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**A STUDY OF THE PERSECUTION OF THE CHRISTIANS UNDER
DIOCLETIAN, HIS CO-REGENTS, AND HIS IMMEDIATE
SUCCESSORS**

**A thesis submitted to the faculty
of
Concordia Theological Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri**

by

ALBERT W. BARR

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
of
Bachelor of Divinity**

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I. Introduction

Church history has been defined as "the record and the explanation of what the church has experienced in the past, of the influence the church has wielded on the life and thought of the world surrounding it, and again of the influence which the world has exerted on the life and thought of the church."¹ Such a definition underlies the primary purpose for this thesis, namely, to consider, on the bases of available sources, the last great persecution of the Christians by an organized, systematic attack of the pagan Roman Empire. It must be realized that a study of an event in history of as great import as the final attempt to stamp out Christianity could become quite lengthy since the various phases, if dealt with individually in a thorough and exhaustive manner, would naturally result in literally volumes of facts, opinions, and numerous conclusions. However, the writer intends to keep as his controlling purpose in submitting this work the following- to gain an overall view, a general picture, of the persecution of the Christians by the empire of Rome at the time of Diocletian.

1. Dr. Theodore Hoyer, Church History Notes, III Year, p.1.

This persecution was, as we shall see, the futile attempt of a fast-passing and deteriorating pagan system to forestall what clearly seemed to be in store, loss of top position in the field of religion, and eventual disappearance from prominence altogether. "The attack of Diocletian, the last and most bloody of the persecutions, was heathen-²ism's final blow in the contest."

From the time this writer first learned of the persecutions of the Christians in the first three centuries anno domini, it has been his desire to delve further into this period in history, and to search out and to learn for himself the basis for the general facts presented in most elementary history textbooks. The persecution which occurred under Diocletian was chosen for study since it is one which marked a turning point both in the history of the Christian Church and in the history of the Roman Empire. In addition, this persecution is remembered for its extreme cruelty shown toward the Christians, even as Arthur Mason writes:

"All former persecutions of the faith were forgotten in the horror with which men looked back upon the last and greatest: the tenth wave (as men delighted to count it) of that great storm, obliterated all the traces that had been left by others: The fiendish cruelty of Nero, the jealous fears of Domitian, the unimpassioned dislike of Marcus, the sweeping purpose of Decius, the clever devices of Valerian, fell into obscurity when compared with the concentrated terrors of that final grapple, which resulted in the destruction of the old Roman Empire and the establishment of the Cross as the symbol of the world's hope." 3

2. K.H.E.Maier, The Causes for the Persecutions of the Early Christians, p.2.

3. Arthur J. Mason, The Persecution of Diocletian, p.1.

The fact that the existence of the Christian Church, therefore, was threatened by an all-out effort on the part of the Roman state makes the consideration of the persecution of Diocletian a profitable study, since much there is to be learned from the roles played by the State, the Church, and the individual Christian. And "at this crisis, it is important to survey the state of Christianity, as well as the character of the sovereign and of the government, which made this ultimate and most vigorous attempt to suppress the triumphant progress of the new faith."⁴

Certain problems will arise in connection with our study and these will be discussed in the thesis at the place they present themselves. The writer does not propose to solve these problems, but merely to offer opinions, thoughts, and evidence which may be of help in guiding the reader toward both a realization of the seriousness of the situation and a satisfactory solution of the problem. Whether or not Diocletian is the real author of this final blast against Christianity is one such problem. Another problem is the determining of the real cause for the persecution. Was it part of Diocletian's plan of reorganization or did it come about because of another reason or reasons? Also to be considered are questions, the answers to which shed much light on this period and the effect of the "great persecution" in general: Why did the government and the emperors act the way they did toward the Christians? Just why did they persecute? How did the Christian Church and the individual Christian weather the storm raging about them? What was the attitude of the persecuted? Was there any difference in the reactions shown by the Christians to the strong-armed tactics of the forces of the Roman Empire? What were the

4. Henry Hart Milman, The History of Christianity, p.207.

results of the Diocletian Persecution?

It is, perhaps, wise to mention here that the study of the persecution of the Christians under Diocletian, his coregents, and his immediate successors will be presented, for the most part, in chronological order, thereby making use of the element of time in the onslaught of paganism over against Christianity. The presentation of the events related to this persecution in order of their occurrence will avail the reader the opportunity to see the gradual progress of the State towards defeat, the Church towards triumph. Wherever possible accounts of the actual happenings will be inserted to complete the picture, and the remarks and conclusions of various historians will be noted to assure the reader that more than just stating facts, however historical they may be, is involved when one undertakes the investigation of an event in history of such importance to the growth and spread of Christianity here upon earth as the persecution of Diocletian is.

Before the persecution itself can be considered some attention must be given to the background involved. The drama of the Diocletian persecution can best be appreciated only when the stage is set properly and effectively. The characters in our exciting and educative drama move across a stage built upon the social, economic, political and religious factors which shaped the course of history in the years just before the advent of Diocletian and a reign of unusual worth. Chapter two of this thesis is entitled, "The Roman World Prior to Diocletian", and therein will be considered the situation confronting Diocletian as he ascends the throne as Emperor of the vast empire. To gain a better

understanding of why certain courses of action were taken and to be aware that many of the main participants in the persecution acted as they did because of knowledge of previous history or because of their individual backgrounds is deemed necessary and profitable by the writer as we undertake a study of this kind.

Two terms that appear quite often in this study are not too well-known or receiving such usage in twentieth century writing. They, therefore, require definition. The words are "edict" and "tetrarchy". An edict is "a public proclamation or decree issued by a sovereign and having the force of a law."⁵ During the period of our study "edict after edict followed in rapid succession".⁶ The other word, "tetrarchy," is the term used for the system of government introduced by Diocletian in 292 A.D. A tetrarch is defined as "a Roman governor whose jurisdiction extended over a fourth part of a province."⁷ Under Diocletian, however, the arrangement was slightly different in that the entire empire was divided among four men, and while each had his particular area to rule, the senior Augustus, Diocletian, was still the supreme authority. All this will be further explained in Chapter Three, but it is mentioned here since the term warrants explanation previous to usage in the thesis proper. One could say that the word "tetrarchy" here has a meaning

5. Webster's New Standard Dictionary, Joseph Devlin, Editor-in-Chief, The World Publishing Company, Cleveland, New York; Copyright '43 p.290.
6. William E. H. Lecky, History of European Morals, Vol. 1, p.490.
7. Webster's New Standard Dictionary, p.939.

somewhat peculiar to this particular period in history, since the term is found used in other periods of Roman history also.

The area of time to be covered in this thesis must of necessity be limited to the reign of Diocletian himself and the years following his reign up to the Edict of Toleration issued by Galerius in 311 A. D. . To go any further would be to open an entire new field of study and defeat the purpose of this paper. Of course, where it is necessary to refer to an event or happening beyond the period from 284 to 311, mention will be made of same, since only then can the reader receive a clear picture of the implications of the persecution of Diocletian, his coregents, and his immediate successors, as the title of this thesis states. The era of Constantine is of itself a topic which warrants a separate study, and yet since much of the results and findings of our present study lead over directly into this period, reference will be made occasionally to that Emperor and his reign. However, the coverage of this tenth persecution, "tenth in order, and of a ten years' duration,"⁸ will be accomplished by keeping within the period 284-311 A.D.

8. Philip Smith, The History of the Christian Church During the First Ten Centuries, p.126.

II. The Roman World Prior to Diocletian

When we glance at the Roman world in the years preceding the accession of Diocletian to the throne, we find that it embraces almost the entire area of the Mediterranean World. From Britain and Gaul in the West to Palestine and Asia Minor in the East, in addition to the northern part of the continent of Africa, the Roman system held sway. And then with the death of Aurelian in 275, which was lamented by the populace, conditions in government and politics took on a serious nature. The army, because of its prestige and continual conquest, was a great influence in matters political. The senate, on the other hand, accustomed to being a power toward directing affairs of state and made up of the leading citizens of the empire, resented this interference of the army in the affairs of the government. A crisis, therefore, was imminent.

Upon the death of Aurelian the Senate refused to name a successor. The army, however, insisted, and yet for almost six months there was no ruler upon the throne. Finally, the aged Tacitus became the choice, and he desired to decline the offer but was met by the insistence of the Senate and was forced to accept. The senate had gained a victory and also regained some of their former rights, some of which were to name one of their own group to office, to determine the list of the College of Consuls, to appoint proconsuls and presidents of the provinces, to give force to the edicts of the emperor, and to have some authority with regard to the question of finances.

Tacitus repelled the Alani-Scythian invasion during his reign, but his occupancy of the ruling chair was of short duration, for six months and twenty days after being made emperor, Tacitus died.

This untimely death was not lamented by his brother, Florianus. Instead he immediately usurped the purple, remaining in possession of it, however, for the short space of three months. For as soon as Tacitus passed away, Probus, a general from the East, stepped upon the scene. It wasn't long before his famous past of splendid service was publicized, and he was proclaimed Emperor of the Roman World. Reigning for six years, Probus managed to restore peace and order to every province of the Roman World. This was done, of course, with the assistance of able lieutenant-generals, some of whom were Carus, Diocletian, Maximian, Constantius, Galerius, Asclepiodatus, Annibalianus, and a host of others. Perhaps the most important service of Probus was the deliverance of Gaul from Bonosus and Proculus in the closing years of his reign. Peace was established with the vanquished nations of Germany, and many of the captive barbarians were scattered throughout the empire, a plan which for the most part proved successful and yet also yielded some disappointments.

The revolt of Saturninus in the East and some troubles in the West demanded quite some attention from the emperor, and more than once Probus felt that it was almost too much for one man to keep control of the world empire. This is an interesting observation, especially in view of the fact that Diocletian's plan of reorganization has been thought of as having come about as a result of that emperor's desire to insure the peace of the empire against such uprisings and troubles.

On the occasion of his triumphal entry into Rome Probus exhibited himself as a man beginning to consider himself as a kind of indispensable, unconquerable individual. While military discipline was less cruel than under Aurelian, nevertheless, Probus maintained a discipline that was strict, rigid, and exact. But the army proved to be dissatisfied with their emperor, and the desire by Probus to do away with the army when peace was completely established only hastened them along in their plan to remedy the situation. As a result of a mutiny by the soldiers, Probus met death, with one thousand swords being plunged into his bosom.

The man to succeed Probus was his Praetorian Praefect, one Carus by name, who was about sixty years of age when raised to the position of emperor. And with his elevation the authority of the Senate expired. Carus was put into office without the consideration of the Senate. With the advent of Diocletian the Senate was pushed even further into the background as will be noted later on.

Persia, once again on the march and waging war in the East, made it necessary for Carus to assume the responsibility of crushing their advance. Just before he left for the East he named his two sons, Carinus and Numerian, as Caesars, and delegated the most power to Carinus. Success was experienced by the Roman forces at first in the Persian War but the death of Carus dispelled the predictions of further glorious conquests.

Numerian and Carinus succeeded their father, Carinus remaining in Rome and Numerian going to the battlefield to take over the leadership of the army. When Numerian, therefore, directed the retreat of what

was a victorious army, the Persians were puzzled at such direction and leadership, so much that the retreat was not particularly hindered.

Carinus, a vain, indulgent person, who is reported to have had nine wives, meanwhile reigned at Rome, putting into office all kinds of reproachful characters, and making his administration one of merit only in so far as history could relate its uncommon splendor and poets could write of the pleasures and entertainments that were all too prevalent.

Numerian died during the return of the troops from Persia, and it was then that the generals and tribunes of the army selected one Diocles, who was then commander of the imperial body guards, to be the emperor. This incident will be discussed more in detail in the next chapter, as well as the death of Numerian. Carinus met death as a result of his debaucherous life and the infidelity of his men.⁹

Thus it was that the political situation in the Roman world as Diocletian received the reins of control was one necessitating immediate attention. A disgruntled Senate, a mutinous, quick-acting army, and an extensive empire requiring careful watching on the part of the emperor all combined to cause the most resourceful of emperors to be on his guard and alert in directing the affairs of administration.

It may be of note to mention here that Eusebius, the Greek historian writing at this time, has the following to say of the years just before Diocletian:

"Aurelian, therefore, after a reign of six years, was succeeded by

9. For a more detailed account of the years just prior to the reign of Diocletian consult Edward Gibbon, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Vol.1, Chapter XII, pp.366-401.

Probus, and he held the government the same number of years, when he was succeeded by Carus, together with Carinus and Numerianus. These again did not continue three full years, when the government devolved on Diocletian, and those subsequently associated with him.¹⁰

Economically the Roman world was in a state of crisis. Coinage was varied, and taxation was causing havoc. Reform was imperative. The short-lived reigns of the ever-changing rulers made a stable currency next to impossible, for each emperor struck commemorative coins to his liking. Taxes of varying degrees were made necessary both by the continuous waging of war and the maintenance of a large subsidized army, and the style of living to which many of the emperors accustomed themselves. This situation affected the existing pagan society. "During the second half of the third century, while the Christian Church was consolidating its position after the persecution and increasing its membership, pagan cults, it would seem, were suffering severely from the economic crisis: ephemeral emperors had neither time nor money for the endowment of religion, and the liberality of private citizens was paralysed."¹¹ Nor was this a situation centered in one locality. For "the evidence of inscriptions tells us the same story both in the Eastern and Western provinces of the empire."¹²

There were two distinct groups in Roman society: Christians and pagans. As can be expected each of these had component parts. In the

10. G.F.Cruse, Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus, p.292.

11. N.H.Baynes, "The Great Persecution", in The Cambridge Ancient History, Cook, Adcock, Charlesworth, and Baynes, ed., Vol.12, p.619.

12. Ibid.

Roman set-up you were usually born into a certain class and remained there. But with the Christians there was no particular attention paid to whether one was rich or poor, slave or free. This trait of the Christians to accept any comer to an equal footing was foreign to the pagan mind. Hence the Pagan Roman held steadfastly to his recognized way of doing things. He couldn't see it any other way, and yet his system lacked something, something, which would stop its rapid decline. "This decline of paganism was the church's opportunity: doctors, lawyers, rhetoricians- the representatives of the culture of the day- were joining the Christian community. Many were, however, still repelled by the prejudice of the educated against the vulgar simplicity of the style of the Christian Scriptures: in a world where literary form and verbal elaboration were so highly valued the Christians were regarded as 'barbarians; ignorant folk, (*ἀγνοῦντες*), completely lacking in the charms and graces of civilized life."¹³ It was a situation like this that caused literary works to appear. If the culture and society of the Roman world could be revived many felt that socially the situation in the empire would be one easily handled. For the culture of the world was finding its place among society. Both the "pagan and Christian shared a common appreciation of the legacy of the past: they were divided only by religion or by a philosophy which was itself essentially religious."¹⁴

During the latter half of the third century the Roman state showed itself willing to trust the Christian, and many were the Christians who

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p.653.

responded to the positions of honor offered to them. While it was not general, military service at this time was forbidden. Yet "there must have been many Christians both in the civil and military service of the Empire when Diocletian came to the throne. And in the life of the municipalities Christians no longer sought to live apart from their pagan neighbors: they held office as municipal senators; apparently, to judge from the canons of the Council of Elvira, they were elected even to municipal priesthoods."¹⁵

Since we are primarily interested in the religious situation in the Roman world prior to Diocletian we shall now turn our attention in that direction. Christianity had come to be a "religio licita" with the accession of Gallienus, and a period of forty years of perfect peace, extending eighteen years into the reign of Diocletian, followed. There was one inconsiderable exception at the time of Aurelian. That emperor attempted to renew hostility near the end of his reign but was assassinated before he signed the decrees or before the decrees had been sent through the provinces.¹⁶ But as Schaff affirms, "Gallienus (260-268) gave peace to the church once more, and even acknowledged Christianity as a religio licita. And this calm continued forty years."¹⁷ "Christianity, during all this time, was not only perfectly free, it was also greatly honoured."¹⁸ There were many Christians in public office, and many church buildings were erected. "In Rome itself, before the outburst of the Diocletian persecution, there were no less than forty churches,"¹⁹

15. Ibid., p.660.

16. Lecky, op. cit. p.486.

17. Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol.2, p.63.

18. Lecky, loc. cit.

19. Ibid.

and "a speedy triumph appeared inevitable."²⁰ But the situation had not always been thus. During the first century Christianity was thought of merely as "one more poisonous superstition from the East, the fruitful mother of queer and revolting cults."²¹ Certainly this Christianity "could hardly arouse the serious interest of the Roman world."²² Then with the new century arriving, Christians were asked to cooperate for the good of the State, only to experience, with the birth of the third century, further combat as Neo-Platonism advanced to the front in opposing the new faith. Many were the attacks against the Christian Church and its sacred books fostered by this comparatively new phase of religion known as Neo-Platonism, with its desire of reconciling the teachings of Plato and Aristotle with oriental conceptions. Gradually, however, the Roman State learned the Christians were no menace to the State but as was so characteristic of the conservatism of the state "the Empire did not pass any relieving act."²³ "Thus it was that even as late as the first half of the third century, when some disaster or natural catastrophe such as an earthquake suggested the gods were angered with men, the populace might demand a persecution of the Christians in order to placate the wrath of an outraged Heaven, and then it is the attitude of the provincial governor which determines the severity of the depression."²⁴ It is the middle of the third century, at the time of Decius, before the

20. Ibid., p. 487.

21. Baynes, op. cit., p. 647.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid., p. 655.

24. Ibid., p. 656.

24. *Environment*

situation changes. Then the state resumes its policy of repression, that initiative in repression having been assumed by the people prior to this time.

"Between the Roman State and the Christian Church there had stood no greater obstacle to reconciliation than the worship of the emperor . . . The pagan could not understand the Christian objection to this tribute of respect to the ruler of the Roman world—the Christian refusal puzzled and irritated many a well meaning Roman governor: it seemed to him, as to Marcus Aurelius, a perverse obstinacy." ²⁵ Here we see another factor of agitation in the religious situation. While peace was being enjoyed by the Christian Church, nevertheless, the pagan system of worship was seeking an opportunity to suppress once and for all this threat to its existence and control of the religious situation in the Roman world.

E. C. Colwell makes the following observation about the Christians:

"They are a third or a new race religiously, as almost all the early Christian writers insist, because they profess a new religion that is distinguished from Judaism by their faith in Jesus as Messiah and distinguished from polytheism by their monotheistic inheritance from Judaism." ²⁶ And because this was the case, this same author can make the further statement: "The concept of the third race, of the Christians as a new and distinct grouping of mankind, was the basic cause of popular opposition in the first few centuries; it was also the victory that overcame the world." ²⁷

25. Ibid., p. 658.

26. Ernest Cadman Colwell, "Popular reactions against Christianity in the Roman Empire", in Environmental Factors in Christian History, McNeill, Spinka, and Willoughby, ed., p. 57.

27. Ibid., p. 71.

Diocletian indeed came to the throne of the Roman world which presented him with the task of establishing unity in the affairs of the state, security in economics, and lasting peace in matters religious, and of doing so immediately. The religious situation, while it seemingly was existing amid peaceful surroundings, nevertheless, rested upon several foundations which were violently opposed to one another in teaching and in practice. The following quotation from A History of the Church by Philip Hughes provides a fitting summary to the Roman World and religion just prior to Diocletian:

"As the third century drew to its close the old State religion and the philosophical deism drew together in opposition to the object of their common hatred. Popular feeling there was in plenty to exploit against the Christians, a tradition which drew some element from every rank and class. It needed but the opportunity and the vast coalition would move. That opportunity none could create but the Emperor. The moment came when he was won over, and the long peace ended, suddenly, in the greatest of all persecutions. That Emperor was Diocletian."

III. The Era of Diocletian

With the stage set for the last of the great persecutions of the Christians it is only proper we turn our attention to the men who were either largely responsible for the persecution itself or active during the time of its execution. In the period of our study six men are more noticeable than any others, with Maxentius, Licinius, and Constantine also playing minor roles. These latter three will be referred to when necessary later in this paper. For the present we are concerned with the parts played by Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, Constantius, Severus, and Maximin Daia. To acquaint the reader with each of these men by means of a brief biography and remarks seems to the writer the best way of introducing each to the reader.

First and foremost it is Diocletian who steps before us for recognition. As emperor (he reigned from 284-305),²⁹ he took for his full name Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus; before ascending the throne, however, it is of note that "his first name Diocles, taken from the city where he was born, Dioclea in Dalmatia. His mother bore the same name as the city. After his accession to the empire, to give his name a more Roman form, he called himself Diocletianus instead of Diocles."³⁰

Born of humble parentage, "his parents having been slaves in the family of

29. "Diocletian", Encyclopaedia Britannica, fourteenth edition, VII, 393.

30. Jean Baptiste Louis Grevier, "Diocletian and Maximian", in The Lives of the Roman Emperors, J. E. Reed, ed., Vol 5, p. 40.

Amilinus, a Roman Senator,"³¹ Diocletian entered this world in 245 A.D. His rise to fame was similar to that of many other emperors in that it came about through service in the army. He worked himself up to top position. From service in minor outposts in the province of Gaul under Aurelian, and "as governor in Moesia under Carus, before he was called to the command of the emperor's bodyguard",³² he progressed so that it can be said that "in the person of Diocletian, the Emperor of Rome became an Oriental Monarch."³³ During the years preceeding his reign "he had also held the office of consul."³⁴ But despite all his military experience his ability as a soldier was average. Diocletian was no outstanding warrior. Yet it is correct to say "he had a sound knowledge of the requirements of the army and a good eye for the larger aspects of strategy."³⁵ And this talent did prove of worth in the later administrative policies of this emperor.

It was after the death of Numerianus that Diocletian was chosen emperor by the troops returning from Persia, at Chalcedon, on Sept. 17, 284.³⁶ Numerianus had succeeded his father, Carus, (as was discussed in Chapter II) and was returning from a war with the Persians "when, in the neighborhood of Byzantium, he was found dead in his tent. The generals without troubling themselves about Carinus, (the other son), elected one of their own number in the place of Numerian, and it was in this way that

31. Foakes-Jackson, The History of the Christian Church to A.D. 461, p. 83.

32. H. Mattingly, "The Imperial Recovery", in The Cambridge Ancient History, Cook et al., ed., Vol. 12, p. 324.

33. Hilman, op. cit., p. 209.

34. H. Mattingly, op. cit., p. 324.

35. Ibid.

36. "Diocletian", Encyclopedia Britannica, fourteenth edition, VII, p. 393.

Diocletian, commander of the imperial guard (comes domesticorum), was raised to the throne (Sept. 17, 284).³⁷ That there was some color to this scene we find when we look at the account of Arthur Mason, who has made an extensive study of this very period. We quote in part the version he gives as to what took place after the death of Numerians.

"Arrius Aper, prefect of the Praetorians, had been canvassing to succeed his son-in-law whenever the vacancy should occur, and had been actually giving the orders during the young Emperor's illness. . . . He was now brought in chains before a court-martial at Chalcedon. Diocles, (such was Diocletian's name while he was yet a subject), who presided in this council, had been Prefect of the corps which guarded immediately the Emperor's person. . . . Aper was his most formidable rival. . . . Lifting his eyes to the sun (the emblem of divinity) Diocles protested his own innocence,--a clear indication that Aper had endeavored to asperse it,--and then pronouncing solemnly, as if on his own personal knowledge, that the prisoner was the murderer of Numerian, he executed the sentence of death upon him with his own hand,-- a clear indication that Aper could have proved his charge."³⁸

A similar opinion as to Diocletian's hastening this act of justice is found in Foakes- Jackson where one reads: "Without entering into any investigation, which might have implicated others and perhaps himself, Diocletian, exclaiming, 'This is the murderer,' plunged his sword into Aper's breast."³⁹

37. Louis Duchesne, Early History of the Christian Church, Vol. 2, p. 2.
38. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 3.
39. Foakes- Jackson, op. cit., p. 82.

The reason Aper was the victim of this hasty judgment can perhaps be traced to the prophecy of a certain Druidess who had foretold that Diocletian would someday be Emperor. This was to happen after he had killed the boar, Aper, and since "it is characteristic of Diocletian that all through his lifetime he believed himself to be the object of a special destiny, whose workings were sometimes discoverable in advance,"⁴⁰ it is understandable why he proceeded to act in a manner such as described above. Diocletian was about thirty-nine years of age when he was proclaimed emperor.⁴¹

As this study progresses the reader shall have ample opportunity to become better acquainted with Diocletian as Emperor and as individual, and hence not too much of his life and reign will be mentioned at this present time. General characteristics and observations can be made at this point since once we have moved into the next chapter our time and space will quickly be taken by the many facts and incidents in his life relative to the persecution. It must be kept in mind that this chapter and these few paragraphs are to give a somewhat clear picture of the Era of Diocletian.

History remembers Diocletian as "luxurious, covetous, ostentatious, and arrogant."⁴² "To his contemporaries he was an object of intense admiration, tinged with a certain uneasiness and distrust. It was certainly by divine favour that he had been elected by the army. He was a notable personality, wise and subtle, but, withal, a man who would

40. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 4.

41. Crevier, op. cit., p. 42.

42. Crevier, op. cit., p. 40.

satisfy how own severity, while leaving its cost in unpopularity to be paid by his assistants." ⁴³ Diocletian was a man of spending and rather of an avaritious nature. As Lactantius remarks, Diocletian had "a certain endless passion for building. . . Here public halls, there a circus, here a mint, and there a workhouse for making implements of war; in one place a habitation for his empress, and another for his daughter." ⁴⁴

The Emperor Diocletian was the possessor of a "far-seeing and comprehensive mind", ⁴⁵ and this will become apparent as his plan for reorganization of the Empire unfolds in the succeeding pages. With his manifestation of energetic statesmanship he "indeed gave his government a somewhat Oriental character." ⁴⁶ For if ever a man was superstitious and fond of pomp and circumstance, this Emperor was of such a kind. Grandeur was a vital part of his set-up, "and it is recorded that Caligula, Domitian, and Diocletian were the three Emperors who delighted to be styled 'dominus et deus.'" ⁴⁷ Of a despotic nature and with an extremely superstitious mind (which will be dealt with later because it enters into the discussion of the causes of the persecution), Diocletian felt the need of exhibiting the splendor of the sovereign and of exacting the loyal reverence of those who came under the jurisdiction of the Roman eagle. For a further consideration of this, Arthur Mason's remarks are of note. Concerning Diocletian and grandeur he writes:

43. H. Mattingly, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

44. Lactantius, "Of the Manner in which the Persecutors Died", in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Roberts and Donaldson, ed., Vol. VII, p. 303.

45. Lecky, *op. cit.*, p. 487.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 488.

47. H. D. M. Spence-Jones, The Early Christians in Rome, p. 42, note 1.

"He was himself susceptible in a high degree of the expressions of artistic order and of grandeur, and he knew men well enough to see how strong is the love of pomp even in the proudest minds. He was aware that men's fear and hatred of ritual is the strongest tribute to its efficacy. And he made a bold use of this power. The Emperor is no longer, as in the time of Carus, a simple soldier seated bareheaded on the grass to receive a foreign embassy. Every theatrical effect is used to inculcate the grandeur of the throne:— the whole army look on with awe-struck eyes, while a Caesar, clad in the imperial purple of Rome, is forced to expiate his fault by marching a mile on foot before the car of the incensed Augustus. The plain title of an Emperor conveyed no adequate notion of the majesty of a Diocletian:— it was but the highest dignity of a decayed Italian town. The Lord and Master of the world assumed a style which express him better, — Sacratissimus Dominus Noster. The word was all the better in the opinion of Diocletian for being abominable to Roman ears: for Diocletian had broken with the narrow traditions of a Roman rule. L'etat c'est moi. The mightiest general, the most venerable senator, might no longer draw near his divine Numen with the old familiar embrace of a fellow Roman. He had assumed, together with the diadem all the other observances of the Persian Court. Those who would approach him (if their rank and if their business warranted the favor) approached through many circles of guards and eunuchs, until at last with their foreheads touching the ground they bowed before the throne, where in rich vestments from the far East, sat the wily Dalmatian scribe." 48

In concluding this brief biography of the Emperor Diocletian let it be known that the discussion of his role in the persecution, his activities during his memorable reign, his sickness and abdication, and the apparent religious leanings he held during his life will be considered in their respective places in this study, and for the completion of our trend of thought at present we look at the death of Diocletian. Here some varying opinions are given and whether he died as a result of his own hand or due to natural causes is not generally known. But for the sake of giving a clearer picture let us look at the account as found in several sources. Philip Schaff attributes his death to suicide.

48. Mason, The Persecution of Diocletian, p. 11-15.

"Diocletian retired into private life in 305, under the curse of the Christians; he found greater pleasure in planting cabbages at Salona in his native Dalmatia, than in governing a vast empire, but his peace was disturbed by the tragical misfortune of his wife and daughter, and in 313, when all the achievements of his reign were destroyed, he destroyed himself." 49 And again in Schaff, "Diocletian had withdrawn from the throne in 305, and in 313 put an end to his embittered life by suicide." 50

Lactantius, a contemporary of Diocletian, gives this dramatic account of the end of the Emperor:

"Tossing to and fro, with the soul agitated by grief, he could neither eat nor take rest. He sighed, groaned, and wept often, and incessantly threw himself into various postures, now on his couch, and now on the ground. So he, who for twenty years was the most prosperous of emperors, having been cast down into the obscurity of a private station, treated in the most contumelious manner, and compelled to abhor life, became incapable of receiving nourishment, and, worn out with anguish of mind, expired." 51

It is interesting to note how Lactantius is prone to paint Diocletian as a vicious personality, and we catch this thought in the above. In succeeding references this characteristic will be more readily noticed. Mason informs us that Diocletian, "that venerable man who had been the maker of so many princes, and survived so many reigns,"⁵² died in 313 A. D. He further adds:

"Besides such pleasure as he could extract from his garden and his books, his servants, masons, and few private friends, he had felt but little joy since his retirement. He had been forced to order to a frightful death the servants whom he admired and loved with almost a childlike simplicity, because they professed a religion in which he saw no harm. He had been once summoned from his repose, and consulted on

49. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 71.

50. Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 11, footnote.

51. Lactantius, op. cit., p. 317.

52. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 338.

the best means of escaping from a difficulty, which, if his advice had been followed, would never had occurred: and when he had given his still wise counsel, not only was it ostentatiously rejected, but the shameless persons whom he had raised to distinction affronted him with the offer of a crown. And as his hairs grew greyer, and his years entitled him to a still deeper veneration his sorrows had increased, and the insults he was compelled to brook were multiplied." 53

These sorrows and insults were the more effective in the latter years towards destroying the will and resistance of Diocletian, for they came as a result of the treatment of his wife and daughter, and the refusal to grant his pless for their safe return and the better treatment of their persons. And so Mason attributes all these factors to hastening the death of Diocletian, a death in his opinion, which came as a result of a sort of self-destruction. He writes:

"Broken with sorrow and shame, insult, sickness, and old age- and (as some say) seized once more with that mental malady which cares had before brought upon him,- Diocletian gave up even the desire for life itself. It did not require much violence to drive the spirit from the worn body. Diocletian refused to touch the food which was served him and he died." 54

History remembers the reign of Diocletian as one which was unique, dynamic, and enduring in many respects. Perhaps one of the best eulogies that can be found about the man Diocles, the Emperor Diocletian, is that which here follows:

"The verdict of history on the character and achievement of Diocletian has on the whole been favorable. He vindicated the majesty of Rome and carried her arms victoriously into every quarter of the Empire. He rebuilt the State on new foundations and gave her under changed forms a new lease of life. He continued an ingenious system of government which successfully escaped the dangers to which his predecessors had succumbed. He established a new basis of authority which

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., p. 341.

finally ended military anarchy. His one conspicuous failure lay in his religious policy which may be contrasted with what Constantine achieved. But nothing less than a deep change of heart could have turned Diocletian from his innate conservatism and love of the old religion to a frank acceptance of the new, and for such a change he was too old. Constantine came to the task in the freshness of youth, and he had Diocletian's failure before him as a guide and as a warning. Here, as elsewhere, it was given to him to complete the work that Diocletian had begun. But the Empire had cause to be thankful for Diocletian, as one 'born for the good of the state.' He had served Rome loyally according to the light that was in him, and had fulfilled the tasks to which he had set his hand; he was able to commit the burden of the Empire to a system of his own and to carry into retirement the love and admiration of his subjects. It is a wonderful path that leads from Diocles, the lowborn-freedman to Diocletian, 'Iovius! felicissimus senior Augustus! Even if much of his building collapsed in that fatal crash he had foreseen, there was that in his work that had the quality to endure.'" 55

That such a glowing tribute can be paid to Diocletian will be shown as we continue to study his reign and persecution in the succeeding pages.

Maximian (286-305), an old friend and countryman of the Emperor, was called to be a sharer in directing the affairs of state in 286. His job was to be largely supervising the military phases of the administration. For although Diocletian had experienced a successful career while in military service he was no great warrior. It can thus be assumed he was aware of his deficiency in this respect and "felt that he needed some faithful soldier capable of undertaking the chief command of the forces, and yet willing to act in obedience to himself."⁵⁶ At any rate Maximian was elevated to the position of full Augustus, "bound to his benefactor by no other laws of subordination than those which gratitude and good

55. H. Mattingly, op. cit., pp. 341-2.

56. Mason, The Persecution of Diocletian, p. 20.

faith would suggest." ⁵⁷ Working with Diocletian, Maximian looked on him
"with a quaintly superstitious fear and laid his victories . . . at the
feet of the elder sovereign." ⁵⁸ And we shall see shortly the events
that transpired during the reign of these two "head Emperors" which gave
Maximian opportunity to be active in militaristic operations.

Maximian was born in Pannonia, near Sirmium, of parents of very mean
condition, and his education was answerable to his birth: and his ignor-
ance was so great and notorious, that a panegyrist, citing before him
the exploits of Scipio Africanus, and extolling him for not having
imitated them, does not scruple to express his doubt whether Maximian
had ever heard of them. ⁵⁹

Not much can be ascertained as ^{to} the exact military genius possessed by
this Augustus Maximian but Reed tells us Maximian "was all his life a ⁶⁰
clownish soldier, rustic, violent, perfidious, cruel, brutally debauched."
He was a comrade of Diocletian in the service and would now accompany the
Senior Augustus along the path of administering to the Roman World. Per-
haps not a clever statesman, but certainly an obedient co-worker,
Maximian was made especially happy at the time of the publication of the
edict inaugurating the persecution, because he could foresee the bloodshed
and human misery, and nothing appealed to his senses as torture and cruelty
did. In this respect Maximian was a ruler with the wrong kind of spirit,
even as Mason concludes:

57. Mason, The Persecution of Diocletian, p. 21.

58. Ibid.

59. Crevier, op. cit., p. 43.

60. Ibid., p. 44.

"His passions were so entirely beyond the control of judgment that not even the hostages, whom subject nations had placed beneath his care, were too sacred for his rapacious hands. And by the innate kinship of wickedness, he was bloodthirsty beyond the run even of his savage countrymen. His cruelty was not like the cruelty of Galerius, sprung from religious fanaticism, impelled by a revengeful hatred, employed with a strong intelligent purpose. Maximian was cruel for cruelty's sake. Blood was his luxury. The intelligence that Diocletian had at last consented to a general persecution must have thrilled him with an intense delight; for his vulture like instinct told him that the business could never be transacted without a sumptuous feast of blood." 61

During his stay upon the throne Maximian proved to be an able assistant to Diocletian in many respects and this will be noted in later pages as the reader follows the escapades of these two Augusti before and after the establishment of the Tetrarchy, and during the early years of persecution. Of course, the abdication of Diocletian, and the resulting like act of Maximian, didn't make the latter Emperor any too happy. He had become fond of his life and to lay aside the purple meant only one thing to him -- boredom through inactivity. "His talents and inclinations were all for an active life: retirement for him meant stagnation." 62

More than once Maximian attempted to regain his former position after abdicating, and his departure from his normally loyal way of service to the Emperor Diocletian brought only death, and no further glory to him. His end and virtual disintegration into a power-thirsty individual is described by Mason:

"From the Council of Carnuntum (307 A.D.) Maximian returned again to Gaul. There he had already made one attempt, during Constantine's absence in Germany, to resume the purple

61. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, pp. 149-150.

62. Mattingly, op. cit., p. 342.

which in all probability at Carnuntum, he had been compelled a second time to doff: but the attempt was but a fiasco: Constantine had returned in haste, and driven Maximian into Marseilles, and while the old man stood on the town wall showering down curses on his son-in-law, the townspeople had opened the gates behind him, and surrendered him to justice. That time, however, he had found but mercy. Constantine made them unfrock him, and gave him a lecture and his life. But in 310 Maximian was guilty of a more criminal design. Calling his daughter, he endeavored to cajole her into a plot against her husband's life. It was agreed that Fausta should not kill the Emperor with her own hands, but ensure to Maximian a facile access to the apartment, where he was to conduct the affair himself. When all this was done, the Empress, a better wife than daughter, laid the plans before the intended victim. On the night agreed, the sentries were few and far between; but Maximian, to make all safe, accosted them, showed who he was, said that he had seen an evil dream which he must tell the Emperor instantly. He entered the bedchamber, dagger in hand, plunged the weapon to his satisfaction into the breast of an unlucky eunuch who had been doomed to occupy his master's couch, and as he was leaving the room in exultation, fell into the hands of Constantine and his armed guards. There was no possibility of defence, and the utmost that could be indulged to the old man who for twenty years had had but one superior in the world, was the liberty to adjust for himself the noose in which he was to hang." 63

Lactantius records his death for posterity in the following brief account:

"At last Maximian obtained leave that the manner of his death should be at his own choice, and he strangled himself . . . Thus that mightiest sovereign - who ruled so long with exceeding glory, and who celebrated his twentieth anniversary - thus that most haughty man had his neck broken, and ended his detestable life by a death base and ignominious." 64

Galerius entered the scene in 292 A.D., being made a Caesar under Diocletian along with Constantius, in compliance with the wishes of the Senior Augustus for a fourfold division of the rule of the Empire.

"Gaius Galerius Valerius Maximianus was a native of that district on the south bank of the Danube, called New Dacia, or

63. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, pp. 297-298.

64. Lactantius, op. cit., p. 313.

sometimes Aurelian's Dacia, where his mother had taken refuge from the inroads of the fierce Carpi who harassed her old home in Wallachia. His youth was spent in pasturing cattle on his native plains; and by the malice of fortune the reminiscence stuck to him in his surname, Armentarius. When he came afterwards into notoriety, with a burlesque exaggeration of the principle on which Diocletian and his colleague had assumed the awful names of Jovius and Hercules, he suffered it to be reported that his mother had had intercourse with the great God of War, the father of Romulus, and that his own birth was the result. It was one of the many sad misfortunes of Valeria, Diocletian's daughter, to be condemned to the honors of his bed, and to be tossed, like the Sibyl's sweet sop to Cerberus as a check to his turbulent ambition. This man was, like most barbarians, brave and warlike, and owed his position entirely to these military gifts. There can be no doubt that Galerius was a very able general indeed, fully worthy of the office of Aurelian and Carus to which he succeeded. He possessed also those other fine qualities, without which ('tis said) no man can be a good commander - fidelity and obedience. No other moral virtues can easily be ascribed to him." 65

In physical appearance Galerius was "of stature tall, full of flesh, and swollen to a horrible bulk to corpulency; by his speech, gestures, and looks, he made himself a terror to all that came near him." 66 This foreboding appearance only added to his terrible character. The role which Galerius played in the Persecution will be discussed in Chapter IV, but it is necessary to mention here that "in this wild beast there dwelt a native barbarity and a savageness foreign to foreign blood," 67 - and this trait was evident throughout the years of his activity. He was 68 "uncompromising, merciless, and excessively ambitious," which in time made him the object of attention of the pagan party, who were seeking a leader from among the leaders to help them achieve their aims, chief of which, was victory over the Christian Church.

65. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, pp. 53-54.

66. Lactantius, op. cit., p. 301.

67. Ibid.

68. Mattingly, op. cit., p. 312.

As Caesar, Galerius proved himself able, and Diocletian must have beamed with pride at the thought that the man he was grooming to succeed him was living up to expectations. Yet, "the victory over Karses was glorious for the empire, but fatal to Diocletian. It swelled the pride of Galerius, who took for it the pompous titles of Persicus, Armeniacus, Adiabenicus and Mediacus."⁶⁹ This pride grew within the breast of the ruthless Caesar, and Galerius, "forgetting something of his old subservience to Diocletian, began to force his claims and policies on the senior Emperor."⁷⁰ Galerius became a prominent power behind the movements of Diocletian as early as 303 and went on to reap a harvest all his own in the years following the senior Augustus' abdication and the elevation to full authority of this militaristic personality, as will be shown.

It is the death of Galerius that now receives attention, and it is curious that Eusebius proceeds to not only describe its horrid complements, but also give his reasons for such a terrible end. He writes concerning Galerius:

"Hence he was visited by a judgment sent from God, which beginning in the flesh proceeded to his very soul. For a sudden tumor appeared about the middle of the body, then a spongy fistula in these parts which continued to extend and penetrate with its ulcerations to the utmost part of the bowels. Hence sprung an immense multitude of worms, hence an insufferable death-like effluvia exhaled, as his whole body before his disease, by reason of his gluttony, had been changed into an excessive mass of fat, which then becoming putrid, exhibited a dreadful and intolerable spectacle to those that drew near. Some, indeed, of the physicians, totally unable to endure the excessively offensive smell, were slain; others again as the swelling had

69. Crevier, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

70. Mattingly, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

penetrated everywhere, and they unable to give any relief, despaired of safety, and were put to death without mercy." 71

Thus, it was, that shortly after the publication of the Edict of Toleration in 311, Galerius succumbed to this dreadful disease.

When turning to glance at Constantius, the other Caesar under Diocletian and Maximian, research gives little information which will help us in forming a mental picture of his person and character, as was possible in the consideration of Diocletian, Maximian, and Galerius. He was installed with Galerius as Caesar, March 1, 292 A.D. A striking tribute is paid to this statesman by Lactantius, who in remarking about Emperors, says, "I pass over Constantius, a prince unlike the others, and worthy to have had the sole government of the empire." 72 This remark of a contemporary writer sheds some light upon the following: "He therefore has above his contemporary emperors the advantage of being nobly born. He was likewise superior to most of them by other still more estimable qualities. He was mild, moderate, humane, beloved by the soldiers, sought the happiness of his people, was regular in his manners, and respected virtue." 73 With a character of this description it is understandable why Constantius was averse to persecution. Instead of enforcing the edicts to the limit in his part of the empire while in power, he rather manifested a friendly attitude toward the subjects of the persecution. He was not a Christian himself, 74 but "he loved their persons, esteemed their fidelity, and entertained not any dislike to their religious principles." 75 His favorable

71. Cruse, op. cit., p. 326.

72. Lactantius, op. cit., p. 304.

73. Crevier, op. cit., p. 50.

74. Arthur J. Mason, The Historic Martyrs of the Primitive Church, p. 376.

75. Gibbon, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 70.

disposition shown towards the Christians in Britain, Spain, and Gaul, where he reigned, may have been the result of his own habit of "following only the dictates of reason in matters of religion,"⁷⁶ as Mosheim suggests, but nevertheless it is evident he followed a specific course in dealing with Christians. "Those Christians about his person who continued steadfast in their faith, he treated with special regard and confidence, it being a common remark with him, that one who has proved unfaithful to his God, would be still less likely to remain faithful to his prince . . . As he could not, while a Caesar, show an open disregard to the edict that had been issued by the Augusti, he suffered the work of destroying the churches to proceed far enough to save appearances. In Gaul, where he usually resided, the Christians enjoyed perfect liberty and quiet, while the persecutions raged in other provinces."⁷⁷

The last two men to be introduced to the reader are Severus and Maximin Daia (sometimes Daia), the two Caesars appointed by Galerius, after the double abdication in 305 A.D. Both men were virtually unknown to the Roman world, and their promotion to the position of Caesar came as a surprise. Little can be discovered about Severus, except that he was nothing more than a good soldier (although after mentioned as a "drunken soldier"⁷⁸) and at the time of the persecution, because of his hatred of the Christians, an ardent executive of the edicts in Italy. "Severus, who took the names of Flavius Valerius, born in Illyricum of obscure parentage, had a way of

76. John Lawrence von Mosheim, Institutes of Ecclesiastical History Ancient and Modern, Vol. 1, p. 207.

77. Dr. Augustus Neander, General History of the Christian Religion and Church, Vol. 1, p. 155.

78. Duchesne, op. cit., p. 13.

thinking as low as his birth. Fond of wine, of dancing, and of every other access of that kind, he turned day into night and night into day.⁷⁹ With such a character, it is hardly surprising that Galerius would decide to add him to the authoritative circle of men shaping the destiny of the Roman State.

The other personage elevated to the title of Caesar under Galerius was likewise an enemy of the Christians, Gaius Galerius Valerius Maximinus by name. At first he governed Egypt and Syria, and then after the death of his uncle Galerius in 311 A. D. he made himself master of all the Asiatic provinces.⁸⁰ Ruled within by cruelty and superstition, this rough barbarian was "called Maximinus to disguise him as a Roman."⁸¹ A nephew of Galerius, this fellow when made a Caesar "was then very young, void of education, destitute of culture, retaining all the clownishness of his country and birth, addicted to drunkenness, superstitious to excess."⁸² Like Galerius, Maximin was "the simple product of the wilds beyond the frontier, tamed a little by the army, but hardly improved from his crude native barbarism."⁸³ As for persecuting the Christians Maximin proved to be more terrorizing than Galerius, and his personal life was one of lust and shame. Proof of this is found in the writings of Lactantius, who speaks thus about this young Caesar: "But that which distinguished his character, and in which he transcended all former emperors, was his desire of debauching women."⁸⁴

79. Grevier, op. cit., p. 83.

80. Neander, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 2.

81. Duchesne, op. cit., p. 13.

82. Grevier, op. cit., p. 84.

83. Hughes, op. cit., p. 213.

84. Lactantius, op. cit., p. 316

The role of this Caesar, who had risen to a seat of importance from the background of a shepherd's life,⁸⁵ in the great persecution, and his connection with the Edict of Galerius of 311 will be treated in the next chapter. It remains here to complete the picture of Maximin with a brief reference to his death. Like the other chief persecutors his demise was also of a dreadful nature. Even though Mason expresses the opinion that "it is probable that Maximin died of nothing worse than a natural death,"⁸⁶ it is from Lactantius that one receives a more probable record of the departure from this earth of this participant in the purge of the Christians at the beginning of the Fourth Century. The last years of Maximin's life had not been peaceful or happy, but full of misery and disappointment. It is with this in mind that Lactantius presents the following account of Maximin's death, which is supposed to have occurred at Tarsus:

"And in the anguish and dismay of his mind, he sought death as the only remedy of those calamities that God had heaped upon him. But first he gorged himself with food, and large draughts of wine, as those are wont who believe that they eat and drink for the last time; and so he swallowed poison. However, the force of the poison, repelled by his full stomach, could not immediately operate, but it produced a grievous disease, resembling the pestilence; and his life was prolonged only that his sufferings might be more severe. And now the poison began to rage, and to burn up everything within him, so that he was driven to distraction with the intolerable pain; and during a fit of frenzy which lasted four days, he gathered handfuls of earth, and greedily devoured it. Having undergone various and excruciating torments, he dashed his forehead against the wall, and his eyes started out of their sockets. And now, become blind, he imagined that he saw God, with His servants arrayed in white robes, sitting in judgment on him. He roared out as men on the rack are wont, and exclaimed that not he, but others, were guilty. In the end, as if he had been racked into confession, he acknowledged his own guilt, and lamentably implored Christ to have mercy upon him. Then,

85. Neander, loc. cit.

86. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 338.

amidst groans, like those of one burnt alive, did he breathe out his guilty soul in the most horrible kind of death." 87

The importance of the Era of Diocletian lies chiefly in two phases of the activity initiated by the Emperor Diocletian: the persecution of the Christians and the reorganization policy of Diocletian. When considering the latter it is necessary to determine the origin and reasons for the introduction of a new governmental policy in the first place. Rome had risen to unsurpassed heights in power and control. Its boundaries extended to the very limits of the civilized world. The Pax Romana had been established with a high price in manpower and monies. Now, a decided change in policy takes place, a change which was to have far reaching effects and results. No longer was there simply one supreme head, but auxiliary rulers in addition. No longer was there one imperial residence and retinue, but four establishments each as splendid as the other. No longer was there unbridled revolts and mutinies, but a type of check and balance system to quickly remedy any situation presented by an uprising in a particular quarter of the Empire. And all this can be attributed to the plan of Diocletian, inaugurated shortly after his ascent to the throne.

Diocletian entered upon a rule over a State that had been made great through military triumph. The predecessors of Diocletian had, for the most part, been capable in this respect, and, at the same time, sorely lacking in administrative ability. There were definite problems to be solved, however, because of this very fact. The position of the Emperor was oftentimes uncertain. The army was no longer what it had been. A return to the Senatorial government would have been impossible, for the Empire

87. Lactantius, op. cit., p. 321.

was no longer in any real sense Roman. "If the world was to be delivered from anarchy, and from the cruel tyranny of the soldiers, there was need of three great things. The sovereignty must be displayed in its most imposing grandeur, to claim the loyal reverence of its subjects. To defend it from all risk of sudden assaults, an apparent division of it was re-⁸⁸quired. The succession must be made regular and well known beforehand." It is probable that Diocletian was aware of the nature of the affairs of state, "that he had, before he began to rule, thought over the ways and means to become master for the good of that critical situation. This need not imply that he must have come to power with a plan of reorganization already fully worked out, but he may have had, in connection with tendencies which had become apparent earlier, a goal before his eyes, which, in the last resort, envisaged the securing of the position of em-⁸⁹peror as the firmest support of the unity of the Empire." Hence, a re-⁹⁰vision of the entire system was necessary, and that Diocletian set about to accomplish.

The result was that Diocletian became "the founder of a New Empire; - not the restorer of an old. Diocletian can in no wise be conceived of as a reformer, in the sense of that word which implies a recurrence to that which is primitive. He was far too great a statesman to attempt a retro-⁹⁰gression: a prodigious stride in advance was what he took."

Experience had taught him that the imperial office had to become the centre of political life. Any interference by the armies, with their weapon of usurpation, had to be dealt with effectively in order to insure the

88. Mason, The Persecution of Diocletian, p. 13.

89. W. Ensslin, "The Reforms of Diocletian", in The Cambridge Ancient History, Cook, Adcock, Charlesworth and Baynes, ed., Vol. 12, p. 383.

90. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, pp. 10-11.

national security. The duties of the emperor were such that the Emperor could very well be omni-present and still be forced to work overtime to maintain the discipline and effectiveness of Roman rule. There must be a strengthening of the military forces. "The loyal and harmonious troops had come to be a manace to peaceful society. They must be brought back to the old Roman discipline."⁹¹ There was need of a change in this set-up.⁹² All too often a ruler "had fallen by the swords of his 'commilitones'." Withdrawal of the emperor from ordinary contact with the people and the addition of kingly prestige and even a religious air to the office of Augustus would prove helpful. Since the Senate had lost its dignity and worth this new concept of authority was all the more imperative. Then, too, "neglect of the gods had brought down their displeasure, attested by many a national disaster. Rome must return to that reverence for the divine which had made her great."⁹³ These problems and others in taxation, coinage, and economic life in general all combined to make reorganization and reform both practical and necessary.

Diocletian decided to introduce a unique arrangement so that, though the supreme authority would be centralized, it would still be channeled to the outlying districts of the empire through the personages of the co-regents. "The leading idea of his system was an absolute centralization, the suppression of all local political life, of every vestige of ancient liberties: in one word, autocracy."⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the system evolved into an immense bureaucracy, as gradually the Senior Augustus delegated the powers of administration to countless major and minor associates.

91. Mattingly, op. cit., p. 326.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

94. Duchesne, op. cit., p. 3.

A revolt of the Bagaudae; bands of peasants in the area of Gaul, gave Diocletian an opportunity to put his new plan into action. Terrorized by barbarians and tax-collectors these people "had set up two emperors of their own, Aelian and Amandus."⁹⁵ Maximian, a comrade of Diocletian, was sent to suppress this uprising and given the title of Caesar. "With the title of Caesar, the reversion of the succession was given to him, but not yet the co-regency that was conferred on him with the title of Augustus. But even then the leadership of the whole remained with the Senior Augustus, who still set himself apart, as Jovius, from Maximian as Mercurius."⁹⁶ Victory over the Bagaudae was quickly achieved by Maximian, and the quick attention given this revolt by the imperial office indicated that Diocletian's plan was one capable of producing result. Advanced to the rank of Augustus of the West in 286 A.D. Maximian became co-ruler with Diocletian.

Further problems demanding attention within the Empire and the desire for an insured succession in rulers brought about the establishment of the Tetrarchy in 292. Two Caesars were appointed, Galerius and Constantius by name, and the plan was not to divide the empire into several kingdoms but "to quadruple the personality of the sovereign."⁹⁷ Greater efficiency was achieved and "the two Head-Emperors claimed the Divine Right in the most literal sense."⁹⁸ The harmony of the four rulers was splendid.

95. Mattingly, *op. cit.*, p. 327.

96. Ensslin, *op. cit.*, pp. 383-384.

97. Mason, *Persecution of Diocletian*, p. 16.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

"All four imitated the pomp of Eastern Sultans, all four ignored the Senate and avoided Rome; and the four together, united as they were by a common reverence for Diocletian while he lived, formed a college of emperors which was never seriously shaken by mutinies."⁹⁹

Subordinate powers were weakened, and there was a separation of civil and military authority. "One Augustus, Diocletian, held the East with Egypt, Libya, Arabia, and Bithynia under his own hand, and Illyricum and it would appear the western part of Asia under the care of his Caesar, Galerius. The other Maximian, held the West, with Rome, Italy, Sicily, Africa, and perhaps Spain under his control, while Gaul and rebel Britain were assigned to the Caesar, Constantius. Each Caesar held the tribunician power, but was subject in all things to his Augustus, while Diocletian, by his wisdom and 'auctoritas', dominated all alike."¹⁰⁰

The four worked together as a team, but the principle of the mobility of the court brought with it an increased strain on the imperial finances. Milan became the seat of Maximian, and Diocletian established his main headquarters in Nicomedia. "Now it really became true that Rome was where the Emperor was."¹⁰¹ The division of control made each supreme in his own area, and the gradual decline in local autonomy in the provinces increased the number of officials, all dependent on the emperor. "The Emperor was now as absolute as a Tsar; but like the Tsar, he gradually lost control of the machine."¹⁰² For, while the scheme of Diocletian

99. Henry Melvill Gwatkin, Early Church History to A. D. 313, Vol. 2, p. 326.

100. Mattingly, op. cit., p. 329.

101. Ensslin, op. cit., p. 386.

102. Gwatkin, op.cit., p. 327.

worked for some time toward increasing efficiency, it "ended in civil war as the claims of natural heirs were set aside in favor of an artificial dynasty. At the same time the system bore heavily upon the people and the prosperity of the Empire rapidly declined."¹⁰³ A new system of taxation was introduced, a regulated plan for succession was the most open abrogation of the Senate's powers, and "in point of fact, Diocletian, so far as our records go, behaved to the Senate precisely as though it did not exist."¹⁰⁴

Praetorian prefects increased in influence because of the new taxation system, 'magistri' became the title for the heads of the departments, the large circle of officials was known as the "imperial consilium", and "rationales vicarii" were added to help in the administration of finances in the newly created dioceses. There was also a large number of legal advisors and others called to councils on affairs of state.¹⁰⁵ "The supreme head (Diocletian) of this immense hierarchy of functionaries, all ornamented with the most high sounding titles, was necessarily obliged to rise entirely above the ordinary conditions of humanity. The person of the Emperor was sacred, divine, eternal; his house was also divine (domus divina)."¹⁰⁶ Rarely did the emperor put in a public appearance and when he did, the occasion assumed the proportions of a great festival. "The seclusion of the sacred person of the ruler is marked by the greater difficulty of gaining admission to him, apparent in the

103. Joseph Cullen Ayer, A Source Book for Ancient Church History, pp. 257-258.

104. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 18.

105. cf. Ensslin, op. cit., p. 389 ff.

106. Duchesne, op. cit., p. 4.

limitation of the adoration to a strictly defined circle of persons, in
which we may see a precursor of the future higher classes of rank.¹⁰⁷

The reorganization policy, with its far-reaching influence, as seen above, even affected the personal lives of the two Caesars. This is mentioned in passing in order to show how sincerely Diocletian aimed at a secure order of things in establishing the Tetrarchy. "To bind both Caesars to himself and his colleague, Diocletian required them to put away their wives and marry the crown princesses. Constantius put away Helena, mother of Constantine, and married Theodora, daughter of Maximian, while Galerius gave up his former wife to marry Diocletian's daughter,¹⁰⁸ Valeria."

In fact, Diocletian's determination to omit nothing which would aid in strengthening his plan, found him consecrating the Tetrarchy and "placing it under the direct protection of the great gods - his own dynasty, the Jovian, under Jupiter, that of Maximian, the Herculan, under Hercules."¹⁰⁹ This fact was of some importance in the persecution, for all four adhered to pagan teachings in the field of religion. Everything possible was done to prepare the Caesars for careers as rulers and to make the reorganization policy of Diocletian work. "But, in spite of all, Diocletian did not succeed in training the subject, who became more and more a mere carrier of state burdens, to take a personal interest in the political life around him. And so the State created by Diocletian

107. Ensslin, op.cit., p. 388.

108. Mattingly, op. cit., p. 328.

109. Ibid, p. 329.

resembled, not the new house that he intended to build, but rather an emergency shelter, which could indeed offer protection from the storm, but in which the lack of light and warmth became more and more obvious," 110

The injection of the account of the situation at this time according to Lactantius seems in place here:

"When Diocletian, the author of crimes and deviser of evils was ruining all things, not even from against God could he withhold his hand. This man, partly by avarice and partly by timidity, overturned the world. For he made three persons sharers with him in the government. The Empire was divided into four parts, and armies were multiplied, since each of the four princes strove to have a much larger military force than any emperor had had when one emperor alone carried on the government. There began to be a greater number of those who received taxes than those who paid them; so that the means of the husbandmen were exhausted by enormous impositions, the fields were abandoned, and cultivated grounds became woodlands, and universal dismay prevailed. Besides, the provinces were divided into minute portions and many presidents and prefects lay heavy on each territory, and almost on every city. There were many stewards and masters and deputy presidents, before whom very few civil causes came, but only condemnations and frequent forfeitures, and exactions of numberless commodities, and I will not say often repeated, but perpetual and intolerable wrongs in the exacting of them." 111

(It is to be noted that Lactantius is not very charitable when writing about Diocletian and his reign and policies.)

The early years of the reign of Diocletian and Maximian gave these two men ample opportunity to be busy about the Empire. Each was able to find a place for service. Maximian directed Carausius against the Frankish and Saxon pirates but Carausius revolted, giving Maximian full occasion to be busy in the north of Gaul and in Britain. In 286-7 Maximian repelled the Alemanni and Burgundians on the Upper Rhine. Two years later

110. Ensslin, op.cit., p. 408.

111. Ayer, op. cit., p. 258.

it became necessary to suppress the Alemanni again. The year 288 A. D. found Maximian, through his Praetorian prefect, Constantius, pushing the Franks back to the ocean, And in 289 and 290 the revolt of the Moors in Africa was put down by Maximian's generals.

Diocletian had even more cause to be kept busy. 286 A.D. saw him take the title "Germanicus Maximus" after winning in warfare on the borders of Pannonia and Moesia. In 288 he induced the Persian king to surrender all claim to Mesopotamia, and Diocletian became "Persicus Maximus". During the same year the Senior Augustus set up him nominee, Tiridates III, as king of Armenia and spent some time in Raetia helping Maximian in a contest with the Chaibones and Heruli. Diocletian fought the Sarmatians in 289 and again in 292, and also turned back a Saracen invasion of Syria in 290. The suppression of a revolt of Coptos and Busiris was accomplished in Egypt in 291.

With the naming of the two Caesars in 292 Diocletian could confidently face the trials that were yet to come. These included the revolt of Carausius in Britain, the Quinquegentanei in Africa, and the land reclamation project along the Danube. Constantius was particularly active (and successful) in dealing with Carausius, and Galerius was given the task of reclamation.

Around 296 A.D. there was a revolt in Egypt, the exact cause of which is unknown, although it presumably had something to do with the economic problems which arose as a result of Diocletian's monetary reforms. (In this same year the Manichaean Edict was issued and served as warning enough as to what Diocletian could do in regard to the Christians also. ¹¹²)

112. Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 330. Also compare Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, on date of this edict, p. 275 ff.

A new enemy was found in Narses of Persia in 296. This ruler was at odds with Tiridates, the vassal king of Armenia. Galerius was called up to direct the fighting and at first was most successful, but then was caught in ambush and defeated at Callinicus. Diocletian had moved to Antioch to assist and regarded this defeat, which Galerius suffered, with great scorn. Diocletian forced his Caesar to be humiliated by walking behind the Senior Augustus' chariot for some distance. But an opportunity was given Galerius to redeem himself in Diocletian's eyes and shortly after Galerius, with reinforcements made up of veterans of several successful legions, quickly subdued Narses and captured a large booty. Eventually a treaty was signed and Mesopotamia was definitely surrendered, a Roman protectorate was established over Armenia and five small provinces across the Tigris were given to Rome. ¹¹³ The years from 293 until 298 were indeed years filled with activity, but the Tetrarchy came through just as its author had expected.

But military activity was not all that demanded the attention of the Emperor. Near the end of 295 there are some noticeable changes in coinage. ¹¹⁴ "About the year 300, after the restoration of peace and public order, Diocletian and his co-rulers found themselves face to face with a commercial crisis. Interest was excessive owing to the scarcity of capital, and the price of commodities and labour had risen in proportion. In 301 they issued the so called Edict of Diocletian, which was an

113. cf. Mattingly, op. cit., p. 327 ff., and Gibbon, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 402-450.

114. Mattingly, op. cit., p. 338.

attempt (necessarily unsuccessful) to fix the maximum prices for different
115
kinds of goods and labour."

In the field of education "Diocletian . . . fixed the rate of payment
116
for various subjects of instruction." Earlier emperors had let the
schools manage themselves.

Art and architecture prospered under Diocletian, and all of the
Tetrarchy had traveling architects in their retinue who acquired new
ideas as they traveled through the vast Roman world. Even though Diocle-
tian possessed no real love of literature personally, he is remembered
as having been a patron of those apt in this field. Arnobius and
117
Lactantius stand out in the field of literature at this time.

But it is the Church and the problem which it presented that comes
before us now. The persecution definitely had a place in the political
history of the Empire. "During the years which followed the attempt of
Decius and Valerian to break the strength of the Church, the Christian faith
had secured its position: it was now 'a State within a State,' too strong
and too well disciplined to be ignored. Could Diocletian in his devotion
to the old sanctities of public life and in his revival of pagan worship
118
maintain a strict neutrality in face of a growing and ambitious Church?"

The eventual meeting of this problem is treated in the next chapter, but
the thought is mentioned here to make the reader mindful that there is a
relation between the system of Diocletian and the eventual persecution.

115. J. E. Sandys, A Companion To Latin Studies, p. 420, para. 618.

116. Ibid., p. 236, para. 291.

117. cf. The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol 12, Chap. XVI, pp. 561-
569, and Chap. XVII, pp. 605-609.

118. Mattingly, op. cit., p. 338.

In 303 Diocletian journeyed to Rome for the Feast of Vicemalia, but since as Emperor he was expected to keep pace with all the activities connected with the Feast and he was an old man, he did not enjoy himself at all. Consequently he departed from Rome after a short stay and in traveling eastward he was stricken with a strange sickness early in 304, and it is Mason who effectively portrays the state of affairs that followed:

"The remainder of the year 304 was a blank in the personal history of Diocletian.. The paralysis affected not only his body, but his mind. That powerful and capacious intellect which had grasped and solved the problems of a world, - which had found the empire a chaos without form and void, and within twenty years had evoked a Golden Age, - which had carried, solitary yet stable, the weight of all the earth, and unsupported from without as the elephant of Indian allegory, - had so utterly shrivelled and collapsed, that though the empire was reeling to and fro with a new supreme conclusion of the two greatest forces known, the only subject that suggested to it any anxiety was the opening of a new circus at Nicomedia." 119

The abdication seemed inevitable, and on May 1, 305, it became a reality, to the partial satisfaction of Diocletian and to the dismay of Maximian.

It is Galerius who can be credited with effecting the abdication. Ever since he gained many victories in his duties as Caesar, a certain pride had seized Galerius and the desire to have full control had grown to the danger point. Several arguments had to be employed and even some threatening occurred before Diocletian could be persuaded to relinquish the throne. For, even though Diocletian seems to have planned on retiring after twenty years of governing, the arrival of the time found him anxious to retain his authority. The persecution was only two years old, and he thought it required his attention. The Empire was only beginning to thrive

119. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 211.

once again. But to these arguments Galerius replied that the Senior Augustus was very sick and old and incapable of efficient administration any longer. Besides, Galerius reminded the emperor that he had more or less promised to retire at this time. Diocletian suggested the establishment of four emperors. Galerius reminded Diocletian of his original plan of succession, and the elder Emperor still hesitated. Finally, Galerius said he would take matters into his own hands, whereupon the aged Diocletian announced his decision to abdicate.¹²⁰

Lactantius records that after Galerius had spoken thus with his Augustus, it caused Diocletian to react strangely, for "on hearing his discourse, the spiritless old man burst into tears, and said, 'Be it as you will!'"¹²¹

As at other times Diocletian consulted divinities when in a quandary, it is to be noted that he also consulted them at this time. For we are told "he turned once more to his omens and his oracles, and he found the outlook dark. The answer of fate came back that a great crash awaited the empire. Diocletian felt that he could not withstand fate; he determined to abandon the Church and the world to the inevitable issue, and to betake the life which after all had proved a failure to the solitude, the homeliness, the religion of Spalatro."¹²²

The solemn act of abdication took place on a plain just outside the city of Nicomedia. Maximian abdicated at the same time, in accordance with an agreement between the two Augusti, at Milan. "Constantius succeeded in the West, as senior Augustus, Galerius as junior in the East. For

120. cf. Crevier, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85, and Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 238 ff.

121. Lactantius, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

122. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 242.

the vacant posts of Caesars, there were two natural claimants, Constantine, son of Constantius, and Maxentius, son of Maximian. Both, however, were passed over, on whatever pretext, and Severus and Maximin Daia, both proteges of Galerius, the latter a relative also, were appointed, the one for the West, the other for the East.¹²³ It is Lactantius who tells us concerning the appointment of Maximin that "all men wondered who he could be, and from whence he came"¹²⁴ but there seems to have been no real opposition to the naming of either of the two new Caesars.

The abdication of Diocletian was followed by eighteen years of discord and confusion and five civil wars.¹²⁵ Constantius was first Augustus but in ill health, and Galerius was eager for full control. Constantine, who had been living with Diocletian, escaped soon after the abdication to his father Constantius, who died in July, 306. Then the army of Britain hailed Constantine as emperor, but Galerius, enraged when first he heard the news, reluctantly called him Caesar. Three months later (Oct. 28, 306) Galerius tried to tax Rome like the provinces were taxed, and the Senate set Maxentius, son of Maximian, up as Caesar and called back Maximian as emperor. Severus, who had been made Augustus by Galerius upon the death of Constantius, was sent to Rome to settle the disturbance, only to be killed by Maxentius. This brought Galerius to Rome to avenge the death of Severus, but retreat was necessary soon after his arrival and the situation reached critical heights.

Diocletian was sought for counsel and a meeting was held at Carnuntum

123. Mattingly, op.cit., p. 340.

124. Lactantius, op. cit., p. 309.

125. Gibbon, op.cit., Vol. 1, Chap. 14, p. 451.

in November, 307. Licinius, a close friend of Galerius, was declared Augustus, and Maximian was forced to abdicate again. Since Maximin Daza had exacted the title of Emperor almost by violence in Egypt and Syria, there were six emperors for a short time: Constantine, Maxentius, Maximian, Licinius, Maximin Daza, and Galerius. But after Carnuntum the scene changed slightly and Maximian's flight to Constantine's court ended in death for that prince as was mentioned more in detail earlier in this chapter. The death of Galerius in 311 left four emperors. Maximin Daza and Licinius armed to get all they could, the one concentrating on Asia, the other on Europe. Maxentius, meanwhile, was enjoying a popular rule in Rome, especially since he was making attempts to restore the old ways. Then came the eventual combat between Constantine and Maxentius. Some of Rome was glad to have Constantine appear to free them from tyranny. Although the strength of the forces opposing Constantine was four times greater than his, the Romans were indulgent and soon succumbed to the warriors, the men who served under Constantine. After a victorious march on Rome, Constantine defeated the forces of Maxentius at the battle of the Milvian Bridge on the Tiber near Rome, and Maxentius was drowned in the course of the encounter. This happened in 312. Licinius defeated the ambitious Maximin in 313, and in the years that followed Licinius and Constantine soon came to a parting of the way.

For our purposes here we can terminate this account of the political and general sides of the reign of Diocletian, his co-regents, and his immediate successors, and direct our attention to the great persecution

126. For a more complete picture of the years following the abdication cf. Gibbon, *op.cit.*, Vol. 1, Chap. 14, pp. 451-503; Gwatkin, *op. cit.*, p. 337 ff.; Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 251 ff.; and Duchesne, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-15.

which was raging throughout most of the years just considered. It may occur to the reader that what has already been considered seems beyond the scope of this paper, but it must be remembered that an understanding of the world at the time of the last great attack by the Roman State over against the Christian Church and of the men who played the leading roles in such an event will serve to give the complete picture of the entire situation.

IV. The Great Persecution Under Diocletian

For almost forty years Christianity had existed as a *religio licita* as a result of the toleration edict of Gallienus, and then suddenly the Church underwent a brutal and violent assault by the Roman Empire, beginning in the year 303 A.D. and continuing for almost ten years, particularly in the Eastern part of the Empire. Why such an abrupt change in policy on the part of the State? What were the underlying causes which brought about a renewal of hostility? Historians do not seem to agree upon one general cause, and a consideration of their opinions reveals that many causes contributed to the initiation of a final systematic attack by the State.

Christians were holding office in many parts of the State, and the growth of Christianity had been phenomenal. Schaff writes, "In the first twenty years of his reign Diocletian respected the toleration edict of Gallienus. His own wife Prisca, his daughter Valeria, and most of his eunuchs and court officers, besides many of the most prominent public functionaries, were Christians, or at least favorable to the Christian religion."¹²⁷

Gwatkin makes a similar statement concerning the Christians in public office: "In Diocletian's palace they abounded. His trusted chamberlains were Christians, and his wife and daughter were more than rumored to be Christians, though that daughter was the wife of Galerius."¹²⁸

127. Schaff, op. cit., p. 65.

128. Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 328.

The appointment of Christians to responsible positions seems to have come about as a result of their really living the teachings they had come to learn and treasure. Even Eusebius remarks about the honor accorded faithful Christian servants and officials:

"Such was that Dorotheus, the most devoted and most faithful of all to them, and, on this account, exceedingly honoured beyond all those that had the charge of government, and the most honourable stations in the provinces. We may also add Gorgonius, equally celebrated with him, and so many others that were honored with the same distinction as these on account of the divine word." 129

Mason, in his book entitled, The Persecution of Diocletian, also shows that the church was wealthy at this time, that some of the bishops lived in splendor, that splendid churches were erected everywhere, and that Christian laymen were in high position everywhere. He adds:

"And in the court itself, all the highest positions about the Emperor Diocletian's person appear to have been purposely assigned to Christian chamberlains. The three who are expressly mentioned, Dorotheus, Gorgonius, and Peter, proved the truth of their faith by their death: it is probable, therefore, that they proved it also by their lives; and that, as Joseph was raised in the heathen house of Potiphar till, whatever was done there, he was the doer of it, so the wise Diocletian (who had ample reason to know that princes are sometimes murdered by those whom they trust) was induced to select for these trusty posts men whose holy lives raised them conspicuously above suspicion. These great officers, so much more influential in on Oriental palace than among us, lived with the master who was so inaccessible to others, on terms of the most easy familiarity. They not only respected so good a prince, but loved him and were loved by him like children with their father." 130.

Then too, the persecution in the Empire during this ten year period "bring out strikingly the presence and numbers of the Christians, often

129. Cruse, *op.cit.*, p. 301.

130. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 39.

where we had no prior inkling of either."¹³¹

And yet, in spite of these favorable conditions, the Christians themselves seem to have given reason for many to agitate toward a new persecution. "A few cases, in which an ill-considered zeal led Christians to insult the Pagan worship, one or two instances of Christians refusing to serve in the army because they believed military life repugnant to their creed, a scandalous relaxation of morals, that had arisen during the long peace, and the fierce and notorious discord displayed by the leaders of the Church, contributed in different ways to accelerate the persecution."¹³²

The Church was "beginning to prove herself the victory that overcometh the world,"¹³³ and at the same time there was a general restlessness in the Empire as "men found there was neither peace nor excitement to be found in the old mythological creeds."¹³⁴ The rites and religious services of paganism were often designed for the deification of sensuality. Even a revival of belief in omens and prophecies, auguries and oracles could not satisfy. But "Christianity, - and the special aspect of it which that age presented, - was eminently calculated to meet the wants expressed in these different forms of religion. It gave an intense interest to the present moment. It aimed at making consciousness as vivid as possible. It invested with a splendid dignity each most trivial action of daily life."¹³⁵

131. J. V. Bartlet, and A. J. Carlyle, Christianity in History, p. 86.
132. Locky, op. cit., p. 489.
133. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 30.
134. Ibid., p. 31.
135. Ibid., p. 34.

The polytheists were awakened by this appeal to man which was characteristic of Christianity, and their awakening found them jealous of Christian zeal and anxious to remedy the situation, to revitalize their own religion. After all, wasn't Paganism the strongest numerically? Why, then, shouldn't it remain so? It is Mason who gives us an interesting observation regarding this factor. He writes:

"But even if the Church could not claim equality with Paganism in this matter of numbers, there were other points besides that of positive faith and energetic zeal, in which she could hold her own.// Intellectual and literary power was fast passing over from the heathen side." 136. This fact alarmed the heathen Roman and as Charles Merivale once commented in a lecture series, "Not yet satisfied, not yet relieved, - nay, as dangers and distresses thicken around him, more agitated, more alarmed, more furious than ever, - the heathen defies the Christian to mortal combat in the latter persecutions of Decius and Diocletian: he will sweep away the enemies of his gods in one hurricane of slaughter, or perish together with them in the impending ruin of his polity and culture." 137

Moreover, not only the individual heathen becomes troubled about the situation, but organized groups begin to take action. "The pagan priests therefore, from well-grounded fears lest Christianity to their great and lasting injury should spread far and wide its triumphs, endeavored to excite Diocletian, whom they knew to be both timid and credulous, by means of feigned oracles and other impositions to engage in persecuting the Christians." ¹³⁸ ¹⁰⁰ Still another group had arisen which saw in Christianity a dangerous rival, and with the aid of literary works and of fifth column activities among the priests and statesmen, this group, known as the Neo-Platonists, managed to advance the conflict between Pagan State and Christ-

136. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

137. Charles Merivale, *The Conversion of the Roman Empire*, p. 114.

138. Mosheim, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-208.

ian Church. So convinced that this group can be classified as the one outstanding cause of the persecution is one historian, Foakes-Jackson, that he makes the following statement about the action taken by the Neo-Platonists:

"This is the true explanation of the persecution under Diocletian, accounting for the phenomena by which it was characterized. The refusal of the oracles to reply to the Emperor because the Christians were tolerated, the burning of the Christian Scriptures, the outrages of the chastity of the Christian virgins, and the other distinguishing features of this persecution may be traced to the influence of Neo-Platonic philosophers like Hierocles and Theotecnus. The earlier persecutions had been political; the last great persecution was essentially religious." 139

101

The general causes of all the previous persecutions also can be mentioned as underlying this persecution. They include the causes of racial, legal, nationalistic, social, economic, and religious nature, in addition to the factors of hatred and popular prejudice over against the Christians for their exclusiveness. There was a conflicting philosophy between the two great religious systems: the claim of Christianity as a universal religion versus the Roman State's idea of national deities, a new creed with no earthly grandeur and history versus the well-established, powerful pagan empire.

110 ["Politics and religion were viewed as one common area of interest, and affairs of state were thought to be safe only when there was close union between the government and the gods." 111] Religion was considered as basic to good government. Such an idea included emperor-

139. Foakes-Jackson, op. cit., p. 196.

110. cf. Maier, The Causes for the Persecutions of the Early Christians.

111. Shirley Jackson Case, "The Acceptance of Christianity by the Roman Emperors," in Papers of the American Society of Church History, Frederick Loetscher, ed., Vol. 3, p. 55.

worship, and here again can be seen another underlying cause for persecuting the Christians at this time. The burning of a bit of incense and pouring out of a few drops of wine before a picture or bust of the emperor upon an altar was opposed by the Christian, whose determination was to worship and honor Christ and only Christ. This stubborn refusal made the heads of government at different times decide upon drastic action. "Rulers so different as Nero and Domitian, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Antoninus, Severus, Decius, and Diocletian, and their ministers, felt that the sternest measures of repression of the new Faith were absolutely necessary if they would stem the fast advancing and apparently resistless tide of Christianity in the Empire." ¹¹² Only when the Christians persisted in their refusal to sacrifice and give adoration to the Emperor and threatened the unity of the Empire "did the Roman State proceed systematically against what it deemed the obstinate representatives of a miserable and dangerous superstition." ¹¹³

[Even Mason concedes that the Roman ideal of the State and the very peculiar relation in which politics stood to religion could only mean eventual conflict between Church and State. We quote from the pen of Mr. Mason:

"The State claimed to be supreme over all religions, and in fact to make them a part of its own machinery. The Holy Catholic Church believed, and still believes, that there is a law higher than the law of the State. Christianity is absolute. The State's ideal of religion was a syncretism (to use a word the German authors love) of national and partial religions: if the deities of a newly conquered

112. Spence-Jones, *op.cit.*, p. 194.

113. James Hardy Ropes, The Apostolic Age, p. 203.

nation were willing to take a seat in the Pantheon, the seats were free to all-comers; if not that religion could not be tolerated. The Holy Catholic Church refused this abominable proposal, for Christ had no concord with Belial. Christianity is universal, The State, holding that all religions were on an equality, could suffer no contest between one deity and another, no crying down of any deities which it had taken under its protection. The Holy Catholic Church was charged with the message of regeneration, and could not rest till men's souls were freed from the foul tyranny of these dumb and devilish idols. Christianity is aggressive. The State was morbidly sensitive of the formation of any societies which might give it trouble even locally. The Holy Catholic Church, while fully recognizing the authority of the Sovereign, thinks, or (alasi) thought, that the first allegiance which was owed to man was owed to her consecrated Pontiffs. Christianity is corporate. For all these reasons, and many, many more, the Church inevitably must have clashed, and did clash again and again, with the old Roman State . . . It is entirely and utterly misleading to speak of the persecution of Diocletian as the climax of his work of restoration. A tremendous change had come over the political aspect of the world since the death of Carus. Diocletian had deliberately, openly, ostentatiously, abandoned the old Roman ideal." 114

And further- "The old Roman notion, then, of the politics of religion did not influence Diocletian." 115

Yet numerous are the historians who present the opinion that Diocletian himself, both because of his personal religion and his attitude toward government and religion as a unit, can be named as the sole underlying cause of the persecution. Gwatkin argues that Diocletian had to make his system of religion effective, when he writes: "True, the universal religion aimed at by Diocletian was only the old paganism and emperor worship: but by this time anyone might see that if he failed like others in making it a living power, nothing remained but Christianity." 116

114. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 72-3.

115. Ibid., p. 75

116. Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 327.

Diocletian was no monotheist, for, according to Milman, "In his assumption of the title Jovius, while his colleague took that of Hercules, Diocletian gave a public pledge of his attachment to the old Polytheism."¹¹⁷

It is Lecky that suggests that "To such an emperor, the problem presented by the rapid progress and the profoundly anti-national character of Christianity must have been a matter of serious consideration, and the weaknesses of his character were most unfavorable to the Church;"¹¹⁸

-and Gibbon reminds the reader that Diocletian's "prudence rendered him averse to any great innovation, and though his temper was not very susceptible to zeal or enthusiasm, he always maintained an habitual regard for the ancient deities of the empire."¹¹⁹

Despite the fact that many Christians were employed in his palace, Diocletian, in the opinion of Duchesne, could not be truly favorable to Christianity. "Whatever may have been his toleration for the opinions of his subjects, his officials, and his family, he, for his part, preserved his attachment to the old customs of the Roman worship. He frequented the temples and sacrificed to the gods, without any mystic ideas, without ostentation, but with a deep devotion, deeming, no doubt, that he was thus fulfilling his duty as a man and, above all, as a sovereign. Such a state of mind could not make him really favorable to rival religions."¹⁵⁰

The Manichaean Edict, which was issued about 287, according to Newman, indicates that Diocletian was unfriendly to Christianity

117. Milman, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

118. Lecky, *op. cit.*, p. 488.

119. Gibbon, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, Chap. 16, p. 56.

150. Duchesne, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

almost from the beginning. ¹⁵¹ Neander cites an inscription "where the emperor boasts of having suppressed Christianity", as bringing out the charge against the Christians that they were ruining the State, and gives this as evidence that Diocletian was given to destroying the faith. ¹⁵² In explaining why Diocletian turned his hand against the Christians after so many years upon the throne, Mattingly advances the idea that he simply took care of the more pressing problems of a military nature ¹⁵³ first.

Once again, it is Mason, who presents to the reader a thought-provoking opinion concerning the personal religion of Diocletian and its consequent bearing upon the persecution. He can see the truth of the claim that Diocletian was deeply religious and at the same time superstitious. But as to whether this would influence Diocletian's attitude toward Christianity or make the Senior Augustus determined to suppress Christianity, Mason hesitates to defend too firmly. Mason argues:

"In the first place, there is nothing whatever to shew that Diocletian was one of the new Platonist school . . . The man was no theologian . . . In the second place, Diocletian exhibits no special devotion towards the old state gods of Rome . . . Thirdly, Diocletian was no impulsive enthusiast." ¹⁵⁴

Mason does venture to say, however, the following: "The only real ground on which he can be thought to have leant to the persecution, was the ¹⁵⁵ great power of the Church as a corporation."

151. Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History, Vol. 1, p. 168.
 152. Neander, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 144.
 153. Mattingly, op. cit., p. 339.
 154. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, pp. 75-76.
 155. Ibid., p. 86. For an interesting exposition of the religion of Diocletian, see p. 84 ff.

Eusebius, the Church historian, considered as the cause (which would possibly be considered both underlying and immediate by him) of the persecution the sins of the Church and God's judgment upon the same. His writing on this subject follows:

"But when, by reason of excessive liberty, we sunk into negligence and sloth, one envying and reviling another in a different ways, and we were almost, as it were, on the point of taking up arms against each other, and were assailing each other with words as with darts and spears, prelates inveighing against prelates, and people rising up against people, and hypocrisy and dissimulation had arisen to the greatest height of malignity, then the divine judgment, which usually proceeds with a lenient hand, whilst the multitudes were yet crowding into the church, with gentle and mild visitations began to afflict its episcopacy; the persecution having began with those brethren that were in the army." 156

Truly, in view of all the paragraphs just presented dealing with the underlying causes of the persecution, the reader can conclude with the historian, Hilman: "Thus, then, an irresistible combination of circumstances tended to precipitate the fatal crisis." 157

The immediate cause of the persecution was the issuance of an edict by Diocletian in 303 A.D. Behind this move, however, there lies an interesting story.

During the winter of 302-303 Diocletian was at his residence in Nicomedia. His Caesar, Galerius, joined him and began insisting upon a rigorous persecution immediately. The Caesar was acting spokesman for leading Neo-Platonists and pagans, who had chosen him both because of his leanings towards their system and because Galerius himself hated the Christians. This hatred had been bred in him by his mother from child-

156. Cruse, op. cit., p. 301.

157. Hilman, op. cit., p. 215.

hood on.

But Diocletian maintained for quite some time a steady resistance to the urgent pleadings of the proud Caesar. All winter, meeting in perfect secrecy, the two deliberated, the Augustus refusing to give consent, the Caesar persuading and trying to alarm. The old prince insisted that a Christian persecution would disturb the whole empire. Besides, Diocletian maintained there was the probability of bloodshed and to that he was averse. For he knew, being a student of history, that to shed their blood rather than heed the commands of a Roman emperor was more agreeable to the Christians. It would do no good to spill blood, and in doing so, advance the cause of an enemy, which would most assuredly happen.

Nevertheless, insisted Galerius, the Christians must be persecuted. Gradually Diocletian weakened in his stand and offered to forbid any Christian to practice his faith within the walls of the palace or the confines of the Emperor's legions. This offer was made with quite some hesitancy, for he was convinced that it would do no good. "The army would suffer greatly by the loss. Diocletian would have to part with servants to whom he was much attached." ¹⁵⁸ But Galerius wasn't satisfied. "That zealot, encouraged at gaining one decided step, was determined to execute now his full design. Before long he had carried another point, though Diocletian fought manfully inch by inch. He persuaded the old man not to rely solely upon his own profound wisdom, but to take the advice of confidential friends. A few dignified generals and a few civilians of high position were accordingly called in to aid in the

158. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 57.

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deliberations." As can be expected, this advisory body, being Pagan, joined Galerius in seeking a persecution and did so with the sincere intent of persuading the aged monarch to break down completely and consent. "Those who were not themselves superstitious thought it more prudent to side with the Emperor who was to succeed than with the Emperor who was
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to retire, within the year."

It wasn't long after that Diocletian agreed to take the question to an oracle, the oracle of the Milesian Apollo. "If the oracle of Apollo, the Sun-God, at Miletus, should respond that it was better not to persecute (and surely he would, if he were a wise divinity), the triumph over Galerius would be complete: superstition would be met on its own ground. A soothsayer was accordingly despatched to put the tremendous question. But, whatever the feelings of Apollo himself may have been, the feelings of his prophet or prophetess were distinctly on the side of the old religion. The old Emperor could hold out no longer. To refuse to act upon the oracle, after he had consulted it, would have signified not only the recantation of the least uncertain article in Diocletian's eclectic creed, but also the abandonment of the state religion, the disestablishment of a faith which was still the faith of the majority: and it required a firmer seat even than his own to take so vast a step. Utterly wearied out, and with a heavy and foreboding heart, though shaken in his own mind and probably half persuaded by arguments and oracles, he at last deferred to Galerius' wishes, only with the express and expressive reserve

159. Ibid., p. 58.

160. Ibid., p. 62.

that no blood was to be shed in the transaction." ¹⁶¹ Diocletian, in view of this account, would seem to have liked to have had no persecution of the type that ensued, and, therefore he attempted to ward off the outbreak of any persecution at all.

Prior to the outbreak of the great persecution there were several incidents, though minor, yet of some importance, which indicated the trend toward a general persecution. Ayer sums these events up in the following words:

"The last great persecution was preceded by a number of laws aimed to annoy the Christians. On March 12, 295, all soldiers were ordered to offer sacrifice. In 296 sacred books of the Christians were sought for and burned at Alexandria. In 297 or 298 Christian persecutions began in the army but the great persecution itself broke out in 303." ¹⁶²

In addition to these laws persecution was largely centered upon the military forces in these years just prior to the First Edict, "and in the army commenced the first overt acts of hostility, which were the prognostics of the general persecution." ¹⁶³

Smith relates that in 298 an order was issued that all persons in military service, or in public employment of any kind, must sacrifice to the gods. ¹⁶⁴ Newman mentions a similar command, but he dates it at about 295 and ascribes it to Galerius. ¹⁶⁵

Perhaps the most important incident at this time was the failure of the priests to derive an omen at a sacrifice held in the presence of Christians and the Emperor. This happened sometime before the persecution,

161. Ibid.,

162. Ayer, op. cit., p. 258.

163. Milman, op. cit., p. 217.

164. Smith, op. cit., p. 111.

165. Newman, op. cit., p. 168.

possibly in the year 297, when Diocletian, in a nervous state and troubled about some problem, ordered a public sacrifice to determine the will of heaven. After several attempts there was no result. The priest in charge blamed the presence of the Christians and the fact they had made the sign of the cross. "The old sovereign, in an uncontrollable fit of vexation and fretfulness, at once gave orders that all the people who were present should be made to sacrifice, and also all the servants in his palace. This conduct of the Christians, to whom he had been so kind, seemed intended just to spite and vex him. He determined that all who refused to do as he bade them should be soundly whipped. His anxiety about the crisis which was approaching (whatever it was) rose to such a pitch, that ^{he} even sent out messages to the commanders of the troops about him to propose the same test to the soldiers under them, and if any should refuse it, to turn them once for all out of the army. Nothing further was done: the excitement soon passed off: no blood was shed, and the Emperor did not wish any to be shed."¹⁶⁶

Some doubt that if such an incident could have brought on all this excitement. "But it must be remembered that Christians and pagans alike believed in magic: it was one thing to tolerate Christians, another to allow them to disturb a solemn pagan rite."¹⁶⁷

Three martyrs are referred to by Mason as having met death during these years.

One was Maximilian, aged twenty-one, who in March, 295, while being

166. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, pp. 42-43.

167. Baynes, op. cit., p. 664.

measured for military gear, announced his refusal to serve in the army or wear the badge. He was told that he could be a Christian and a soldier at the same time. As proof he was asked to think of the great number of Christians in military service. He replied that this was none of his business and eventually was beheaded.

The two others were known as Marcellus and Cassian. Marcellus, at a feast in Tangiers, refused to eat the meats being served, renounced the service, and added his renunciation of allegiance to the Emperors. Treated decently at his trial, he was sentenced to death. Cassian, upon hearing the Vicarius to whom he was actuary pronounce the sentence, "flung away his pen and book, and strenuously asserted that the decision was unjust" and was given the same punishment.

Mason asserts that the treatment of these three martyrs was not primarily occasioned by the fact that they were Christian. He contends: "Not one of these martyrs then, perished simply for being a Christian, but for martyr and treason." In fact, Mason is of the opinion that the action of Diocletian at the incident of the augurs was the result of Diocletian's nervous disposition. Holding this opinion, he can write:

"I cannot but think that everything points to the fact that the old man was most favorably disposed towards the Church, and even when he was so far stirred as to terrify her by a taste of what he might do if he pleased, dealt far more leniently than might be expected."

The official outbreak of the great persecution under Diocletian occurred on February 23, 303, with the destruction of the magnificent

168. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, pp. 44-45.

169. Ibid., pp. 45-46.

170. Ibid., p. 47.

171. Ibid., p. 48.

church at Nicomedia and was followed on the next day with the publication of the First Edict in connection with the persecution. Diocletian had been shown that Christianity was a menace and the selection of the Feast of the Terminalia (the feast day for Terminalus, the God of Boundaries) seemed an appropriate one on which to mark the beginning of the end for Christianity.

Lactantius, writing in his De Mortibus Persecutorum, describes the outbreak of the persecution as follows:

"A fit and auspicious day was sought for the accomplishment of this undertaking (i.e., the persecution of the Christians); and the festival of the Great god Terminalus, celebrated on the seventh calends of March (Feb. 23), was chosen, to put an end as it were, to this religion; that day the first of death, was first of evil's cause! Vergil, and cause of evils which befell not only the Christians but the whole world. Then that day dawned, in the eighth consulship of Diocletian and seventh of Maximianus, suddenly, while it was hardly light, the prefect, together with the chief commanders, tribunes, and officers of the treasury, came to the Church (in Nicomedia), and when the gates had been forced open they sought for an image of God. The books of the Holy Scriptures were found and burnt; the spoil was given to all. Rapine, confusion, and tumult reigned. Since the church was situated on rising ground, and tumult reigned visible from the palace, Diocletian and Galerius stood there as if on a watch-tower and disputed long together whether it ought to be set on fire. The opinion of Diocletian prevailed, for he feared lest, when so great a fire should once be started, the city might be burnt; for many and large buildings surrounded the Church on all sides. Then the praetorian guard, in battle array, came with axes and other iron instruments, and having been let loose everywhere, in a few hours they levelled that very lofty building to the ground. On. 13. Next day the edict was published ordaining that men of the Christian religion should be deprived of all honors and dignities; and also that they should be subjected to torture, of whatsoever rank or position they might be; and that every suit of law should be entertained against them; but they, on the other hand, could not bring any suit for any wrong, adultery, or theft; and finally, that they should have neither freedom nor the right of suffrage. A certain person, although not properly, yet with a brave soul, tore down this edict and cut it up, saying in derision: 'These are the tri-

umphs of Goths and Sarmatians." Having been brought to judgment, he was not only tortured, but was burnt in the legal manner, and with admirable patience he was consumed to ashes." 172

Worthy of note at this point is the fact that the men who destroyed the church searched for an image of God. To their way of thinking, worship was always connected with an idol, a picture, or a bust. Strange, then, to them was this lack of discovery of an image of the Christian's God.

The proclamation of the First Edict of Persecution on the day following the destruction of the Church at Nicomedia did more than cause the shedding of blood. It declared to the Christians the procedure which was to be followed in the attack upon them. The very contents of the Edict revealed a new approach in dealing with the Christians. Although the exact text of this edict which inaugurated the persecution cannot be quoted, the main provisions can be summarized with some degree of certainty. Of all the sources which discuss this edict, Mason appears to have arrived at the best summary, which is herewith presented:

"I. All Churches were to be instantly levelled with their foundations. II. All copies of the Sacred Books were to be committed to the flames. III. (1) All Christian men who held any official position, were (not only to be stripped of their dignities, but) to be reduced to the condition of those who had no civil rights whatever; - to whom consequently torture (illegal for citizens) might be applied; - who might be sued at law, assaulted, plundered, have their wives defiled, without the barest possibility of defence or redress. (2) All Christian men who were not state officers, but lived quietly at home in households of their own, and all who were free servants either in the palace, or in other great houses, were to lose (not only, like the former class, all their rights as citizens, but) even the innate right of freedom itself, and to submit without a murmur to the dictates of a slave-owner." 173

172. Ayer, op. cit., pp. 259-261.

173. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, pp. 103-104.

Concerning this First Edict, Heander makes a noteworthy observation:

"There was something novel in the undertaking to deprive the Christians of their religious writings. It differed from the mode of proceeding in the former persecutions, when it was hoped to suppress the sect by removing away their teachers and guides. The importance of these documents, as a means of preserving and propagating the Christian faith, must now have been understood. And there can be no doubt that the destruction of every copy of the Bible, had such a thing been possible, would have proved more effectual than the removal of those living witnesses of the faith, whose example served only to call forth a still greater number to supply their place. On the other hand, could the plan have been carried out, to destroy every existing copy of the Scriptures, the very source would have been cut off, from which true Christianity and the life of the Church was ever freshly springing with unconquerable vigor." 174

Other sources make similar comments concerning this recognition of the importance of the Scriptures to the life of the Church; one source even suggests that the First Edict was composed under the influence of some learned pagans who were aware of this importance too. 175

Even after the publication of the First Edict "giving orders for a persecution such as no former emperor had conceived", 176 its appearance throughout the provinces came about only gradually. This is particularly interesting because it would give weight to the opinion of many that Diocletian, even after the outbreak of hostility, was both hesitant and fearful. It appears that there are numerous reasons for the delay in the distribution of this First Edict. "In the capital of Thrace, near as it was to Nicomedia, the proconsul, whose wife was a Christian, did not make it known until Epiphany of the following year. In Africa and

174. Heander, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

175. cf. E. De Pressense, *The Early Years of Christianity*, Vol. 2, pp. 207-208; Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 169; and Mason, *Persecution of Diocletian*, p. 105 ff.

176. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

Numidia it was posted in the months of May or June. It reached Caesarea, where Eusebius lived, in the end of March; 'when' as we are told with singular pathos, 'the day of our Savior's Passion was just drawing on.' At Alexandria, if we may unravel the confusion of the dates in the Chronicle, the sickening news arrived precisely to mar the blessed joy of Easter morning.¹⁷⁷

Two palace fires ushered in consequences in which many met death. Galerius wasn't satisfied, according to Lactantius, with the First Edict, and plotted how he might still convince Diocletian to employ excessive cruelty in persecuting. The Caesar resorted to hiring agents to fire the palace and then blamed the Christians, in the opinion of Lactantius.¹⁷⁸

The results were dreadful. Almost no one escaped the fury of the Senior Augustus as he sought to determine the cause of such a happening, forgetting his determination to refrain from bloodshed. Galerius, after the second fire, left the city with much show, lest he be burned alive.¹⁷⁹ "Diocletian went to work in earnest with the Christians around him."

"The whole of the palace suffered in consequence. His wife and daughter were forced to sacrifice; Adauctus, the head of the fiscal administration; the eunuchs in favour, Peter, Dorotheus, and Gorgonius; the bishop of Nicomedia, Anthimus; priests, deacons, Christians of every age, even women, were burnt or drowned wholesale. Thus was expiated the crime, clearly a faked one, of having set fire to the sacred palace and attempted to destroy two emperors at once."¹⁸⁰

177. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, pp. 139-140.

178. Ayer, op. cit., pp. 260-261.

179. Mason, Historic Martyrs, p. 221.

180. Duchesne, op. cit., p. 11.

The fact remains that the real cause of the fires remains an unsolved mystery to this very day.

It can be noted here, however, as Crevier observes, that after the fire Diocletian's actions may have given proof to the Christianity of his wife and daughter. Crevier writes:

"It was also then that he compelled, to use Lactantius' words, his wife *Prisca*, and his daughter *Valeria*, to sacrifice to idols. If this be true, if compulsion was really used with them, it is a proof that they were Christians, or at least well inclined to favor Christianity, and that they had been instructed in it to a certain degree." 181

The rising of *Eugenius* at Antioch in Syria soon came to the attention of Diocletian and became an added factor in disturbing the Emperor's peace of mind. Since many of the soldiers dredging the entrance to the harbor were Christians, it was hastily concluded that this was a conspiracy against the Emperor. Reports that there were likewise revolts in Armenia and Cappadocia, and that they were instigated by Christians, caused even more alarm. "As in former times of persecution, every public disaster was ascribed to the anger of the gods against their in-
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pious deniers"; and the danger to the throne that could accompany these revolts in the East led to the Second Edict.

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"The Church must be deprived of its leaders." This was the underlying principle in issuing this new edict, which appeared so soon after the first one. The imprisonment of all the Christian clergy was ordered,

181. Crevier, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
182. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
183. Baynes, *op. cit.*, p. 666.

and as Eusebius informs the reader,¹⁸⁴ "an unnumbered host was shut up in every place and on every hand prisons built long ago for murderers and violators of tombs were now filled with bishops and elders and deacons, with readers and exorcists, so that no longer was any space left in them for condemned criminals." (This Second Edict was issued in March, 303.)

It would seem that there was indeed a definite purpose in Diocletian's ordering the leaders of the Church to be imprisoned. "Christian hopes of rebellion," writes Mason,¹⁸⁵ "would be crushed by so tremendous an exhibition of imperial power; while Christian aspirations after martyrdom would be cooled by the positive refusal of gratification."

The occasion of Diocletian's visit to Rome in the fall of 303 gave the Emperor opportunity to continue a customary practice of granting liberty to many of those in prison. He had come to Rome to celebrate his Vicennalia, the twentieth anniversary of his reign, with the problem of the imprisoned Christian clergy still unsolved. But not long after arriving in Rome, on December 21, 303, to be exact, he issued an edict which he thought would become an acceptable solution, and which history has named the Third Edict. It was an edict containing a condition. The clergy would be set at liberty, if they would sacrifice to the Roman gods. The use of force, also, was urged, and the employment of tortures of vicious degree now became common. "Every effort was made to enforce the order: 'For in one case a man's hands would be held and he

184. Ibid., p. 667.

185. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 137.

would be dragged to the altar; the foul and unholy sacrifice would be thrust into his right hand and then he would be released as though he had sacrificed. Another might never even touch the sacrifice, but when others declared that he had sacrificed, he would go away in silence. Yet another was lifted up half dead, and was thrown down as though he were already a corpse; they freed him from his fetters and counted him amongst those who had sacrificed. While another was shouting and protesting that he would not yield, he was struck on the mouth and silenced by a number of attendants appointed for the purpose; finally he was violently thrust out of prison, even though he had not sacrificed. So anxious were they by any and every means to seem to have gained their ends.-(Eusebius). Thus at length the prisons were emptied."

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Mason's remarks on the Third Edict are of note, and are here quoted in part:

"On the day of the winter solstice, the edict of the Vicennalia went forth as usual, commanding all the prison doors to be thrown open, and the malefactors released. But the amnesty was not so full and free as at other times; for by the action of the Second anti-Christian Edict, instead of the murderers and grave-thieves who usually listened to the welcome proclamation, the dungeons were choked with Bishops and Priests, Deacons, and Subdeacons, Readers and Exorcists. Such criminals were not to be let off so easily. Irritated as they might well be by their rigorous confinement, they might set themselves immediately at the head of the Christian conspiracy which a few months back had looked so formidable. A little note (which we call the Third Edict, because to Christian eyes it has worn the important aspect of an act of

persecution) was appended to the amnesty, to say that it applied even to these Clergymen, provided they would sacrifice: and that if they needed some encouragement to take advantage of it, any kind of torture might be thrown into the scale of freedom." 187

The Fourth Edict, issued in April, 304, extended the provisions of the Third Edict to include all the Christians. Every man, woman, and child was ordered to sacrifice on penalty of death. Truly this was a bloody edict.

Determining the author of this new edict brings to light that two men are credited with having it published. The fact that Diocletian was ill just prior to the issuance of this edict and possibly still recuperating is cited as the reason he couldn't possibly have written it. Baynes and Mosheim contend that it was the work of Galerius, while Schaff, Mason, and Gwatkin name Maximian as the author. The writer presents the views of these five sources for the reader's consideration and refers the reader to the text of each source for further investigation.

Baynes: "During the incapacity of the Augustus, Galerius seized the opportunity; he issued the bloody fourth edict commanding all-men, women, and children-to sacrifice and make libation on penalty of death." 188

Mosheim: "In the second year of the persecution, A.D. 304, Diocletian published a fourth edict, at the instigation of his son-in-law and the other enemies of the Christians." 189

Schaff: "Maximian issued the fourth, the worst of all, April, 30, 304." 190

Mason: "Three or four months later, in March or April 304, when Diocletian was incapacitated by illness from taking part in the work of government, his colleague

187. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, pp. 206-207.

188. Baynes, op. cit., pp. 667-668.

189. Mosheim, op. cit., p. 209.

190. Schaff, op. cit., p. 66.

Maximian, put forth an edict that all Christians, wherever found were to be compelled to sacrifice in public, or upon refusal die." 191

Gwatkin, after stating Maximian issued this Fourth Edict, continues:

"Diocletian aimed skilful blows at the churches, the books, and the clergy; Maximian's only idea was to force on every private Christian the choice between apostasy and death."¹⁹²

With the double abdication of Diocletian and Maximian in 305 Christians experienced new trends in the persecution. In the West the hostility gradually subsided, but in the East there was a renewal of activity and a virtual reign of terror. Maximin Daza had been appointed Caesar by Galerius, and it is under his direction that the persecution in the East grew worse. A Fifth Edict was issued, and it commanded "that all males with their wives and servants, and even their children, should sacrifice and actually taste the accursed offerings, and that all provisions in the markets should be sprinkled with sacrificial wine."¹⁹³

As to dating the Fifth Edict there seems to be a problem and all that one can conclude is that it appeared in the first years just after the abdication of Diocletian. Schaff gives the autumn of 308 as the date of its publication and Baynes places it early in 309, with both sources giving the same provisions stated in the edict which history calls the Fifth Edict.¹⁹⁴

Still another problem arises when the Fifth Edict is considered. Gwatkin mentions a fifth edict, also, but the contents of it are at

191. Mason, Historic Martyrs, p. 223.

192. Gwatkin, op. cit., pp. 336-337.

193. Schaff, op. cit., p. 68

194. cf. Schaff, op. cit., p. 68 and Baynes, op. cit., p. 671. On p. 669 in Cambridge reference is made to a new edict of Maximian but it would appear that this is a restatement of the Fourth Edict of 304.

variance with what has just been mentioned in the preceding paragraphs. Writing concerning the decline of the persecution in general immediately after the abdication and the reaction of Maximin Daza to this situation, Gwatkin presents the following:

"So a fifth edict commanded that the Christians should have the left foot disabled and the right eye cut out and its socket seared, and then be sent to slavery in the mines, where further cruelty could be used without attracting too much attention." 195

At any rate, the Fifth Edict brought with it dreadful consequences, especially since its provisions were of a decisive and bitter nature. In commenting on the Fifth Edict, the historian Schaff, remarks:

"This monstrous law introduced a reign of terror for two years, and left the Christians no alternative but apostasy or starvation. All the pains, which iron and steel, fire and sword, rack and cross, wild beasts and beastly men could inflict, were employed to gain the useless end." 196

The year 311 A.D. saw the unexpected happen. Galerius, suffering from a horrible illness, issued an edict which was published on the thirtieth of April.¹⁹⁷ "It is known as the 'Edict of Three Emperors', as it was issued from Nicomedia in the name of Galerius, Constantine, and Licinius."¹⁹⁸ Shortly after its proclamation Galerius died, and Maximin Daza waged a revival of the persecution and inaugurated a program of pagan restoration which continued until his death in 313. Nevertheless, "This edict virtually closes the period of persecution in the

195. Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 315.
196. Schaff, op. cit., p. 68.
197. Baynes, op. cit., p. 671.
198. Ayer, op. cit., p. 262.

Roman Empire."

So that the reader may be enabled to understand the opinions concerning the Edict of Toleration of 311 which will be presented, the text of this edict, as found in Eusebius, is here included:

"Amongst our other measures, which we are always making for the use and profit of the commonwealth, we have hitherto endeavored to bring all things into conformity with the ancient laws and public order of the Romans, and to bring it about also that the Christians, who have abandoned the religion of their ancestors, should return to sound reason. For in some way such wilfulness has seized the Christians and such folly possessed them that they do not follow those constitutions of the ancients, which peradventure their own ancestors first, established, but entirely according to their own judgment and as it pleased they were making such laws for themselves as they would observe, and in different places were assembling various sorts of people. In short, when our command was issued that they were to betake themselves to the institutions of the ancients, many of them were subdued by danger, many also were ruined. Yet when great numbers of them held to their determination, and we saw that they neither gave worship and due reverence to the gods nor yet regarded the God of the Christians, we therefore, mindful of our most mild clemency and of the unbroken custom whereby we are accustomed to grant pardon to all men, have thought that in this case also speediest indulgence ought to be granted to them, that the Christians might exist again and might establish their gatherings, yet so that they do nothing contrary to good order. By another letter we shall signify to magistrates how they are to proceed. Wherefore, in accordance with this our indulgence, they ought to pray their God for our good estate, for that of the commonwealth, and for their own, that the commonwealth may endure on every side unharmed and that they may be able to live securely in their own homes." 200

"The edict of toleration," writes Schaff, "was an involuntary and irresistible concession of the incurable impotence of heathenism and

199. Schaff, op. cit., p. 72.

200. Ayer, op. cit., pp. 262-263.

the indestructible power of Christianity. It left but a step to the downfall of one and the supremacy of the other in the empire of the
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Caesars."

Milman offers the following comments:

"Whether this edict was dictated by wisdom, or by remorse, or by superstitious terror; whether it was the act of a statesman, convinced by experience of the impolicy, or even the injustice, of his sanguinary acts; whether, in the agonies of his excruciating disease, his conscience was harassed by the thought of his tortured victims; or, having vainly solicited the assistance of his own deities, he would desperately endeavor to propitiate the favor, or, at least, allay the wrath of the Christians' God, - the whole Roman world was witness to the public and humiliating acknowledgment of defeat exhorted from the dying emperor." 202

The tone of the edict proper is far from repentant. The persecution had been well meant. The fact was that it had failed in its purpose. Perhaps Mason's thoughts on the Edict of Toleration of 311 will help in giving the reader a better understanding of the implications of its contents. Speaking of the edict Mason offers:

"In it a few days before he expired he restored Christianity to its privileges: but the restoration is couched in language treacherous, contradictory, and sour with the most virulent hatred. Galerius is full of remorse, and full of terror. He believed in our God, in the same way as the Christians believed in his. His tortures seem to him to be the vengeance of Christ whose disciples he had wronged; but he lays the blame upon the Christians, because they had forsaken Christ. The dying Emperor shows no penitence, makes no confession, except of his impotence. He wishes to dupe and outwit the angry Christ, by pretending to be not a persecutor but a Reformer. With a curse, he dashes his edict of toleration in the Church's face, and hopes superstitiously that it will win him an indemnity." 203

201. Schaff, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 11.

202. Milman, op. cit., p. 231.

203. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, p. 299.

It is not to be forgotten that the edict of 311 makes no provision for the restitution of church property taken during the persecution. Also, it is to be remembered that the request that the Christians pray to their God for the emperors might be an indication of Galerius' superstitious mind.

One may wonder why Maximin Daza did not also sign this edict. As far as can be determined, his hatred of the Christians was an important factor for his failure to add his name to a proclamation for toleration. Only Mason, of all the sources considered, presents a comment on this subject. His view is: "Maximin refused to set his seal to Galerius' edict. He found it the easier to refuse, because his uncle's immediate death released him from the fear of having to give account of his independence. Hating the Church as he did, he would not pledge himself by formal enactment to allow her freedom and justice."²⁰⁴ Thus it was that Maximin continued to persecute and attempted to rebuild the pagan church and system until his death in 313 and the appearance of a far better edict of toleration, the Edict of Milan.

As has already been shown earlier in this chapter in considering the causes and the outbreak of the great persecution during the reign of Diocletian, the role of Diocletian was not as prominent as one may be led to believe. For one thing, Diocletian was a man of study and wanted to stress leniency in dealing with the Christians. Because of this factor²⁰⁵ Gibbon believes that Diocletian permitted the persecution. His person-

204. Ibid., p. 309.

205. Gibbon, op. cit., Vol. 2, Chap. XVI, p. 61.

al distaste for bloodshed and his desire for a humane treatment of the Christians, which he manifested at the time of deciding to persecute, also figure into the picture. "It was Diocletian's express wish that in extirpating Christianity no blood be shed. He knew what happened in earlier persecutions. 'As a rule,' he said, 'the Christians are only too happy to die.' His own repression of Christianity was to be conducted on milder principles."

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Although he himself was a follower of the Roman deities, it would seem that Diocletian was wise enough to contemplate the possibilities of a mutual existence of the two systems, according to some. "The gods of paganism had not been, as was the Semitic Jehovah, jealous deities; there was room in the working out of his task for the collaboration of the worshippers of the Christian God. Statesmanship could hardly come to any other conclusion."

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In addition to these thoughts, the reader is asked to keep in mind that even though history ascribes this last great persecution to Diocletian, what has already been mentioned concerning the parts played by Galerius and Maximin Daza give opportunity for consideration of the possibility that the roles they played were more prominent, more determined, and more disastrous to the Church.

Galerius was a man of ruthless character, and as Caesar and as Augustus he showed no pity for age or sex. When Constantius was Caesar Christians were treated leniently by him and as Augustus the policy of

206. Mason, Historic Martyrs, p. 220.

207. Baynes, op. cit., p. 661.

this man became even more commendable. "The persecutions against the Christians ceased absolutely in the countries which obeyed him; and his just example was followed by Severus, who restored peace to the churches of Italy and Africa." ²⁰⁸ "It was quite otherwise in Illyricum, in Thrace, Asia-Minor, and the Orient, where nothing was opposed to the will of Galerius and of Maximin, his creature. In these men natural ferocity was at the service of religious conviction: Galerius was devout, Maximin a fanatic. The latter combined an unbridled, brutal, and despotic licentiousness with an extraordinary zeal for the worship of the gods." ²⁰⁹

The devotion of Galerius to the pagan system may in itself be considered as reason enough why that personage assumed a great role in the persecution. The pagan leaders needed a powerful leader to carry out their ideas of preventing their defeat by the Christians. "Such a one they found in Dioclesian's son-in-law, the Caesar, Gaius Galerius Maximian. This prince had raised himself from obscurity by his warlike talents. Educated in the blind superstitions of paganism, he was devoted to his religion; and moreover made great account of sacrifices and divinations." ²¹⁰

Maximin Daza, called by Meander; "the bitterest enemy of Christianity and the Christians;" ²¹¹ likewise earned for himself a leading role in the persecution. The Eastern provinces were the scenes of his brutality. A man "inclined by native disposition to serve as a tool to the priests;" ²¹² and at the same time of a rough, violent, and despotic temper"; such

208. Crevier, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

209. Duchesne, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

210. Meander, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 145.

211. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 2.

212. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 2.

as Maximin was, could hardly be expected to repress his own desire for annihilating the Christians. That is why the student investigating this period can discern a definite policy in Maximin's persecuting, especially in the last persecution he conducted. There were three main underlying principles: an organized repression by municipal authorities, a re-vamping of the set-up of heathenism, and the establishment of education on a purely heathen foundation.

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From the time of the publication of the First Edict all through the persecution the role of the Christians in the persecution was one of varying degree. "Though they generally obeyed within the limits of conscience and submitted beyond them, deep resentment was universal, intemperate language common, fierce defiance not rare." Many were the evidences of Christian heroism, but just as noticeable were the defections, as had been the case in previous persecutions. In general, it can be said there were four courses of action taken by the Christians: some remained loyal to the faith and perished, others became fanatics and courted death, another portion resorted to underhanded tactics to escape harm, and still others gave up their God and submitted.

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The testimony of the sources for this study quickly broaden one's view, and various comments and findings are mentioned here to substantiate the fact that all Christians did not react in like manner.

Hosheim mentions that many died from stubbornness in refusing to give up their sacred books, and that many others gave in, with death in

213. Gwatkin, op. cit., pp. 351-352.
214. Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 334.

view, and were branded as Traditors. ²¹⁵ Kurtz remarks that "the number of the Lapsi, though still considerable, was in proportion very much less than under the Decian persecution." ²¹⁶ Mentioning the tortures and sufferings endured by the Christians, Milman gives us the following: "Those who submitted performed the hated ceremony with visible reluctance, with trembling hand, averted countenance, and deep remorse of heart; those who resisted to death were animated by the presence of multitudes, who, ²¹⁷ if they dared not applaud, could scarcely conceal their admiration." The historian Schaff offers these words: "In this as in former persecutions, the number of apostates who preferred the earthly life to the heavenly, was very great. To these was now added also the new class of the traditores who delivered the holy Scriptures to the heathen authorities to be burned." ²¹⁸ "Others - and examples of this class we find particularly in North Africa, where a certain leaning to enthusiasm belonged to the native temperament of the people - challenged the pagan magistrates to do their office, and courted martyrdom with a fanatic zeal," writes Meander. ²¹⁹ That there were even some of the clergy that did not remain steadfast is brought out by Duchesne, when he says: "Moreover, the bishops and clergy often showed themselves accommodating and gave up their holy books, thinking, doubtless, that it would be easy later on to obtain new copies." ²²⁰ This same author also speaks of those who sought death. "Excited enthusiasts," he adds, "rushed to

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215. Mosheim, *op. cit.*, p. 208.
216. Kurtz, *Church History*, Vol. 1, p. 84.
217. Milman, *op. cit.*, p. 229.
218. Schaff, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 69.
219. Meander, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 151.
220. Duchesne, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

martyrdom, denounced themselves, made an uproar before the tribunals, and
insulted the police.²²¹

And again Duchesne gives a reaction of the
Christians. "There were also many apostates," he says, "most of them in
a great hurry to do whatever they were told to do, in order to escape
from danger; others resisting at first, and then weakening, over come by
the horror of the dungeons and the anguish of the torture."²²²

The large
group who used fraudulent methods to escape harm is also referred to by
Duchesne, who describes them as follows: "Many deceived the police, sent
their slaves or their pagan friends to sacrifice in their stead, and thus
obtained their certificate of sacrifice. Others followed a simpler method
still, and bought this certificate, if they could find anyone disposed to
sell it to them."²²³

Some, when the Bible-hunting soldiers would enter
their homes, substituted other books for their Scriptures. "Instead of
the copies of the Holy Scriptures, they surrendered the manuscripts of
some heretical books, and thus tried to satisfy at once their conscience
and their cowardice."²²⁴ "And it must never be forgotten that Christians
were at times provocative. When Hierocles in Egypt had condemned a Christ-
ian virgin to confinement in a brothel, Aedesius knocked him down and con-
tinued beating him as he lay on the ground."²²⁵

The severity varied throughout the Empire, and the record of Eusebius,
an eye-witness to many of the events that transpired, is perhaps the best
account which can portray to the reader the woes and sufferings which the

221. Ibid., p. 18.

222. Ibid.,

223. Ibid., p. 19.

224. De Pressense, op. cit., p. 209.

225. Baynes, op. cit., p. 676.

Christians experienced and an understanding of why many of them reacted the way they did. Two extractions dealing with the treatment accorded those of the Faith are noted at this point. Writing of the various ways in which Christian men and women suffered, Eusebius relates:

Why need we mention the rest by name, or number the multitude of the men, or picture the various sufferings of the admirable martyrs of Christ? Some of them were slain with the axe, as in Arabia. The limbs of some were broken, as in Cappadocia. Some, raised on high by the feet, with their heads down, while a gentle fire burned beneath them, were suffocated by the smoke which arose from the burning wood, as was done in Mesopotamia. Others were mutilated by cutting off their noses and ears and hands, and cutting to pieces the other members and parts of their bodies, as in Alexandria. Why need we revive the recollection of those in Antioch who were roasted on grates, not so as to kill them, but so as to subject them to a lingering punishment? Or of others who preferred to thrust their right hand into the fire rather than touch the impious sacrifice? Some, shrinking from the trial, rather than be taken and fall into the hands of their enemies, threw themselves from lofty houses, considering death preferable to the cruelty of the impious. In Pontus, others endured sufferings horrible to hear. Their fingers were pincered with sharp reeds under their nails. Melted lead, bubbling and boiling with the heat, was poured down the backs of others, and they were roasted in the most sensitive parts of the body. Others endured on their breasts and privy members shameful and unmentionable torments, which the noble and law-observing judges, to show their severity, devised, as more honorable manifestations of wisdom. And new tortures were continually invented, as if they were endeavoring, by surpassing one another, to gain prizes in a contest. 226

And again, speaking of the sufferings of those in Thebais, Eusebius reports:

These, instead of hooks, had their bodies scraped with shells, and were mangled in this way until they died. Women tied by one foot, and then raised on high in the

226. Eusebius, "The Church History of Eusebius" in A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Vol. 1, Hace and Schaff, ed., pp. 332-333.

air by certain machines, with their naked bodies and wholly uncovered, presented this most foul, cruel, and inhuman spectacle to all beholders; others again perished, bound to trees and branches. For, drawing the stoutest of the branches together by machines for this purpose, and binding the limbs of the martyrs to each of these, they then let loose the boughs to resume their natural position, designing thus to produce a violent action, to tear asunder the limbs of those they thus treated. And all these things were doing not only for a few days, or some time, but for a series of whole years." 227

Once an entire town was destroyed, as Eusebius informs us:

"Indeed the armed soldiery surrounded a certain Christian town in Phrygia, together with the garrison, and hurling fire into it, burnt them, together with women and children, calling upon Christ the God of all. And this, because all the inhabitants of this town, even the very governor and magistrate with all the men of rank, and the whole people, confessed themselves Christians and would not obey, in any degree, those that commanded them to offer sacrifice." 228

Many martyrs died in this great persecution, but the number is unknown. The martyrdom of a palace domestic, described in Eusebius, is of special interest since it helps the reader to see just how great was the suffering endured by many an individual Christian.

"He was led into the middle of the aforesaid city, before those emperors already mentioned. He was then commanded to sacrifice, but as he refused, he was ordered to be stripped, and lifted on high, and to be scourged with rods over his whole body, until he should be subdued in his resolution, and forced to do what he was commanded. But as he was unmovable amid all these sufferings, his bones already appearing bared of the flesh, they mixed vinegar with salt, and poured it upon the mangled parts of the body. But as he bore these tortures, a gridiron and fire was produced, and the remnants of his body, like pieces of meat for roasting and eating, were placed in the fire, not at once, so that he might expire soon, but taken little by little, whilst his torturers were not permitted to let him alone,

227. Gruse, *op. cit.*, pp. 310-311

228. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

unless after these sufferings he breathed his last before they had completed their task. He, however, persevered in his purpose, and gave up his life, victorious in the midst of his tortures. Such was the martyrdom of one of the imperial domestics, worthy in reality of his name, for he was called Peter." 229

Most certainly the role of the Christian in the persecution is either one of faith and courage, or of fear and shame. Before going on to the next point in our study it is perhaps of interest to the reader to know that Arthur Mason, who made considerable study of this period and of the persecution, relates in some detail the treatment and deaths of many martyrs.
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"The inert resistance of the general mass wearied out the vexatious and harassing measures of the government."²³¹ At the time of the First Edict there was a new type of magistrate in office to execute the order, a determined individual, filled with greed and hatred and the desire for bloodshed. But the scene changed. By the time the Fourth Edict appeared the magistrates and governors carrying out the decrees were seemingly less interested. "Some only sent the Christians into banishment, when the attempt to make them offer sacrifices failed."²³² "There were even some who, when the term of their office had expired, boasted of not having put a single Christian to death. In the matter of the pagan actions required, the authorities were very easily satisfied; sometimes they registered people against their will as having complied with the law."²³³ By the time the Edict of Toleration was issued in 311, not only many Christ-

229. *Ibid.*, p. 306.

230. Compare Mason, *Persecution of Diocletian*, pp. 154-8, 159-166, 172-3, 175 ff., 188, 190-201, 223-25, 225-27, 229-34, 248-50, 259-71.

231. Hilman, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

232. Mosheim, *op. cit.*, p. 210, note 11.

233. Duchesne, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

ians had played a strange role in the persecutions, but numerous government officials likewise.

The immediate consequences of the persecutions were soon felt by both the State and the Church. The State had come to realize that the persecution was a failure and had granted toleration; now it must undertake the task of establishing harmony between itself and this organization which had shown itself to be based upon a solid foundation, the Christian Church. The Church had been challenged and had emerged victorious; now it must deal with the problems within its own household.

All kinds of fictitious stories of horrible treatment arose, the use of relics increased, legends were given much consideration, and the selection of a local patron martyr was not uncommon. ²³⁴

"Many Christians who had been driven by the persecution of Diocletian out of Egypt, Lybia, and Syria, took refuge with the neighboring barbarian tribes, and there enjoyed that freedom in the worship of God which they could not find in the Roman empire." ²³⁵ This fact called for the Church's immediate attention, since its spread into new fields brought with it many mission opportunities and problems of organization.

Then, too, there was the problem of strengthening the internal organization of the Church. Imprisonment of the clergy had caused confusion. The people were like sheep without a shepherd. Discipline was sorely lacking due to enforced absence of the bishops. Difference of opinion prevailed with regard to what action should be taken with the "traitors"

234. Lecky, op. cit., p. 494ff.

235. Neander, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 124.

and the *Legsi*.

Many at the time of the persecution had honestly earned the title of traitors; "so too, there were many accused of this, against whom the accusation could by no means be proved. Such a charge might easily be converted into a weapon for the gratification of personal malice: the propensity to mistake inferences for facts rendered it no difficult matter to prove the accusations."²³⁶ There were two parties which took a stand on the action of the Christians. They were discretely opposed to each other in their argumentation. The one favored not giving honor or recognition to the fanatic martyrs. The leader of this group was Mensurius of Carthage. The other group, headed by Secundus, who was bishop in Mauritania, felt that those whom Mensurius called fanatic martyrs did deserve honor and credit. Such divisions of opinion in this and other matters led directly into the famous Donatist and Keltian schisms.²³⁷ What to do with those who had fallen away from the Church during the persecution was indeed an immediate consequence of major importance after the cessation of hostility in the last great persecution.

With Constantine's ascent to the throne came the order for the restoration of Church property.²³⁸ The State began to change its attitude toward the Christian religion. For as Spence-Jones writes: "The extent of this last onslaught, the awful severity of its edicts, the fearful thoroughness with which these edicts were carried out, the numbers, the

236. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

237. *Ibid.*, p. 216 ff.

238. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

constancy and brave patience of the confessors, went home to the hearts of the indifferent; it affected then the enemies of the church, and brought about a complete revulsion of feeling towards the once hated and despised sect."²³⁹

There are three main topics connected with the persecution which cause scholars to advance opinions. They are the number of martyrs that was realized in this persecution, the real author of this final purge, and the reliability of the two main primary sources, Eusebius and Lactantius.

In general, the total number of those who perished in the persecution, whether wilfully or unwilfully, cannot be determined. "One cannot undertake to give any fair idea of the martyrs of even of the tortures of that time," writes Waterman.²⁴⁰ ^{Baynes} Kasser's that "It is idle to attempt to estimate the number of those who gave their lives for the faith."²⁴¹ Only Gibbon proposes a plan whereby the number can be estimated and determined.

"... it is reasonable to believe that the country which had given birth to Christianity produced at least the sixteenth part of the martyrs who suffered death within the dominions of Galerius and Maximian; the whole might consequently amount to about fifteen hundred, a number which, if it is equally divided between the ten years of the persecution, will allow an annual consumption of one and hundred fifty martyrs. Alloting the same proportion to the provinces of Italy, Africa, and perhaps Spain, where, at the end of two or three years, the rigor of the penal laws was either suspended or abolished, the multitude of Christians in the Roman empire, on whom a capital punishment was inflicted by a judicial sentence, will be reduced to somewhat less than two thousand persons."²⁴²

²³⁹. Spence-Jones, op. cit., p. 151.

²⁴⁰. Inachus Katerman, The Post Apostolic Age, in Ten Epochs of Church History, Vol. 2, John Fulton, ed., p. 144.

²⁴¹. Baynes, op. cit., p. 674.

²⁴². Gibbon, op. cit., Vol. 2, Chap. XVI, p. 84.

Commenting on this, E. G. Sihler says: "Edward Gibbon has written about the persecution with curious bias. As the world does not generally examine his and our sources, but trusts and reads and quotes him instead, we must not, as simple students of the events even, lose sight of the fact that it must have been his design here to disparage the Christians and their leaders."^{243.}

As for the author of the persecution Diocletian is most generally named. But there is room to entertain the suggestion that Galerius was, after all, the real author, and that the accounts of history have simply failed to divorce the name of Diocletian from the persecution which began during his reign. What has already been written in these pages it is hoped will help the reader in deciding for himself who the real author was. The failure to mention, however, the arguments of Mason, would be a failure to offer a convincing defense of Diocletian and his part in the persecution. Mason writes:

"May, as we have already seen, the author of the "Deaths of the Persecutors" is interested to paint Diocletian as odious in his personal character, and as hostile to the Church as he can possibly make him. He records most grudgingly the old Emperor's successive resistances - how he is torn along from point to point, grasping at everything in the way that may strengthen his position; and at last with cruel sagacity he ascribes his conduct to that most repulsive trait which his enemies affected to find in his character, of using other men's vices to conceal his own. If then in this case we take off all that is due to Lactantius' malevolent bias, we have, as a residuum, the historical fact that the persecution of Diocletian was wrung from him, after a stubborn and protracted resistance, by the violence and arguments of Galerius . . . Eusebius, who at the time when his eighth book was written had no special sources of information, but represents the current opinion of the

243. E. G. Sihler, From Augustus to Augustine, p. 188

day, is perfectly aware that Galerius was present at Nicomedia, at the time of the outbreak of the persecution. Again and again the Bishop of Caesarea ascribes unreservedly the origin of the persecution to Galerius. His testimony is all the more valuable because he does not expatiate upon the fact, but records it simply as being what everyone knew already . . . And though we can set little historical value on the fact that Ruffinus translates him without modifying, it is more important to notice that as late as the middle of the eleventh century, when the name of Diocletian was as indissolubly connected with the persecution as it is now, Cefrenus, though he fancies that Diocletian's persecution had been raging for a long while past, introduces an entirely new contest, in the year 303, under the auspices of Galerius. And this is positively all the evidence that we can glean from the original authorities. There is not a single witness in all antiquity who can be summoned to prove that the war against the Christians originated with the Great Augustus.²⁴⁴

Eusebius and Lactantius were contemporaries of Diocletian and because of this, their accounts are of some value. However, as can be detected in the above quotation, each of these men betray a definite attitude. There is one source which can be said to express the general opinion of most historians: Eusebius and Lactantius center their material in the ecclesiastical field and are bitter because of the persecution. Eusebius is the fairer of the two, while Lactantius puts the worst construction on all that Diocletian did.²⁴⁵

244. Mason, Persecution of Diocletian, pp. 64-68.
245. Gwatkin, op. cit., p. 325.

V. Conclusion

In view of what has been presented in this thesis, it is not difficult for the reader to perceive that the persecution under Diocletian, his co-regents, and his immediate successors had a great effect upon the three leading participants: the State, the Church, and the individual Christian.

The effect of the persecution on the State was seen in the State's realization that the persecution had been a failure. The organized attempt to crush Christianity had resulted in toleration. Christianity was recognized as a vital association with a unique power capable of crushing and withstanding the united efforts of government to forestall its triumphant march forward. The determination to establish a system affording harmony between the Roman State and the Christian Church for the benefit and welfare of both these organizations now became the objective of succeeding rulers.

The persecution of Diocletian effected the Church in a twofold way. The unity of its component parts and the apparent dissension within its ranks were both brought about as a result of the persecution, and the Church saw the need for strengthening the former, and attending to the problems connected with the latter. The stage was now set for the great Council of Nicea and for the continued advance of the new Faith which had stood up against the onslaught of a pagan world. The realization of its vitality must have given the Church new life and determination, and the

years just following the persecution were to reveal the great impact hostility had made upon the Church in convincing it of its purpose to build upon a firm foundation and in assuring it that the gates of hell could not prevail against it.

Even the individual Christian was effected by the persecution. The edicts which were issued so fast and so maliciously had forced him to make a decision as to where his loyalty should be placed. The individual had been made aware of the importance of his own activity relative to victory or defeat, and there was, in spite of the many defections, a zeal which was both steadfast and praiseworthy. Christians became convinced that their religion was one which was alive and one which had something to offer. The fact that Christianity had defeated what many an individual had thought to be unconquerable did much toward the strengthening of the ties between the individual Christian and his Church.

Before we close our study it is well that we mention once more the salient points which should be remembered in connection with the persecution of Diocletian. The reader is asked to keep in mind that the underlying causes for this last great persecution by the Roman State were numerous and that all of them tended to contribute toward the final purge. Then too, the system of government and the men at the head of that system assume roles in this persecution far greater in relative importance than in former persecutions. This persecution was the result of a gradual movement toward a showdown between heathenism and Christianity, and while it is designated as Diocletian's work, let it be remembered that evidence presented makes it necessary for the student or reader of this thesis to

carefully weigh all sides of the picture before coming to a definite conclusion as to the authorship. Another point to be remembered is that the exact number of those who were martyred or who defected is not known but that the effects of the actions of both these groups reached far out into the Church and the State.

The persecution of Diocletian is indeed an interesting subject to study. One cannot but feel that this attempt to stamp out an organization not limited to a particular locale has many lessons for the Christian of the Twentieth Century. Perhaps it is true that history repeats itself. At any rate, present day leaders in various parts of the world undoubtedly possess the same qualities and characteristics of the men connected with the Diocletian persecution. Just as determined are many organized groups today to rid the world of the Christian religion, and it is hoped that their trend toward hostility can be curbed. The Christian of the Twentieth Century most assuredly can see in this study many parallels between the world in 303 A.D. and the world in 1949 A.D.; it is the same world, it is the same Church, it is the same battle that must be waged. And the Christian Church, as in the days of Diocletian, even today moves on to the final and complete victory.

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