

Philip the Arabian 244-249: Some have suggested that Philip was a secret believer. Whether true or not, the church did enjoy relief from persecution and some privileges in his time.

Decius Trajan 249-251: The release from persecution ended with Trajan, the most bitter of Christian persecutors to this time. His particular methods of testing the church come later in these notes but he decimated the African church and sought the open return to the temple worship of the older deities. His was the first consistent effort to eliminate the Christian witness. Rome, Africa, France, etc., all felt the evil of his force.

Valerian 252-259: tended to continue the policies of Trajan although one can only pursue such bitter policies and practices for a lesser period of time.

Gallienus 260-268: here was a softer attitude towards the church and just in the nick of time. The church began to receive judicial benefits in his time although the empire was weakening and a lengthy political interregnum would follow his rule.

Diocletian 284-305: A strict militarist, Diocletian reverted to the practices of the Trajan persecution. He was influenced in this way by Galerius, his authority in Asia Minor. His persecutions were systematic in most of the east and the eastern part of North Africa. His commitment to emperor worship was considerable but by the time of his ascendancy it is estimated that about 1/3 of the total population of the empire professed some form of Christianity. The persecution peaked in 304 and it became apparent that the church could not be eliminated. In 305 Diocletian abdicated the emperorship and retired to the Black Sea regions.

He was responsible for the division of the empire into east/west, north/south segments. He concluded the empire was too big for any single person to rule effectively. In the west his designated leader was Constantius Chlorus and under him Constantine and Maxentius. In the east he ruled himself with supporting leaders in Galerius and Licinius. His ideas may have had a good political inclination but the rivalries that would follow such a plan were enough to destroy it before it got off the ground, so to speak.