

C. Details of Period

1. Marcus Aurelius^u (170) During the reign of Marcus Aurelius, Melito writes the "race of the worshipers of God were persecuted as never before."
2. Septimius Severus in 202 decreed a rigid ban on Christianity and instituted a persecution more thorough even than that of Marcus Aurelius. The persecution was continued by his successor Caracalla.
 - a. Fanaticism during this persecution was particularly marked, martyrdom was highly prized, and even sought after: he who appeared before a magistrate and stood up for the faith in face of death was honored as a Confessor. Every leader who strives to impress his thinking upon the people as a whole faces the danger of over-zealous extremists carrying things too far, while the mass of the people are little moved.
 - b. After these persecutions controversy invariably arose concerning the reinstatement of believers who had: (Lapsers)
 - (1) Burned incense to the gods.
 - (2) Purchased certificates saying they had rendered homage to the gods.
 - (3) Sacrificed one of the sacred bks.
3. Alexander Severus (225-235) Severus lifted the ban on Christianity and added a statue of ~~Jesus~~^{Christ} and Christ in his private chapel, since he felt he should seek the good in all religions. *Neo-Platonism*
4. This brief period of peace was succeeded by 3 years of fury under a barbarian usurper. Then followed 14 years of peace.
5. Decius (249-251) An earnest, energetic emperor who felt the Roman state rested on paganism and was therefore threatened by Christianity. He decreed a return to paganism and carried out a most effective persecution aimed particularly at the bishops. In spite of the popular favoring of martyrdom, Cyprian Bishop of Carthage flees, maintaining that one ought not to deliberately seek martyrdom. Cyprian survived to lead the church until Valerian's persecution during which he was martyred. Note that multitudes followed Cyprian to the scaffold and virtually deified him thus indicating the persecutions were not of the intense type practiced by the Inquisition or modern Russia.