

## *Odiosa sanctitas*

### St Peter Damian, Simony, and Reform

Early in 1067, St Peter Damian, cardinal-bishop of Ostia and a key member of the reform party in Rome, travelled to Florence, where the monks of the neighbouring monastery of Vallombrosa, under the leadership of Giovanni Gualberto, had accused Bishop Pietro Mezzabarba of simony, and had launched a very public campaign against him. Damian's involvement in this affair provides the vantage point for a new reading of the latter part of his career and of selected aspects of his thought. Although he had no sympathy for simonists, Damian concluded that the Vallombrosans had not made their case against the bishop, but were rather themselves at fault for publicly preaching an erroneous sacramental theology, and for employing tactics that represented a complete betrayal of the monastic ideal. Ultimately, however, it was the Vallombrosans who prevailed. When an ordeal organized by Gualberto was widely perceived as having proven Mezzabarba's guilt, Damian had to face the prospect of his having been wrong. Increasingly throughout the 1060s Damian found himself in the grip of *contemptus mundi*, a particularly dark vision according to which the world was sinking inexorably into a moral abyss that presaged the last times. It was accompanied by a deepening sense of disillusionment about the value of his efforts to serve the larger interests of the church, and it strengthened his resolve to withdraw from such service in favour of the consolations of the eremitic life. These were tendencies that the outcome of the Mezzabarba affair could only have reinforced.

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St Peter Damian, Simony, and Reform

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## Abbreviations

- AASS *Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur*. Antwerp, 1643–1940.
- AN Anonimo della Nazionale, *Vita Iohannis Gualberti auctore discipulo eius anonymo*, ed. F. Baethgen, MGH, SS 30.2 (Hannover, 1934; repr. Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann; New York: Kraus Reprint, 1964), pp. 1104–1110.
- AP Atto of Pistoia, *Vita altera S. Joannis Gualberti*, AASS, editio novissima, curante Ioanne Carnandet, Julii III (Paris and Rome: Apud Victorem Palme, Bibliopolam, 1867), pp. 348–363.
- AS Andreas of Strumi, *Vita S. Iohannis Gualberti*, ed. F. Baethgen, MGH, SS 30.2 (Hannover, 1934; repr. Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann; New York: Kraus Reprint, 1964), pp. 1080–1104.
- BHL *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina antiquae et mediae aetatis*, ediderunt socii Bollandiani, 2 vols. Brussels, 1898–1899. [Supplementum (Subsidia Hagiographica 12), Brussels, 1911. Novum Supplementum, ed. Henricus Fros (Subsidia Hagiographica 70), Brussels, 1986.]
- CCCM Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis. Turnhout: Brepols, 1971– .
- CCL Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953– .
- CSEL Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum. Vienna: Holder – Pichler – Tempsky, 1866– .
- Gratian, Gratian of Bologna, *Decretum*, ed. E. A. Friedberg, *Corpus iuris canonici* 1 (Leipzig, 1879). The reference is to Pars Secunda, Causa 35, Questio 5, Capitulum 2.
- JE, JK, JL P. Jaffé, *Regesta pontificum Romanorum ab condita ecclesia ad annum post Christum natum MCXCVIII*, 2 vols., 2nd. edition, ed. S. Löwenfeld, F. Kaltenbrunner, P. Ewald. Leipzig: Veit et Comp., 1885–1888. Kaltenbrunner was responsible for entries up to A.D. 590 (JK), Ewald for entries up to A.D. 882 (JE), and Löwenfeld for the remainder (JL).

- Kehr, IP III, 20 Kehr, P. F. *Italia pontificia sive repertorium privilegiorum et litterarum a Romanis pontificibus ante annum MCLXXXVIII Italiae ecclesiis, monasteriis, civitatibus singulisque personis concessorum*. 8 vols. Berlin: Weidmann, 1906–1935. The reference is to vol. 3, p. 20. A third number would be the item number.
- MGH Monumenta Germaniae Historica.
- Const. Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum. Hannover: Hahn, 1893– .
- Ep. sel. Epistolae selectae. Berlin: Weidmann, 1916– .
- Fontes iuris Fontes iuris Germanici antiqui in usum scholarum separatim editi. Hannover: Hahn, 1909– .
- Ldl Libelli de lite imperatorum et pontificum. Hannover: Hahn, 1891–1897.
- SS Scriptores. Hannover: Hahn, 1826.
- SS rer. Germ. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi. Hannover: Hahn, 1871– .
- SS rer. Germ. N.S. Scriptores rerum Germanicarum, Nova Series. Berlin: Weidmann, 1922– .
- PL Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina, ed. J. P. Migne. Paris, 1844–1864.
- RSB *La Règle de Saint Benoît*, ed. and trans. Jean Neufville and Adalbert de Vogüé, SC 181–182. Paris: Cerf, 1972.
- SC Sources chrétiennes. Paris: Cerf, 1942– .

## Preface

I was first introduced to the Pietro Mezzabarba story, which lies at the heart of this book, several years ago, when my attention was focused primarily on the *Dialogues* of Abbot Desiderius of Montecassino. The *Dialogues* provide an early, although, it is now clear, not entirely satisfactory account of the ordeal that sealed Mezzabarba's fate and the events leading up to it. The discovery that St Peter Damian had a significant role to play particularly sparked my interest, and I formulated a plan to write an article on Damian's involvement. However, with the completion, in January 2003, of an initial draft in four short chapters, it became clear that it was really a book that was taking shape. It was the complexity of the issues, and the relatively unfettered opportunity to explore them that my retirement made possible, that delayed the final appearance of the book for several more years. Never before have I enjoyed the luxury of being able to explore an issue until my curiosity was exhausted, whether publishable results were likely or not.

The reader will quickly discern my indebtedness to an extensive historiography. Less obvious are debts of a more personal nature that I am pleased to acknowledge here: to my friend and colleague, Dr Ross Kilpatrick, for invaluable advice, always graciously and generously provided, on Latin usage; to the staff of the Interlibrary Loan office of Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, for their persistence in tracking down even the rarest of titles; and to the staff of both the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale and the Archivio di Stato in Florence for their courtesy and assistance. I would also like to thank the two readers appointed by the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. Their constructive advice and criticism provided the crucial stimulus needed to give the book its final form. My principal debt, however, is to my wife, Valerie, for her unflinching support and encouragement. Thirty-three years ago Valerie was willing to reschedule her wedding day in order to accommodate a visit to the Vatican Library on our honeymoon. Over the years her fluency in languages I can only read has opened more doors for scholarly research than my memory could faithfully recount.

Elginburg, Ontario  
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