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What if Constantine did not convert to Christianity? That is a hypothetical question that is worth every christian's time to ponder over. How would the faith and doctrines develop if Christianity remained "Underground"? How would one treat his/her own faith? How would Christianity's relationship with other religions i.e. Islam, be like ? In this short essay, these ideas will be explored and discussed, to show how radically different the world as we know it would differ if Constantine did not adopt Christianity.

For the first 300 years of its history, Christianity remained an illegal religion. Its believers were persecuted for their belief, as we read in many early church writings, from *Acts of the Apostles* to *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*. Persecution first came in from disassociation. Christianity, originating from Second Temple Period Judaism, was beginning its slow parting of ways with her parent religion as early as the second half of the first century. As more and more gentile converts joined the faith, Christianity became less and less "Jewish" in a sense, and naturally Judaism did not want to be associated with "new" religion. Persecution also came externally, after the Jerusalem council, Gentiles were no longer required to convert to Judaism, hence rendering Christianity a new cult under Roman jurisdiction. Romans would not tolerate this newly developed cult to go any further. If Constantine had visioned different letters at Milvian bridge, these two types of persecution would probably persist, and martyrology would

become a central aspect of Christian faith. Yet, this would force one of this faith to treat his/her belief seriously, even to a point of death, not too dissimilar to what the underground Church movement of China is experiencing.

Under the threat of life, Christians forged in the crucible of persecution would have faith in refined gold. The term “Lay Christian” would probably not exist, there would be no such thing as a lay believer of the faith. You would either be one that would hold on to your belief until death or not be a believer at all if death is what you feared. However, I believe the growth of the church would more or less be the same, since history has shown that suppressions usually result in wide-spreadness. Under these conditions, martyrs would have a much higher regard and admiration than the apostolic succession. Individuality would have its effects both ways, due to the lack of a central authority the rise of heretics would be inevitable. This would probably not result in the similar religions infighting that plagued medieval christian europe, but would definitely lead to far more schisms than what Christianity has experienced so far. Due to its fragmentary nature, this Christianity would not have united under the same banner and fought against neighboring religions, particularly Islam.

Without becoming a dominant religion of the west, the Rise of Islam would have a lesser effect on the west. Given its lightning rise and spread, Islam would probably dominate Europe more or less, absorbing a far less powerful Christianity under its umbrella, just as Judaism has survived under Islamic rule. Christianity would probably also be considered as a “People of the Book”, and persecution would probably finally end after 600 years. The clash between Christianity and Islam would probably not be as strong due to Islam’s tolerance of the faith, but

due to its factionalism, there is no reason to doubt that certain extremist groups would exist under the circumstances.

All in all, as we can see in this hypothetical “what if” situation, the world as we know it would have been far different. Constantine’s adoption of Christianity has profound effects to how world history is played out, how Christian theology would develop and how inter-religion relationships would develop over time.

Sources

Morillo, Stephen. *Frameworks of World History*. New York City, Oxford UP, 2014.