

Critical Reading – Section 3

Time—20 Minutes (15 Questions)

For each question in this section, select the best answer among the choices and indicate your selection by darkening the appropriate oval.

Directions: The questions following each passage are based on its content. Your choice should be made on the basis of what is *stated* or *implied* in the passage and in any introductory material that may be provided.

Questions 1-13 are based on the following double passage.

Passage A

- The decline of Rome was the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness. Prosperity hastened decay; Rome's destruction multiplied with each triumph. The story of Rome's ruin is simple and obvious: it exhibited neither reason nor good taste. But instead of inquiring why the Roman Empire was destroyed, we should rather be surprised that it had subsisted so long. The victorious legions, who, in distant wars, acquired the vices of strangers and mercenaries, first oppressed the freedom of the republic and afterward violated the rules of those "born to the purple."* Over time the emperors, anxious for their personal safety and the public peace, were reduced to loosening the harsh discipline which once had rendered them formidable to the enemy. The vigor of the military government was relaxed and finally dissolved by the partial institutions of Constantine who divided the Empire into an eastern and a western section, and the Roman world was overwhelmed by the pressure of barbarians especially in the west. In the western section of the Empire, the barbarians played the leading part both in the government and in the army, and settling in masses, displaced the Roman population. The ruling classes were replaced by Germans. As the happiness of a future life is the great object of religion, we may hear without surprise or scandal that the introduction, or at least the abuse, of Christianity had some influence on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. The clergy successfully

- preached the doctrines of patience and faint-heartedness; 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 demands of charity and devotion. The soldiers' pay was lavished on the multitudes of monks and nuns whose only service was pleading the merits of chastity. The indolence of the monks was devoutly embraced by a servile and effeminate age. The Church (and even the State) was distracted by repressive religious factions, whose conflicts were sometimes bloody and always unforgiving. The Roman world was oppressed by a new species of tyranny: sects, persecuting each other, themselves were repressed by the state, becoming the secret enemies of their country. Church Fathers in Rome did their best to keep its stream of doctrine pure and undefiled by muddy cross-currents. They fought off Gnosticism: matter is evil, only spirit is good.

- The decline of the Roman Empire was hastened by the conversion to Christianity of Constantine. In 312 A.D. more for luck than faith, Constantine went into battle with a cross on his legion standards. When he won the battle, he almost immediately issued his edict of toleration for Christian faith throughout the Empire. He allowed himself to be baptized a Christian on his deathbed 24 years later.

Adapted from Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

*Cloth of purple color was worn exclusively by Roman emperors.