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“Falling” Forward

9/18/98

HIST 121 – Pope

Typically when one thinks of the Romans, they only think of the actual Roman Empire. In truth the Romans were more than just people, they were the defining influence in the Mediterranean during the age of the Empire and for many years afterwards. Though the actual Roman Empire did fall, the culture that it developed and left behind did not. This can be demonstrated by looking at major figures who were not of the Roman Empire, but acted and even called themselves Roman. Four of the most influential leaders who did this were Clovis, Theodoric, Justinian, and Pope Gregory I.

Clovis, King of the Franks from around 481 CE, (The Medieval Record, p. 63), was very much an imitator of the Roman Empire. In the years of his rule, the empire was still crumbling in the West in the years after Constantine had moved the capitol eastward. His philosophy was that to be a great king, he needed to imitate the strongest empire up to that time, the Roman Empire (Notes, 9/4/98). One of his methods of doing so was maintaining a peace among the Franks and others over which he ruled. He did this using a method of peace by domination (Notes, 9/4/98). This is also the primary method that was employed by the Romans. The Romans would typically conquer territory and keep the peace by keeping troops in the region by giving them land (Notes, 8/26/98). Another way that Clovis mirrored the Romans was through the Salic Law. This law code was created by Clovis and was the first example of written law within the Germanic culture. From his increased contact with the Romans, Clovis decided that in order to be great he, like the Romans, needed a written law code. (The Medieval Record, pp. 49-54) Clovis was also appointed to the position of consul by Emperor Anastasius I around 500 CE. (The Medieval Record, p. 67) When this was done Gregory of Tours, a bishop, said “he clad himself in the purple tunic and chlamys.” (The Medieval Record, p. 67) This demonstrates some of his Roman allegiances toward the Roman society. Otherwise, how likely is it that one

would find a Germanic leader behaving in such a manner. This demonstrates how Clovis wanted to act as the new empire in the west, once the Romans had moved to Constantinople. The reign of Clovis was remarkably Roman in many aspects, from his treatment of the Roman mannerisms to mimicking the Roman Empire through the treatment of his own.

Other leaders also took many Roman policies to use within their kingdoms. Theodoric, King of the Ostrogoths, adopted many of the Roman policies as they were. One reason for this might be that he spent ten years of his young life as an imperial guest in Constantinople. (Notes/Discussion, 9/2/98) The influences that his stay in this Roman metropolis had on him are remarkable. Despite his belief of Christianity, he would refer to the old Roman polytheistic gods; “bring forth your young men for the discipline of Mars”. (The Medieval Record, p. 58) He also held respect the Roman concept of *Mos Maiorum*, or “ways of the ancestors”. In an address to the Jews of Genoa he states “we therefore gladly accede to your request that all the privileges which the foresight of antiquity conferred upon the Jewish customs shall be renewed to you”. (The Medieval Record, p. 59) In the case of Theodoric, these were not his ancestors that he was referring to, but the ways of the Roman ancestors whom for he held the utmost respect. Theodoric also had positions within his kingdom that had Roman names, such as the *Spectabilis*. (The Medieval Record, p. 58) Lastly, Theodoric would tell his people to “obey the Roman customs”, “live after the law of the Romans”, and “clothe yourselves with the morals of the toga”. (The Medieval Record, pp. 58-59) All of these demonstrate his great respect and following of Roman customs.

When the Roman Empire had completed its transition to the east, Justinian took control of what is now referred to as the Byzantine Empire. During his rule, Justinian decided that he had a severe problem. He was the emperor of the Roman Empire, but he did not control Rome.

He did succeed in reclaiming Rome and expanding the empire, but that only lasted for a while after his death. (Notes, 9/11/98) This is just like the Roman Empire which was continually expanding into the first few centuries. (Notes, 8/26/98) Justinian also decided to reform the Roman law code. As put by Procopius, “he purified them from the mass of quibbles, and by greatly strengthening them, preserved them from contradiction”. (The Medieval Record, p. 76) This demonstrates his belief in the Roman society and its standards, or otherwise he would have rewritten the code completely. Justinian also believed himself to be Roman; as evidenced by his use of terms like Roman Emperor, the Roman people, and the Roman state; when he referred to himself and those under his rule. (The Institutes) Justinian was more Roman through action than anything else, but it was an obvious influence on his rule nonetheless.

The Roman influence went beyond the other rulers and future emperors. It also spread to the church. Pope Gregory I, also known as Gregory the Great, appears to have been greatly influenced by the earlier Roman culture. Especially noticeable are his similarities to the Imperial Cult. (Notes, 8/28/98) These similarities are not direct, for in the Christian views of Gregory, he would have been appalled by an emperor claiming that he was God. The influence is indirectly through logic because Gregory felt that one of the important aspects was divine knowledge in a ruler. This is evidenced in his letters when he says of an emperor “he righteously and correctly knows that no person can exercise proper rule on earth unless he knows how to deal with divine matters”. (The Medieval Record, p. 115) He also see the emperor as a “God-appointed Lord”, much in the way that in the Imperial Cult the emperors were deified, where he is the leader that has been spiritually chosen. (The Medieval Record, p. 58; Notes, 8/28/98) Lastly, Gregory not only sees the emperor in Constantinople as having these responsibilities in his region, but Gregory also feels the need to be both a spiritual and secular leader. He does this by conquering

and gaining land around Rome, or building up the Papal Patrimony. (Notes, 9/9/98) This is also reflective of the Imperial Cult--who claimed to become gods after death or even be gods on earth and therefore they were spiritual leaders--because he is attempting to gain secular power to couple with his being the spiritual leader. Gregory's one-man impersonation of the Imperial Cult demonstrates some of the great influences that the Roman Empire even had on the Christian church.

None of these four men was born or truly raised as Romans in the days of the empire, but all of them behaved in a manner that was influenced in some way by the empire. This demonstrates the greatness of the empire at that point in time. Not only did the Roman civilization impact those who were members of the empire, but it reached out to the neighboring Germans, many of whom were not necessarily allies, and empires that extended far into the medieval times.