

# Greco-Roman Culture and the Rise of Christianity

- Limitations of Classical Culture
  - The search for spiritual and emotional meaning in the empire.
    - 1. Emotional justification of individual worth.
    - 2. Emotional (non-rational) explanation of life .
    - 3. Assurance of an afterlife as unique personalities.

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- Questions:
- 1. Do you buy the theory that the ideals and actual conditions of safety, security, prosperity, and civilized life contributed to the rise of feelings antagonistic to those ideals? That is like saying that people want more than security and material wealth and that there are positive human needs of an emotional, spiritual nature which security and material wealth cannot satisfy. Do you agree?
- 2. It has been said that the ancient world as represented by the Roman empire was at a dead end and had nowhere else to go. Do you agree? Was the fall of Rome a good thing?

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- Limitations of Classical Culture
    - What did Eternal Rome offer?
    - 1. Peace and Security under the Emperor.  
Personal salvation or spiritual comfort?
    - 2. Material prosperity.
      - Trimalchio in Petronius' Satyricon
      - Prosperity not enough of a reason to live.
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- Questions:
- 1. If ancient Rome had had mass media such as we have today, would people have felt any closer to their Caesar-god? And thus not have felt alienated?
- 2. Do you know anyone who "worships" some hero and tries to find some meaning in being a fan of that person? ("Fan" comes from Fanatic) Is this like Caesar worship?
- 3. Modern heroes tend to be anti-heroes. (They are like us, except famous for being famous.) Explain.

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- Limitations of Classical Culture
  - What did Eternal Rome offer?
  - 3. The civilized life of the empire.
  - Meaning as a whole way of life? Copied and memorized, but broke no new ground. Seneca (5 B.C. - 65 A.D.)

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- Question:
  - The cities just described sound like modern cities: places to live but not ways of life. Agree?

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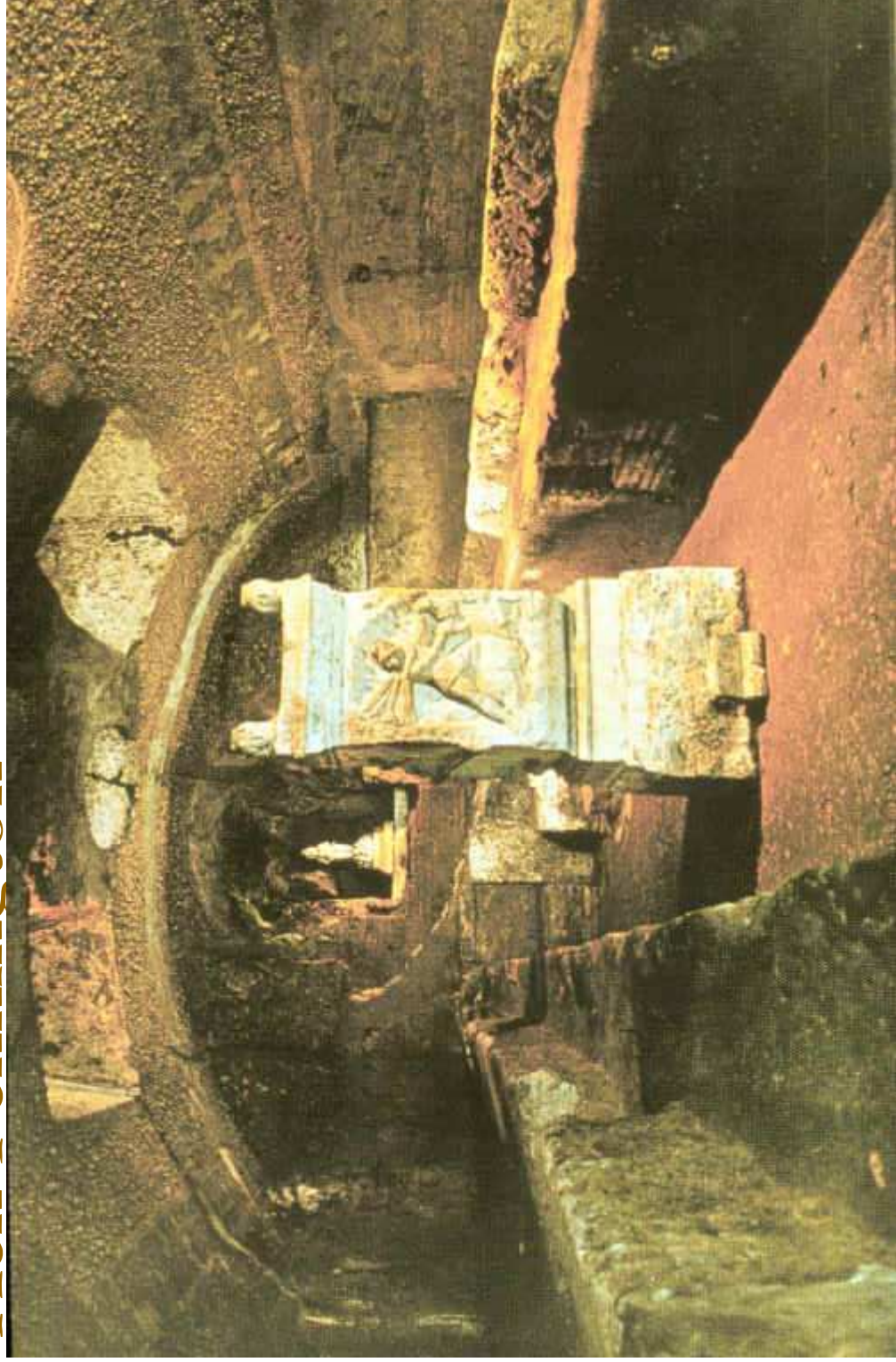
- Limitations of Classical Culture
  - Fundamental weaknesses in classical culture.
    - 1. Lack of conviction that the individual human being was worthwhile.
    - Stressed mankind rather than the individual.
    - Mystery cults. Mithraism and soldiers.

# Mithra Slaying the Bull



# An Underground Mithraeum (Temple)

Ken Pennington



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- Limitations of Classical Culture
  - Fundamental Weaknesses
    - 2. Emphasis on rationalism and a denial of emotions.
      - Fear of the volitional element in man.
  - Eternal Rome became a stifling concept.

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## ■ Questions:

- 1. What are the dangers of the emotional or volitional as an element in the human personality? Do feelings tend to carry one away?
  - 2. What are the limits of rationalism? Do you know the character Dr. Spock on "Star Trek"? All reason and no feeling? What is the proper role of feeling and thinking?
  - 3. The epigraph "Non fui, fui, non sum, non curo" (I was not, I was, I am not, I don't care), used so often that even abbreviated as "n.f.f.n.s.n.c." it was still understood.
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- Limitations of Classical Culture
  - Fundamental Weaknesses
    - 3. The last weakness: Naturalism.
      - Naturalism became pessimism without any hope of escape.
      - Life was better than ever before, but was this enough? Not for many who turned to new views such as Christianity.