

Constantine: General confusion reigned in the Empire following the completion of Diocletian's rule (305-312) but by 312 Licinius had gained control of the east and Constantine the west. Galerius had died, following a relaxation of persecution, and Constantine had followed the sign of the cross (In Hoc Signum, Vincat) and defeated Maxentius at the battle of the Mulvian Bridge outside Rome. In 313 Constantine and Licinius authorized the Edict of Milan...the legalization of Christianity (one of the few dates the student should know) and not only did persecution cease but Christianity became fashionable. In 324 Constantine and Licinius fought it out with Constantine surviving and becoming the sole ruler of the empire until his death in 337. He moved the capitol from Rome to Constantinople (Byzantium) and instituted all sorts of political/economic changes.

III.1.b
Roman
persecutions

Persecutions and Methods

The greatest of all the persecutions of the church were those of Decius Trajan and Diocletian. The basic methods were similar and we can treat them as one unit so long as the student can see the time differential. The procedure was something like this:

Basically the military was mobilized to lead a search for Christians and Christian leaders. The challenge was given to Christians to renew the older pagan worship or die for defiance. The approach was simple:

--efficient leaders were usually killed outright

--followers were forced to recant, often under great torture, or to compromise their profession of faith by offering sacrifice to the Gods.

--many were mutilated, exiled, and vigorously punished to bring about compliance and those who recanted were spared and those who found some compromise solution were generally overlooked. Many were simply killed. The actual outworking was not so simple as this may sound and the impact on the church was large.

First of all, those who recanted were known as lapsed indicating they had fallen from the truth. It was inevitable that when the persecution would end many of these would seek to return to the church when they saw