

Abstract

This dissertation explores the Latin foundations of Christian humanism through the writings of Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius (ca. 250–325 AD), one of the most influential Christian authors of late antiquity. The study investigates the semantic field and historical development of the concepts *humanitas* and *humanitas christiana*, seeking to reconstruct their anthropological, ethical, aesthetic, and political dimensions within the Christian tradition.

The first chapter establishes the theoretical and methodological framework by defining *humanitas* as an anthropological and civilizational project rooted in Greek *paideia* and *philanthropia*, and later shaped by Cicero as a model of intellectual, moral, and civic formation. This is then contrasted with *humanitas christiana*, interpreted as a Christian reworking of this classical ideal, centered on the dignity, education, and integral development of the human person.

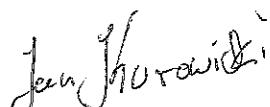
The second chapter presents Lactantius as both a thinker and a writer, highlighting his biography, literary corpus, and intellectual orientation. Particular attention is devoted to the *Divinae institutiones*, the first systematic exposition of Christian philosophy and theology in Latin literature, conceived as an erudite rival to classical monuments. Lactantius is shown as the first Latin Christian humanist, synthesizing rhetorical artistry with Christian doctrine.

The third chapter analyzes the concept of *humanitas* in Lactantius' writings, especially in relation to the categories of *vera sapientia* (true wisdom) and *vera religio* (true religion). His works are read as an attempt to integrate philosophy and religion into a unified vision of human existence, where Christianity emerges as philosophy *par excellence*. The chapter also discusses Lactantius' theory of aesthetics and his literary emulation of Cicero, showing how his Christian humanism anticipates Renaissance ideals.

The fourth chapter addresses the socio-political implications of Lactantius' thought, particularly his historiosophical vision of human history, his close relation to Emperor Constantine, and his reflections on law, justice, and divine order. Central to his political humanism is the idea of *unitas humanitatis*—the unity of humankind grounded in truth, justice, and faith.

The fifth and final chapter traces the reception and *auctoritas* of Lactantius from antiquity through the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. Special emphasis is placed on the fifteenth-century revival of his works and the peculiar veneration of his figure among humanists, culminating in his lasting role as an emblem of Christian humanism.

The study concludes that Lactantius, though often overlooked, occupies a central place in the genealogy of Christian humanism. His synthesis of classical culture and Christian doctrine not only shaped the intellectual landscape of late antiquity but also provided a foundation for later European thought. Far from being a marginal figure, Lactantius stands as a master of words and a pioneer of the Christian humanist tradition, whose relevance extends to modern debates about the nature and dignity of humanity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jen Horwitz".