



**The Profession of the Religious and selections from  
the Falsely-Believed and Forged Donation of  
Constantine (Renaissance and Reformation Texts  
in Translation, 1)**

*Lorenzo Valla*

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*Lorenzo Valla*

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Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457) was a leading humanist scholar and controversial writer of the fifteenth century. Born in Rome he spent part of his early life in other cities in Italy teaching rhetoric. After serving as secretary to the king of Naples, Alfonso V of Aragon, from 1435 to 1448, he eventually returned to his native city where he became apostolic secretary two years before his death. Although his works, all written in Latin, treat a number of linguistic, historical or philosophical issues, his most polemical treatises are those dealing with religious questions. In *The Profession of the Religious* and *The Falsely-Believed and Forged Donation of Constantine*, both dating from around 1440, he advocates an inner kind of spirituality that can be achieved even by the laity and he criticizes the ecclesiastical institutions for their role in exploiting the legend according to which the emperor had allegedly conferred political power on the Pope. These treatises, and especially the well-known *Donation*, aroused considerable interest among the Protestant reformers; they are, moreover, fascinating texts for the modern reader too. Structured as a dialogue and an oration, respectively, they illustrate the various discursive strategies devised by the author as effective means of persuasion.

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