



Good day Worthy Knights, in this part 107, Lactantius

Wikipedia

**Lucius Caecilius Firmianus signo Lactantius** (c. 250 – c. 325) was an early Christian author who became an advisor to Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, guiding his Christian religious policy in its initial stages of emergence.

The text of the Edict of Milan has been preserved in two different sources. The better-known source is *Church History*, by Eusebius, which was written in the early 320s. However, as Eusebius viewed Licinius as Constantine's political nemesis, he edited Licinius completely out of the text.

The second source, Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors* (*De Mortibus Persecutorum*), written before 315, contains a presumably more accurate version.

### Biography

Lactantius was of Punic or Berber origin, born into a Pagan family. In his early life, he taught rhetoric in his native town, which may have been Cirta in Numidia.

Lactantius had a successful public career at first. At the request of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, he became an official professor of rhetoric in Nicomedia. There, he associated in the imperial circle with the administrator and polemicist Sossianus Hierocles and the pagan philosopher Porphyry. He first met Constantine and Galerius, whom he cast as villain in the persecutions. Having converted to Christianity, he resigned his post before Diocletian's purging of Christians from his immediate staff.

As a Latin *rhetor* in a Greek city, he subsequently lived in poverty and eked out a living by writing until Constantine the Great became his patron. The persecution forced him to leave Nicomedia, perhaps re-locating to North Africa. The Emperor Constantine appointed the elderly Lactantius Latin tutor to his son Crispus in 309-310 who was probably 10-15 years old at the time.

### Writing

Like so many of the early Christian authors, Lactantius depended on classical models. Saint Jerome praised his writing style while faulting his ability as a Christian apologist, saying:

"Lactantius has a flow of eloquence worthy of Tully: would that he had been as ready to teach our doctrines as to pull down those of others!"

Similarly, the early humanists called him the "Christian Cicero". A translator of the *Divine Institutes* wrote: "Lactantius has always held a very high place among the Christian Fathers, not only on account of the subject-matter of his writings, but also on account of the varied erudition, the sweetness of expression, and the grace and elegance of style, by which they are characterized."

He wrote apologetic works explaining Christianity in terms that would be palatable to educated people who still practiced the traditional religions of the Empire. He defended Christian beliefs against the criticisms of Hellenistic philosophers.

Renaissance humanists took a renewed interest in him, more for his elaborately rhetorical Latin style than for his theology. His works were copied in manuscript several times in the 15th century and first printed in 1465 at the Abbey of Subiaco. This edition was the first book printed in Italy to have a date of printing, as well as the first use of a Greek alphabet font anywhere,

### **Prophetic exegesis**

None of the Fathers thus far had been more verbose on the millennial kingdom subject than Lactantius or more particular in describing the times and events preceding and following. He held firmly that the millennium originates with the second advent of Christ and marks the destruction of the wicked, the binding of the devil and the raising of the righteous dead.

Book VII of *The Divine Institutes* indicates a familiarity with Jewish, Christian, Egyptian and Iranian apocalyptic material.

He depicted Jesus reigning with the resurrected righteous on this earth during the seventh thousand years prior to the general judgment. In the end, the devil, having been bound during the thousand years, is loosed; the enslaved nations rebel against the righteous, who hide underground until the hosts, attacking the Holy City, are overwhelmed by fire and brimstone and mutual slaughter, and buried altogether by an earthquake: rather unnecessarily, it would seem, since the wicked are thereupon raised again to be sent into eternal punishment.

Next, God renews the earth, after the punishment of the wicked, and the Lord alone is thenceforth worshiped in the renovated earth.

Lactantius confidently stated that the beginning of the end would be the fall, or breakup, of the Roman Empire. However, this view fell out of favour with the conversion of Constantine and the improved lot of Christians:

"Many Christians felt that any expectation of the downfall of the empire was as disloyal to God as it was to Rome."

Attempts to determine the time of the End were viewed as in contradiction to Acts 1:7: "It is not for you to know the times or seasons that the Father has established by his own authority," and Mark 13:32: "But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."



Mural possibly depicting Lactantius