

The Favored Religion

We all know the story of how Constantine came along and flattered the church into his clutches and that he actually believed¹ that the Christian god had given him his victory and that the same god would now protect the Roman Empire as long as the emperors worshipped him and the church was faithful to him. So Constantine started to shower blessings on the church and its leaders.

And the walls came tumbling down. Instead of using brute force to turn the church into a state religion, Constantine simply used flattering speech to turn it over to him. He promoted Christians to positions of prominence in the state and surrounded himself with Christian advisors. He even had Christian bishops accompany his troops into battle to ensure God's favor. He began paying salaries out of the state treasury to the leaders of most churches, and he passed laws in favor of the church leaders for obligatory state service. He believed that a spiritually healthy church would ensure God's favor on the empire.

One of the main reasons the religion of Christianity was the favored religion among the national governments and emperors was because Christians themselves could be totally involved in everything everyone else was who wasn't a Christian. It posed no problem whatsoever, no strange and outrageous behavior, beliefs, or practices that would cause any upheaval in the government or national peace. Christianity became a belief only, which allowed them to be able to mix in without any kind of adverse ways about them.² They became good soldiers, good politicians and presidents, senators, congressmen, good movie stars and producers, used car salesmen, IBM executives, rich entrepreneurs, and great evangelists who hobnobbed with presidents and kings. They didn't make waves.

¹ Whether or not, or whatever it meant for him to believe in the Christian god...

² What was once a sheepfold now became a zoo.

So all this taken together, Constantine saw the religion called Christianity as his pet religion, due to the fact of its docile lifestyle and compromising nature, and he began passing laws to Christianize the Roman world and to support his agenda. While in the past the church was persecuted for its stand against its evil, it was now accepted as a new leaf in its developmental process. The distinction between Christians and non-Christians was broken down and more and more non-believers became “believers” since Christianity was the favored religion and promised worldly success and prosperity as good witnesses for Christ.

In the past when the church was only in community form, there was nothing about prosperity that would attract a person to it, except to give up their rotten, stinking life in this world, according to the gospel, as Jn 12:25-26 was the only way and the only ones who were saved out of the world. But Christianity now has become a religion where one can have all the success and prosperity, and no longer has to hate his life in this world (since he had no former life in the world), as the disciple asked in Mk 10:26 and was told verses 29-30, which was contrary to the new way the church had become by Constantine’s maneuvering.

James saw it coming in Jms 4:4, adopting the world’s methods, the church became friends with the world and hoards of the un-regenerated filled the ranks of Christendom’s beautiful church buildings on Sunday mornings, taking on the name “Christian.” Most presidents in America claim to be a Christian to get the popular vote.

In the past, while the lampstand stood in every place, while love was the distinction between the saved and the unsaved, the fair-weather converts were ferreted out in hard times (Acts 14:22), or when there were leaders who watched over the souls of the flock and saw who would obey them and who had the hard time doing it. But gradually, leaders were raised up who softened the blows of the cross each one was carrying.

What if an angel appeared to a Christian as in Acts 5:20? What would he say that would clarify why his life was so different from the nominal pagans which would cut the unbelievers to the heart, convicting them of their self-centered life? True conversion is to be Messiah-centered, since He took all of our self-centered disposition upon Himself in death (2 Cor 5:21). Now all who have His Spirit in them (1 Cor 6:17) are centered on Him in all their doings in the Body (Eph 2:10; 4:16).