consists of art, learning, health, economy and charms of social intercourse. This is productive for happiness to the private life. The love of action is a principle that is much stronger and has a doubtful nature. This love of action led to anger, ambition and revenge, although if guided properly by propriety and benevolence it could be harmonized with love of pleasure to form the perfect idea of human nature. If the Christians had perfectly formed this idea then there was no problems with the pagans, "[b]ut it was not in *this* world that the primitive Christians were desirous of making themselves either agreeable or useful."²⁵⁴ Gibbon then demonstrates how Christians do not partake in society to form a perfect human nature. Christians condemn all pleasures and luxury. For Gibbon, "[t]he acquisition of knowledge, the exercise of our reason or fancy, and the cheerful flow of unguarded conversation, may employ the leisure of a liberal mind."²⁵⁵ This is important for a society to evolve and progress but Christianity refused to accept any of it "[s]uch amusement, however, were rejected with abhorrence or admitted with the utmost caution, by the severity of the fathers, who despised all knowledge that was not useful to salvation, and who considered all levity of discourse as a criminal abuse of the gift of speech."²⁵⁶ Along with these ideas Christians took no luxury. Gibbon criticizes that this is normal because those who took to the Christian faith were poor and therefore ignorant: "But it is always easy, as well as agreeable, for the inferior ranks of mankind to claim merit from the contempt of that pomp and pleasure, which fortune has placed beyond their reach....The virtue of the primitive Christians, like the first Romans, was very frequently guarded by poverty and ignorance."²⁵⁷ As well as having an aversion to the pleasures of the world they also had an aversion to the business of war and government: "they refused to take active part in civil administration or the military defence of

²⁵² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 476.

²⁵³ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 478.

²⁵⁴ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 478.

²⁵⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 478.

²⁵⁶ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 478.

²⁵⁷ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 479.

the empire.”²⁵⁸ This caused a problem for the Roman Empire because the Christians were unwilling to defend it from foreign attacks. Gibbon even goes as far as saying this might be a criminal offence: “[t]his indolent, or even criminal disregard to the public welfare, exposed them to the contempt and reproaches of the Pagans, who very frequently asked, what must be the fate of the empire, attacked on every side by the barbarians, if all mankind should adopt the pusillanimous sentiments of the new sect?”²⁵⁹

The fifth and final cause of the Christian progress that was detrimental to the Roman Empire is Christian activity in government of the church, which acted as a separate society that attacked the established pagan religion of the empire.²⁶⁰ Gibbon criticizes the church government for many of the problems that happened to Christianity because he believes that this office was easily corruptible: “The ecclesiastical governors of the Christians were taught to unite the wisdom of the serpent with the innocence of the dove; but as the former was refined, so the latter was insensibly corrupted by the habits of government.”²⁶¹ The government of the church elected bishops to lead Christians in different congregations.²⁶² Gibbon believed the election of a bishop would lead to corruption overtime because as the church government progressed, the bishops were raised to a more prominent position and they attempted to dominate their brethren.²⁶³ At this time, the pontiff of Rome during this time asserted his dominance over all of Christianity because Rome boasted about having the tombs of two famous apostles, Peter and Paul, compared to other cities like Antioch, Ephesus or Corinth, who only had one.²⁶⁴

One attribute that made the Christian Church progress in both wealth and followers was the use of oblations or donations. In the beginning, the Roman state had laws against the church gaining too much wealth from their followers but over time the laws became looser: “The progress of Christianity, and the civil confusion of the empire, contributed to relax the severity of the laws, and before the close of the third century many considerable estates were bestowed on the opulent churches of Rome, Milan, Antioch, Alexandria...”²⁶⁵ A major part of these oblations were kept for the maintenance of the clergy and the bishops but the rest was given to the

²⁵⁸ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 482.

²⁵⁹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 482.

²⁶⁰ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 482.

²⁶¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 483.

²⁶² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 484.

²⁶³ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 488.

²⁶⁴ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 489.

²⁶⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 493.

patrimony of the poor. "... It [Oblation] was distributed to support widows and orphans, the lame, the sick, and the aged of the community; to comfort strangers and pilgrims, and to alleviate the misfortunes of prisoners and captives, more especially when their sufferings had been occasioned by their firm attachment to the cause of religion."²⁶⁶ Gibbon attributed this aspect of the oblations to gaining more Christian converts as well as keeping them in line with Christian virtue. Excommunication was another useful church tool to keep everyone in line with the Christian virtues. If for whatever reason a Christian was excommunicated they no longer had access to oblations.²⁶⁷ Along with not being able to acquire oblations, the Christian was excluded from happiness in eternal life. This did cause a divide in the church because then came the question of allowing the excommunicated back into the faith.²⁶⁸ This was a question of justice versus clemency or mercy.²⁶⁹ Gibbon explains that the church had a "well-tempered mixture of liberality and rigour, the judicious dispensations of rewards and punishments, according to the maxims of policy as well as justice, constituted the *human* strength of the church."²⁷⁰ This is the reason to which Gibbon attributes the success of the church government even though bishops may become easily corruptible.²⁷¹ In addition to Gibbon's five causes of Christian progress, which he describes as a one of the causes for the fall of the Roman Empire, he adds how polytheism's weakness aided the Christian religion. Gibbon points to some causes that aided the Christian religion increase its members and popularity. The first of these was that the pagan religion was practiced by the noble class which had a lot more wealth than the lower Roman class.²⁷² This caused a type of separation between the poor and the rich, compared to the Christian religion that made everyone equal in the eye of the Christian God.

In the final chapter, XVI, of his first volume Gibbon looks at the Roman governments actions towards the Christians, his argument here is to see whether or not the persecutions were as bad as the early ecclesiastical historian, such as Eusebius, recorded or if this was simply a

²⁶⁶ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 493.

²⁶⁷ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 494.

²⁶⁸ We are able to see a similar type of issue with the Donatist who did not want to let the priests and bishops back into the Christian Church after having abandoned the faith to save their lives, see Gérard Vallée, *The Shaping of Christianity: The History and Literature of its Formative Centuries (100-800)* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 83-84.

²⁶⁹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 495.

²⁷⁰ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 496.

²⁷¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 496.

²⁷² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 497.

useful tool to help Christian propaganda and progress.²⁷³ Gibbon acknowledges that the Romans were severe towards Christians compared to other religions that were around at the time, but he still feels that there was an exaggeration of persecution within the recorded history. The Jewish religion was tolerated compared to Christianity because the Jewish people were considered a nation and Christianity was considered to be a sect.²⁷⁴ To the Romans, the Christians themselves had rebelled against their father religion as well as violate the Roman constitution.²⁷⁵ This sect also followed a man called Jesus Christ who was charged as criminal by his own people and the Roman government was confused as to why Christians wanted to follow Jesus Christ. In contrast, the pagans followed heroes who vanquished monsters and tyrants. These heroes were standards of heroism and worthy of worship. However, Christians wished to follow a criminal who had caused issues within his own religious faith.²⁷⁶

Christianity remained ignored for a long period of time and was simply hated because Christians ostracized themselves from the Roman civilization. The ecclesiastical historians put a lot of emphasis on the persecutions of the first Christians but Gibbon blames church historians like Eusebius for choosing what helps to glorify the faith compared to other possible atrocities.²⁷⁷ Gibbon argues that the Romans were not very keen on persecutions of Christians and in fact tried to not have them persecuted or tortured.²⁷⁸ “They frequently declined the odious task of persecution, dismissed the charge with contempt, or suggested to the accused Christian some legal evasion, by which he might elude the severity of the laws.”²⁷⁹ Romans persecuted Christians as a last recourse when they were adamant to not reform and abide by Roman life. This led to a period which gave martyrs to the Christian cause. For Gibbon, martyrs were “either bishops and presbyters, the persons the most distinguished among the Christians by their rank and influence, and whose example might strike terror into the whole sect.”²⁸⁰ Martyrdom was only committed by those who had some form of influence and this is why they became heroic in their deeds. Gibbon says that martyrdom was a choice because of the rewards that it included.

²⁷³ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 514.

²⁷⁴ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 517.

²⁷⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 518.

²⁷⁶ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 520.

²⁷⁷ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 577.

²⁷⁸ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 539.

²⁷⁹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 539.

²⁸⁰ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 540.

“The fire of martyrdom supplied every defect and expiated every sin; that while the souls of ordinary Christians were obliged to pass through a slow and painful purification, the triumphant sufferers entered into the immediate fruition of eternal bliss, where society of the patriarchs, the apostles, and the prophets, they reigned with Christ, and acted as his assessors in the universal judgement of mankind.”²⁸¹

The martyrs generally chose this mode of death to give themselves eternal goodness in the afterlife. The problem for Gibbon is that not all martyrs were choosing this death for the right reason, “[s]ome of these were persons oppressed by poverty and debts, who blindly sought to terminate a miserable existence by a glorious death.”²⁸²

Gibbon’s Further Arguments Against Christians and General Observations

In the following chapters, Gibbon further pushed his analysis of how Christianity corrupted the Roman Empire.²⁸³ The reign of Constantine the Great, which helped to establish Christianity in the Roman Empire was a big turning point in the empire’s history. The reign of Constantine was by far the most advantageous for the Christian religion. Gibbon did not see his reign as gloriously as Eusebius did, but constantly criticizes Constantine for the way he ruled the empire and how his policies, along with the relationship with the Germanic tribes, made the empire weaker.²⁸⁴ Some of Constantine’s policies reduced the number of legions which kept commanders in check from possibly rising to higher power by the military might.²⁸⁵ At the same time as reducing the Roman legions, he increased the Germanic auxiliaries.²⁸⁶ The effect of this

²⁸¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 545.

²⁸² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 577-578.

²⁸³ After the publication of the first volume of *Decline and Fall* Gibbon was generally well received except from the Christian community who felt that Gibbon was attacking the Christian faith and blaming them as one of the primary causes of the fall of the Roman Empire. For a contemporary Christian response on Gibbons views of Christianity, see Joseph Milner, *Gibbon’s Account of Christianity Considered (1781)* (London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974). Gibbon after having received many rebukes from the Christian population was forced to write a vindication on some of the aspects that he mentioned in the first volume. For the vindication see Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. ed. David Womersley, vol. 3 (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995), 1107. For a more modern view on these vindications see Patricia B. Craddock, *Edward Gibbon, Luminus Historian 1772-1794* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Pres, 1989).

²⁸⁴ Gibbon even goes as far as saying that it is Constantine that sowed the seeds of decline with his political policies, see Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 585.

²⁸⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 621.

²⁸⁶ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* I, 623.

policy was an increase of Germanic tribes migrating into Roman territory. The restructuring of the military as well as the increase in the Germanic population eventually hindered the empire in the long run. Eusebius described Constantine's reign as heaven on earth, to be more precise that the kingdom that God had promised had finally arrived. Eusebius believed that the Roman Empire was continuing the process of preparing humanity for the word of God since it began.²⁸⁷ He also thought that the Roman Empire was mimicking the kingdom of God on earth. Under the reign of Constantine, the empire was united and this was a Christian triumph over the pagan society which was starting to crumble.²⁸⁸ Eusebius's view presented Christianity and the reign of Constantine as a positive force for the faith. Later, Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) introduced a new view on the history of Christianity in his book *The City of God*.²⁸⁹ Gibbon notes that Eusebius concludes his narrative of church history and the Christian triumph at Constantine. It was ironic that after the death of Constantine in 337 CE, the empire was to fall further into bloodshed making Eusebius' analysis of Constantine's reign obsolete.²⁹⁰

Gibbon disputes Constantine's motive to convert to Christianity. He questions three possible miracles that Constantine faced before his conversion to the Christian faith, all of which relate to the visions of the cross giving him victory. The first is the standard of the cross. Constantine used a symbol of Christ's suffering to motivate his troops and push them to victory. Along with this standard the second vision comes to Constantine in a dream and that is to engrave the cross on all the soldier's armory, weaponry and shield to give assurance and enthusiasm of victory.²⁹¹ The third was the vision of the cross in the sky which again made him feel as though victory was assured if he chose the religion of the Christians.²⁹² By putting all these "miracles" together we are able to see how Constantine was depicted as a conqueror for the

²⁸⁷ F. Edward Cranz, "Kingdom and Polity in Eusebius of Caesarea," *The Harvard Theological Review* 45, (1952): 47.

²⁸⁸ F. Edward Cranz, "De Civitate Dei, XV. 2, and Augustine's idea of the Christian Society," *Speculum* 25, no. 2 (1950): 220.

²⁸⁹ For further views on Augustine view of Christian history, see Augustine. *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson. (Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 1998). Between books XV- XVIII in *City of God*. Augustine looks at the history of the two cities and the idea of two cities co-existing, the city of God and the city of man. For Augustine, even though both cities have the ability to attain the grace of God, they are opposites. The city of heaven represents living with the love of God and the city of man is a city that serves false idols. This means that the earth will never live for anyone but itself. It will continue being a pale imitation of the city of God.

²⁹⁰ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 660.

²⁹¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 736.

²⁹² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 741.

Christians. God had chosen him to lead.²⁹³ These victories led Constantine to become a devout patron to the Christian faith, and led historians to misunderstand his patronage for his conversion to Christianity. Gibbon looks into the conversion of Constantine and sees it as possibly sincere. He does state that if Constantine was sincere he only converted at the end of his life. The reason for delay was “ ... there were many who judged it imprudent to precipitate a salutary rite, which could not be repeated; to throw away an inestimable privilege, which could never be recovered. By the delay of their baptism, they could venture freely to indulge their passion in the enjoyment of this world, while they retained in their own hand the means of a sure and easy absolution.”²⁹⁴ For Gibbon, Constantine was possibly baptized at the end of his life because this way he was able to take advantage of both lifestyle. He continued to engage in the pleasures of being an emperor without having to worry about being punished in the afterlife. Under Constantine, the Church became more powerful and it is from this point onwards that Gibbon describes possible corruption within the faith compared to its original message in the first century.²⁹⁵ Constantine represented a golden age for the Christians. After years of persecutions they had finally reached security, wealth, honours and revenge on the pagans.²⁹⁶

During the fourth and fifth centuries, the pagan religion began to decline and make way for the population of late antiquity to follow Christianity. Gibbon notices a type of exchange that happened between Christians and pagans. Christianity already started absorbing pagan ceremonies into its rites. This is most strongly seen in the case of Christian relics. Gibbon dislikes the relics because he believes that it corrupted the Christian message.²⁹⁷ The belief that Christian relics were bad probably came from Gibbon background as a Protestant.²⁹⁸ This for Gibbon was to create names for skeletons and further corrupt the church with superstitious

²⁹³ This is how Eusebius, a devout Christian, characterized Constantine. Constantine's reign also comes after years of persecution against the Christian faith which further made Eusebius and his peers believe that the kingdom of God has appeared on earth.

²⁹⁴ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 746.

²⁹⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 752.

²⁹⁶ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 766.

²⁹⁷ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley, vol. II (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1995), 92. Volume 3 originally published in 1781 and volume 4 originally published in 1788 here collected in one volume.

²⁹⁸ The Reformation of the Church which happened in the fifteenth century was a movement that argued against the Roman Church. The Reformation took political, philosophical and religious factors against the Roman Church. It is while arguing these different factors that many different denominations split on how the religious message should be governed. Protestantism was one of these denominations which believed in a taking the message from the gospel more literal and tended to discard any type of iconoclasm, see John Vidmar, *The Catholic Church Through the Ages: A History*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 177-232.

ideas.²⁹⁹ Connected with the ideas of Christian relics was that these had the power to heal the followers. Miracles for Gibbon are generally seen as a negative.³⁰⁰ The ceremonies held for these saints mimicked the ceremonies that the pagans held for their Gods. It was like the saints and their relics had become demi-gods worthy of worship. “The most respectable bishops had persuaded themselves that the ignorant rustics would more cheerfully renounce superstitions of paganism, if they found some resemblance, some compensations in the bosom of Christianity.”³⁰¹ By imitating the pagan ceremonies, Christianity themselves had become what they once fought against and had made a model that could become easily corruptible: “The religion of Constantine achieved, in less than a century the final conquest of the Roman Empire: but the victors themselves were insensibly subdued by the arts of their vanquished rivals.”³⁰²

Gibbon writes his general observations after chapter XXXVIII, which forms his observations on Clovis and the Merovingians. It is important to note that Gibbon considers the Merovingian age to be one of numerous causes to the decline and fall of the Roman Empire because he describes their history before his general observations on the fall of the Roman West.³⁰³ Although Gibbon was very negative towards Constantine’s age and the Germanic migrations, he takes a kinder view of the Merovingian age.³⁰⁴ The Merovingians, very much like other Germanic tribes, might have contributed to the decline of the Roman Empire but began to restructure the falling empire by successfully merging different cultures together.³⁰⁵ The general

²⁹⁹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall II*, 92.

³⁰⁰ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall II*, 93. The negativity of miracles is connected with the Enlightenment era because of the rise of Deism. Deism believed that there was a creator God who created the universe but then did not do anything else and just sat to watch. Hence science was able to discover laws that were put by God into the creation of the world but disagree with miracles which Deists believed to be superstitious, see John Vidmar, *The Catholic Church Through the Ages: A History*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 258-261.

³⁰¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall II*, 97.

³⁰² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall II*, 97.

³⁰³ Wood tells us that Gibbon could have put his general observations after chapter XXXVI, XXXVII or even chapter XXXIX. But the fact that he put it after chapter XXXVIII means that he sees the Germanic tribe as the culmination of the history of the Western Empire, see Ian N. Wood, “Gibbon and the Merovingians,” in *Edward Gibbon and Empire*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick and Roland Quinault (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 117.

³⁰⁴ Ian N. Wood, “Gibbon and the Merovingians,” in *Edward Gibbon and Empire*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick and Roland Quinault (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 119. It is possible that Gibbon might have been biased when writing about the Merovingians because they were the ancestors of France. Gibbon having spent time in France had come to become well acquainted with French literature and more likely tried to debate for the Merovingian age from political exploitation in the pre-revolution France, see Ian N. Wood, “Gibbon and the Merovingians” in *Edward Gibbon and Empire*, ed. Rosamond McKitterick and Roland Quinault (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 127.

³⁰⁵ How the Merovingians and the Franks help preserve the three different cultures together will be looked at in chapter four.

observation comes at the end of his third volume in the *Decline and Fall* and encompasses the end of the Roman West. Gibbon goes over some of the arguments that he brought forward when discussing the decline and fall and emphasizes them in this general part.

After surveying and discussing the decline of the West, Gibbon argues that three main issues arise. First, there was the problems of the Roman military, which was a sluggish army in the 4th and 5th centuries compared to earlier times. When looking at the Republic and the beginning of the empire under Augustus, every citizen was obliged to take part in the army and protect its nation against enemies. They were even oath bound to this obligation to the state. This ensured that the Roman army never lacked soldiers and defenders of its power.³⁰⁶ Connected to the problems of the army we must look into the age of Constantine. Constantine was among the first to relax military powers and hand them to Germanic people, instead of having citizens of the empire take up arms.³⁰⁷ Religion also had an effect when it came the time to recruit soldiers for the army. The promise of an afterlife, which is one of the main arguments for Christianity, made the population weaker and less likely to want to go to war for the present nation, when salvation was to be attained after death in a heavenly kingdom.³⁰⁸ “The clergy successfully preached the doctrines of patience and pusillanimity; the active virtues of society were discouraged; and the last remains of military spirit were buried in the cloister: a large portion of public and private wealth was consecrated to the specious demands of charity and devotion...”³⁰⁹ The affairs of the church also distracted the state and emperors from issues happening around them.³¹⁰ Gibbon also blames Christianity for becoming enemies within the empire: “the Roman world was oppressed by a new species of tyranny; and the persecuted sects became the secret enemies of their country.”³¹¹

According to Gibbon, a second factor that contributed to the decline of the empire is that the power of government was divided between West and East. Both co-emperors wanted to control the empire and this led to some problems seen in a double reign. The two halves were each constantly trying to obtain superiority over the other and in the end created a separation

³⁰⁶ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* II, 509.

³⁰⁷ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* II, 510.

³⁰⁸ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* II, 510.

³⁰⁹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* II, 510.

³¹⁰ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* II, 511.

³¹¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* II, 511.

between its peoples and cultures, which were no longer the same.³¹² Along with this issues of governing the empire, the emperor was more concerned with himself than the state: “The happiness of one hundred million depended on the personal merit of one, or two, men, perhaps children, whose minds were corrupted by education, luxury and despotic power.”³¹³ Gibbon uses the sons of Theodosius, Arcadius and Honorius, as an example to illustrate his point. During the reign of the sons of Theodosius, they abandoned governing to different groups. The church went to the bishops, the affairs of the State to eunuchs and affairs of military to the Germanic tribes.³¹⁴ Another factor was that Rome was ignorant of the world around it and the numbers of its enemies, like the problems in the East with the Huns. The Huns, who pushed west, caused one of the biggest migration shifts of its time. Germanic tribes who were generally settled outside of the Roman Empire were forced to move into Roman lands because of the Huns. The Germanic tribes finding themselves in a cold, poor, and dangerous situation were fortified by their strength and courage. They were in a phase of evolution and learning from Roman culture, were better able to improve themselves and take a more prominent place within the empire which overwhelmed the Roman citizens.³¹⁵

Gibbon’s argument demonstrates two main themes when discussing the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. The first is the impact that Christianity had on the internal organization of the empire. He argues that there were five primary causes that were instrumental to Christianity but detrimental to the empire. The first of these causes is the inability of Christians taking part in active civil life in the Roman Empire, which most citizens had to take in. This caused a visible divide between the Christians and the pagan Romans but also helped fuel hatred towards Christians because of Christianity’s zeal of their faith. Gibbon also points towards Christian doctrine of immortality as a possible issue. The doctrine of immortality made it more difficult to live in the present day. Everything that the Christians did was for a better afterlife, meaning that worldly affairs were treated as not important. The third cause was that of miracles within the church, Gibbon having an enlightenment age background was very sceptical about miracles. He believed that with no proof their cannot be a belief in miracles and that this helped corrupt the Church. Gibbon tells us that early Christian virtues were also one of the primary causes for the

³¹² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* II, 510.

³¹³ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* II, 513.

³¹⁴ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* II, 513.

³¹⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* II, 514.

Empire's decline. The effects of repentance always kept Christians in good standing in their community. No matter what had been done as long as people repented it meant that they were able to access the afterlife. The Christian virtues also bring issues with the principle of love of pleasure and love of action. Christianity by denying the principle love of pleasure they were not able to harmonize it properly with love of action, meaning that they further refused to take part in society which has helped humankind transform to better itself. The final primary cause for Gibbon is the increasing role that Christianity took in Roman government. The roles taken by the church weakened the Roman state further because, according to Gibbon, they elected bishops that were fallible and was easily corruptible.

Gibbon's theme of internal disintegration is further argued with the reign of Constantine. The argument is that Constantine had helped established the Christian religion. His laws and policies supported Christian tendencies. Gibbon criticizes Constantine's motive to convert and points to his deathbed baptism, if he ever was baptized, as sign that he did not really want to live in the Christian life on the earthly world. Constantine's reign also connects with the second theme of external problems, meaning the Germanic tribes and their migrations into the empire. Constantine's policies implemented a relationship with some of the Germanic tribes. The Roman Empire was ignorant of the enemies around its borders and this caused a domino effect that pushed Germanic tribes into the Roman territory. The Roman state was not ready to handle such a situation and this helped cause a decline in their governmental structures.

After the general observation and the end of third volume of *the Decline and Fall*, Gibbon turned his attention and the majority of the following three volumes on what happens in the East with brief mentions of the West to make a comparison. Gibbon's arguments against Christianity might be viewed as problematic and biased because of his own personal background. While writing the *Decline and Fall* he had a protestant lens and lived in the enlightenment era which challenged Church authority. Gibbon was harsh on Christianity because he believed it ended a glorious empire to bring humanity into a dark age.

The next chapter will present the Ostrogothic and Frankish kingdom that are the direct successors of the Roman Traditions. In these two kingdoms we will see how Christianity and the Germanic tribes adapt and transform their surrounding areas to help restructure the West.

Chapter 3: After the Fall: Continuation of the Roman West

Chapter 3 will look at two kingdoms that are formed after the collapse of the Roman West.³¹⁶ The first is the Ostrogothic Kingdom who ruled by Theodoric the Great, established himself in Italy and continued policies from the Roman Empire. He successfully created a system that allowed for both Germanic and Roman people to cohabitate. His system, although successful while he was alive, quickly fell apart once he died. The second will look at the establishment of the Frankish kingdoms ruled by Clovis. The Franks were around since the beginning of the Germanic migrations, but they remained mainly on the sidelines between the second and fourth centuries. During the reign of Clovis, the Franks rose to become a powerful kingdom in the early sixth century. They successfully adopted Roman culture and mixed it with Germanic culture to create a lasting kingdom, unlike that of the Ostrogoths.

Theodoric the Great (r. 475- 526 CE).

Theodoric the Great was to become one of the most accomplished Germanic rulers in his time by successfully merging the Roman and Germanic traditions. After the Roman West fell as a consequence of losing its last emperor, Romulus Augustulus, Italy was left to govern itself with little to no help from the Byzantine Empire. Odoacer had taken power and named himself

³¹⁶ See figure 1 on page 71.

king though he was not recognized by the Eastern Emperor, Zeno. By defeating Odoacer and taking control of Italy, Theodoric becomes a ruler that continues the Roman tradition of the past.

Theodoric's father, Thiudimar (d. 474 CE), served under Attila.³¹⁷ He was part of the royalty that stayed behind when the Hunnic Empire took over parts of the East. The Hunnic Empire fell quickly after the death of its leader Attila. By 454 CE, the Pannonian Goths had defeated a coalition of former Hunnic subjects, therefore separating themselves from any connection with the Hunnic Empire.³¹⁸ After the death of his brother, Valamer (c.420-c. 465 CE), Thiudimar became the leader of the Pannonian Goths.³¹⁹ Thiudimar raised his son, Theodoric, to royal status, thus undermining his other brother, Vidimer.³²⁰ The Pannonian Goths then continued to plague the Roman Empire. The independent and newly reconstituted Goths signed treaties with the Roman Empire and settled in Pannonia as federates.³²¹ Whenever payments were not forthcoming, they broke their pact and raided the empire.³²² As a consequence of a failed raid, Thiudimar had to give his son, Theodoric, as a hostage to Constantinople. The boy was only eight years old and was to remain a hostage until he was eighteen. It was during those ten years that Theodoric was influenced by Roman culture and the Roman imperial system of governance.³²³ After his father's death, Theodoric returned to lead the Ostrogoth faction in c. 470/471 CE.³²⁴ Once in power, he began to remove the opposing Gothic groups, the Thracian Goths, led by Theodoric Strabo (d. 481 CE). By late 483 CE, Theodoric had Strabo's son, Recitach (d.483 CE) murdered, at the instigation of Zeno.³²⁵ This caused a collapse in the Thracian Goths and the majority of them attached themselves to Theodoric and the Pannonian Goths.³²⁶ The combination of these two groups formed the Ostrogoths under Theodoric's governance.

Theodoric was able to contract an uneasy peace with Emperor Zeno by 483 CE and was granted land and appointed with a consular ship in 484 CE which was unheard of from a

³¹⁷ Geary, 71.

³¹⁸This coalition included Suevi, Sciri, Sarmatians, Gepids and Rugi, see Bury, 177.

³¹⁹ Peter Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 154.

³²⁰ Heather, *Goths*, 155.

³²¹ Geary, 71.

³²² Geary, 71.

³²³ Geary, 71.

³²⁴ Bury, 178.

³²⁵ Heather, *Goths*, 163.

³²⁶ Heather, *Goths*, 164.

Germanic leader.³²⁷ This uneasy truce did not stop Theodoric from making raids into the Eastern Roman Empire.³²⁸ Zeno then decided in 488 CE to send him west, to reclaim Italy from Odoacer.³²⁹ It is unknown if Zeno had planned to have both Germanic leaders, Theodoric and Odoacer, kill each other in battle or if it was simply to interfere in the Western regimes.³³⁰ The details of Theodoric and Zeno's agreement are not known either; it is unclear whether he was to reign as a subordinate to the Eastern Empire or be completely independent.³³¹

Odoacer, having established himself as king, declared Italy separate from the Eastern Empire.³³² He was seen as a stable ruler and he continued to govern Italy as the Roman Emperors had previously.³³³ The Romans may have felt some animosity towards him due to him having appointed himself as king, a practice that has been despised since the founding of Rome, and because he identified himself with Hunnic culture.³³⁴ The fact remained that he was still a usurper of the Roman emperorship, which is why when Theodoric came to take back Italy for the Eastern Empire, the Roman senate lent their support to the latter.³³⁵ The conflict between Odoacer and Theodoric lasted for three and a half years.³³⁶ Theodoric besieged Odoacer forces in Ravenna. In 493 CE, after coming to a truce, Theodoric entered the city and ten days later killed Odoacer at a banquet.³³⁷ After this victory, Theodoric became the undisputed ruler of Italy and continued to reign as Odoacer did by maintaining the Roman constitution and laws.³³⁸

To understand the concept of the Roman way of life for Theodoric, we must consider how the Romans themselves viewed it. They believed that the empire was made more conceivable by classical literature, which helped control their violent passions. This control prevented the Romans from doing absurd things that made them seem savage or uncivilized; unlike the Germanic tribes, who had irrational thoughts.³³⁹ The Roman way of life came to

³²⁷ Heather, *Goths*, 163.

³²⁸ Geary, 72.

³²⁹ Geary, 72.

³³⁰ Bury, 179-180.

³³¹ Peter Heather, *The Restoration of Rome: Barbarian Popes & Imperial Pretenders* (London: Pan Books, 2014), 73.

³³² Bury, 182.

³³³ Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 285.

³³⁴ The Romans believed that the Huns slew and ate their old men, drank blood and slept on the back of their horses, see. J.M.Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West 400-1000* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), 33.

³³⁵ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Barbarian West*, 33.

³³⁶ Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 287.

³³⁷ Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 287.

³³⁸ Bury, 194.

³³⁹ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 56.

symbolize a superior attribute of an imperial rule.³⁴⁰ Christianity supported this idea and furthered this logical understanding of a superior rational society by adding the cosmological order.³⁴¹ “No earthly ruler could hold power unless the divinity so ordered.”³⁴² This meant that the Roman Empire was put into place by the divine power in order to perfect humanity.³⁴³ In 492 CE, while Theodoric began his rule of Italy, Zeno died and the Eastern Empire was too busy dealing with its own problems to be able to deal with what was happening in the West. This allowed Theodoric to firmly establish himself in Italy.³⁴⁴ In 497 CE, Theodoric sent an envoy to the new Eastern Emperor, Anastasius I (r. 491–518 CE), and demanded to be recognized as the leader of the West. The emperor gave him his consent, and Theodoric became the official leader of the West.³⁴⁵

Theodoric believed he knew how he was going to govern Italy. He put a dualistic system of politics in place, a system which rested on Roman traditions.³⁴⁶ It did not replace it, but improved upon it. At the same time, he represented the Eastern Emperors’ desires to discourage them from interfering with his reign.³⁴⁷ The administrative aspects of Theodoric’s government remained Roman and only those who had Roman citizenship continued to occupy administrative offices. The consulship remained for Roman citizens, as seen by the election of Boethius and Symmachus in 498 CE, with the exception of Eutharic in 519 CE.³⁴⁸ The senate performed much of the same functions as it did before, although it was a weak political body by this time.³⁴⁹ The Goths were not allowed to enter the senate offices or any other civil posts³⁵⁰, but they came to control the military organizations.³⁵¹ They had experienced fighting against the Roman forces in the past which made them stronger as a military power. Although ruling Italy through Roman customs, Theodoric did not want to test the emperors in the East. He did not create new

³⁴⁰ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome* 56.

³⁴¹ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 56.

³⁴² Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 56.

³⁴³ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 56.

³⁴⁴ Geary, 72.

³⁴⁵ Stephen Mitchel, *A History of the Later Roman Empire AD 284-641: The Transformation of the Ancient World* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 215.

³⁴⁶ Geary, 72.

³⁴⁷ Geary, 72.

³⁴⁸ Bury, 188.

³⁴⁹ Bury, 192.

³⁵⁰ Bury, 190.

³⁵¹ Geary, 72.

legislation but left that privilege to the Eastern Emperor.³⁵² Theodoric issued an *edict*, modifications to laws. This is seen in the *tuitio* (protection), a law that was used to protect Romans from Goths and vice versa. The law was utilized very little before Theodoric, but his modifications made it more pertinent for use. The law continued to protect those who asked for it but now more severe actions were taken against those who broke this law. The *tuitio* was now reinforced by a *saio* (royal messenger).³⁵³ This might have been influenced by the Germanic tribes who had a similar law that reinforced the king's duty to protect all his people.³⁵⁴ To break this rule meant that the king had failed his people.³⁵⁵ It is important to note that Theodoric did not create new laws only modified or added to them, therefore amending Roman laws.³⁵⁶ The coins that circulated during his reign still had the Eastern Emperor stamped on them on one side, which kept the Eastern Emperor happy and Theodoric subordinate to the Emperors in the East.³⁵⁷ Theodoric also included the words *Invicta Roma* on the coins to show his support of the Roman ideology.³⁵⁸ Theodoric seems to be one of the only Germanic kings to understand the importance of the Roman concept of a capital, having established his court at Ravenna. Also, he did exactly what many of the previous emperors did; he embellished and restored many of the city's buildings.³⁵⁹ This practice continued to demonstrate his likeness to the Western Roman Emperors who came before him.

Theodoric expanded his kingdom by expelling the Vandal forces from Sicily in 491 CE. He then kept the Vandals in North Africa in check, preventing their expansion into Italy.³⁶⁰ By 504–505 CE, he had conquered most of the middle Danubian region.³⁶¹ With these two successful regional expansions, the Emperor Anastasius in the East was less than pleased with the power that Theodoric was collecting for himself and responded by sending mercenaries to try and stop him, which Theodoric easily defeated.³⁶² A Gallic crisis in 506–507 CE was instrumental to gaining more territorial land. The problems resided between the Visigoths, who

³⁵² Bury, 193.

³⁵³ Jones, 102.

³⁵⁴ The equivalent law of *tuitio* (protection) for Germans was known as *Konigsschutz*, see John B. Bury, *The Invasion of Europe by the Barbarians* (New York: Russel & Russel Inc., 1963), 202.

³⁵⁵ Bury, 201-202.

³⁵⁶ Bury, 194.

³⁵⁷ Bury, 193.

³⁵⁸ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 60.

³⁵⁹ Musset, 50.

³⁶⁰ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 74.

³⁶¹ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 75.

³⁶² Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 75.

were allied to Ostrogoths, and the Franks, who won a battle over the Visigoths. The Eastern Empire had negotiated a truce with Clovis and, while he defeated the Visigoths, Constantinople kept Theodoric busy and unable to help his allies.³⁶³ In 507 CE, a letter sent to the Eastern Emperor Anastasius, mentioned how Theodoric was forming a new Roman Empire in the West: “ ... our royalty is an imitation of yours, modelled on your good purpose, a copy of the only empire; and in so far as we follow you do we excel all other nations.”³⁶⁴ Theodoric extended an olive branch to try and not anger the emperor further due to his constant territorial gain, and even tried to convince him that he was only emulating practices of the Roman Empire in the East.

In 508 CE, Theodoric, now free from Constantinople’s threat, was able to go over the Italian Alps and push back the Franks and the Burgundians, although the Franks retained most of Aquitaine.³⁶⁵ Since their defeat at Vouille (507 CE), the Visigothic kingdom had fallen into disarray which allowed for Theodoric to make his move and in 511 CE, he held the Visigothic territory, part of Mediterranean Gaul, and Spain.³⁶⁶ This frustrated Anastasius because Theodoric had again expanded his territory. Tensions were high between the West and the East and so Theodoric did not push his luck by taking the title of *Augustus*. This could have caused war with the Byzantines, which could have been much more serious compared to the skirmishes that happened during the time of Theodoric’s territorial expansion.³⁶⁷ Theodoric took the title of king, but not king of the Goths,³⁶⁸ instead, he became known as a *Gaukonig* (a king among other kings). This also meant that his kingdom grew by having neighbouring areas join him. He did this knowing that there were leaders or kings made in other groups like the Visigoth, Vandals and Franks. He controlled a sort of loose confederation of the Germanic tribes.³⁶⁹

Theodoric established a dualistic political system in his kingdom where the Romans and the Goths remained divided by legal and religious status.³⁷⁰ The Goths were previously converted from their pagan beliefs to Arianism in the fourth century, but lived with the Romans turned Nicene Christian under Theodoric.³⁷¹ Theodoric felt that it was better to keep both groups

³⁶³ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 78.

³⁶⁴ This letter is translated by Thomas Hodgkin as quoted in Peter Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 221.

³⁶⁵ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 78.

³⁶⁶ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 78.

³⁶⁷ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 79.

³⁶⁸ Bury, 197.

³⁶⁹ Geary, 73.

³⁷⁰ Bury, 203.

³⁷¹ Bury, 46.

divided causing less conflicts about religious views in his kingdom. Most legal appointment remained opened to Roman Christians as they had in the past since the Age of Constantine and military appointments was given to Arian Gothic leaders. This divide functioned in theory but caused tensions between the two Christian groups, but Theodoric remained tolerant of both. In a letter to the Jews in Genoa, Theodoric states: “I cannot command your faith, for no one is forced to believe against his will.”³⁷² By this he meant that it is impossible to force someone into faith if they do not believe it. Theodoric remained open to all religions under his domain. During his early reign, he demonstrated a very positive relationship with the Catholic church which had become the official legate of the ancient civilization.³⁷³ Theodoric is even said to have saluted the pope as though he was St. Peter.³⁷⁴ The Catholic church, in turn, seems to have recognized Theodoric as a king because he was asked to help with a problem of papal succession.³⁷⁵

The relationship between Theodoric and the Catholic church was probably successful in his early reign because the Catholic church was facing a type of schism with the Eastern Church. At the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, Nestorius (386–450 CE) argued about the two natures of Christ.³⁷⁶ The debate ended with the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) stating that there were two natures in Christ (human and divine) but one person, and that the Son and the Father were equal. Pope Leo I (r. 440–461 CE) did not attend the council of Chalcedon but sent a delegate with the *Tome of Leo*.³⁷⁷ By 482 CE, debates from the Council of Chalcedon were still present and causing issues between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians. Emperor Zeno tired of these arguments between the two groups and pressured Acacius (d. 489 CE), the Patriarch of Constantinople, to issue a document called the *Henotikon* (act of union). This act united the Eastern Church. The next emperor, Anastasius, rejected Chalcedon and its views on the nature of

³⁷² Cassiodorus, *Variae*, trans. S. J. B. Barnish (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), II:27. “*Religionem imperare non possumus, quia nemo cogitur ut credit invitus.*” (Translated above by S. J. B. Barnish).

³⁷³ Gamaliel Milner, “The Noblest of the Barbarians,” *Modern Churchman* 27, no. 12 (March 1938): 656.

³⁷⁴ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 59.

³⁷⁵ This was known as the Laurentian Schism. The Arian king chose the papal successor between the Archpriest Laurence and Symmachus (r. 498-514). Theodoric ended up choosing the latter who was a late convert from paganism and was anti-byzantine and pro-Goth. This was not seen in a positive light although Theodoric’s choice was the logical one, see Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, 4th ed., (London: Yale University Press, 2014), 50-51, see also Peter Heather, *The Restoration of Rome: Barbarian Popes & Imperial Pretenders* (London: Pan Books, 2014), 59.

³⁷⁶ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 83-84.

³⁷⁷ See Pope Leo I, “Letter XXVIII,” in *From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, vol. 12. trans. Charles Lett Feltoe, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1895.), 38-43.

Christ.³⁷⁸ This caused a problem with the Papacy because it was as if the Council of Chalcedon never existed, causing the Acacian Schism. The Pope, Felix III (r. 483–492 CE), and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Acacius, excommunicated each other over this theological debate. The problem was not solved until Justin I (r. 518–527 CE), a newly elected emperor in 518 CE, took measures to accept Chalcedon.³⁷⁹ Theodoric was essential to restoring the peace between the Eastern and Western Church.³⁸⁰ In 519 CE, Theodoric, who was unable to have heirs, established Euthuric (c. 480–522) as his replacement when he died. Since Theodoric had helped with the Chalcedon problem, Justin had agreed to allow Euthuric to be the next ruler of Theodoric’s kingdom and did not interfere with this succession.³⁸¹

In 520 CE, Theodoric began to experience problems with Catholic Christians, affecting his rule. The problem for the Goths was that they converted to Arianism too early, unlike the Franks who did so two centuries later. When the Goths converted, it is very probable that they did not understand the metaphysical questions, the *homoousion* versus the *homoiousion* clause.³⁸² Having already abandoned their pagan gods to please their civilized neighbours in the fourth century, they most likely felt they had done enough. By 522 CE, the Eastern Emperor Justin, began to persecute non-Nicene Christians in the East but also on the frontier of Theodoric’s kingdom. Theodoric, being Arian himself, interpreted this as a slight against him by the Eastern Emperor and took counter measures against Roman Catholics as retribution.³⁸³ By this time, his successor Euthuric had died and Justin refused to recognize any new heirs proposed by Theodoric. Thus, the tension in their relationships continued. Theodoric sent Pope John I (r. 523–526 CE) to Constantinople to speak on Theodoric’s succession and the Arian persecutions. Pope John was successful in stopping Arian persecutions, but unsuccessful when discussing Theodoric’s successor and reversing those who had been forced to convert to Nicene-Christianity.³⁸⁴ Theodoric blamed Pope John for being unable to secure his heir with

³⁷⁸ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 84.

³⁷⁹ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 85.

³⁸⁰ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 86.

³⁸¹ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 86.

³⁸² Milner, 656.

³⁸³ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 95.

³⁸⁴ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 95.

Constantinople and had him starved in jail.³⁸⁵ Theodoric ruled Italy for thirty-three years until his death in 526 CE.³⁸⁶

For many, Theodoric brought back a brief glimpse of Roman civilization.³⁸⁷ He was the most aware of the Roman-Germanic leaders. Theodoric represented the best of the Germanic leaders because he wanted to rescue Gothic culture, Roman culture, and the Christian Church in his early reign.³⁸⁸ Although his Ostrogothic kingdom flourished while he lived, there were still some issues that caused his kingdom not to succeed past his generation.³⁸⁹ Some scholars argued that the Romans who served under Theodoric did not really want to serve under a new Gothic king. Cassiodorus (c. 485-c. 585 CE) is said to have served a Gothic king because his regime was fundamentally Roman.³⁹⁰ Another issue that may have caused the decline of his kingdom was the presence two religious factions within his kingdom, which divided the people.³⁹¹ Ostrogothic identity also seems to have been a problem because the Ostrogoths were never truly united and assimilated under one rule, with each Ostrogothic tribe having their own culture and clan loyalties, which did not bode well under Theodoric's dualistic political system. However, changes did occur within the empire and, if Theodoric had managed to establish another generation of rulers after him, a successful kingdom like the Frankish one might have emerged.³⁹² This does not stop some from saying that Theodoric eclipsed the Frankish king Clovis, because he had established a reign where there was tolerance and the Roman *Civitas*.³⁹³

Clovis I (r. 481–511 CE), Gregory of Tours (c. 538–593/594 CE) and the Franks

³⁸⁵ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 95.

³⁸⁶ Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 288.

³⁸⁷ Milner, 655. Jones states that Theodoric ushered a golden age of peace and prosperity during his reign, see A.H.M. Jones, *The Decline of the Ancient World* (London: Longmans, Green and Co Ltd., 1966), 102.

³⁸⁸ Milner, 653.

³⁸⁹ His kingdom was destroyed during Justinian's Gothic war and the Italy belonged to the Eastern Empire for a short while after 540 CE, see Stephen Mitchel, *A History of the Later Roman Empire AD 284-641: The Transformation of the Ancient World* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 146-147.

³⁹⁰ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 88. This argument can also be made for Boethius (480-524 CE), see also Arnaldo Momigliano, "Cassiodorus and the Italian Culture of his Time," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 41 (1955), 215-248. For a good overview of the life of Boethius and the troubles he had with had with Theodoric, see Boethius, *Opuscula Sacra*, trans. Alain Galonnier, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions Peeters, 2007), 68-95.

³⁹¹ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 97.

³⁹² Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 336.

³⁹³ Heather, *The Restoration of Rome*, 97.

The Franks were more successful than other Germanic tribes, like the Ostrogoths, in continuing from where the Roman Empire left off. The Frankish kingdom outlasted the first generation of Germanic kingdoms established by Vandals, Visigoths, Burgundians, and Ostrogoths.³⁹⁴ They applied what they had learned from the Roman Empire along with their Germanic culture and founded a lasting kingdom. The two cultures would eventually merge and unite, unlike the Ostrogothic kingdom which had a system of co-habitation. The Franks merged their traditions with the Roman culture successfully. This might be because the Franks accepted Catholic Christianity before most of the other Germanic tribes. To understand how the Franks came to merge their culture with that of the Romans, we must analyze their history and progression over time. It was not until the Western Empire fell that we see a leader emerge from the Franks. Under Clovis, the Franks were successful at expanding their territory, which gave them a more power and a prominent political base.

The Frankish beginnings were similar to those of other Germanic tribes, having arrived in Gaul from Germania. The Franks merged with the people living in Gaul at the time, known as Gallo-Romans, who were citizens of Gaul since Julius Caesar incorporated the land into the Roman Republic.³⁹⁵ This group of people had established themselves in the Roman Empire and had become proper Roman citizens. It is through interactions with these Gallo-Roman that the Franks became accustomed to Roman Traditions. The Franks followed the same type of formation as other Germanic tribes before establishing their kingdom. Before the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, there were Frankish tribes serving in the Roman Empire's military as a defence against other Germanic tribes. The Germanic tribes on the Gallic frontier were generally loyal to the empire and less problematic than the Goths.³⁹⁶ Leaders of these tribes that served the Roman military became known as imperial Germans. One such leader was Childeric I (c. 437–482 CE) who, under Roman command, in 463 CE became a very successful leader. He belonged to a tribe known as the Salians.³⁹⁷ This group dominated the others and became the leader of the

³⁹⁴ Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 507.

³⁹⁵ Julius Caesar (100 - 44 BCE) campaigned in Gaul between 58 - 51 BCE, see Robert Latouche, "The Roman Conquest," in *Caesar to Charlemagne: The Beginnings of France*, trans. Jennifer Nicholson (New York: Barnes & Nobles Inc., 1968), 3-48.

³⁹⁶ Geary, 79.

³⁹⁷ The Salian Franks migrated into the south of Gaul around 406 CE.

Franks.³⁹⁸ As a leader, Childeric kept good relationships with the neighbouring leaders and the Gallo-Roman aristocrats.

By 475 CE, the Visigoths had become a great power in the West and Childeric wanted to avoid unnecessary problems with them. Instead, he decided to have a treaty with them which was signed in 475 CE and he married off his sister to the Visigothic king, Euric (r. 466–484).³⁹⁹ Although Childeric was a pagan, he was still known as the protector of *romanitas*, thus demonstrating the importance of the Roman culture.⁴⁰⁰ Since he was defending the Roman culture, he had to defend Orthodox and Catholic Christianity.⁴⁰¹ This is the beginning of the Frankish attempts to merge with the Roman culture and the Catholic Church. Being respected by the Gallo-Roman aristocracy and being named the protector of *romanitas* allowed Childeric to build the groundwork for his son, Clovis, to continue building the Frankish kingdom in the West.⁴⁰²

Upon Childeric's death in 481/482 CE, Clovis became the chieftain over the Franks. Our main source about Clovis and the Franks is the sixth-century bishop named Gregory of Tours. He wrote *The History of the Franks*, which promoted the Franks as one of the most Christian tribes to come from Germania.⁴⁰³ He saw Clovis as a conqueror who fought for the Christian faith comparing his catholic Christian rule to many of the different Germanic tribes, like the Burgundians, who had adopted Arian doctrines. Clovis was important because he built a foundation that made the Frankish kingdom last. During his accession, a letter that was sent to him by Remigius (437- 533 CE) the Bishop of Rheims, gives us a good idea of the type of ruler that Remigius wished Clovis to be: “[y]our bounty should be pure and decent and you should pay respect to your bishops and always have recourse to their advice; and if there is agreement

³⁹⁸ Geary, 80.

³⁹⁹ Geary, 81.

⁴⁰⁰ *Romanitas* is defined in the West as a term meaning a process by which an indigenous people incorporated into the Empire acquired cultural attributes which made them appear Roman. *Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*, 1st ed.(2005), s.v. “Romanization.”

⁴⁰¹ Geary, 81

⁴⁰² Childeric's grave demonstrates the type of wealth and power that he attained in his life time, see Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell,1988), 79, see also Ian N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdom* (London: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1994), 40.

⁴⁰³ See Gregory Bishop of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974). For modern scholarship on Gregory of Tours and the social history of the sixth century, I recommend reading the works of Martin Heinzelmann, an expert on Gregory of Tours, see Martin Heinzelmann, *Gregory of Tours: History and Society in the Sixth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

between you and them, your province will better endure...”⁴⁰⁴ The Bishop of Rheims also stated in his letter: “[l]et your court be open to all, so that no one shall depart from there downhearted.”⁴⁰⁵ The Gallo-Romans, who were Christianized like the rest of the Roman Empire, obviously had bishops in their cities. The call for toleration was made by the Bishop of Rheims which was not surprising considering the neighbouring Germanic tribes. The Bishop of Rheims used two themes in his letter. The first was a formulaic Roman theme, namely, to be a good king he should have honest advisors, administration, and provide justice.⁴⁰⁶ The second theme was more Christian in tone. Remigius saw the role of the bishop being important as an advisor to Clovis, since God had rewarded him with becoming the leader of the Salian Franks.⁴⁰⁷ He needed Clovis to understand the basic message of the last judgment parable found in Matthew 25:31–46.⁴⁰⁸ This letter also indicated that Clovis showed favour towards the Gallo-Roman culture and allowed them to continue with their traditions.⁴⁰⁹ This should not be surprising considering that Clovis grew up under his father’s teaching which demonstrated a type of toleration and protection of other cultures. Clovis did not want to disturb the Gallo-Roman way of life and eventually merged their traditions with his own.⁴¹⁰ This letter sent around 482 CE⁴¹¹ demonstrated that although the Roman West had fallen, the people who lived under the empire still believed it was continuing because they still used imperial offices.⁴¹² Under Clovis, the Franks began to expand their territory.⁴¹³ The Franks, having served the Roman military in the past, was very well organized. Being trained in the way of Roman warfare was something that the Germanic tribes had perfected over the years, serving as federates of the empire. This gave an edge to the Germanic tribes in warfare and helped to Romanize the Frankish tribes because they had learned about Roman culture and civilizations by serving alongside Roman

⁴⁰⁴ See Remigius’s letter to Clovis in Alexander Callander Murray, ed. and trans. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). 260.

⁴⁰⁵ Remigius’s letter to Clovis in *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul*, 260.

⁴⁰⁶ William M. Daly, “Clovis: How Barbaric, How Pagan?,” *Speculum* 69, no. 3 (1994): 632.

⁴⁰⁷ Daly, 633.

⁴⁰⁸ Daly, 633.

⁴⁰⁹ Daly, 623.

⁴¹⁰ Daly, 624.

⁴¹¹ The letters dating has been disputed and could range from 481 CE all the way to 486 CE. See Ian N. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdom* (London: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1994), 41.

⁴¹² Herman Fisher, “The Belief in the Continuity of the Roman Empire among the Franks of the Fifth and Sixth Centuries,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 10, no.4 (1925): 544.

⁴¹³ See figure 2 on page 72.

soldiers.⁴¹⁴ Clovis defeated Syagrius (430–486/487 CE)⁴¹⁵ in 486 CE at a battle near Soissons and then seized his territory which included Lyon and the Seine and Loire.⁴¹⁶ This battle gave him the supremacy over the Frankish tribes and made him their main ruler. Although his father was considered the ruler of the Franks, there was always opposition to his leadership status. Clovis' victory over Syagrius made it clear that he was the uncontested leader.

Little is known from the period between 486 CE and 500 CE. Most of our information on the reign of Clovis comes from Gregory of Tours.⁴¹⁷ By the time Gregory's *History of the Franks* was written, Clovis had been dead for sixty-four years and all the information about his reign was not well chronicled anywhere else. Gregory tried to weave a chronology from the information he had.⁴¹⁸

During his reign, Clovis understood the importance of political marriages, and gave his sister, Audofleda, (c.493 CE) to the Ostrogothic King Theodoric.⁴¹⁹ One of the most important marriages at the time was his to Chlothild (475–545 CE), the niece of Gundobad (r. 473–516 CE), the Germanic chief of the Burgundians.⁴²⁰ This union led to an uneasy pact with the Burgundians.⁴²¹ The marriage was unlike what he had contracted for his sister and relatives, but may be seen more as a political move against the Burgundians. Gregory tells us that Chlothild's father, Chilperic II (r.473-493 CE), was murdered by his brother, Gundobad, who then exiled his niece. Clovis then asked for her hand in marriage.⁴²² Both Gregory of Tours and Fredegar use this story as a means for the uneasy relationship between the Franks and the Burgundians.⁴²³ Chlothild, unlike most of the Burgundians, was a Catholic Christian—having been educated in

⁴¹⁴ Geary, 90.

⁴¹⁵ Some Scholars like Edward James argue that Syagrius was an unimportant character to the history of the Franks. The conflict with Syagrius may have been a literary addition to the time, to help show Clovis as the right ruler for the Franks, see Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 79.

⁴¹⁶ Geary, 82.

⁴¹⁷ Gregory is said to have started writing the book around 575 CE. Scholars like Heinzelmen believe that the book was written in two phase the first four books written around 575CE and the second phase being in Gregory's later years, see Guy Halsall, "The Preface to Book V of Gregory of Tours' Histories: its Form, Context and Significance," *The English Historical Review* 122, no. 496 (2007): 297-317.

⁴¹⁸ Modern scholarship tends to disagree with his chronology. See Ian N. Wood, "Gregory of Tours and Clovis" *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 63, (1985): 249-272.

⁴¹⁹ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 42.

⁴²⁰ Bury, 235.

⁴²¹ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 42.

⁴²² Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 43.

⁴²³ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 43. Fredegar is the name given to an anonymous writer of Frankish history in the sixth century, see Alexander Callander Murray, ed. and trans. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 447.

the Catholic faith—felt it was her duty to convert her husband. But he rejected the Catholic faith until war broke out with the Alamanni.⁴²⁴ The Alamanni, which was a neighbouring tribe that controlled parts of Gaul, started moving east into another Frankish tribe territory, the Ripurians. Clovis and the Salian Franks named themselves protectors of this branch of the Franks and defeated the Alamanni at the battle of Tolbiac.⁴²⁵ During the battle of Tolbiac (497 CE), he began to lose the battle and, according to legend, he looked to the heaven and asked his wife's God for help to win the battle.⁴²⁶ God answered his wish and led him to victory in the battlefield. This story is given to us by Gregory of Tours and could be seen as pro-Merovingian propaganda. In his *History of the Franks*, Gregory made political observations of his own time and combined them with what was known of Clovis, sixty-five years prior, in order to write a good history of the Franks who had none up until Gregory's time. The story of Clovis' battle in Tolbiac in 497 CE has a similar motif that connects him with Emperor Constantine the Great. Gregory, knowing the story of Constantine's battle of Milvian Bridge and wanting to imitate Eusebius' *Church History* wrote his book as Christian propaganda for the reign of Clovis. We see many similarities between Gregory's history and Eusebius'. Both have a leader who turned towards Christianity and helped it become more powerful in a crucial time. The similarities between Constantine and Clovis are important when introducing pro-Merovingian propaganda; likening Clovis to Constantine might have sent a positive message to the reader of Gregory's history about the Merovingian dynasty.⁴²⁷

With the victory over the Alamanni in Tolbiac, we have a depiction of Clovis as a more legendary character, especially when it comes to his conversion and baptism. According to Gregory of Tours, Clovis was baptized by Reimigus, the Bishop Rheims, on Christmas day. The baptism scene is described by Gregory of Tours: "Like some new Constantine he stepped

⁴²⁴ Geary, 85, see also Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley, vol. II (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1995), 389.

⁴²⁵ Bury, 239.

⁴²⁶ The dating for this battle has been debated amongst scholars because of the baptism of Clovis. Van de Vyer argues that the battle of Tolbiac happens much later than 496 CE. That it happens in 506 CE. If this is the case then the argument for Clovis' late baptism on Christmas day in 508 CE is a lot closer to the decisive moment of the battle, see Van de Vyer, "L'unique victoire contre les Alamans et la conversion de Clovis en 506," in *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 17 (1938). There is also a letter sent from Theodoric to Clovis congratulating him on his victory over the Alamanni. This letter is dated around 506/507 CE, see Alexander Callander Murray, ed. and trans., *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 261. For a description of the battle against the Alamanni, see Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin books, 1974), 143.

⁴²⁷ For more similarities between Constantine and Clovis, see Yitzhak Hen, "Clovis, Gregory of Tours, and Pro-Merovingian Propaganda," *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 71, (1993).

forward to the baptismal pool, ready to wash away the sores of his old leprosy and to be cleansed in flowing water from the sordid stains which he had borne so long.”⁴²⁸ The baptism into the Christian faith was a type of rebirth: after Clovis was baptized, he had a new outlook and purpose which were reflected when making decisions.⁴²⁹

His baptism and conversion are difficult to date but could have taken place any time between 496 CE and 508 CE.⁴³⁰ A letter from the Bishop of Avitus of Vienne (c. 470–517/519 CE) argued for an early conversion to the Catholic faith: “[t]he followers of all kind of sects have cast the shadow of the name Christian over your keen intelligence with their views, diverse in their conjecture, various their great numbers, and empty as far as truth is concerned...”⁴³¹ Bishop Avitus was a member of the court of Gundobad. The Burgundians were Arians and Avitus’ letter demonstrates his desire for Gundobad to become a Catholic. He stated that Clovis was intelligent in deciding to convert in Catholicism. Further in this letter, he also stated that now that Clovis had become a Catholic he should preach the faith to his kingdom: “I would have you extend from the good treasury of your heart the seed of faith to more remote peoples whom none sprouts of perverse dogma has corrupted, because they are situated in a state of natural ignorance. Be not ashamed or reluctant to send embassies on the matter and to add to the realm of God, who has raised up yours to such an extent.”⁴³² With this statement, we are able to see how Clovis planned to continue the expansion of his territory and who his enemies might be, namely all those who did not yet belong to the Catholic faith.

Clovis’ conversion to Catholic Christianity was not as simple as Gregory or Avitus has us believe. Scholars argue about what kind of Christianity Clovis converted to originally. It is possible that he might have converted to Arianism before. Only due to pressure from his wife did he convert to Catholic Christianity. Moreover it is believed that he did not convert to a radical monotheism but more of a syncretic polytheism that merged the different gods together and led

⁴²⁸ Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin books, 1974), 144.

⁴²⁹ J.N. Hillgarth, ed. *Christianity and Paganism 350-750: The Conversion of Western Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 12.

⁴³⁰ See Patrick Geary, *Before France and Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 85, see also J.M Wallace-Hadrill, *The-Long Haired Kings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 169.

⁴³¹ See Avitus’s letter to Clovis in Alexander Callander Murray, ed. and trans., *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 261.

⁴³² See Avitus’s letter to Clovis, *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader*, 263-264.

to the addition of the Christian God to the pantheon and the enlistment of the Christian God for help when needed.⁴³³

The Frankish Westward migration was plagued with similar problems that other Germanic chieftains had, namely how to assimilate the Roman culture and impose their own Germanic ones. Having great respect for the Roman culture, Clovis strove to imitate it. The Gallo-Romans living in Gaul at the time were Christians. It is not too difficult to imagine his conversion as due more to political convenience than personal convictions.⁴³⁴ Clovis' conversion made it easier to combine Gallo-Roman and Germanic traditions towards a useful political and social end.⁴³⁵ Clovis, unlike Theodoric, succeeded in uniting both the Gallo-Romans and the Germanic Franks into one cooperating society instead of two separate cohabiting entities.⁴³⁶ The conversion of Clovis helped rally the Gallo-Romans to the Frankish ideals.⁴³⁷

Clovis joined Christianity in the fight against all other religions and injustices inflicted on the faith. After his baptism, Gregory said that “[m]ore than three thousand of his [Clovis] army were baptized at the same time.”⁴³⁸ If that account is true, then the population on the outskirts of the royal court was also being converted at the same time as their leader. However, some sources show the opposite and claim that the area around the royal courts was in fact only semi-Christian.⁴³⁹ The church's solution to this problem was to send missionaries and monks to these areas. The monks could more freely move around, compared to the secular clergymen who stayed in populated towns, and could reach areas of the Frankish kingdoms that the clergymen had never visited. In the small towns, the monks worked very close to the peasants, gaining their trust. Monks like St. Walaric and St. Theodulph, who worked on cultivating the lands and clearing territory ended up converting these peasants to the Christian faith.⁴⁴⁰ Through the hard work of these monks the population of the countryside and the small towns around the royal court were converted to Christianity,

⁴³³ See Patrick Geary, *Before France and Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 85, see also J.M Wallace-Hadrill, *The-Long Haired Kings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 169.

⁴³⁴ An argument for a personal conversion of Clovis see John Moorhead, "Clovis' Motives for Becoming a Catholic Christian," *The Journal of Religious History* 13, no.4 (1985).

⁴³⁵ Daly, 624.

⁴³⁶ Geary, 93.

⁴³⁷ Geary, 86.

⁴³⁸ Gregory of Tours, 144.

⁴³⁹ Dawson, 154.

⁴⁴⁰ Dawson, 159.

According to Gregory, the kingdom of the Visigoths was persecuting Catholics in Toulouse and this gave Clovis a reason to attack that Visigothic kingdom. It is important to note that other historians did not record any conflict between the Catholics and the Arians in Toulouse.⁴⁴¹ It was his victory over the Visigoths that established Clovis as the founder of the Merovingian dynasty. This war was understood by Christian writers and the church as a decisive war between Catholic and Arian Christianity.⁴⁴² This battle brought together the forces of the Franks along with the Gallo-Romans against the Visigoths.⁴⁴³ The battle of Vouillé in 507 CE was Clovis's most successful battle; not only did he double his territory by winning this battle in the southwest of Gaul, but he was named the defender of the Christian faith, which made him even more revered by Christians for centuries to come.⁴⁴⁴ Apart from being victorious, he still managed to protect the church. In a letter sent to Aquitanian bishops:

“We have commanded with respect to the rights of all churches, that no one is to try to seize any kind of property, neither from religious women nor from widows who can be shown to be dedicated to the service of the lord; likewise, from clerics and the children of both clerics and widows staying in the homes of their parents ... the command has been given that none of them are to suffer any violence or injury.”⁴⁴⁵

This letter shows that Clovis worries about the people of the church but might also be a move to gain political favours over the Arians by the Catholics in his time. This might also have helped gain more support from the Gallo-Romans because he showed that he cared about the churches outside of his kingdom's territory.

After this victory, he formed an alliance with the Emperor Anastasius and had the consulate awarded to him.⁴⁴⁶ During his victory ceremony he had a consular procession where he scattered gold and silver to the crowds from horseback. This demonstrates the combining of two traditional cultures, Germanic and Roman. The scattering of gold was a performance typically

⁴⁴¹ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 46.

⁴⁴² Bury, 249.

⁴⁴³ Bury, 249

⁴⁴⁴ Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 87.

⁴⁴⁵ See Clovis's letter to the Aquitanian bishops on the king's peace in Alexander Callander Murray, ed. and trans. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 267.

⁴⁴⁶ James, 87.

presenting consular processions by the Roman consuls. The main difference is that he scattered gold and silver from horseback instead of a chariot.⁴⁴⁷ During the ceremony he also dressed in a purple tunic, military mantle, and wore a diadem on his head. This was generally more associated with an imperial ceremony and not with a consular procession; this act associated his leadership with the Roman imperial tradition.⁴⁴⁸ From this point forward, Clovis united the Franks under his rule. Then he began to eliminate any other leaders that challenged his authority. Most of these other leaders were related to him.⁴⁴⁹ By 511 CE, Clovis had eliminated the other leaders of the Frankish tribes and consolidated his rule as king of the Franks. He called a council in Orleans to try and fix other problems with the theological doctrine. This again recalls similarities with Constantine, who called the council of Nicaea in 325 CE, after consolidating his power.

In 511 CE, there was a written law called the *Lex Salica*⁴⁵⁰ that was created. Although the laws are said to have existed before this time, it is quite evident that it has been influenced by Romans laws. Having a written code is not something present in Germanic traditions which shows us the influence that Romans had in helping Germanic tribes codify traditional systems.⁴⁵¹ Having laws written down demonstrates the importance of having paperwork. For example, tax systems that were in place relied heavily on a recorded paper trail.⁴⁵² Under Clovis there also seemed to have been the creation of *comes*, which connected the Gallo-Roman aristocracy directly with the Franks. The *comes* or count consisted of a small garrison. The general responsibility of the *comes* was both judicial and military. They enforced royal law and raised a levy from the area.⁴⁵³ A count who failed those he governed was punished except if excused by royal business.⁴⁵⁴ This law is similar to the *tuitio* that Theodoric passed which made the king responsible for protecting those who asked him for protection.⁴⁵⁵ It is the *Lex Salica* that states

⁴⁴⁷ J.M Wallace-Hadrill, *The-Long Haired Kings* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 175.

⁴⁴⁸ Geary, 87.

⁴⁴⁹ Geary, 87.

⁴⁵⁰ For a translated text of the Laws of the Salian Frank in modern English, see Katherine Fischer Drew trans., *The Laws of the Salian Franks* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1991). For further understanding of Germanic law, see Alexander Callander Murray, *Germanic Kinship Structure: Studies in Law and Society in Antiquity and in the Early Middle Age* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1983).

⁴⁵¹ Geary, 90.

⁴⁵² Geary, 92.

⁴⁵³ Geary, 94.

⁴⁵⁴ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired King*, 4.

⁴⁵⁵ Jones, 102.

that there is a *Rex Francorum* (Frankish king).⁴⁵⁶ This king had a devoted group of armed guards for his protection. The king in return provided for their upkeep and protect their lives as well.⁴⁵⁷

Clovis died in the year 511 CE. The kingdom was divided between his four sons. The division of his kingdom seems less Frankish and more Roman. This was demonstrated by the division of the kingdom among Roman political boundaries and the establishment of each brother in his own capital. The boundaries reflected less Roman imperial traditions and more Gallo-Roman traditions which look at the Roman *Civitates*.⁴⁵⁸

Clovis had transformed the Franks from a Germanic northern tribe into an influential power in Gaul and the Mediterranean. His reign was crucial to the establishment of the Franks, but not decisive in the development of the Frankish power.⁴⁵⁹ It was through his sons in the following fifty years that the Frankish kingdom became a dominant Germanic successor kingdom of the Roman Empire.⁴⁶⁰ The remaining areas in Gaul were conquered by the descendants of Clovis. The Burgundian kingdom was absorbed into the Frankish kingdom by 534 CE. The Ostrogoths gave Provence to the Franks two years later, for aid, during the Gothic wars with Emperor Justinian (r. 527-565 CE). This allowed the Frankish kingdom to grow.⁴⁶¹ With all this expansion the kingdom had become a dominant power in the West. The Eastern Byzantine Empire sought to support through emissaries and subsidies different factions in the Frankish kingdoms to bolster imperial design in the West. Although the Byzantines were unsuccessful in using the Franks to destroy their rivals, they acknowledged Frankish superiority in the West.⁴⁶²

The main difference between the Frankish and Ostrogothic kingdom resides in the principles by which they were established. The Frankish kingdom did not put a dual system that kept both Germanic Tribes and Romans apart but instead decided to have them mix together.⁴⁶³ This proved to be successful because the Frankish kingdom outlasted the Ostrogothic kingdom. The synthesis between the people in the kingdom was successful by not having them live separately and divided between tasks. The people in Gaul were united under one religion,

⁴⁵⁶ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings*, 3.

⁴⁵⁷ Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings*, 4.

⁴⁵⁸ Geary, 95.

⁴⁵⁹ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 49.

⁴⁶⁰ James, 92.

⁴⁶¹ Geary, 117.

⁴⁶² Geary, 118.

⁴⁶³ Geary, 88.

Catholicism. The unity between all of the people who lived under Franks helped reduce the occurrence of conflict within the kingdom. This is similar to what the Roman Empire was trying to accomplish in the fourth century with the debates between pagans and Christians. Geographically, Gaul also had an advantage by being far from the Byzantine Empire compared to Italy.⁴⁶⁴ This distance did help keep the Byzantine Empire away from interfering into Frankish affairs because they had no real interest in the area. This allowed the Franks to establish themselves successfully unlike the Ostrogothic Kingdom. With all these advantages over the Ostrogothic Kingdom the Franks were to become the true inheritors of the Roman Empire's traditions.

The next chapter will look at how the Frankish Kingdom continued to prosper under Christian and Germanic culture. It will present the important roles these two traditions had in transforming and maintaining the structures of the fallen Roman Empire. It is thanks to both of them that the Roman culture survived and even helped form the early medieval states.

⁴⁶⁴ Geary, 89.



Figure 1: Europe at the fall of the Roman West in 476 CE.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁵ Guriezous, “Europe and the Near East AD 476,” (2016), accessed July 10, 2018 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Europe_and_the_Near_East_at_476_AD.png

Chapter 4: Myths, Cults and Bishops: Combining Traditions

This chapter will review three case studies in an effort to counter the argument brought forth by Gibbon that Christianity weakened the Roman State, thus making it more likely to be taken over by barbarians who ended the Western Roman Empire. In the first case study, the mythological origins theory will be briefly analyzed to demonstrate the importance of the syncretic fusion that occurred in the fifth and sixth centuries. Using the accounts of Gregory of Tours and Fredegar, the syncretic nature of the culture in the society at the time, mainly Christian and Germanic, will show the continuity with the glorious Roman past. The second case study will look at the rise of the cults of the saints and their relics. Between the fourth and sixth century, there is a monumental shift in the reverence for the saints, through the relationship with these saints, Christians were able to become closer to God. The cult of the saints demonstrates a Christian adaptation of Roman traditions into a new form of worshiping that differed from paganism. It is also through these cults that Christians found an easier way to convert the pagan Germanic tribes to Christianity. The third case study will look at the rise of the bishop during the sixth and seventh centuries. At this time the papacy was beginning to gain power in Rome, but it is the bishops who held the power in their small communities. As the inheritor of the Roman constitution, the bishop, along with the king, governed and applied the laws to help their communities' function. This created a powerful church institution in the society that used both a Roman and Christian past to form and educate a functional Germanic kingdom, showing the flaws in Gibbon's view of a corrupt and useless ecclesiastical institution.

The Frankish origin story: German, Roman or Christian?

By the mid-sixth century, the Merovingians had carved out a big piece of Gaul for themselves and was the ruling dynasty. They began to create an identity for themselves that made them similar to the ancient powers of the Mediterranean Basin, the Romans, and before them the Greeks. To create a link to these powerful empires they had to create a mythological origin story. The works of Gregory of Tours and Fredegar help us understand how the Franks came to see themselves in the aftermath of the Roman Empire. Like the Roman and Greek Empire, the Merovingians claimed that they descended from divinity which meant that they were

selected to rule over the people of Frankish Gaul. When looking at the origins of the Franks, different aspects of their culture appears.

When Gregory of Tours discussed the historical beginning of the Franks he ignored the mythological origins of the Frankish kings. He decided to introduce it as a problem to be solved rather than a story to be told. “Many people do not even know the name of the first king of the Franks.”⁴⁶⁷ This sets up the story as taking place so long ago that there was no memory of the Franks before they were Christianized. He then went on to give the readers a description of the area that he believed the Franks came from:

It is commonly said that the Franks came originally from Pannonia and first colonized the banks of the Rhine. Then they crossed the river, marched through Thuringia, and set up in each country district and each city long-haired kings chosen from the foremost and most noble family of their race.⁴⁶⁸

Gregory described that the Franks used nobility as a mark for who was to lead them.⁴⁶⁹ He explained how at this time, the Franks were heathens who followed paganism: “This particular race of people always seems to have followed idolatrous practices, for they did not recognize the true God.”⁴⁷⁰ He linked these ideas with homilies on the Bible saying that the Franks did not know about the one true God. Gregory took a Christian approach to the origins of the Franks. This account of the origins can be seen as a migration history that does not have any mythological features, unlike what will be seen in Fredegar’s account in the mid-seventh century. It is possible that Gregory might have been inspired by the story of St. Martin of Tours, who was also said to have migrated from Pannonia, creating symbolism in the story of the Frankish migrations.⁴⁷¹ Gregory, due to writing in the sixth century, might have had an undeveloped account of the origin story or willingly chose to suppress aspects that might have

⁴⁶⁷ Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1974), 120.

⁴⁶⁸ Gregory of Tours, 125.

⁴⁶⁹ The Merovingians’ are known as the long-haired kings because of the way they displayed their hair.

⁴⁷⁰ Gregory of Tours, 125.

⁴⁷¹ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdom*, 35. Saint Martin of Tours died in 397 CE in Candes and his body was fought over by the people of Poitiers and Tours. In the citizens of Tours smuggled and kept the body of St. Martin. The saints were said to have healing powers and became patronized in the Merovingian courts. See Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), 55.

made them look too pagan to any Christian community. Gregory was amongst the first to tell us of the Franks and portrayed it as a normal migration story and a territorial overtaking.

Fredegar wrote his history about the origins of the Franks in the mid-seventh century. By then the Merovingian kingdom was better established and became a powerful state in early medieval Europe. Fredegar's goal was to summarize earlier chronicles by other authors, like Jerome (c. 347- 420 CE) and Gregory of Tours.⁴⁷² Often he added his own interpolations to the stories, and thus the story changed. When discussing the *Chronicle* of Jerome, Fredegar added the idea that it was Priam who abducted Helen and was the main instigator for the Trojan war.⁴⁷³ He then claimed that the Franks descended from Priam.⁴⁷⁴ The Franks later chose another king: "It is written in the book of history how afterwards they had Frigas as king. Later they were divided into two parts. One part went to Macedonia."⁴⁷⁵ Fredegar was connecting the origins of the Franks with that of the Macedonians. The Macedonians, under Alexander the Great (r. 336-323 BCE), conquered a big part of the Greek and Persian Empire.⁴⁷⁶ The Macedonians had become dominant over Greece and Persia and were a powerful state until the death of Alexander, which brought an end to the Macedonian Empire. The Roman Republic took the Hellenistic model of the Macedonians and adjusted it to its needs to become the ruling empire. By relating the Franks' origin stories to those of the Macedonians, the Frankish origin myth was made more powerful. Fredegar continued his interpolation of the Frankish origins: "Now the other part, which advanced from Frigia [=Phrygia], had been deceived by Ulysses [...] Wandering through many regions with their wives and children they chose amongst themselves a king named Francio; from him they are called Franks."⁴⁷⁷ In this statement, Fredegar gave us an etymological origin of how the Franks got their name. Etymology was used to explain origins but not only

⁴⁷² Jerome is known for his Latin translation of the Old Testament which is called the *Vulgate*, see Gérard Vallée, *The shaping of Christianity: The History and literature of its Formative Centuries 100-800* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 183-184.

⁴⁷³ See Fredegar's "Chronicle II," in Alexander Callander Murray, ed. and trans. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 591.

⁴⁷⁴ See Fredegar's "Chronicle II," in *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader*, 591.

⁴⁷⁵ See Fredegar's "Chronicle II," in *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader*, 591.

⁴⁷⁶ For a survey of Alexander the Great's conquest of Greece and Persia and the world around him, see F. W. Walbank, *The Hellenistic World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

⁴⁷⁷ It is believed that Fredegar might have confused the name of the king Frigas with the region known as Phrygia. Hence the reason why when reading the interpolation, it changes from a king to a place, see Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 235.

that, it also was helpful in describing the characteristics of a people.⁴⁷⁸ A good example of this is seen with the Britons who in Latin are called *bruti* because they were seen as stupid.⁴⁷⁹

The Franks under Francio migrated west. During their travels from the east they fought with many peoples and it is said that they devastated parts of Asia until they settled between the Rhine and the Danube: “There Francio died. Since a small band of them now were left, because of the many battles Francio had fought, they established dukes from amongst themselves. Ever rejecting the authority of another king.”⁴⁸⁰ Further in his chronicle, Fredegar elaborated on the Trojan origins of the Franks and portrayed them as the equals of the Romans: “Aeneas and Frigas, it is said were brothers.”⁴⁸¹ This completed the link that the Romans and the Franks were descended from the same origin, by making Aeneas, the ancestor of Romulus and Remus (the founders of Rome),⁴⁸² brothers with Frigas who became the founder of the Franks. This gave the reader the impression that the Franks were just as powerful as the Romans.⁴⁸³

Fredegar’s interpretation of the account by Gregory of Tours about the Frankish origins is captivating because he added a mythical divinity that explained the reason why the Franks were chosen:

It is said that when Chlodio was staying with his wife on the sea shore in the summer, his wife went to the water to bathe at noon, and a beast of Neptune resembling the Quinotaur [=Minotaur] sought her out. As she conceived right away either by beast or by her husband, she afterwards gave birth to a son called Merovech, after whom the kings of the Franks were later called Merovingians.⁴⁸⁴

This was an important addition to the origin of the Franks because it included a possible deity as the progenitor of the Franks. Unlike the account of Gregory of Tours who completely ignored or

⁴⁷⁸ Alexander Callander Murray, ed., “Post vocantur Merohingii: Fredegar, Merovech, and ‘Sacral Kingship,’” in *After Rome’s Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History, Essays Presented to Walter Goffart*, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 140.

⁴⁷⁹ The name Briton might also come from their mythical founder Brutus who also ironically came from Troy. This was created by later British historians to make a link to the foundation of Rome. See Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 236.

⁴⁸⁰ See Fredegar, “Chronicle II,” in *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader*, 592.

⁴⁸¹ See Fredegar’s “Chronicle II,” in *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader*, 593

⁴⁸² For a telling of this myth, see Livy, *The Rise of Rome: Book one to five*, trans .T. J. Luce, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7-12.

⁴⁸³ Some argued that they were more powerful because they were Christians, see Edward James, *The Franks* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 236.

⁴⁸⁴ See Fredegar, “Chronicle II,” in *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader*, 594.

suppressed the story, Fredegar added it to create a stronger origin story for the Franks, one that was similar to that of the Romans and the Greeks. This addition was significant because the story might have had its origin in primitive religious Germanic beliefs.⁴⁸⁵ The story might have had its influence in an old cult myth, mainly connected with a fertility god. If the story existed before, one can understand why Gregory chose to suppress it because of its pagan elements. Fredegar did not explicitly say who impregnated Chlodio's wife.⁴⁸⁶ This could have alluded to a temporary divinization of Chlodio, by which he became a god who took the form of a divine sea creature, half-man and half-bull.⁴⁸⁷ The connection to the older Germanic traditions can be furthered by looking at the ninth century biography of Charlemagne by Einhard (c.775- 840 CE) who said this about the last Frankish kings: "Wherever he [the Frankish king] had to travel, he went by wagon, drawn by yoked oxen."⁴⁸⁸ This connects to the ritual called the *Kultwagen*, reminiscent of the yearly circuit of Nerthus, which links it to fertility cults.⁴⁸⁹ With this in mind, it is understandable why Gregory might have wanted to brush away the mythological aspects of the story because it demonstrated a primitive view of religion.⁴⁹⁰ From a Roman perspective, this mythological episode reminds us of the Greek tale of the Minotaur and Minos.⁴⁹¹ The story was a popular one at the time and since the story was absorbed into the Latin literature we are able to see how it might have been used in Frankish mythology for propaganda. The story was used in association with Virgil's *Aeneid* which connected it to a Trojan mythographic tradition.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁵ Alexander Callander Murray, ed., "Post vocantur Merovingii: Fredegar, Merovech, and 'Sacral Kingship,'" in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History, Essays Presented to Walter Goffart*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 122, see also David Henry Miller, "Sacral Kingship, Biblical Kingship and the Elevation of Pepin the Short," in *Religion, Culture and Society in the Early Middle Ages: Studies in Honor of Richard E. Sullivan*, ed. Thomas F.X. and John J. Contreni (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publication, 1987), 131-154.

⁴⁸⁶ Murray argues that it might be possible that this could be seen as anti-Merovingian propaganda. This story has a women sleeping with a demon or divine creature making an unholy match and showing a form of corruption in the lineage. See Alexander Callander Murray, ed., "Post vocantur Merovingii: Fredegar, Merovech, and 'Sacral Kingship,'" In *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History, Essays Presented to Walter Goffart*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 147.

⁴⁸⁷ Murray, "Post vocantur Merovingii: Fredegar, Merovech, and 'Sacral Kingship,'" 123.

⁴⁸⁸ Einhard uses the ox-wagon to describe how weak the Frankish kings had become in the eight centuries, see Einhard, "Life of Charlemagne," in Alexander Callander Murray, ed. and trans. *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 655.

⁴⁸⁹ Murray, "Post vocantur Merovingii: Fredegar, Merovech, and 'Sacral Kingship,'" 130.

⁴⁹⁰ Murray, "Post vocantur Merovingii: Fredegar, Merovech, and 'Sacral Kingship,'" 135

⁴⁹¹ For a modern retelling of this tale see Edith Hamilton, *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* (New York: Warner books, 1942), 157-158, see also Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A.D Melville (Oxford: Oxford University press. 2008), 175.

⁴⁹² Murray, "Post vocantur Merovingii: Fredegar, Merovech, and 'Sacral Kingship,'" 138. A further connection can be made to the Trojan descent. Murray brings an interesting point that by connecting the Romans, Macedonians and

The mythological connection of the Franks to the Trojans demonstrates an influence that came from Greco-Roman culture. It creates a common ancestry between a people that have been known to conquer and successfully build empires. The Franks who were very similar to the Romans, had to create an ethnic origin story that did not make them look like they emerged from nowhere, with no real right to rule.⁴⁹³ One of the biggest inheritances from Roman culture was the written word that Rome left to the world after its fall. Latin was understood by many of the aristocracy and it allowed many to know the literature of the ancient world. The Frankish society were able to use this common language to write down a history for themselves that was remembered over the oral traditions of the past.⁴⁹⁴

When considering mythology, Gibbon looked at the fable of the Seven Sleepers, which talks of seven young men hiding from the persecutions of their time. This took place in the time of a pagan emperor and they hid in a cave and blocked the entrance with a large stone. The seven young men fell asleep for what they believed to be a couple of hours but upon unblocking the rock that had imprisoned them, they realized that two-hundred years had passed. They had awoken in a different world, a world ruled by a Christian Emperor.⁴⁹⁵ The story for Gibbon represented the difference between two ages. He calls the story a philosophical romance and argues that it is not history because it does not show the actual transformation of one state into another.⁴⁹⁶ The legends of the Franks are similar but serve the purpose to demonstrate a coherence with the past, unlike the fable of the seven sleepers, where one does not see what happens between the sleeping and waking of the young men. The Franks try to demonstrate where they came from and how their history was useful to their reign. Although Gibbon does not mention the origins of the Franks in his chapter XXXVIII on the Merovingians, we are able to

the Franks we are able to see that its three founders, Alexander, Augustus and Merovech, all say that they descend from gods, Apollo, Jove and Neptune. This was a pleasing diversion although no evidence is available to us to maintain that Fredegar had this in mind, see Alexander Callander Murray, ed., "Post vocantur Merovingii: Fredegar, Merovech, and 'Sacral Kingship,'" in *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History, Essays Presented to Walter Goffart*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 147. Bruno Dumézil also argues against Fredegar knowing of an oral history that came from the Germanic culture. Instead he says that Fredegar made a history for the Franks much like the Romans did for themselves, see Bruno Dumézil, *Des Gaulois aux Carolingiens* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013), 71.

⁴⁹³ Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: A History of Europe from 400 to 1000* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2010), 200-201.

⁴⁹⁴ Rosamond McKitterick, "The Written Word and Oral Communication: Rome's Legacy to the Franks," in *The Frankish Kings and Culture in the Early Middle Ages* (Great Britain: Variorum, 1995), 89.

⁴⁹⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall II*, 292.

⁴⁹⁶ John Mathews, "Gibbon and the later Roman Empire causes and circumstances," in *Edward Gibbon and Empire*, 12.

understand that he does not see the origin of the Franks as actual history, but just a fable that adds no actual depth to the people. Therefore, he ignored the literary connection to the past. Gibbon, when speaking about the Merovingians, is not as critical as when he talks about other Germanic tribes but he still believes them to be superstitious because of their Christian beliefs.⁴⁹⁷

Gibbon does blame the Merovingians for the fall of the West, because this chapter comes before his general observations. But what the origin story of the Franks present is that the Merovingian dynasty was not a reason for the fall of the Roman West. Instead, it demonstrates that the people of the time did not truly believe that the Roman Empire ended but in fact was continuing. The merging of Roman and Frankish culture had come to a point where the Franks themselves wanted to be Roman to a certain degree. They even went as far as creating a story for themselves that connects to older powerful establishments that were successful. Having an origin story for themselves made it natural to see that they were continuing the Roman Empire. Moreover, by imitating the myths and applying them to their dynasty, they were just another power that had descended from the Trojan mythography and this was the strongest reason for their rule. It creates a link that shows a continuation with the Roman Empire although under different rulers.

The Cult of the Saints and its Importance for Christian Unification

Gibbon refused to view the cult of the saints as a positive factor for Christianity and he does not believe that it added much towards humanity other than more superstitions and further problems of corruption in the church:

In the long period of twelve hundred years, which elapsed between the reign of Constantine and the reformation of Luther, the worship of the saints and relics corrupted the pure and perfect simplicity of the Christian model; and some symptoms of degeneracy may be observed in the first generations which adopted and cherished this pernicious innovation.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁷ Ian Wood, "Gibbon and the Merovingians," 122.

⁴⁹⁸ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* II, 92

Contrary to what Gibbon believes, Christianity's cult of saints and relics helped unify the fallen empire in the West. It is through the reverence of these saints that the members of the community were connected to each other. Through the cults, Christianity adapted to Germanic traditions and facilitated their conversion. This is seen with some of the festivals, like Easter.⁴⁹⁹ The lives of the saints, similar to those of the apostles, served as a moral compass for many and the population strived to mimic their local saints.⁵⁰⁰ Christianity during the age of Constantine needed heroes to help the faithful in their Christian worship and the saints filled this role, like ancient pagan heroes. The adventure of the pagan heroes had an underlying message for the people of their time, the saints also communicated messages to the masses of the new Christian age. They acted as individuals that helped communication with God, on behalf of the worshiper. Although Gibbon had issues with the cult of the saints and their relics, this Christian model of adapting an older pagan tradition of worship in the Roman World, helped connect the communities from the east to the west. Christianity adapted the pagan worship to fit with their new model and by doing this it opened itself to more followers.

Establishing the Christian Cult

The reverence for the saints begins with the Christian veneration of martyrs. Among the first martyrs were some of the Apostles who had sacrificed themselves for the faith.⁵⁰¹ Christian reverence of the saints grew out of older Roman traditions of honoring the dead, where the family of the deceased gathered around the person's grave and celebrated a memorial meal.⁵⁰² Christianity took this idea and made it a feast day honoring the saint's lives. For the Cappadocian Fathers in the East, the cult of martyrs was important for the Christian identity.⁵⁰³ The festivals honoring the saints were instrumental for them and their worshippers. First, it created a united community among the followers of the Christian religion and second, it acted as a moral compass for the masses. Since the festival was a day of veneration for the saints, it became widespread across the empire. The festival incorporated an individual aspect where the person

⁴⁹⁹ See J.G. Frazer, "Oriental Religion in the West," in *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1925), 356-362.

⁵⁰⁰ For a good article to see how the saint was influential for the people of the time, see Peter Brown, "The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," *Representations*, no. 2 (1983):1-25.

⁵⁰¹ Vidmar, 72.

⁵⁰² Vidmar, 72.

⁵⁰³ Vasiliki M. Limberis, *Architects of Piety: The Cappadocian Fathers and the Cult of the Martyrs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

asked for some form of help from a saint and at the same time it also linked the individual to a bigger community and gave them a sense of belonging.⁵⁰⁴ It is thanks to these festivals that Christians felt connected from Rome to Constantinople, regardless of issues that presented themselves during the age.⁵⁰⁵ The second aspect that was favorable for the veneration of saints is the moral aspect. Those of the Christian faith tried to follow their teachings and morals; for example, a common action undertaken by the worshipers was being more hospitable to their neighbours.⁵⁰⁶ This furthered the sense of community with the Christian faith.

In the early days of veneration of these saints there was no rule on who had control over the bodies. This caused some issues between localities. With the Church's increasing power and the growing importance of saints, localities and rich families competed for their remains and burial place.⁵⁰⁷ Families wanted to own parts of the saints because it enhanced their social status and it was also believed that it helped them attain a higher status in the afterlife. They believed that the saint's proximity to God was beneficial for the family. The saint's burial in the family grave gave its members a physical proximity to the corpse and in turn caused the family to have a spiritual proximity to God.⁵⁰⁸ Often localities were at war over who had control over the body. The resolution to this issue was to divide the body between different localities.⁵⁰⁹ Another possible issue is that competing over the saints' bodies risked making the veneration a private affair. If the veneration of the body became private, Christianity was going to have a hard time connecting everyone through its saints. By the end of the fourth century the veneration of the saints had become increasingly problematic because the rich were taking the saintly bodies and using it to increase their personal status. Ambrose of Milan and Augustine of Hippo acted on this problem of the privatization of the cults.

According to Ambrose of Milan, the saints should belong to the whole of the church and not to a select few. We see his thoughts on the matter in a letter that he sent to his sister when he found the bodies of St. Gervasius and St. Protasius: "Thanks be to You, Lord Jesus, that at this time You have stirred up for us the spirits of the holy martyr when Your Church needs greater protection. Let all know what sort of champions I desire, who are able to defend, but desire not

⁵⁰⁴ Limberis, 16-17.

⁵⁰⁵ Limberis, 20.

⁵⁰⁶ Limberis, 30.

⁵⁰⁷ Vidmar, 73.

⁵⁰⁸ Vidmar, 73.

⁵⁰⁹ Vidmar, 73.

to attack. These have I gained for you, O holy people, such as may help all and injure none.”⁵¹⁰ Ambrose in this part of the letter thanks Christ for sending the martyrs to help out the Christian faith and for bringing miracles back on earth through the saints. He claims that these martyrs are back to help and protect all of the Christian people. In the same part of the letter he refers to the saints as “soldiers of Christ.”⁵¹¹ Ambrose also discusses the relics of saints and tells us how they should be presented and not buried: “The glorious relics are taken out of an ignoble burying-place, the trophies are displayed under heaven. The tomb is wet with blood. The marks of the bloody triumph are present, the relics are found undisturbed in their order, the head separated from the body.”⁵¹² Ambrose did not believe that the relics should remain buried but should be visible under the heavens, as well as being visible for all of the followers of Christ. This countered the argument of privatization where a family obtained a relic and kept it without showing it to the world.

Augustine of Hippo attacked the ideas of a cult being similar to pagan rituals. The confusion was that some Romans believed that sacrifices were made to the saints. The main difference between the two is that Christians venerate the saints compared to the pagans who sacrificed to their gods: “For it is to God that sacrifices are offered at their [saints] memorials, who made both men and martyrs, and united them in heavenly honour with holy angels.”⁵¹³ Augustine goes on to say that the offerings made to the saints are actually for God:

We celebrate such sacrifices, both so that we may thank the true God for their victories, and so that, as we renew our memory of them, we may urge ourselves to imitate them in winning such crowns and palms, invoking the same God to our aid. Therefore, whatever offerings are brought by the pious to the places of the martyrs, these are only adornments of their memorials and not sacred or sacrificial objects given to the dead as though they were gods.⁵¹⁴

⁵¹⁰ Ambrose of Milan, *Letters* trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin and H.T.F. Duckworth in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, Vol. 10. ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co, 1896): 22:10.

⁵¹¹ Ambrose of Milan, 22:10.

⁵¹² Ambrose of Milan, 22:12.

⁵¹³ Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 357.

⁵¹⁴ Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, 357.

Augustine demonstrates that the saints were there to help people become closer to God. By imitating them beings, the people had access to God and won his favor for their lives.

The action of these two Christian bishops changed how the saints were venerated becoming more public and elaborated.⁵¹⁵ The saints and their miracles were to be documented more than before and more shrines were built for their veneration. This enhanced the cult and made it more accessible to all further helping connect the communities together and have a shared identity.⁵¹⁶

The Power of the Cult of the Saints

The power that the saints held is important for the expansion of Christianity and it became an important part of Christian identity. The perceived power that these saints gave to the community helped it flourish in the late fifth and sixth century. The saints became a cult just as important as the deities of pagan Europe but the main difference between the two is that the saints were venerated to bring the worshipper closer to God, as for the worship of ancient deities was to gain favor from the gods.

The Christian saint represented a powerful intermediary between the living people and God in the afterlife. The inscription on the tomb of St. Martin demonstrates their importance: “Here lies Martin the bishop, of Holy memory whose soul is in the hand of God; but he is fully here, present and made plain in Miracles of every kind.”⁵¹⁷ This inscription describes how a man like Martin is gone to the afterlife, but that there is still an earthly presence in his tomb. God is suspending reality through St Martin’s intercession, to cause miracles that will help Christian believers deal with the everyday life. This created a community around the dead bishop and further strengthened the Christian bound. Christians were able to create communities out of visibly nowhere. In the fourth century we see this with the creation of monastic communities in the desert and by the fifth century we see bishops balancing the town and non-town communities, by using a dead saint to unify towns who have the same Christian beliefs.⁵¹⁸ The tomb remained local to the towns which presented some issues because of the location of the saint’s tomb, not everyone was able to bathe in the saint’s miracles and blessings. The solution to

⁵¹⁵ Vidmar, 74.

⁵¹⁶ Vidmar, 74.

⁵¹⁷ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 4.

⁵¹⁸ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 8.

this issue was to detach pieces from the saintly body (which became known as relics) and send them to another area where it conveyed the blessings of the saint. The relics were a powerful tool for Christians because they held more power than the actual site of the body and, since a relic was detached from a physically dead body, it was perfect for the ideas of a life after death.⁵¹⁹ This helped the dialectic of bishops and preachers because although the saint was dead, they continued to perform miracles. Relics continued to perform miracles as well and represented a form of conquering death even as its host lied in a tomb rotting.⁵²⁰

The separation between the tomb and the relic created an importance in *praesentia*, physical presence of the holy, whether in the midst of a particular community or in the possession of particular individuals. This was one of the greatest blessings a late-antique Christian could enjoy.⁵²¹ The proximity between the saint and the worshipper gave the idea of a friendship with an invisible companion.⁵²² The invisible companion was always next to his “friend” guiding him along the path to attaining a proper afterlife next to God. This helped the individual believers stay on the right path and mimic the saints’ morals. On a more communal side, the relics unified communities together because the relic made ideas of the “holy” more accessible, than if they were to remain in a localized area.⁵²³ The arrival of a relic into a community meant that it received an *adventus*. This was a festival that was given to the relic and the saint for arriving into the community.⁵²⁴ The Christians adapted the Roman *adventus* which was a celebration of the arrival of the emperor in a community, by all and not just nobility, hence this celebration united everyone.⁵²⁵ The use of *adventus* for the relics of the saints acted as a unifying force for the many different classes of people within a town or community but it also added magnificence to the relic itself. The relic was seen as great, if not greater than the Roman Emperor.⁵²⁶

The saint’s *potentia*, power, is seen through the tortures that they suffered in life. The more they suffered the more power they and their relics had.⁵²⁷ Those that were healed by relics

⁵¹⁹ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 78.

⁵²⁰ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 79.

⁵²¹ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 88.

⁵²² Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 88.

⁵²³ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 91.

⁵²⁴ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 98.

⁵²⁵ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 99.

⁵²⁶ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 99.

⁵²⁷ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 107.

or were blessed by the saints then had a change in social status. It was not uncommon to see a person who was poor become part of the saint's family.⁵²⁸ This social standing was connected with the *reverentia* of the saint. To remain in good standing, one had to continue giving reverence to the saintly patron. The good or bad standing is directly related to the person's relationship with the saint. Through reverence given to the saint the person acquired a high social and cultural grooming as well as an important etiquette towards the supernatural that was favorable for the worshipper as long as they were giving proper reverence.⁵²⁹ *Rusticitas* was the opposite of *reverentia* which represented a failed relationship; this meant that they rejected the saint's friendship.⁵³⁰ A combination of both *praesentia* and *reverentia* was instrumental to the unification of Christian identity.⁵³¹

From Pagan Heroes to Christian Saints: Christianity Appropriating Ancient Traditions.

As stated above the cult of the saints became an important aspect to cultural appropriation and converted many Germanic tribes by this method. Saints came from all types of different backgrounds, being from either aristocratic stock or from the poorest of the people at the time. This is what made it so easy to convert the people. Because whichever saint they chose, they were able to be associated with them. The association with a single saint might have been more personal but the festivities for the chosen saint increased the communal bond.

For the Germanic tribes, Christianity appropriated their culture to facilitate conversion. They took Germanic traditions and transformed it to serve a purpose. As we have seen with the mythology above, Christianity used older traditions from Germanic culture. One of these traditions was the Germanic tribes view of civic morality. This was very important to them because they viewed their actions as representing the group. The Christian faith brought a more personal value that made the person contemplate about themselves.⁵³² Using the Franks as an example, they valued war because of the experienced gained in war. The experience of war was an experience that each member of the tribe had felt.⁵³³ There was an oral history that followed this idea as well. The older generations spoke of tales of heroic success of their lives and the

⁵²⁸ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 113.

⁵²⁹ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 119.

⁵³⁰ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 119.

⁵³¹ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 120.

⁵³² Jonathan Barlow, "The Morality of the Franks," in *Wolf Liebeschuetz Reflected*, ed. John Drinkwater and Benet Salway (Institute of Classical Studies: University of London, 2007), 107.

⁵³³ Barlow, 107.

pass. The younger generation had to follow a similar life, it was expected of them. By not following the experience of the older generation, they were seen as offensive.⁵³⁴ With the value of war the Franks also held dear the value of chance, this meant that by surviving a battle, the Franks gained more prestige because of the luck that they had during the battle. Romans were perplexed by this idea and did not understand why the Franks thought this way. The Roman army was governed by the value of courage. This was important because it made them stand apart from the Franks. Being more organized, the Romans projected a moral mythical exemplar, like Hercules, a hero who made choices that benefited humankind.⁵³⁵ In the time of Constantine the Great, war was a place of conversion, but over time the emperors became more flawed and were replaced by the soldier-saint figures.⁵³⁶ With the conversion of Clovis, the Franks merged both Germanic values of fortune and war with Christian value of protecting and giving to the poor. Clovis and Christianity found a way to move forward with both values being mixed together. War became validated if it was used in defence of the faith and against heresy.⁵³⁷

The Franks, came to select St. Martin as their patron saint. This saint demonstrated attributes that the Frankish tribes respected. From Saint Martin's life we learn that he was a soldier before becoming a saint. Although forced into the military because his father had served, he was honorable and considered a professional soldier.⁵³⁸ This is very similar to what the younger generations of Germanic people might have felt when they had to follow into their fathers' footsteps. There is also the encounter between Martin and a poor naked man, when Martin noticed that no one was willing to help the naked man. Martin then decided to cut his cloak in half and give him a piece, to keep him warm.⁵³⁹ Although he was ridiculed by other soldiers because of his mutilated garments, he was still seen as a good example of what soldiers should do, that is, protect his people at the risk of his own life. A soldier's life is given freely to the protection of the people and this ideology is seen in the Frankish courts and with Christian piety. In the Frankish courts the king is at the service of the people. Martin demonstrated his service to the people as a soldier and as a Christian we are able to see how he helped a poor naked man even though he had less than other soldiers around. The alms giving to the poor is an

⁵³⁴ Barlow, 108.

⁵³⁵ Barlow, 108.

⁵³⁶ Barlow, 109.

⁵³⁷ Barlow, 111.

⁵³⁸ Sulpicius Severus, *Life of Saint Martin* in "Medieval Saints: A Reader," trans. Rev. Alexander Roberts, ed. Mary-Ann Stouck (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1999), 140.

⁵³⁹ Severus, 140-141.

important aspect to Christian ideology and with Martin we see how the saints combined the importance of protecting and giving to the poor.

The Rise of the Authoritative Bishop in the Frankish Kingdom in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries

The bishop became a major political power in the late empire thanks to the donated lands and the authority over the cult of the saints because it gave them more spiritual authority.⁵⁴⁰ Through these cults they were able to gain political favors because of the way they connected with these saints. They tended to be seen as holding a special place among God's followers and elected to lead the faithful onto the right path. The most important aspect of the bishop in this period was to form an ideology that was relevant to the post-Roman world.⁵⁴¹ There are two types of episcopal ideologies that emerge in the sixth century. The first is the bishop's governance of his diocese and the second is about how the bishop remained active in both worldly and spiritual affairs. There is also Gregory of Tours' view which concentrates on the violence of the kings versus the religiosity of the bishops.⁵⁴² Both of these ideologies try to deal with the problem of kingship and the role that the aristocrats have to play in this new post Roman world.

The Frankish Bishops Model

The model that Frankish bishops followed was inspired by the ideals created by Ambrose of Milan and Pope Gregory the Great (540-604 CE).⁵⁴³ It is thanks to these two theologians that the bishops became closer to the court and helped advise the king in his decisions, while at the same time providing good episcopal authority for their community. To be a good authority figure for an episcopal community, the bishops had to protect the poor and uphold a view of Christian charity. The bishop held this ideology high because it forced the kings and the aristocracy to

⁵⁴⁰ Chris Wickham, *Medieval Europe: From the Breakup of the Western Roman Empire to the Reformation* (London: Yale University Press, 2016), 31.

⁵⁴¹ Michael Edward Moore, *A Sacred Kingdom: Bishops and the Rise of Frankish kingship, 300-850* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 85.

⁵⁴² Moore, 85.

⁵⁴³ Moore, 86.

follow his example.⁵⁴⁴ By protecting and giving to the poor the king and the aristocrats helped to propagate the Christians message hence bringing he community closer to God.

Ambrose's career exemplifies the importance of how aristocratic value and governmental ideals can go from the empire to the Church.⁵⁴⁵ For clerical responsibility Ambrose used *De Officiis* (On Duties) by Cicero and wrote a book with the same title.⁵⁴⁶ In this work Ambrose came up with the idea of how a cleric should act around his community. It was important for Ambrose that the bishops be very active in ecclesiastical law and were active in the courts around the king.⁵⁴⁷ Ambrose himself was descended from Gallic aristocracy, hence his comfort with law and governmental administration. He added this to his views on how a bishop should function.⁵⁴⁸ In his work, he addresses the *Sacerdos*, which meant priest and mostly bishops, a word that was still used in Merovingian councils.⁵⁴⁹

The character of the bishop was important, he had to control his emotions and be a good example of a positive leader to those around him, to show a unified church. Another attribute that was important is that he dealt with issues quickly because if a problem arose in his own church, it could easily cause division in his flock.⁵⁵⁰ Because of Ambrose's aristocratic background, he was able to deal with the emperor directly and to represent his church. This was to form an important model for the relationship between bishop and emperor and resonated strongly in northern Italy and Gaul.⁵⁵¹ Ambrose's relationship with Theodosius might have been strained at times, but it is through the episode of the Thessalonica massacre, which Theodosius ordered, that we see Ambrose's true power towards the emperor.⁵⁵² Ambrose threatened Theodosius with excommunication if he did not repent for this massacre and suspended him from the church for eight months before Theodosius was accepted back into the church's good graces.⁵⁵³ It was Ambrose and the church that ruled over the emperors when they made morally wrong choices. In

⁵⁴⁴ Moore, 86.

⁵⁴⁵ Moore, 87.

⁵⁴⁶ For a good translation of the work by Cicero, see Cicero, *On Duties* trans. & ed. M.T. Griffin and E.M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). For a translation of the work by Ambrose, see. Ambrose, *De Officiis* ed. and trans. Ivor J. Davidson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵⁴⁷ Moore, 86.

⁵⁴⁸ Moore, 86.

⁵⁴⁹ Moore, 87.

⁵⁵⁰ Moore, 88.

⁵⁵¹ Moore, 88.

⁵⁵² Freeman, *A New History*, 256.

⁵⁵³ Freeman, *A New History*, 256.

this episode, episcopal power is revealed as a potent nucleus and Gaul went on to adopt this “Ambrosian model” of bishops.⁵⁵⁴

Pope Gregory I who wrote *Liber Regulae Pastoralis* in the late sixth century was another very influential bishop worth mentioning.⁵⁵⁵ In this book Pope Gregory discussed how bishops should serve their diocese. The true bishop had no ambition and in fact tried to avoid becoming a bishop in the first place.⁵⁵⁶ The bishop does not rule over the people but serves them instead. The model demonstrates that episcopal power should follow in the footsteps of St Peter the Apostle. Peter had pre-eminence over the church because he had the keys to heaven and refused signs of reverence.⁵⁵⁷ After the Roman West fell, Pope Gregory had to deal with the Germanic kingdoms and be effective in his active role. He did face problems in the West as he did in the East. Constantinople did not view Rome as a main center for the faith, whereas Pope Gregory viewed the patriarch of Constantinople as an alternative understanding of episcopal authority corrupted by demons.⁵⁵⁸ In the West, Pope Gregory still had difficulty imposing his superiority because the papacy was fragile and did not hold as much power as it did later.⁵⁵⁹ Pope Gregory in the region of Gaul concentrated his effort on reforms of episcopal authority, abolition of simony, and creating friendly relations with the royal family. His interactions with Queen Brunhilde (c. 543-613 CE) was difficult. Upon requesting the pallium for her bishop, Pope Gregory could do anything else but accept. This demonstrates the fragile and limited state of the papacy at this time.⁵⁶⁰ By the end of the sixth century Pope Gregory decided to look further north, past the Mediterranean.⁵⁶¹ Britain had been conquered by the Anglo-Saxons and they were thus mostly pagan at the beginning of the sixth century. Although he had trouble with the region of Gaul he did prove successful in sending a mission to convert Britain. The papal initiative was important and innovative, being one of the first mission from Rome to convert a people.⁵⁶² Pope Gregory sent on this mission monks with his work entitled *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*. The book was

⁵⁵⁴ Moore, 89.

⁵⁵⁵ For a translation of this work, see Gregory I, Pope, *Pastoral Care* trans. Ann. Henri Davis (Westminster: Newman Press, 1955). For a good overview of Pope Gregory’s time, see R. A. Markus, *Gregory the Great and his World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵⁵⁶ Moore 91.

⁵⁵⁷ Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, 4th ed., (London: Yale University Press, 2014), 66.

⁵⁵⁸ Duffy, 66.

⁵⁵⁹ Duffy, 67.

⁵⁶⁰ Duffy, 68, see also Lynette Olson, *The Early Middle Ages: The Birth of Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 52.

⁵⁶¹ Lynette Olson, *The Early Middle Ages: The Birth of Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 52.

⁵⁶² Olson, 52.

important to the development of the Anglo-Saxons and helped the monks and bishops of the area to convert the pagans.⁵⁶³ His primary objective was the pre-eminence of the Roman Church. Pope Gregory was skeptical about Christian kings in the Germanic kingdom, yet he did try to instruct and advise them to follow the same ends of the Church.⁵⁶⁴ Focusing on Britain proved to be instrumental because this was a place that had been ignored in the aftermath of the fall of the Roman West. By converting the Anglo-Saxons, Pope Gregory was bringing them into the fold of a united Christianity. The bishop wielded a dual power in the Germanic kingdoms because he was responsible for episcopal authority and had to remain active in the political and legal governance of the court.⁵⁶⁵ Ambrose and Pope Gregory heavily influenced the bishops in Gaul, like Gregory of Tours in the sixth century.

Views of the Bishop in Gregory of Tours

Gregory of Tours was the bishop of the Franks who influenced later understanding of episcopal power and courtly relationships with the kings. Through his narrative of the *History of the Franks*, we are able to see the “Ambrosian model” and how a bishop should act with a king. Arianism was still a big problem on the outskirts of various kingdoms and was one of Gregory’s main preoccupations. His goal at this time was to purge the courts of Arianism as well as on the outskirts of the city.⁵⁶⁶ Gregory describes a social landscape where the king and the bishop or monk dominate the landscape. The two sat in parallel seats of power.⁵⁶⁷ It is often by contrast that Gregory demonstrates how one is different from the other but that both are needed to rule a kingdom. Gregory believed that the royal power was not able to set the moral tone in a kingdom and that saints and martyrs were windows into reality that the kings should emulate.⁵⁶⁸

Stories of saints are intertwined with narrative of reigning kings to demonstrate the historical violence of the world with the non-historical world of monastic retreat.⁵⁶⁹ The idea that monasteries stood outside of the kings’ power was explained by the occupants of these monasteries themselves as if they were in prison, because they were used as such by kings and

⁵⁶³ Olson, 52.

⁵⁶⁴ Moore, 91-92.

⁵⁶⁵ Moore, 92.

⁵⁶⁶ Moore, 99.

⁵⁶⁷ Moore, 105.

⁵⁶⁸ Moore, 106-107.

⁵⁶⁹ Moore, 108.

bishops.⁵⁷⁰ Gregory himself had sent a rival to a monastery who had tried to usurp him from his see. King Guntram (r. 561- 592 CE) also sent a bishop to a monastery whom he deemed problematic.⁵⁷¹ The monastery and the church were a sacred precinct outside of this earthly world. All those who entered these establishments were protected and temporarily removed from any worldly conflict.⁵⁷² Looking into the characters of the king and bishop he sees how they contrast each other. Gregory makes the king act out in anger and take actions that results in being rash compared with the bishop who is thoughtful and reviews the laws before taking action.⁵⁷³ This is very similar to the stories of Ambrose and Theodosius where the emperors' actions were rash and had to be checked by episcopal power. More often than not the rash decisions of the Merovingian kings made the society and the church suffer. For example, under the reign of Guntram, Chilperic launched a civil war that made the church suffer: "He burned the churches, stole their holy vessels, killed the clergy, emptied the monasteries of monks, raped the nuns in their convents and caused devastation everywhere. There was more, even more weeping in the churches in this period than there had been at the time of Diocletian's persecutions."⁵⁷⁴

Gregory tells us that the anger of kings made it worse than the persecution of Diocletian which had been dubbed the "great persecution" on account of the death toll. The bishop made a plea for the Christianization of power in which the realm of Christian space should be organized by committed religious men and an obedient Christian king.⁵⁷⁵ Between Chilperic and Guntram, Gregory preferred the latter because Guntram views were closer to what bishop wanted. But far from being the perfect king, Guntram was still an earthly ruler who had his faults, such as taking a man, who had asked the church of St. Martin for asylum, away to be executed.⁵⁷⁶ But oddly enough Gregory still thought of Guntram as a "priest-king," in the sense that he acted in the way a bishop should on certain issues: "For three days his own alms were greater than usual, and he seemed so anxious about all his people that he might well have been taken for one of our Lord's bishops, rather than a king."⁵⁷⁷ Gregory's statements about king Guntram were often contradictory, but, taken as a whole, the king was able to act according to the bishop's ideology.

⁵⁷⁰ Moore, 109.

⁵⁷¹ Moore, 109.

⁵⁷² Moore, 109.

⁵⁷³ Moore, 115.

⁵⁷⁴ Gregory of Tours, 244.

⁵⁷⁵ Moore, 116.

⁵⁷⁶ Moore, 119.

⁵⁷⁷ Gregory of Tours, 510.

The ruler, by acting this way, was closer to the bishop and able to rule more equitably and become a more exemplary Christian king. As the Roman Empire faded, bishops had to preserve and renew the legislation of their predecessors as well as preserve their episcopal institution.⁵⁷⁸

Court Relations Between King and Bishop

The royal courts attracted many people and most had come to live in the area because they wanted to be close to the king and take part in affairs of court life, something which reveals the idea of *Konigsnach* (closeness to the king).⁵⁷⁹ The kingdoms are organized around cities and dioceses governed by bishops.⁵⁸⁰ This demonstrates how a bishop was to govern an area. The kings sometimes tried to intervene in the elections of bishops of important sees to have control over areas.⁵⁸¹ The problem between kingship and the episcopal power is seen in the way the king and the bishop interact with one another. As seen above, Gregory tried to construct a contrast between king and bishop. Although partly successful, Gregory was more concerned with the spiritual powers which leaves open the question of what the proper relationship between king and bishop were.

Roman laws are a good example of where the king and the bishop worked together.⁵⁸² The Church helped to maintain the laws. The laws that were still circulating at this time formed the *Theodosian Code*, which contained laws of general significance other than regional and were meant to produce unified governance for both East and West. After the fall of Rome, laws were no longer backed up by imperial power. But still, the Western kingdoms used the *Theodosian Code* as a basis for law and achieved mastery over it.⁵⁸³ By studying the codex and writing everything down, the bishops became the keepers of the Roman law through history. When it

⁵⁷⁸ Moore, 121.

⁵⁷⁹ Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome*, 122.

⁵⁸⁰ The Merovingian kingdom of the Franks is the direct continuation of the Roman Provincial administrations. See Rosamond Mckitterick ed., "Politics," in *The Early Middle Ages: Europe 400-1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 28.

⁵⁸⁰ Moore, 123-124.

⁵⁸¹ Moore, 122. This was common in Northern parts of Gaul. In the south of Gaul, like Arles, the Christian community was untouched by kingly intervention on elections of bishops. See Michael Edward Moore, *A Sacred Kingdom: Bishops and the Rise of Frankish Kingship, 300-850* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 94.

⁵⁸² Moore, 123. It is important to note that the early kings of the Franks were a ruler of a people and not a territory. Their territory expanded as long as it was habited by their people. It is also through these early kings that we see the closest emulations of Roman laws, see Rosamond Mckitterick ed., "Politics," in *The Early Middle Ages: Europe 400-1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 27; 30, see also Charles Freeman, *Holy Bones, Holy Dust: How Relics Shaped the History of Medieval Europe* (London: Yale University Press, 2011), 49.

⁵⁸³ Moore, 130.

comes to the laws of the Roman Empire there is no decline and fall but a gradual process of adaption and alterations.⁵⁸⁴ If the Germanic tribes had entered into the Roman territory and established their own laws over the Roman ones, then this could have suggested a fall and Roman culture meant little to the tribes.⁵⁸⁵ If, on the other hand, the Germanic tribes used some of the laws of the Romans, then this demonstrates a syncretic transition between the fall and the successor kingdoms.⁵⁸⁶ Along with the Salic law (the code of the Salian Franks who conquered Gaul in the fifth century and the most important, although not the oldest, of all Teutonic laws or *leges barbarorum*), people still held a Roman law that was still applicable.⁵⁸⁷ Depending on the region, the people were able to be tried by their own laws. The Germanic laws at the time were more personal than territorial.⁵⁸⁸ The late fifth century left an opening between the emperor and their bishops. Only bishops were able to expound doctrinal power, and this came to rival imperial administrators, even emperors were subject to the clerical discipline.⁵⁸⁹ The Christians were able to claim both sides of their identity as a Roman resident or as a Christian. The bishop was often at ease between the roles of judge and mediator.⁵⁹⁰

In the Frankish kingdom after the fall, the cultural stature of bishops was maintained but expanded.⁵⁹¹ The Merovingian Church maintained the traditions from the Gallo-Roman Church especially in the recapitulation of old conciliar law, renewing old canons. they also wielded the laws of the Christian world from East to West.⁵⁹² Any Christian who was visiting the realm of the Franks was to be tried by the bishop and Christian laws, which was taken from tradition. The bishop looked at the law books as sacred because they were intertwined with the history of Christianity, especially since the time of Constantine.⁵⁹³ Any power should have legality to have a good ruling authority.⁵⁹⁴ The kings were unable to take the imperial structures of emperorship and apply them to themselves directly—which is why they needed an origin story—that gave

⁵⁸⁴ Rosamond Mckitterick ed., “Politics,” in *The Early Middle Ages: Europe 400-1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 43-44.

⁵⁸⁵ P. S. Barnwell, “Jurist and Kings: Laws and Custom in the late Roman and Early Medieval West,” *Past & Present* 168 (2000), 6.

⁵⁸⁶ Barnwell, 6.

⁵⁸⁷ Moore, 132.

⁵⁸⁸ Barnwell, 7.

⁵⁸⁹ For a good example of a bishop subjecting an emperor to penance for what they did, see Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 315.

⁵⁹⁰ Moore, 128.

⁵⁹¹ Moore, 128.

⁵⁹² Moore, 129.

⁵⁹³ Moore, 123-124.

⁵⁹⁴ Moore, 124.

them the illusion of being an elected dynasty meant to reign over a people.⁵⁹⁵ The bishops, on the other hand, developed their political theology from their own traditions of their past, perceiving a dualism in power. Relying on the Bible and near Eastern traditions the bishops were able to understand the present world of power.⁵⁹⁶ This is the same ancient traditions and symbology (throne, sceptre, diadem, the purple *chlamys*) that were absorbed into the Roman Empire as adopted by Hellenistic forms of monarchy and cult rulership.⁵⁹⁷ Through these past traditions, the bishop was able to form a proper shape of society which included the kings and gave them an important and stable role to play in tandem with episcopal power.⁵⁹⁸ This was a good example of the “Ambrosian model,” where the king and the bishop ruled in tandem with one another.

The bishops began to build their power base in the late sixth century and king Chilperic complained about this: “My treasury is always empty. All our wealth has fallen into the hands of the Church. There is no one with any power left except the bishops.”⁵⁹⁹ During the seventh century, the relationship between king and bishop had become complicated. The king Clothar II (r.613-629 CE) at the beginning of the seventh century called a council in Paris (614 CE), where bishops present established the ancient networks and sacred landscapes with emerging northern centers and Frankish stronghold.⁶⁰⁰ The council also announced the significance of ancient law in the self-authenticating mode of recapitulation.⁶⁰¹ This was an important step because Clothar II believed divine favour flowed from his support of the bishops. From this council, royal law gained prestige from the setting while conciliar law gained stature and forced royal promulgation, forming an ideal diarchy.⁶⁰² This allowed for bishops to build up estates and have a patrimony attached to their offices which gave them even more power.⁶⁰³ This demonstrates the power and importance gained by the bishops with the aid and support of some kings to become a powerful force. The bishops at the beginning of the sixth century were not so different than the bishops at the time of Ambrose. After the fall of the Roman West the bishops, besides

⁵⁹⁵ Moore, 126.

⁵⁹⁶ Moore, 127.

⁵⁹⁷ Moore, 127, see also Rosamond McKitterick ed., “Politics,” in *The Early Middle Ages: Europe 400-1000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 54.

⁵⁹⁸ Moore, 128.

⁵⁹⁹ Gregory of Tours, 380

⁶⁰⁰ For more on the councils and synods of Frankish Gaul from the Merovingian period please see J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 94-109.

⁶⁰¹ Moore, 138.

⁶⁰² Moore, 138.

⁶⁰³ Moore, 138. For a good over view of Frankish church property please see J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

leading the people of the faith, were responsible administrators of memory and traditions: using their knowledge of the past they were to help out the reigning kings of the Merovingian dynasty. This brought them closer to the king and gave them some special favors at court which eventually gave them more land and with it more power. The relationship between bishop and king was complicated at times, but in the sixth and seventh centuries, the two were needed to govern the kingdom if it was to survive.

Gibbon's work tends to suggest that the fall of Rome had one primary cause, namely the rise of Christianity; but that was not the case, as the work of scholars I have cited above demonstrates. Gibbon's work presented many different failures but at the same time shows how new societies emerged like a phoenix from its own ashes, sometimes bringing old superstitions with it.⁶⁰⁴ But this should not be seen as a negative. This might be partially right in the sense that new societies were created but as far as new laws, we see that the bishop and episcopal authority used traditional laws and even went as far as to preserve past legislation. Without the bishops and episcopal authority, society might have lost more information about the past and the kingdoms could not have a foundation to build on. It is thanks to these bishops that we still have written laws. With laws being preserved, the Germanic kingdoms were able to see and use references from the Roman traditions.

Gibbon believed that the bishops represent what was wrong with the Christianity in government because bishops who had become corrupt infected the Church.⁶⁰⁵ As the above section has demonstrated, Gibbon was wrong about the roles that the bishop played in the aftermath of the Roman West. They played an important role in helping to form the new kingdoms. Thanks to the influences of Ambrose of Milan and Pope Gregory I, we are able to see how they were to guide people to a better spiritual life. This included acting as a guide for the kings. As we see with Gregory of Tours, the relationship between king and bishop was not always easy but necessary and it kept the king from acting too rashly. As an administrator of memory and traditions, the bishop was able to help with legislation for the new kingdoms and kept a connection to Roman institutions of law. Gibbon believed that Christian doctrine weakened the new kingdoms because the bishops worried about the personal salvation of the king. The case study of the importance of the bishop presented in this chapter demonstrates how

⁶⁰⁴ Mathews, "Gibbon and the later Roman Empire causes and circumstances," in *Edward Gibbon and Empire*, 19.

⁶⁰⁵ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall I*, 482

the king and the bishop had to work together to govern the state. If there was corruption within the government, it did not just come from the bishop and his authority but in fact it was caused by both parties. When looking at the bishop under Gregory of Tours, we see the active actions the bishop took when ruling with the king. Bishops promoted a better state by serving as a check on kingly authority. Gibbon's issues with the episcopal powers might come from his background as an Anglican. His positions look to scripture and he believes that the tradition of episcopal authority is what perverts the faith, which does not exist within the biblical tradition.⁶⁰⁶

After looking at these three case studies, we are able to notice just how much Christianity and the Germanic traditions adapted older Roman traditions. By looking at the Frankish origin myth, we see that they were able to establish an identity to themselves that was similar to the Romans and the Greeks. This shows that they came from a divine source and were appointed to lead the people. The Romans had done the same by imitating the Greeks. With the cult of the saints we see that Christians are adapting older Roman pagan traditions of worship. Christianity transformed cult worship into Christian veneration for the saints, which indicates a difference with the Roman past and took away the views of sacrificial barbarianism. The cult of the saints was also an important aspect to Christian unification between communities. The communities were connected from east to west by affiliation with the saints festival. By looking at the roles of the bishops and the impact that they had on society. This directly contradicts Gibbon's view about the role of Christians in communities and court government. The Western bishop is an important figure when connecting to the Roman past because he was the keeper of the written laws and had the ability to advise the kings on matters of state that helped Christianity flourish after the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

It is clear that Gibbon misunderstood what happened in the sixth and seventh centuries. He did not take into account all that Christianity had offered to the new Germanic kingdoms. He also did not account for all that Christianity had inherited from the Roman past. Gibbon did not see himself as the enemy of Christianity when he wrote his *Decline and Fall*. This much is sure because he was surprised by the reactions that Christians had to his first volume. He even wrote a vindication to supplicate the harsh views that Christianity had received in his first publication of the book. Gibbon's view on Christianity was problematic but demonstrated that he was clearly a

⁶⁰⁶ Owen Chadwick, "Gibbon and the Church Historians," in *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. G.W. Bowersock, John Clive and Stephen R. Graubard (London: Harvard University Press, 1977), 221.

product of his time. The age of Enlightenment had brought forth ideas of separation of church and state and how to promote human progress. The case studies above demonstrate that although the Roman West had fallen, the Roman culture continued into the new kingdoms thanks to a melding of culture and use of the Roman past.

Conclusion

Gibbon was a man of his time, living during a period of enlightenment and revolution. More importantly, on the one hand, his own religious upbringing and presuppositions can clearly be found throughout his work, tainting his interpretation of Rome's fall and the culpability of Christianity. The problems Gibbon had with Christianity are in part due to his bias against the Catholic view of the religion. In his youth, he had switched to Catholicism because he found the message to be inspiring but after being taught by a Calvinist he reverted to Protestantism. Protestantism emphasized the biblical message of Christianity at the expense of the later traditions developed in Catholicism and Orthodoxy based on the same Bible. On the other hand, the Age of Enlightenment pushed science to the forefront and began questioning the use and role of religion in society. Publishing his *Decline and Fall*, between the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) and the French Revolution (1789), Gibbon was very aware of the internal and external issues that governments during his time faced. It also was similar to the same types of problems that the Roman Empire faced, and this might have driven him to write the history of the empire to try and understand the causes of the decline and fall of any empire.

Gibbon's argument against Christianity is that it weakened the empire from within. When looking at his five reasons of how Christianity progressed, zeal of early Christians, doctrine of immortality, miracles of the early church, Christian virtues and Christians being active in government, we have been able to understand how he might have come to his conclusion about the decline. But as this thesis has shown, this was not the case. When looking at the issues that he had with miracles, virtues and the doctrine of immortality we only have to look at the benefits of the cult of the saints. The cult was instrumental for the Roman Empire during and after its fall because it helped guide and connect many different peoples as well as helped convert some of the Germanic tribes. Whether or not one believed in miracles, they happened for the people living in that age, and we must give credit to the idea that miracles played a role and was instrumental for the society. Gibbon strongly criticized Christian miracles and calls the belief in miracles superstitious. He does not acknowledge the importance that these miracles had for the identity of Christianity. Christians got together to celebrate the life of a saint and their miracles. This led to a uniform celebration across the empire which united all those of the Christian faith. This acted as a beacon for Christians to remember their faith and see that they were not alone.

When looking at the doctrine of immortality, Christians noticed that a life after death was possible and the cult of the saints helped Christians on the path to a good afterlife. By celebrating the lives of the saints, Christians gave reverence to a particular saint for special favours. These favours varied widely, but the most important one was to become a special “friend” of the saint and through the saint a friend of God. Being a “friend” with the saint meant that they put in a good word for the person with God. From this relationship the Christians had an “in” with God which almost surely guaranteed them a place in a positive afterlife. Gibbon argued that Christians did not really care for the present life and did everything to prepare for the next. But this is not true as we see with the cults of the saints, what one person did in this life was important because it affected his/her afterlife. If one person chose to do bad, s/he were not rewarded with a good afterlife. The saints themselves demonstrated that a life after death was possible by their miracles and relics. The relics of the saints were physically detached from the dead body meaning that it had overcome death. This meant that it was given a second life to live and propagate the possibilities of a life after death.

This brings us to Christian virtues which were instrumental for the empire after its decline. The cults of the saints kept these virtues intact. The Christians wanted to get into the afterlife, which is why they chose to follow a saint. The saints’ lives were well known and became a moral compass for the people living in that time. The way the saints acted in their lives influenced many to mimic them and follow in their footsteps. This helped the Empire become more respectful of the different classes of people. The poor were more likely to be helped by the rich because of the message of Christianity of helping the poor. Gibbon did not see how far-reaching the cult of the saints was for the society in the fifth and sixth centuries. The cult of the saints even helped convert some of the Germanic tribes because of their affinity with the soldier-saint who demonstrated certain values that Germanic traditions cherished.

Gibbon points towards Christian zeal and their activity in the Roman government as a reason for the declining prosperity of the empire. These two points contradict one another. He argues that Christians did not take part in the civil celebration of the Roman Empire when it was pagan but does not acknowledge how important their participation in government became after the reign of Constantine. The mere fact that Christians were in the government is enough for Gibbon to say they helped bring down the empire. Once Christianity became the empire’s religion we see that Christians’ role in government was instrumental. The Christians maintained

Roman traditions well after its decline in 476 CE. This is seen in the role that the bishop had during and after the fall of the Roman West. The bishop was an important figure within the court of the new Germanic kingdoms, because he acted as a link to the Roman past as well as a role model of how to have a positive relationship with the new Germanic leaders. Thanks to prominent men like Ambrose of Milan and Pope Gregory I, the bishop was able to understand his role within a royal court. The first role that they had was to combine clerical responsibility with governmental ideals. This meant bringing the ideas of the church into dialogue with the ideals of the state. This is an important combination because it makes or breaks the success of the relationship between the bishop and the new Germanic king. Their second role was how they should serve their diocese and maintain a positive relationship with the royal family. By serving their community faithfully and keeping positive relationships with royalty, we are able to see how bishops became a positive force within the royal courts. Gibbon believed this position to be corruptible and having this power was a cause of the decline before the fall of the empire. Bishops guided kings towards positive actions and helped them not make rash decisions. They were the keepers of Roman legislation and institutions because they had written it down during the fourth and fifth centuries.

The second theme that Gibbon mentions is that of external issues with the Germanic tribes that entered into the Roman Empire. After 476 CE the empire was divided and for Gibbon, this meant that it no longer existed in the West. What he does not seem to acknowledge is that Roman traditions were kept alive thanks to the Christians and merged with the Germanic culture to transform the Western territories into new kingdoms that benefited from a Roman past. The Ostrogothic kingdom of Theodoric remained very Roman in its way, as we see through Theodoric's legislation and politics. Theodoric implemented a dualistic political system which caused problems for his kingdom but that did not affect how "Roman" he was. Because the dualistic system separated his people into Arians Christians and Catholic Christians, the Ostrogothic kingdom failed to succeed past Theodoric's generation. This demonstrates that he was unable to combine both peoples in his kingdom which eventually led it to its destruction. The Ostrogothic kingdom was unlike the kingdom of the Franks who had more support from the Catholic Christians and a unified faith across its entire people.

The Franks adapted to the Roman traditions and even went as far as trying to become Roman. We are able to see this in their mythology. The Franks, having no origin story, invented

one that was very similar to the Greco-Roman world. By these myths, they found similar grounds with Roman traditions. They created a common ancestral coherence between the Merovingian dynasty and the Roman Empire. Gibbon argued that just like the seven sleepers fable, this story demonstrated two different ages. This is proven wrong because of the way the Franks framed their mythological history, as having common ancestors in the past that formed successful empires. The Franks also differed from the Ostrogoths in being united within the Catholic faith which meant that there were no big divisions within their courts. This made it easier to govern with Christianity at its side. The relationship between the Church and the Germanic Franks helped make the Franks a dominant force in the West. Gibbon did not see the Merovingian dynasty as continuing the Roman Empire which is why he put their history before his general observations on the fall. These two kingdoms demonstrate that Gibbon did not understand the continuity that happened for the empire. Although the empire had “fallen” both these kingdoms demonstrate that they continued Roman traditions and merged it with Germanic and Christian culture to form something new.

Edward Gibbon did not truly understand how the Roman West had declined during the time between the Antonine dynasty and the collapse of Western Empire in 476 CE.⁶⁰⁷ The Roman Empire did decline after its golden age, but there were many factors that caused its demise. To say that it fell completely and was destroyed is problematic. Christianity and the Germanic tribe were not the cause of its decline as Gibbon claimed, but created a link to the Roman past and prolonged it until its transformation into many new kingdoms under Germanic leaders. Gibbon’s argument of how Christianity and the influx of the Germanic tribes affected and caused the fall of the Roman Empire is not new. Throughout history we have seen big empires struggle to survive. Gibbon himself saw the end of the French monarchical system. The problems of the Church and the State are still a heavily debated argument in the present. These are signs that the society must change and adapt to a newer world view. It is important to note that as we adapt and change, we should not forget the past because it is our past that will help build a new foundation to a better society.

⁶⁰⁷ Jordan In his book, tells us that Gibbon gives two dozen reasons for the Fall of the empire, see David P. Jordan, *Gibbon and His Roman Empire* (Chicago: University of Illinois Pres, 1971).

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