

Peter Damiani

(1006–1072)

1. Biography

- born in Ravenna
- teacher of the liberal arts in Ravenna
- In his thirtieth year he suddenly left the world and became a hermit at Fonte Avellano near Gubbio (Eugubium) in Umbria.
- drawn to Rome, and against his will chosen bishop of Ostia and Cardinal of the Roman church by Stephen X. in 1058.
- sent on important missions to Milan, Florence, Montecassino, Cluny, Mainz, Frankfurt.
- He had the confidence of the Emperor Henry III.
- He resigned his bishopric and returned to his monastic cell in the Apennines.
- his writings: Epistles, Sermons, Lives of Saints, ascetic tracts, and Poems.
- reformer of clerical corruption
"What would the bishops of old have done, had they to endure the torments which now attend the episcopate? To ride forth constantly accompanied by troops

of soldiers with swords and lances, to be girt about with armed men, like a heathen general! Every day royal banquets, every day parade! The table loaded with delicacies for voluptuous guests; while the poor pine away with famine!”

2. Anti-intellectual Polemics

“I spurn Plato, the searcher into the hidden things of nature, who set a measure to the movements of the planets, and calculated the courses of the stars; Pythagoras, who divided the round world into its regions with his mathematician’s rod, means nothing to me; I renounce the much-thumbed books of Nichomachus, and Euclid too, round-shouldered from pouring over his complex geometrical problems; the rhetoricians with their syllogisms and the cavillings of the sophists are useless in this matter. Let the gymnasts shiver in their nakedness for love of wisdom, and the peripatetics seek truth at the bottom of the well.

For I seek from you the Highest Truth, not that which lies ignobly hidden in a well, but that which rose from the earth, and, made manifest to all the world, reigns in eternal majesty in Heaven. What are the inventions of crazy poets to me? What do I care for the melodramatic adventures of pompous tragedians? Let the comedians put an end to the poisoned stream of scurrilities flowing from their noisy lips, and the satirists cease to burden their audiences with bitter banquets of insidious slander. The Ciceronians shall not sway me with their smooth speech, nor the followers of Demonsthenes convince me by skilled argument or captious persuasion. Back to your shades, you whom worldly wisdom has defiled. Those blinded by the sulphurous flames of the teachings of darkness can give me nothing. Let the simplicity of Christ instruct me, and the true humility of the wise loose me from the chains of doubt. [...]

Whoever, then, devotes to the study of pagan letters, or to any earthly thing, that care which is chiefly due to that punctilious inner examination of ourselves whereby we may please God, deserves to perish, for he is devoting that incense which should be offered to God alone to transitory and vain things. And that which we say concerning knowledge must be admitted to apply to all the pleasures of this life. [...]

Now, these two wives of man are virtue and pleasure, at variance with each other, feeling jealousy, malice and hatred. And pleasure belongs to this life, but virtue to everlasting glory. The former is beloved because she allures her husband (the feeble soul) with seductive delights; the other

is described as hated because she causes men to travel a narrow and painful road and always sets before them hard and bitter things. But the son of the hated wife is our first-born, for our Creator in the beginning gave virtue to us, but pleasure, and all the allurements of the flesh, proceed from the defects of our fallen nature. [...]

Wherefore, dearly beloved, take up the weapons of temperance, humility, patience, obedience, chastity, charity and all the other virtues and fight, not for towns and fields not for sons or wives, but for your very souls, which are more important than any love of friendship. [...]

O eremitic life, you are the soul's bath, the death of evil-doing, the cleanser of filth; you make clean the hidden places of the soul, wash away the foulness of sin and make souls shine with angelic purity. The hermit's cell is the meeting-place of God and man, a cross-roads for those who dwell in the flesh and heavenly things. [...]

Those who know you love you; those who have rested in the delight of your embrace know the merits of your praise. As for those who do not know these things, they can never know you. [...] When any holy soul is truly joined to its Redeemer by love, then it is united with Him as if on the bridal couch in a bond of intimate delight."