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*The Letters of the young Peter Damian: Rhetoric and Reform  
in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century*

Il linguaggio usato da Pier Damiani (1007-1072) nelle sue lettere giovanili (primo volume dell'edizione Reindel, che copre gli anni 1040-1052) è stato spesso considerato barocco ed eccessivo; in realtà tale autore stava solo usando (e in modo eccellente) gli insegnamenti dell'*ars rhetorica*, elaborando una prosa nella quale parole e significato sono strettamente connessi, al servizio della verità Cristiana e dei primordi della Riforma Gregoriana. L'articolo mostra alcuni esempi dell'abilità letteraria di Pier Damiani, con particolare attenzione alla *Rhetoricae declamationis invecio in episcopum monachos ad saeculum revocantem*.

As the contemporary sources and the legacy of his activities clearly show, the cardinal-bishop Peter Damian (1007-1072/73) is one of the most representative characters in the cultural world of the eleventh century<sup>1</sup>. His fervour in the efforts of the Church Reform is generally well known, as well as his moral stature; at least in the last three decades, his philosophical competencies have also been widely recognized<sup>2</sup>. His one hundred and eighty letters that we still

<sup>1</sup> This article is a revised version of the paper with the same name presented at the International Congress *La lettre dans son environnement* (Madrid, 14-15 January 2015). I am extremely grateful to the promoters of the Congress for the opportunity to talk about Peter Damian in the context of the program EPISTOLA. *La lettre en péninsule Ibérique et dans l'Occident latin. Héritages et transformations d'un genre littéraire (IV<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> siècle)*. This article is strictly related to my previous work «*Omnes dialecticos... decerno*». *Ruolo delle arti liberali e strategie argomentative nelle epistolae del giovane Pier Damiani (1040-1052)*, published in the previous issue of «Schola Salernitana. Annali» (XXIII, 2018): some of the texts discussed there in a philosophical perspective are examined here from a literal-rhetorical point of view. – For general information about Peter Damian, see the recent *Pier Damiani. L'eremita, il teologo, il riformatore*.

<sup>2</sup> For the newest essays on the contribution of Peter Damian to the history of

hold are considered everywhere to be an exceptional testimony of his time, his culture and his personality<sup>3</sup>. But his literary proficiencies and his writing style are generally less appreciated, and his language is sometimes considered too baroque and excessive<sup>4</sup>. This is a too strict judgment for one who is considered to be the best writer of his century. The period around the year 1000 has a particular appreciation for an exaggerate and overburdened writing style that we can also read, for example, in the passionate letters and pamphlets of RATHERIUS OF VERONA (890-974 ca.), bishop of the northern Italian city in the middle of the tenth century<sup>5</sup>. We do not have to judge this embellished manner of expression with our contemporary parameters: these writers use – as well as possible – all the resources that the *ars rhetorica* offers them. From their point of view, the abundance of figures of speech and the complicated structures of their syntax are a surplus value to their prose: there is nothing superfluous and everything is aimed to the amusement of the public and based on an esthetical ideal we no longer possess (in this sense, the perfect model of this literary taste is the *Rhetorimachia* of the Lombard scholar Anselm of Besate, active during the first half of the 11th century<sup>6</sup>). But, of course, there are also some philosophical premises to this literary habit that concern the concept of ‘Rhetoric’.

At the time of Peter Damian, the subject called ‘Rhetoric’ is primarily one of the seven liberal arts, i. e. one of the ways that – in the sense stated by Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and by the African man of learning Martianus Capella (V saec. ex.-VI saec. in.) – supports and allows the acquisition of a stable knowledge, or *sapientia*<sup>7</sup>. More specifically,

philosophy see Cantin, *Les sciences séculières et la foi*; Resnick, *Divine power and possibility*; d’Onofrio, *La crisi dell’equilibrio*, pp. 436-444; Holopainen, *Dialectic and theology*, pp. 6-43; Gaskin, *Peter Damian on divine power*; Martello, *La dottrina dei teologi*, pp. 43-47, 88-108.

<sup>3</sup> See the Kurt Reindel’s edition (in four volumes) in the MGH: Petrus Damiani, *Die Briefe*. In the entire article, I will mention this edition as “ed. Reindel”, with number of the volume, pages and lines to which I refer.

<sup>4</sup> About the ‘literary hedonism’ of Peter Damian wrote some very interesting pages Giovanni Tabacco: see Tabacco, *Spiritualità e cultura nel Medioevo*, pp. 249-266. See also Bertoni, *Lingua e stile*; Ricci, *Gregorio Magno, Pier Damiani*.

<sup>5</sup> About RATHERIUS see de Filippis, *Riflessioni sull’economia*, in particular pp. 97-108.

<sup>6</sup> About Anselm see Id., *Die Freude (an) der Rhetorik*.

<sup>7</sup> About the general concept of *artes liberales* the collective volume *Arts libéraux et*

Rhetoric, as second or third and culminant *ars* of the *trivium*, is the intellectual discipline that permits the composition of a suitable speech, written or oral, that can convince someone of something<sup>8</sup>. In the Middle Ages, the core of its teaching is still the Ciceronian one, yet adapted, especially by Augustine of Hippo, Boethius and Alcuin of York, to the Christian universe.

In an Augustinian sense, Rhetoric can be the ‘voice of the truth’ that the *ars dialectica*, i. e. logic, finds: it can spread the central messages of the Christian faith using its resources, as shown in the *De doctrina christiana*, and it can make them more comprehensible and persuasive, literally dressing them for a wider and clearer understanding<sup>9</sup>. For the great late antique thinker Boethius, in a sense that is not in contrast with the first one, Rhetoric and its rules have, or at least can have, an argumentative value: they can prove something, even if they cannot reach the universal truth alone, because their power is generally limited to the world of the particular and the contingent, for example a single juridical case, or a specific practical problem. Rhetoric can prove that *this* man is

*philosophie* is still useful. On Augustine’s attempt to compose a series of treatises on the arts see Pizzani, *L’enciclopedia agostiniana*; De Rosalia, *Propositi e realtà*. Finally, for an exhaustive presentation of the life and work of *Martianus Capella*, see Grebe, *Martianus Capella*.

<sup>8</sup> See de Filippis, *Loquax Pagina*, and in particular pp. 314-315 for the shift, theorised by Boethius, of the discipline from the third (which it leaves to dialectic) to the second place of the *trivium*.

<sup>9</sup> lo See *ibid.*, pp. 211-293. For a very interesting perspective see Augustinus Hipponensis, *De ordine*, II, 13, 38, p. 174, 1-18: «Illa igitur ratio perfecta dispositaque grammatica admonita est quaerere atque attendere hanc ipsam vim, qua peperit artem; nam eam definiendo distribuendo colligendo non solum digesserat atque ordinarat, verum ab omni etiam falsitatis inreptione defenderat. Quando ergo transiret ad alia fabricanda, nisi ipsa sua prius quasi quaedam machinamenta et instrumenta distingueret notaret digereret proderetque ipsam disciplinam disciplinarum, quam dialecticam vocant? Haec docet docere, haec docet discere; in hac se ipsa ratio demonstrat atque aperit, quae sit, quid velit, quid valeat. Scit scire, sola scientes facere non solum vult sed etiam potest. Verum quoniam plerumque stulti homines ad ea, quae suadentur recte utiliter et honeste, non ipsam sincerissimam quam rarus animus videt veritatem, sed proprios sensus consuetudinemque sectantur, oportebat eos non doceri solum, quantum queunt, sed saepe et maxime commoveri. Hanc suam partem, quae id ageret, necessitatis plenior quam puritatis referatissimo gremio deliciarum, quas populo spargat, ut ad utilitatem suam dignetur adduci, vocavit rhetoricam».

innocent, or that *this* king has to be removed; but it can't extend those conclusions to *all* men and all kings. This is not, for Boethius, a limitation of rhetoric's skills, it is instead the individuation of its specific field of research<sup>10</sup>. This field is further specified by Alcuin of York, the principal organizer of Charlemagne's *schola palatina*: Rhetoric has to do, first of all, with ethics and politics, i. e. with practical philosophy. Also in this sense, Rhetoric has an argumentative force: it is the subject designated for discussing all practical matters<sup>11</sup>.

In this early-medieval paradigm of thinking and references, the language of the letters of Peter Damian is fully and deeply rhetoric in both the meanings showed; on the one hand, the cardinal applies rhetoric to theological truths in order to make them clearer; on the other hand, he uses it to discuss some of the central problems of the Church Reform or of the politics of the eleventh century in Italy. In all those particular cases in which he uses Rhetoric in an argumentative sense, or to make the truth clearer, external appearance and internal sense, words and meaning are deeply entwined, sometimes to the point that a slight change in language can destroy the significance of the debated thesis. Rhetoric and its resources are not only, or no more an ornamentation: they are an indispensable instrument of what Peter Damian would prove or would say. Without rhetoric, the truth would be less captivating, and practical demonstrations less incisive.

It is necessary to clarify, then, what rhetoric can exactly do, and what its skills are for Peter Damian and his contemporaries. At ground level, this art operates on the language: figures of speech, the use of a style suitable to the circumstances and some other tricks are already useful for the statement of a thesis<sup>12</sup>. At a higher *niveau*, oratory offers

<sup>10</sup> See de Filippis, *Loquax Pagina*, pp. 296-311. Most of Boethius' theses are contained in his last work on the *trivium*, *De topicis differentiis*: see Severinus Boethius, *De topicis differentiis*.

<sup>11</sup> See de Filippis, *Loquax Pagina*, pp. 349-363. Alcuin of York wrote, indeed, a *Disputatio de rhetorica et virtutibus*: see Alcuinus Eboracensis, *Disputatio de rhetorica et virtutibus*.

<sup>12</sup> For example, from the origin of Latin rhetorical theories (without even speaking of the Greek ones) the orators codified a three-level system of styles; each of them is useful in different typologies of juridical cases and speeches in general. So the anonymous author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, one of the oldest systematic tractates of Roman culture, describes each of them, from the one which needs humble and

the rules to compose a discourse that can be convincing as a whole: it can teach how to organize the matter, how to declaim it, when to use emotional resources, and so on<sup>13</sup>. At the third and last level, rhetoric has its own argumentative strategies: it learns the methodology to find the proofs; it can judge their value and their credibility by examining it; and it can compare two laws (or, in a more important and general way, two written texts) to determine what is useful or effective in a determinate situation<sup>14</sup>. We mustn't forget that Latin rhetoric arose in a juridical context: when it's used in a Christian one, it still does not lose its inquisitive and questioning habit completely.

It is possible to recognize many examples of an argumentative use of rhetoric in Peter Damian's letters. One of the most significant is a theological one: *De divina omnipotentia* is probably the most famous and studied of Peter Damian's letters<sup>15</sup>. In this text, he fights against

ordinary language (*sermo humilis, sermo attenuatus*) to the most embellished and rich one (*sermo grandis or gravis*), via a median style that is particularly gracious and gentle (*sermo mediocris or modicus*): «Sunt igitur tria genera, quae genera nos figuras appellamus, in quibus omnis oratio non vitiosa consumitur: unam gravem, alteram mediocrem, tertiam extenuatam vocamus. Gravis est, quae constat ex verborum gravium levi et ornata constructione. Mediocris est, quae constat ex humiliore neque tamen ex infuma et pervulgatissima verborum dignitate. Attenuata est, quae demissa est usque ad usitatissimam puri consuetudinem sermonis» (*Rhetorica ad Herennium*, IV, 8, 11, p. 162).

<sup>13</sup> Fundamental oratorical theory includes, for example, the *dispositio* (teaching about the correct disposition of arguments and proofs in the *oratio*), the *actio* or *pronuntiatio* (precepts about the voice and the gesture more appropriate to declamation), and some considerations on the ethos that the *rhetor* has to have and the pathos that he has to use. See de Filippis, *Loquax Pagina*, respectively pp. 66-72, 74-75, 99-101.

<sup>14</sup> About the theory of proofs in the Ancient (and then Medieval) rhetoric see *ibid.*, pp. 88-99. Anyway, the core of the Roman doctrine is the teaching about the *constitutiones*, the various typologies of juridical situations an *orator* could face: for each of them he has to use peculiar strategies that can ease the victory of his client. The case law presented in the text is the so-called *contrariae leges*, which is described in this terms by the *auctor ad Herennium*: «Ex contrariis legibus controversia constat, cum alia lex iubet aut permittit, alia vetat quippiam fieri, hoc modo: Lex vetat eum, qui de pecuniis repetundis damnatus sit, in contione orationem habere: altera lex iuber augurem, in demortui locum qui petat, in contione nominare. Augur quidam damnatus de pecuniis repetundis in demortui locum nominavit; petitur ab eo multa. Constitutio legitima ex contrariis legibus» (*Rhetorica ad Herennium*, I, 11, 20, pp. 103-104).

<sup>15</sup> See Petrus Damiani, *Epistula* 119 (*ad Desiderium Cassinensis monasterii*) (*De*

what he calls *dialectici*, the scholars who pretend to apply the rules of human logic to theology without adapting them to the higher truth of the divine<sup>16</sup>. Against those men, in the most passionate part of the letter, he pronounces this *invectiva* that surely resounded for ages in the ears of Peter Damian's enemies.

«Veniant dialectici, sive potius ut putantur haeretici, ipsi viderint, veniant, inquam, verba trutinantes, quaestiones suas buccis concrepan-tibus ventilantes, proponentes, assumentes, et ut illis videtur inevita-bilia concludentes, ac dicant: "Si peperit, concubuit; sed peperit, ergo concubuit". Numquid hoc ante redemptionis humanae mysterium non videbatur inexpugnabilis roboris argumentum? Sed factum est sacra-mentum, et solutum est argumentum»<sup>17</sup>.

In those few lines there is an incredible amount of figures of speech. Many endings of words balance each other thanks to the *similiter ca-dens*; with a *correctio*, Peter Damian announces that the *dialectici* should better be called *heretici*. The last sentence is very impressive: «Sed factum est sacramentum, et solutum est argumentum», which of-fers a rare case of *isocolon* or *compar*, the locution in which the *cola*, or members, of a phrase contain the same number of syllables<sup>18</sup>. This is obviously no mere literary adornment. Here Peter Damian asserts a thesis of incredible force: the truths of the logic, symbolised through the hypothetic syllogism «Si peperit, cum viro concubuit», a case-syllogism

*divina omnipotentia*), ed. Reindel, III, pp. 341-384. Among the many studies devoted to this pamphlet I recommend (beyond the already cited papers) Palmeri, *Il concetto logico di omnipotentia*; Malaguti, II "De divina omnipotentia".

<sup>16</sup> The existence of an organised and self-aware "faction" of *dialectici* is very much questioned in the current historical-philosophical debates: it is more likely that Peter Damian attacked the general inclination of some scholars of his time for their excessive rationalization of the mysteries of faith. For a recent *status quaestionis* see d'Onofrio, *La storia del pensiero altomedievale*, pp. 60-66.

<sup>17</sup> Petrus Damiani, *Epistula* 119, ed. Reindel, III, p. 366, 15-21.

<sup>18</sup> Those are the definitions of the *auctor ad Herennium* for each of those figures: «Similiter cadens exornatio appellatur, cum in eadem constructione verborum duo aut plura sunt verba, quae similiter isdem casibus efferantur (...); «Correctio est, quae tollit id, quod dictum est, et pro eo id, quod magis idoneum videtur, reponit (...); «Compar appellatur, quod habet in se membra orationis (...) quae constant ex pari fere numero syllabarum». See respectively *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, IV, 20, 28, p. 173; IV, 26, 36, p. 178; IV, 20, 28, p. 173.

studied in the schools as emblem of logical necessity, is no longer valid after the Revelation of the Christian truth and the birth of Christ<sup>19</sup>. This *argumentum*, i. e. this rational and universal thinking, something that for the human mind and for logical schemes should be eternally valid, is now destroyed – *solutum*<sup>20</sup>. And there is no logical demonstration to prove this; the whole proof is in the *isocolon* and in its expressive force, which makes it a sort of slogan against the *dialectici*. Peter Damian uses here only the authority of Christian faith (and we must not forget that the use of authority is already a rhetorical strategy<sup>21</sup>), but covers it with an intelligent use of literary rhetoric that renders it more captivating and useful. The readers remember the *isocolon* and only thanks to it do they embrace Peter Damian's thesis; no logical demonstration could obtain such a rapid and powerful result.

Something similar, with a widespread use of all rhetorical resources, occurs in many letters Peter Damian commits to the cause of the Church Reform. The Investiture Controversy isn't started yet in the strict sense, but since his youth the monk is always devoted to the struggle against simony, immorality and secular interferences in religious life, and his efforts will be a consistent impulse for Gregory the VII and the other reformist cardinals and popes. In many occasions, his ideas are proven only through the strength of rhetorical argumentations and through the

<sup>19</sup> This syllogism is used by Cicero as example of the indubitable strength and necessity of logical argumentation. See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De inventione*, I, 29, 44, pp. 37, 24-38, 8: «Omnis autem argumentatio, quae ex iis locis, quos commemoravimus, sumetur, aut probabilis aut necessaria debet esse. Etenim, ut breviter describamus, argumentatio videtur esse inventum aliquo ex genere rem aliquam aut probabiliter ostendens aut necessarie demonstrans. Necessarie demonstrantur ea, quae aliter ac dicuntur nec fieri nec probari possunt, hoc modo: “si peperit, cum viro concubuit”».

<sup>20</sup> For a definition of *argumentum* and its distinction from *argumentatio* see de Filippis, *Loquax Pagina*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>21</sup> In the *Topica*, a booklet significantly widespread in the Middle Ages and devoted to the classification of the loci from which the *argumenta* derive, Cicero discusses the *auctoritas* by speaking of the loci *extrinseci* (i. e. the ones deduced from something that doesn't concern the legal case directly) as the elements that grant fides to a statement. See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Topica*, 19, 73, p. 30, 2-11: «Haec ergo argumentatio quae dicitur artis expertis in testimonio posita est. Testimonium autem nunc dicimus omne quod ab aliqua re externa sumitur ad faciendam fidem. Persona autem non qualiscumque est testimonii pondus habet; ad fidem enim faciendam auctoritas quaeritur, sed auctoritatem aut natura aut tempus affert».

finest resources of language: oratory becomes in these letters the vehicle of ethics and it is always the focus of attention. In this sense, the first letters, composed before his achievement of the cardinalship, are extremely interesting, being less known and studied than the later ones.

One of Peter Damian's early writings (number 10 in Reindel's collection) is addressed to the hermit *Guillelmus*, who does not join the community governed by him in Fonte Avellana due to the prohibition of drinking wine there<sup>22</sup>. Peter Damian elaborates then a *laus*, an epideictic discourse written according to the Ciceronian guidelines, of the water, that in its highpoint becomes a *prosopopeia*, one of the politest figure of speech, of the water itself<sup>23</sup>. This entire literary game, of course, aims at the spiritual elevation of the monks: «Ideo vinum, carnes, coniugia et multa his similia monachis postponenda perpendimus, ut abstinendo a creaturis creatori arctius placeamus»<sup>24</sup>. But in this case, rhetoric wasn't so helpful: the later letter eighteen, *De ordine eremitarum*, testifies that after a few years Peter Damian gave up and allowed a moderate use of wine in his community<sup>25</sup>.

More impressive is this moral use of rhetoric in letter twenty-one, known as *De vera felicitate ac sapientia*, written to the jurist Bonomo, who doesn't seem to care about the Doomsday<sup>26</sup>. So Peter Damian depicts in front of him a terrific image of divine justice:

<sup>22</sup> See Petrus Damiani, *Epistula 10 (ad G[uillelmum])*, ed. Reindel, I, pp. 128-136; also see de Filippis, «*Omnes dialecticos... decerno*», p. 60.

<sup>23</sup> Following the Roman tradition, the *genus laudativum* or *demonstrativum* is the third general type of discourse, after the *genus iudiciale*, the forensic one, and the *genus deliberativum*, i. e. the political speech. See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De inventione*, I, 5, 7, p. 7, 1-10: «Aristoteles autem, qui huic arti plurima adiumenta atque ornamenta subministravit, tribus in generibus rerum versari rhetoris officium putavit, demonstrativo, deliberativo, iudiciali. Demonstrativum est, quod tribuitur in alicuius certae personae laudem aut vituperationem; deliberativum, quod positum in disceptatione civili habet in se sententiae dictionem; iudiciale, quod positum in iudicio habet in se accusationem et defensionem aut petitionem et recusationem».

<sup>24</sup> Petrus Damiani, *Epistula 10*, ed. Reindel, I, p. 129, 12-14.

<sup>25</sup> See Id., *Epistula 18 (ad fratres Avellanenses) (De ordine eremitarum)*, ed. Reindel, I, p. 172, 10-20.

<sup>26</sup> See Id., *Epistula 23 (ad B[onohominum]) (De vera felicitate ac sapientia)*, ed. Reindel, I, pp. 202-211.



«Age ergo, cum ad illum ultimum iudicium venerimus ab eo scilicet iudice iudicandi, qui nec falli occultatione criminum potest, nec ad impunitatem promerendam muneris alicuius oblatione corrumpi; cum ceperit omnia secreta relevari, et non actus ac verba, sed etiam ipse cogitationes ostendi, quid faciemus sub tanti iudicis maiestate? Quid excusationis obtendere poterimus? Qua nos defensionis arte purgabimus? Quae nobis subventura est paenitentia, quam in hac carne contempsimus? Quae nos defensura sunt opera bona, quae in hac vita non fecimus? Ad quos apostolos aut ad quos alios sanctos confugituri sumus, quorum exempla simul ac verba despeximus? An forte aliqua se fragilitas corporis excusabit?»<sup>27</sup>.

The central message is that Christ the judge cannot be corrupted or deceived, but the terror of damnation is expressed only by a high rhetorical language containing six interrogations which urge the reader especially through their intrinsic force. The rhetoric is here the medium of the message, but it is also the message itself.

This theory can be perhaps better clarified through the *Liber Gomorianus*, or letter thirty-one, without a doubt one of the most remarkable and audacious writings of the eleventh century<sup>28</sup>. In a long dossier full of proofs and argumentations, Peter Damian deplores what he thinks to be the worst plague of the religious life of his times, i. e. homosexuality. The whole letter is structured through the logical-rhetorical instrument of the *comparatio*, which has the power to compare and confront two or more similar occurrences, stating that they have to be handled in an identical manner<sup>29</sup>. Just to give some examples: Peter Damian declares

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 207, 27-208, 2.

<sup>28</sup> See *Id.*, *Epistula 31 (ad Leonem papam) (Liber Gomorianus)*, ed. Reindel, I, pp. 284-330. See also, from a philosophical point of view, de Filippis, «*Omnes dialecticos... decerno*», pp. 64-67.

<sup>29</sup> For a definition of the *topos ex comparatione* see Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Topica*, 4, 23, pp. 11, 23-12, 8: «Ex comparatione autem omnia valent quae sunt huius modi: quod in re maiore valet, valeat in minore ut, si in urbe fines non reguntur, nec aqua in urbe arceatur. Item contra: quod in minore valet, valeat in maiore. Licet idem exemplum convertere. Item: quod in re pari valet, valeat in hac quae par est; ut: quoniam usus auctoritas fundi biennium est, sit etiam aedium. At in lege aedes non appellantur et sunt ceterarum <rerum> omnium quarum annuus est usus. Valeat aequitas quae paribus in causis paria iura desiderat».

that, as the Church punishes heterosexual intercourse between two members of a holy order with the loss of the religious status, so it shall be done for those who have a homosexual one; if the ancient Hebrew King Ozias has been pushed out of the temple of Salomon because of his leprosy, the same should be done with the monks that, in the very rigid Peter Damian's view (yet so characteristic of his time's feelings), are 'sick' with homosexuality; and so on<sup>30</sup>. Peter Damian bases his theory on the rules of dialectic, the Church tradition and juridical praxis, but it is the rhetoric that explains the questions and clarifies the matter – it cannot be accidental that, after a long list of evidence, the end of the letter takes the form of a *declamatio*, i. e. a rhetorical-juridical controversy against an ideal spokesperson of the sodomites<sup>31</sup>.

Many rhetorical strategies can also be found in the letter forty, the famous *Liber Gratissimus*, which Peter Damian dedicates to the struggle of the Church against the Simoniacs<sup>32</sup>. For once, the monk's thesis is not the strictest of his time (which was supported in the same years by cardinal Humbertus of Silva Candida in his *Adversus simoniacos*): he thinks that, although the Simoniacs must be eradicated from the Church, not all their religious acts must be annulled – in particular, the priests ordained by a simoniacal bishop can remain in their functions, because the power to ordain comes from the Holy Ghost itself and not from the bishop. The monk derives his argumentations mainly from the Canon law, from the Church Fathers' writings and from history, and it is again the *comparatio* which sustains most of his argumentations: if the Simoniacs can baptize, a statement that no one questions, they can also ordain, because both operations are a sacrament.

«Cum ergo unus idemque videlicet symoniacus utrobique canonicarum orationum ordinem expleat, utrobique nomen divinitatis regulariter invocet, quomodo per eum in baptismo Spiritus sanctus detur, quomodo in sacerdotali promotione non detur, non rationis penetrat sensus, non humanus discernit intuitus»<sup>33</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> See respectively Petrus Damiani, *Epistula* 31, ed. Reindel, I, p. 298, 8-29; p. 315, 7-16 and 2 Cr 26, 20.

<sup>31</sup> See Petrus Damiani, *Epistula* 31, ed. Reindel, I, pp. 311-325.

<sup>32</sup> See Id., *Epistula* 40 (*ad Heinricum episcopum*) (*Liber Gratissimus*), ed. Reindel, I, pp. 384-509. See also de Filippis, «*Omnes dialecticos... decerno*», pp. 67-68.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 451, 13-18.

But this time, Peter Damian also uses the third level of oratorical skills, i. e. the argumentative instruments that are strictly rhetoric. In the middle of the letter he announces that from now on he will debate by using Canon law and that he will proceed «quibusdam collationibus rerum»<sup>34</sup>. In simple terms, in absence of clear legislation about the Simoniacs, he will use widespread laws of incontestable authority to derive from them what they do not say explicitly, but they would surely admit. This is not a simple comparison: what we have here is a precise application of rhetorical teaching concerning the written law, that Cicero usually calls *ratiocinatio* or *ratiocinativum* – and the later authors also call *collectio* – and that he describes with words quite similar to the ones of Peter Damian<sup>35</sup>. This means that the centre of the *Liber* and of such an important thesis for the religious life of the eleventh century is elaborated, once again, through a rhetorical rule.

The best example of the use of rhetoric in the early letters perhaps comes from the *Epistula* thirty-eight, which carries in some manuscripts the title *Rhetoricae declamationis invectio in episcopum monachos ad saeculum revocantem*<sup>36</sup>. The circumstances of its redaction, or at least the recount of them that the monk offers at the beginning of the letter, are quite unusual. Taking part in a holy synod around 1050 in Rome, Peter Damian met Guido, bishop of Numana, who was charged at the time with supporting the monks who gave up their vows to return in the secular life. Surrendering to wrath and indignation due to the moral and social consequences of this concession, Peter Damian started to insult him, and, after having returned to Fonte Avellana, wrote this pamphlet

<sup>34</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 455, 1-3: «Sed iam sacros canones quo vacat compendio perscrutemur, et, licet manifesta propositae quaestionis crebro non reperiatur inesse sententia, quid tenendum sit, quibusdam rerum collationibus approbemus».

<sup>35</sup> See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De inventione*, II, 50, 148, p. 142, 23-25: «Ex ratiocinatione nascitur controversia, cum ex eo, quod uspiam est, ad id, quod nusquam scriptum est, venit (...)». For a late Antique author see for example Fortunatianus, *Ars rhetorica*, I, 26, p. 101, 18-20: «Collectivus status qui est? Cum ex scripto colligimus ad id, quod scriptum non est, ut perinde esse doceamus, ac si scriptum fuisset».

<sup>36</sup> See Petrus Damiani, *Epistula 38 (ad Gislerium episcopum) (Rhetoricae declamationis invectio in episcopum monachos ad saeculum revocantem)*, ed. Reindel, I, pp. 347-373. For some philosophical remarks see de Filippis, «*Omnes dialecticos... decerno*», p. 61, footnote 28.

against him in the form of an invective or *vituperatio*, that is the exact contrary of a *laus* or praise speech, and that in the Ciceronian system is the third type of discourse, after the juridical oration and the political discussion<sup>37</sup>. But when he discovers that the bishop is totally innocent of the charges, with some slight changes he addresses his writing to a fictional prelate named Marius, and dedicates the whole to another bishop and friend, Gislerius of Osimo, telling the entire story with some embarrassment<sup>38</sup>.

To emphasize the juridical-rhetorical aspects of the letter, Peter Damian presents himself as a lawyer in front of a judge<sup>39</sup>. The core thesis of the pamphlet is very simple and, as usual, strict: the monastic vow can never be broken, even if a person who has taken it was forced or deceived. It is a sacrament, a second baptism, and in no case it can be revoked. Peter Damian again attacks his adversary with a long series of *interrogationes* and *comparationes*: for example, he elaborates a complex military image stating that the one who has already fought besides the Celestial Emperor can not go back to the inferior secular world<sup>40</sup>. But when he comes to the sentences of the Church Fathers included in canon law his thesis, he debates them precisely with the rhetorical rules Cicero used for interpreting roman jurisprudence.

So, thanks to the case law of *ambiguum*, that has to be used when a norm can be interpreted in two or more opposite manners, he refuses a possible interpretation of a sentence of pope Leo the Great, showing how the text absolutely cannot sustain the permissive interpretation he rejects.

«Primus itaque magnus Leo suae auctoritatis figat articulum et ut  
revera insuperabilis dux ipse praeferat in prima belli fronte vexillum.

<sup>37</sup> See Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De inventione*, I, 5, 7, p. 7, 1-10.

<sup>38</sup> See Petrus Damiani, *Epistula* 38, pp. 348-350. There is, of course, the possibility that the whole story was fictional, and that Peter Damian wanted to attack Gislerius himself, or to write a sort of “open letter” to all bishops who allow this wrong usage: see Reindel, *Petrus Damiani*, pp. 214-216.

<sup>39</sup> See Petrus Damiani, *Epistula* 38, p. 350, 9-12: «Hoc quasi vilis sarculus subsequens glebas frangat, immo ut exemplum congruentius proferatur, hoc velut orator manifesti criminis reos esse convincat, quos illa auctoritas velut arbiter praesidens canonici vigoris censura coerceat».

<sup>40</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 354, 1-16.

Ait enim inter caetera: ‘Propositum monachi proprio arbitrio aut voluntate susceptum deseri non potest absque peccato’. [...] Ubi notandum, quod vir dissertissimus non ait, ut noster garrir episcopus, ‘propositum monachi longa morositate susceptum’. [...] Nihil ergo virium temporali reliquit morositati, qui totum spontaneae tribuit voluntati»<sup>41</sup>.

But Peter Damian outdoes himself when he analyses a case that is apparently against his interpretation: in one of his letters, cited by his biographer Iohannes Diaconus, pope Gregory the Great clearly allows a man to go back to his home, his wife and the secular life after taking the vows. This time the monk uses another typology of interpretation of written texts, the so called *scriptum et sententia*: in his opinion, not only do we have to consider the literal significance of a text, but we also have to examine the context and the intention of the composer<sup>42</sup>. Only in this way can we really comprehend it. It is true in the presented case that pope Gregory allows the breaking of a sacred vow, but if and only if the man who pronounced it, who was a married man, took it against the agreement of his wife. The universal principle of the inviolability of a sacred vow is then respected: the man is already bound to another sacrament and another vow that he cannot break by himself.

«Sed quoniam omnis versuti litigatori machina tunc exacte convincitur, si quicquid ab eo obici posse perpenditur, velut gravissimis argumentationum arietibus antea refellatur, non erubescas forsitan dicere, quia beatus Gregorius hominem de monasterio retrahi et uxori suae etiamsi iam tonsoratus esset reddi praecepit. Sed et nos tibi non immerito respondemus, quia sagitta in lapidem missa interdum percutit dirigentem et saepe incautus miles eodem telo, quo percutere adversarium nititur, ipse potius loetaliter vulneratur. Si enim hoc exemplum diligenter inspicias, pro nobis stare cernitur, nostris allegationibus attestari inexpugnabiliter invenitur. Et ut, quod dicitur, ispa rei manifestatione clarescat, aliquid hic de Gregoriana epistola intermiscere non pigeat: “Agathora”, inquit, “Iatrix presentium quæsta est, maritum suum

<sup>41</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 357, 9-20. See also Burchardus, *Decretum*, VIII, 8, PL 140, coll. 793D-794A; and Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De inventione*, II, 40, 116, p. 131, 8-11: «Ex ambiguo autem nascitur controversia, cum, quid senserit scriptor, obscurum est, quod scriptum duas pluresve res significat».

<sup>42</sup> See *ibid.*, II, 42, 121, p. 131, 8-11: «Ex scripto et sententia controversia consistit, cum alter verbis ipsis, quæ scripta sunt, utitur, alter ad id, quod scriptorem sensisse dicit, omnem adiungit dictionem».

contra voluntatem suam in monasterio Urbici abbatis esse conversum. Quod, quia ad eiusdem abbatis culpam et invidiam non est dubium pertinere, experientiae tuae praecipimus, ut diligenti inquisitione discutiat, ne forte cum eius voluntate conversus sit vel ipsa se mutare promiserit. Et si hoc repererit, et illum in monasterio permanere provideat, et hanc sicut mutari compellat”. Ecce nihil hic de morosa conversione, nichil de diuturnitate probationis inquiritur, sed hoc tantum iubetur, ut si ille cum uxoria voluntate et promissione conversus fuisse convincitur, in eodem perseverare proposito omnibus modis compellatur. Quod autem sequitur: “Si vero nihil horum est”, hoc est videlicet, si neque cum voluntate neque cum promissione uxoris conversus est, ut reddatur»<sup>43</sup>.

We can then argue that the language and the rhetoric of Peter Damian are an indispensable part of his aesthetic, of his argumentative technic and also of his philosophy. As one of the best experts of liberal arts in his century, he knows the power of language and of the high and structured language that rhetoric is and, as he remembers in the *Invectio* itself, in no case would he renounce its use at the service of morality, the Church and the truth: «Magis eligendum est de simplicitate locutionis in episcoporum iudicio corripì, quam ante tribunal superni iudicis de silentio condemnari», “it is better to choose to be accused of too frank language in judging the bishops, than to be condemned because of silence in front of the eternal judge”<sup>44</sup>. A far from being an ‘enemy of philosophy’, or worse an ‘anti-dialectician’, Peter Damian seems fully aware of the power of a rightful use of the language in the Augustinian way<sup>45</sup> – and he is also very capable to use this power.

<sup>43</sup> Petrus Damiani, *Epistula* 38, ed. Reindel, I, pp. 361, 16-362, 18; see also Iohannes Diaconus, *Sancti Gregorii Magni vita*, IV, 41, PL 75, col. 203D.

<sup>44</sup> Petrus Damiani, *Epistula* 38, ed. Reindel, I, p. 351, 1-2.

<sup>45</sup> I obviously refer to Augustinus Hipponensis, *De doctrina christiana*, IV, 2, 3, p. 117, 1-18, about the necessity, for a Christian preacher, to use rhetoric – I would like to deeply thank Prof. John F. Gavin S.J. (College of the Holy Cross, Worcester, MA/ Istituto Patristico Augustinianum, Roma, Italy) for his revision of this text.

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