

D. The Rise of Christianity within Rome

1. Shaping the history of all the Germanic tribes after the fall of Rome was the religion that had risen to primacy within the Roman Empire: *Christianity*.
2. Since this is not a history of ancient Rome, we will cover only the highlights of this story, which begins with the slow spread of the religion from its epicenter in far eastern reaches of the Roman empire, where the historical birth of Jesus occurred c.4 BC.
3. In the early decades of Christianity's rise, Christians were persecuted because they refused to worship the Roman emperors as gods in addition to their own God.
4. The fortunes of Christianity shifted dramatically when, during the civil wars of a decaying Roman empire, a military commander named Constantine, fighting for control of the Roman world, had a religious vision, and converted to Christianity.
5. By the **Edict of Milan of 313 AD**, Constantine then made Christianity legal within the empire.
6. Keen to promote his own belief at the expense of an entrenched priesthood in Rome, Constantine moved the capital of the empire to the Greek city of Byzantium, which became "Constantinople." (Today, after its Islamic conquest, it is known as *Istanbul*.)
7. Then in **325 AD**, Constantine hosted the leaders of the Christian world at the nearby site of *Nicaea*. This meeting produced a consensus on what version of Christianity should be promoted within the Roman world. That version, adopted by the **Council of Nicaea** became known as the **Nicene Creed**.
8. A competing interpretation of early Christian belief defended by a priest named Arius was proscribed as "heresy." This *Arian Christianity* was forced out of the Roman world—into the *Germanic world*.
9. Completing the incubation of Christianity as an organized religion within the Roman empire, the emperor Theodosius made all other forms of religion illegal in various imperial measures from **380 to 391 AD**.



A painting of the *Council of Nicaea* of **325 AD** shows Constantine in the center, surrounded by the key bishops and priests of Christianity at the time, who, together, formulated the Nicene Creed. The heretical priest **Arius** is shown at the bottom.