

The rhetoric of simplicity: faith and rhetoric in Peter Damian

Scriptie ter afsluiting van de master Religie en Theologie: Wortels en
ontwikkeling van het Christendom

Subfaculteit Godgeleerdheid
Universiteit Utrecht

Julian Yolles
3138623

Begeleider: dr. B.S. Hellemans
Tweede lezer: Prof. dr. M.B. Pranger

15 juli 2009

Table of contents

Abstract.....	3
1. ‘Simple rhetoric’?.....	4
1.1 Introduction.....	4
1.2 The problem.....	5
1.3 <i>Sancta simplicitas</i>	8
2. <i>De divina omnipotentia</i>	14
2.1 Peter Damian and dialectic.....	14
2.2 <i>De divina omnipotentia</i> on the art of rhetoric.....	16
2.3 Historical context.....	26
3. <i>Dominus vobiscum</i>	28
3.1 Introduction.....	28
3.2 The rhetorical situation of <i>Dominus vobiscum</i>	29
3.3 <i>Dominus vobiscum</i> on the art of rhetoric.....	31
4. Conclusion.....	39
4.1 Summary.....	39
4.2 Concluding remarks.....	41
4.3 Suggestions for further investigation.....	42
5. Bibliography.....	44

Abstract

In this paper I explore the problem of the ambiguous attitude maintained towards the art of rhetoric in relation to faith by the eleventh-century prior, hermit and cardinal-bishop Peter Damian. I have taken my cue mainly from the solution proposed by Jean Leclercq: *sancta simplicitas*. After providing a description of the origin and development of this term in several contexts, I turn to the most studied and widely discussed of Peter Damian's letters, *De divina omnipotentia*. While analyzing Peter Damian's explicit statements on the art of rhetoric and his own use of rhetoric, I provide an outline of a central problem: Peter Damian, while highly critical of the application of rhetoric to matters of faith, is guilty of the same offense. After situating *De divina omnipotentia* in eleventh-century polemics between traditional monastic and new and upcoming scholastic centers of education, I turn to another major letter in Damian's *oeuvre*, *Dominus vobiscum*. After suggesting an outline of the rhetorical situation that underlies this letter, I continue my efforts of rhetorical analysis. In both letters, I discuss the various solutions Peter Damian himself offers to the practice of rhetoric in relation to faith, and suggest that these, on the basis of my rhetorical analysis, are rhetorical tactics rather than theological or epistemological principles, as suggested by Leclercq. Ultimately, this paper makes a call for a critical attitude towards Peter Damian's statements that takes account of the rhetorical and historical context involved.

1. ‘Simple rhetoric’?

1.1 Introduction

In the twenty-first *canto* of Dante’s *Paradiso* in *La Divina Commedia*, a speaker, later to be revealed as Peter Damian, forcefully discourages the traveler from excessive inquiry into the Divine, in accordance with human (and angelic) epistemological limits, and proceeds to launch an acerbic invective against the corruption and hypocrisy of the church.¹ This is emblematic of the way in which Peter Damian (1007-1072) was to be remembered in history: a theologian and one of the great forces of the Gregorian Reforms of the eleventh century. In fact, although many details are yet unknown or of tenuous certainty,² he was much more than that: not only an ascetic prior and hermit, but also a papal legate, and at one point even a cardinal-bishop.³ It is even possible that, previous to his monastic conversion, he had been a *magister* of the secular arts, as his hagiographer John of Lodi reports,⁴ or perhaps a lawyer.⁵ Regardless of his initial profession, it is clear that Peter Damian had enjoyed a thorough education in the arts, as he displays stunning eloquence in the vast amount of letters and sermons that comprise his literary corpus.⁶ Despite his proficiency in the arts and the possible worldly success that might have accompanied it,⁷ Peter Damian converted to monasticism in 1035, leaving a secular career behind to follow instead “the right path of truth” (“*rectum veritatis tramitem*”).⁸ This paper seeks to analyze how Peter Damian envisions the position of the art of rhetoric on this path, by looking at both concrete usage of rhetoric as well as explicit reflection on the *rhetorica ars*. The question is relevant on several levels: not only can it

¹ *La Divina Commedia*, *Paradiso* 21.43-135.

² Peter Damian is surprisingly reticent about his past, making us dependent on his only contemporary biographer/hagiographer, John of Lodi: *Patrologia Latina* (henceforth referred to as *PL*) 144, 113-146. For a useful overview and critique of biographical studies of Peter Damian, see K. Reindel, “Neue Literatur zu Petrus Damiani,” *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung der Geschichte des Mittelalters* 32, 1976, 405-443.

³ Cf. Dom Jean Leclercq’s chapter headings in *St. Pierre Damien: Ermite et Homme d’Église*, Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1960: “l’écolier, l’ermite, le cardinal, le vétéran, l’écrivain, le poète, le savant, le théologien, le prophète”.

⁴ For a rather neutral position on this matter and an overview of the differing positions of scholars, see I.M. Resnick, *Divine power and possibility in St. Peter Damian's De divina omnipotentia*, Leiden etc.: E.J. Brill, 1992, 10 n. 14, and also – for a more positive position – O. Schönbeck, “Peter Damian and the rhetoric of an ascetic,” in M.W. Herren, C.J. McDonough, R.G. Arthur eds., *Latin culture in the eleventh century* (Proceedings of the third international conference on Medieval Latin studies, Cambridge, September 9-12 1998), Turnhout: Brepols, 1998, vol. 2, 350-370, at 351.

⁵ *Lettre sur la toute-puissance divine*, A. Cantin tr. and ed., Paris: Les éditions du Cerf (Sources Chrétiennes 191), 1972, 17 and, more recently, cf. A. Cantin, *Saint Pierre Damien (1007-1072) Autrefois – aujourd’hui*, Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2006, 17-18, where he argues that Peter Damian may have taught both the liberal arts and law.

⁶ Leclercq 1960, 172: “... Pierre Damien est l’un des meilleurs latinistes de son époque, l’un des écrivains les plus grands du moyen âge latin.”

⁷ *Vita*, *PL* 144, 117B.

⁸ *De divina omnipotentia*, *PL* 145, 603D.

provide more information on the changing role of rhetoric in theology and the debates thereof in the eleventh century and subsequently, but it can also clarify the position of the arts in general in monastic schools and the development of that position in burgeoning universities.⁹ Moreover, it may be able to shed more light on the renaissance of rhetoric and the development of a new kind of rhetoric that took place in this period – as exemplified by the figure of Alberic of Monte Cassino, who cites Peter Damian’s letters as examples of rhetorical virtuosity in his *Flores*.¹⁰

First, the current problems in this subject will be discussed, as well as the *lacunae* with respect to rhetoric left by André Cantin’s work, *Les sciences séculières et la foi: les deux voies de la science au jugement de S. Pierre Damien (1007-1072)*, which focused on Peter Damian’s stance towards the secular arts in relation to his theology.¹¹

1.2 The problem

On the basis of Peter Damian’s letter on divine omnipotence titled *De divina omnipotentia*, he was long considered to be an anti-dialectic – a view that has since been adjusted in several studies.¹² As will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, Peter Damian has earned his fame in philosophy by allegedly asserting that God could make the impossible possible, and so taking an anti-logical approach that was opposed to that of contemporary dialecticians who posited the principle of non-contradiction. Apart from his stance towards dialectic in *De divina omnipotentia*, Peter Damian is also seen to be, in a sense, anti-grammatical in his letter titled *Dominus vobiscum*, where he argues that the laws of grammar are not binding when it comes to the sacred liturgy. Problematic as his positions are on the relation between the secular arts and theology, Peter Damian’s ambiguous attitude towards the remaining trivial art – rhetoric – yet needs a lot of attention. In *De divina omnipotentia*, Peter Damian characterizes dialectic and rhetoric as handmaidens (“ancillae”) of theology, criticizes rhetoric in the treatise *De sancta simplicitate*¹³ and many other places,¹⁴ praises the *sermo piscatorius*, yet simultaneously likens himself to Cicero and Demosthenes¹⁵ and makes

⁹ M.B. Pranger, “De school als utopie: van klooster- naar stadsschool,” in R.E.V. Stuip & C. Vellekoop eds., *Scholing in de Middeleeuwen*, Hilversum: Verloren, 1995, 205-220, at 212.

¹⁰ Cantin 1972, 284-285.

¹¹ A. Cantin, *Les sciences séculières et la foi: les deux voies de la science au jugement de S. Pierre Damien (1007-1072)*, Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, 1975.

¹² For an overview, see T.J. Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology in the Eleventh Century*, Helsinki: Limes ry, 1995, 12-14.

¹³ J.M. Miller, M.H. Prosser, T.W. Benson, *Readings in Medieval Rhetoric*, Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973, 218.

¹⁴ For instance *Serm.* 32 and *Ep.* 32.

¹⁵ *Ep.* 5.5, *P.L.* 144, 346C.

abundant use of rhetorical ‘flowers’ – as in the praise of the hermitage in *Dominus vobiscum*, where he makes express use of rhetoric to portray the hermitage as the heavenly abode.¹⁶ As of yet, no satisfying solution has been presented to solve these discrepancies and contradictions.

Jean Leclercq stated the problem clearly: since the myth of ‘Peter Damian the anti-intellectual’ has been proven to be such by the studies of Friolin Dressler and J. Gonsette,¹⁷ it is important to see what place is given – both psychologically and spiritually – to the intellectual life in Peter Damian’s literary work.¹⁸ The problem of the relation between science and faith, Leclercq explains, is one that goes back at least to the Church Fathers, who solved it with the pragmatic approach of *simplicitas*. This approach, which was to be taken over by Peter Damian, was not only a minimalist approach but also entailed a qualitative significance: the arts needed to be kept morally pure. The term, as first used in this manner by Jerome, originally denoted a literary style of biblical rusticity as apposed to pagan urbanity¹⁹ – the significance of which will be discussed later on.²⁰ How is this *simplicitas* to square with Peter Damian’s riveting rhetorical style? Paraphrasing from Peter Damian’s *De sancta simplicitate*, Leclercq states a baffling paradox, wherein Peter Damian launches a vehement attack against pagan proponents of classical knowledge, among which Plato, Cicero and Demosthenes, and does so by making use of expressions taken from Juvenal. Leclercq exclaims: “Que de rhétorique en semblables tirades, et en même temps quelle sincérité! L’humilité chrétienne s’oppose à la grandiloquence des écoles de philosophie, et la sage ignorance à la sottise des dialecticiens. La preuve, que pour Pierre Damien, rhétorique et humilité ne sont pas irréconciliables est qu’il utilise la première pour louer la seconde.”²¹ Leclercq fails to provide a solution (as far as that is possible) to this contradiction, but later on explains that in general, it is to be found in Peter Damian’s pragmatic approach that is founded in humility²² – but it would have been useful to provide some insight as to the mechanics of Peter Damian’s use of rhetoric in relation to this *simplicitas*.

¹⁶ Pranger 1995, 212.

¹⁷ F. Dressler, *Petrus Damiani: Leben und Werk* (Studia Anselmiana 34), Rome: Herder, 1954; J. Gonsette, *Pierre Damien et la culture profane*, Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain (Essais Philosophiques 7), 1956.

¹⁸ Leclercq 1960, 193.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 194: “simplicité allait souvent de pair avec rusticité; en littérature, c’était l’art de parler sans apprêts, d’éviter toute affectation et toute dissimulation.”

²⁰ See the section below, “*Sancta simplicitas*”.

²¹ Leclercq 1960, 198.

²² *Ibid.*, 201: “l’école du Christ est celle de l’humilité. Si l’on consent à y entrer, l’on y reçoit, avec la foi, la possibilité de purifier de toute erreur les sept arts libéraux: les philosophes et les poètes, soumis en nous, par nous, au magistère de Dieu, nous aident à progresser dans les lettres sacrées.”

André Cantin's approach is different; he seeks to analyze the unity Damian gives to the pursuit and value of science, and assumes the veracity of the account of Peter Damian's secular career as told by John of Lodi.²³ The problem, as far as rhetoric is concerned, is stated succinctly: "il professe qu'il ne lui sied d'écrire que d'un style 'pauvre' et 'rustique' et une rhétorique raffinée rend éclatantes jusqu'à ses professions de 'rusticité'."²⁴ This discrepant attitude, Cantin says later on, appears unsolvable.²⁵ However, Cantin proceeds to argue that, given his past, Peter Damian did not have much of a choice in ascribing to rhetoric whilst rejecting it, as he himself repeatedly stresses the importance of the virtue of *perseverantia*.²⁶ Cantin uses Peter Damian's (presumed) past as an argument on more occasions,²⁷ such as when he describes the influence of rhetoric in schools and how it shaped intellectual thought,²⁸ and that it is in these schools that the vain verbosity that Peter Damian inveighs against was taught, and that because of his upbringing in these schools and the hold they had on the intellectual world of the time, he was forced to partake in a rhetoric he did not approve of – in spite of himself.²⁹ Verbose eloquence was expected by his readers – 'une exigence sociale' Cantin calls it³⁰ – readers who had a keen eye for style and verbal elegance.³¹ Because of this 'tyranny of good style',³² Damian was forced to make a 'grand sacrifice' for his contemporaries by resorting to eloquent speech.³³ Nevertheless, Peter Damian in more than one work refers to his own style as 'rustic' – yet these works, remarks Cantin, are his most eloquent.³⁴ Just as Cantin failed to take Peter Damian's rhetoric seriously on its own merits by resorting to external arguments (such as the intellectual climate and Peter Damian's past) to explain Damian's use of rhetoric, so does he fail to take Peter Damian's classification of 'rusticity' seriously, regarding it as a sort of ploy.³⁵

²³ See Cantin 1975, in chapter one: "La conversion d'un rhéteur". Later studies, such as Reindel and Resnick (see above, n. 4), were to be more hesitant about biographical details in the *Vita*.

²⁴ Cantin 1975, 19.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 58-60.

²⁷ Cf. his more recent defense of John of Lodi's reliability in Cantin 2006, 12-13.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 91-94.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 115 n. 1: "des expressions ... en disent plus long, par leur richesse et leur fréquence, sur le goût du beau style ou du style orné que Damien, malgré lui, parageait [sic] avec les rhéteurs de son temps."

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

³¹ *Ibid.*: "Il savait donc qu'il ne pouvait quasi rien écrire sans tomber sous la coupe et l'examen de connaisseurs exigeants, idolâtres de la forme, qui plaçaient au plus haut degré de l'ouvrage bien fait le fin travail de l'ornement du style."

³² *Ibid.*, 341.

³³ *Ibid.*, 343.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 339.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 339: "certaines excuses font plus que rendre sa 'rusticité' suspecte"; cf. 340: "rusticité imaginaire" and 344: "Cette 'rudeesse' qu'il voudrait en vain attribuer a son propre style", and more recently in Cantin 2006, 93: "fausse modestie?"

It is the intent of this paper to judge Peter Damian's rhetoric on its own merits, by forming rhetorical analyses of several of his letters, and by attempting to integrate it coherently in the formative principle of *sancta simplicitas* that governs his thought of the relationship between faith and the secular arts. Throughout, the guiding question of this paper will be the following: what is the place accorded to rhetoric by Peter Damian's theological and spiritual thought, and how does it relate to the principle of *sancta simplicitas*? Rhetorical analyses of several works of Peter Damian will be made in order to form a coherent picture of his use of rhetoric, if we are to be able to relate this with the *sancta simplicitas*. For this, I have chosen the two most studied letters, providing us with the most extensive documentation possible: the *Dominus vobiscum* and *De divina omnipotentia*. The methodology employed will be philological in the sense that detailed analysis of Peter Damian's rhetoric and of the rhetorical situation of the specific letter will be performed; it is historical in the sense that these findings will be related to contemporary intellectual debates of the eleventh century. This combination will allow us to paint a coherent picture of the rhetorical mechanics of the texts involved in relation to the theoretical statements they contain, whilst maintaining a firm footing in the historical context that surrounded these letters, making the conclusions drawn by this paper relevant to our understanding of that historical context.

Our first step, however, must be to submit the *sancta simplicitas* to closer analysis, to consider it as a theological, epistemological, and ultimately, stylistic principle, and situate it in its historical context by looking at classical oratory, the Bible and the Church Fathers.

1.3 *Sancta simplicitas*

As mentioned above, Leclercq asseverated that as a solution to the problem of the relation between the secular arts and faith, Peter Damian chose to employ *sancta simplicitas*. Does this also hold true for the relation between faith and rhetoric? Leclercq implies that it does (by choosing to refer to the secular arts in general) though he does not give it a specialized treatment; it is the aim of this paper to see if this is indeed the case – and if so, exactly how and to what degree. First, it may prove useful to try and understand precisely what *sancta simplicitas* entails by attempting to locate its origins.

Ernst-Robert Curtius does not, in his seminal work *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, treat the exact term under discussion, but in covering the rhetoric of (affected) humility, does mention that in this context the word *rusticitas* is not uncommonly

found³⁶ – a word that happens to be used as a synonym of *simplicitas* by Peter Damian on more than one occasion.³⁷ He dismisses, however, the view that this had its conception in biblical origins, as there are a myriad of classical examples of *topoi* of humility.³⁸ The problem with this view is that – though the origin of *topoi* of humility should certainly not be sought in the Bible – *rusticitas* and *simplicitas* tend to cover a much wider array of meaning, having even a moral and religious significance unlikely to be found in classical *topoi*.

Leclercq, however, gives an excellent account of *simplicitas* according to biblical origins, proceeding to trace its development throughout late antiquity and the Middle Ages,³⁹ which I nevertheless believe needs supplementing in three areas. Firstly, Leclercq provides several citations of New Testament usage of *simplex* and its cognates that most likely influenced later usage, and offers a rather brief account of the development of Old Testament usage to that of the New.⁴⁰ The account, although correct in my view, would do well to focus on concrete instances; the expression *in simplicitate cordis*, for example, is rather wide-spread in the Old Testament,⁴¹ and tends to designate something akin to ‘sincerity.’ This term is then also found in the New Testament,⁴² and eventually only *simplicitas* occurs, denoting ‘sincerity’ by itself – as is indubitably the case in the following juxtaposition with *sinceritas* in 2 Cor 1:12:

Nam gloria nostra haec est testimonium conscientiae nostrae quod in simplicitate et sinceritate Dei et non in sapientia carnali sed in gratia Dei conversati sumus in mundo, abundantius autem ad vos.

(For our glory is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity of heart and sincerity of God, and not in carnal wisdom, but in the grace of God, we have conversed in this world: and more abundantly towards you.⁴³)

³⁶ E.R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, Bern and München: Francke Verlag, 1961³, 414.

³⁷ Cantin 1975, 355.

³⁸ Ibid.: “Die ‘Unfähigkeitsbeteuerungen’ des Mittelalters haben ihren Ursprung also zum größten Teil im stilistischen Manierismus der Spätantike, nicht in der Bibel.”

³⁹ Leclercq 1960, 194-196.

⁴⁰ Though see *ibid.*, 194: “Dans les textes de l’Ancien Testament qui sont antérieurs à l’exil, il traduit des mots qui expriment l’intégrité: celle-ci, selon les cas, est l’innocence, l’absence de péché, ou la justice que confère la pratique de la Loi. Après l’exil, les termes qu’il recouvre signifient de plus en plus la droiture, le sincérité.”

⁴¹ E.g. Wis 1:1: “diligite iustitiam qui iudicatis terram sentite de Domino in bonitate et in simplicitate cordis quaerite illum.”

⁴² E.g. Ac 2:46.

⁴³ For the translation of Biblical texts I have made use of the Douay-Rheims version, *The Holy Bible*, Baltimore: John Murphy, 1899.

Two more important *addenda* to Leclercq's account, however, involve his omission of any discussion of possible classical influence (in particular of rhetoric and the theory of styles) and the failure to mention Augustine. A recently translated study on rhetoric and theology in the Middle Ages linked *sancta simplicitas* to the rhetorical strategy of artfully using inelegant words to appear sincere⁴⁴ – a strategy quoted from Cicero by Augustine in *De doctrina christiana*.⁴⁵ Augustine then applies this same technique of *simplicitas* when claiming to be sincere, to aim at *evidentia*, or clarity of speech, born out of a *cura docendi*, a preoccupation with teaching.

In *L'Amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu*, a slightly earlier work than his monograph on Peter Damian, Leclercq had already painted the important concept of *sancta simplicitas* in broad strokes.⁴⁶ There, he makes the important contribution of describing the concept as the answer formulated by proponents of monastic wisdom against the upcoming scholastic schools. Although the term originated among the church fathers, it was appropriated by monks from the eleventh century onward to designate a specific attitude towards the practice of theology and the use of the secular arts. *Sancta simplicitas* was an attitude of humility, as against the arrogance or 'inflation' monks perceived scholastic theologians displayed in their use of the arts. This arrogance was both moral and psychological, in that curiosity led to distraction from prayer, which in turn led to undue complexity. Leclercq manages to create a succinct account of a complex debate, within which we are able to interpret the term *sancta simplicitas* – something he neglected to do in his monograph on Peter Damian. Although this account will prove useful in our survey of Peter Damian's attitude towards rhetoric, it contains a problematic division at the end:

Of course, there are some who protest sincerely against a method which, not without foundation, appears to them vainglorious, because of the kind of curiosity it arouses and fosters. But there are also some for whom any effort at investigation is pride of intellect and who would be inclined to view laziness of the intelligence as a form of faith.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ A. Leupin, tr. D. Laatsch, *Fiction and incarnation: rhetoric, theology, and literature in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 127: "the trope functions by imitating ordinary discourse with the purpose of persuading the judge. To disguise his verbal skill, the orator uses the words of popular everyday speech as if they were his ... In the Latin tradition from Cicero ... 'rustic' or 'everyday' speech becomes a rhetorical figure deliberately used in culture's refined discourse (the *sermo urbanus*) to convince and manipulate."

⁴⁵ *Orat.* 78 in *De doct. christ.* 4.10.24.

⁴⁶ I have used the English translation: J. Leclercq, C. Misrahi tr., *The love of learning and the desire for God: a study of monastic culture*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1982³, 204-207.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 207.

This is a division one cannot make, as it implies that the historian is able to distinguish between what is ‘sincere’ and ‘insincere’.⁴⁸ What one *can* do, however, is turn a critical eye to the rhetorical situation of the text, and the author’s own use of the arts. This will allow the historian to contrast what an author *does* with what he *says*, which will prevent him from taking the author’s statements at face-value and making misinformed judgments of sincerity or insincerity. While one may still be unable to pass the judgment of sincerity (which is perhaps one the historian should refrain from altogether), this will allow him to discover inconsistencies between theory and practice.

A splendid treatment of the relationship between classical rhetoric, biblical *simplicitas*, and Augustine has been given by Erich Auerbach in his monumental *Literary language and its public in late Latin antiquity and in the Middle Ages*.⁴⁹ Auerbach describes the problem Christian writers with a classical education faced: which literary style to employ? On the one hand, classical oratorical theory prescribed proper usage of style according to the subject matter at hand: lowly material such as vulgar comedy deserved the *sermo humilis*, and so on.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the Bible, which contained the loftiest subject of all – the redemption of mankind – was expressed in what was, to classical tastes, a crude and rustic style. This inspired a radical re-evaluation of the theory of styles, leading to an enduring dialectic wherein the lofty themes of Christianity became associated with the humble style.⁵¹ Auerbach next quotes an important passage from Augustine’s *Confessiones*, in which Augustine describes his re-evaluation of the Bible’s low style, and which I will reproduce here in full:

iam enim absurditatem, quae me in illis litteris solebat offendere, cum multa ex eis probabiliter exposita audissem, ad sacramentorum altitudinem referebam eoque mihi illa venerabilior et sacrosancta fide dignior apparebat auctoritas, quo et omnibus ad legendum esset in promptu et secreti sui dignitatem in intellectu profundiore servaret, verbis apertissimis et humillimo genere loquendi se cunctis praebens et exercens intentionem eorum, qui non sunt leves corde,

⁴⁸ It is the same idea of supposed ‘sincerity’ that fuels such misconceived statements that Peter Damian lets himself get carried away by his own rhetoric – see H. de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l’Écriture*, 4 vols., Paris: Aubrier, 1959-1964, vol. 3, 168 n. 1: “Pierre Damien ... se laissant emporter par la rhétorique”.

⁴⁹ Translated by Ralph Manheim from the original: *Literatursprache und Publikum in der lateinischen Spätantike und im Mittelalter*.

⁵⁰ Cic. *Orat.* 69ff.

⁵¹ Important in this regard is the following, E. Auerbach, tr. R. Manheim, *Literary language & its public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, 35: “Because of its connotation of inferior rank, *humilis* came to be one of the terms most frequently used to designate the low style: *sermo humilis*. ... On the other hand ... *humilis* became the most important adjective characterizing the Incarnation; in all Christian literature written in Latin it came to express the atmosphere and level of Christ’s life and suffering.”

ut exciperet omnes populari sinu et per angusta foramina paucos ad te traiceret, multo tamen plures, quam si nec tanto apice auctoritatis emineret nec turbas gremio sanctae humilitatis hauriret.⁵²

(For those absurdities which in those Scriptures were wont to offend me, after I had heard divers of them expounded probably, I referred now to the depth of the mystery: yea, and the authority of that Book appeared so much the more venerable, and so much the more worthy of our religious credit, by how much the readier at hand it was for all to read upon, preserving yet the majesty of the secret under the profoundness of the meaning, offering itself unto all in words most open, and in a style of speaking most humble, and exercising the attention of such as are not light of heart; that it might by that means receive all into its common bosom, and through narrow passages, waft over some few towards thee: yet are these few a good many more than they would have been, had it not obtained the eminency of such high authority, nor allured on those companies with a bosom of holy humility.)

The key element here is the *sancta humilitas* mentioned at the end; *humilitas*, *simplicitas*, *rusticitas* – which are all synonyms expressing the same idea⁵³ – becomes a Christian virtue, not only in a moral and spiritual sense, but at its basic level in a linguistic and stylistic sense – and thus also rhetorically.

One final study I would like to discuss is that of Walter Veit.⁵⁴ In treating several aspects of *simplicitas* – namely, the rhetorical tradition, the epistemological aspect, the relation of *simplicitas* to the soul, the Christian development, and the moral dimension – Veit starts by situating it in the ancient debate of Asianism/mannerism vs. Atticism/classicism.⁵⁵ Another valuable contribution made by Veit is the signaling of Seneca’s role in establishing *simplicitas* as a moral virtue – both on a material level and referring to expression of speech.⁵⁶ Finally, it is highly significant that Veit cites Peter Damian – and specifically *De sancta simplicitate* – as one who has created a theological “doctrine of *simplicitas*,”⁵⁷ and who “has brought together most of the aspects of this area of the semantic field of our topos in order to argue against ‘scientia’ – here oratory”⁵⁸. Lastly, Veit proffers an insightful definition of the concept *simplicitas* and its underlying idea: “For that is, I believe, what in essence the topos

⁵² *Conf.* 6.5; the translation used is that of W. Watts, *Augustine: Confessions* (Loeb Classical Library), 2 vols., Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1912.

⁵³ Cf. Auerbach 1993, 50 n. 22.

⁵⁴ W. Veit, “Sancta Simplicitas,” in J. Riesz, P. Boerner, B. Scholz eds., *Sensus communis: contemporary trends in comparative literature. Festschrift für Henry Remak*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1986, 369-383.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 372.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 374 and 376.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 381.

[of simplicity, JJT] argues for: an image of man in protest against an increasingly complex world, alienated from its perceived source of existence – *natura sive deus* – and by this very fact questioning the power of a rationality and progress in conflict with its own ideology.”⁵⁹

In the following chapter, I shall preface my analysis of *De divina omnipotentia* with a brief discussion of Peter Damian’s conception of dialectic, the results of which may prove beneficial in the subsequent rhetorical analysis of the text.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 372.

2. *De divina omnipotentia*

2.1 Peter Damian and dialectic

Pedro Damián, decía Ulrike, perció en la batalla, y en la hora de su muerte suplicó a Dios que lo hiciera volver a Entre Ríos. Dios vaciló un segundo antes de otorgar esa gracia, y quien la había pedido ya estaba muerto, y algunos hombres lo habían visto caer. Dios, que no puede cambiar el pasado, pero sí las imágenes del pasado, cambió la imagen de la muerte en la de un desfallecimiento, y la sombra del entrerriano volvió a su tierra.⁶⁰

(Pedro Damián, said Ulrike, died in the battle, and at the moment of his death he beseeched God to allow him to return to Entre Rios. God doubted for a second before granting him the favor, and the one who had asked Him for it was already dead, and some men had seen him fall. God, who is unable to change the past, but is able to change the images of the past, changed the image of the death in one of a fainting, and the shadow of the man from Entre Rios returned to his land.)

Jorge Luis Borges treats, in the fantastically humorous manner that was so characteristic of him, the complex matter of God's ability to undo the past by way of a fictional story about the existence of two identical persons (Pedro Damián) who met their ends in two different ways. I say here 'complex', since it is not precisely clear what *De divina omnipotentia* claims concerning God's omnipotence, despite Peter Damian's later reputation as an anti-dialectician. I have chosen to analyze this letter because it is not only the most read and studied work of Peter Damian, and so will provide a suitable and well-documented introduction,⁶¹ but also because Damian's attitude towards the art of dialectic that figures so prominently here will provide the ideal stepping-stone to an analysis of Damian's attitude towards rhetoric.⁶²

Round about 1064,⁶³ Peter Damian entertained, as he presents it, a discussion over dinner with the abbot Desiderius of Monte Cassino, whose guest he was; the topic was

⁶⁰ J.L. Borges, taken from his short-story "La otra muerte"; the edition used is J.L. Borges, M.R. Barnatán ed., *Narraciones*, Madrid: Catedra, 1980.

⁶¹ For the most important works of the vast amount of literature that has gathered on this letter, see Reindel's introduction to the letter (119 in his edition): K. Reindel ed., *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani*, München: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 4 vols., 1983-1993, vol. 3, and the introduction in the translation made by Blum & Resnick: O.J. Blum & I.M. Resnick trs., *Peter Damian: letters*, 6 vols., Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1989-2005, vol. 5.

⁶² Cf. the introduction to the translation of the letters, Blum & Resnick 1989-2005, vol. 1, 31: "It is perhaps his most ambitious rhetorical and dialectical production."

⁶³ See Reindel's introduction to the letter; cf. Cantin 1972, 31-32 and Resnick 1992, 20 for a later dating.

whether or not God had the power to restore virginity that had been lost. The discussion, which was incited by the reading of letter 22 of Jerome, quickly gained a more general tenet, when the question was asked if God could undo what happened in the past. Toivo Holopainen presents a remarkably clear account of the differing interpretations of Damian's letter throughout the last several decades of scholarship, prior to offering his own.⁶⁴ Interpretations of *De divina omnipotentia*, Holopainen notes, have pivoted around the following lines:

Nam quod fuit non potest vere dici quia non fuit, et e diverso quod non fuit non recte dicitur quia fuit. Quae enim contraria sunt in uno eodemque subiecto congruere nequent. Haec porro impossibilitas recte quidem dicitur si ad naturae referatur inopiam; absit autem ut ad maiestatem sit applicanda divinam. Qui enim naturae dedit originem, facile, cum vult, naturae tollit necessitatem.⁶⁵

(For assuredly what was, cannot in truth be considered not to have been, and antithetically, what was not, cannot coincide in the same subject. This impossibility, moreover, is properly maintained in reference to the needs of nature. But God forbid that it be applied to divine majesty; for he who brought nature into being, at will easily abrogates the necessity of nature.)

These lines have been taken to mean that the principle of logical non-contradiction, being a natural and contingent law subject to God's creation, could not limit God's power⁶⁶; alternately, since Peter Damian makes no explicit statement regarding the matter, they have been interpreted to mean that Damian intends to bring dialecticians with his letter to a more careful weighing of the validity of their principle,⁶⁷ or conversely, that to cause a contradiction would be an evil, and since God cannot will evil, He could not violate the principle of non-contradiction – thereby making the above what Holopainen calls “an empty hypothesis”.⁶⁸ Holopainen clears some of the haze by starting off with Peter Damian's definition of God's omnipotence. Divine omnipotence is formulated by Peter Damian, Holopainen notes, as God “being able to do what He can will” – and since God, being good, can only will that which is good, divine omnipotence is equal to God's willing of good.⁶⁹ Holopainen proceeds to demonstrate that Damian is referring to a debate among dialecticians

⁶⁴ Holopainen 1995, 11-47.

⁶⁵ *De div. omnipot.* 612A; throughout, the translation used is that of Blum & Resnick 1989-2005; for convenience, the Latin edition used is that of Cantin 1972 (which uses Migne's references).

⁶⁶ J.A. Endres, *Petrus Damiani und die weltliche Wissenschaft* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters 8.3), Münster: Aschendorff, 1910, 23-30.

⁶⁷ Cantin 1972, 261.

⁶⁸ Resnick 1992, 102-111.

⁶⁹ Holopainen 1996, 19, referring to *De div. omnipot.* 599A.

concerning the “consequence of necessity or of impossibility”, whom Damian then chides for applying these rules of dialectic so thoughtlessly to theology.⁷⁰ It is in this context that Peter Damian comments on the attitude of these dialecticians:

Isti autem qui antiquam quaestionem noviter afferunt, dum altiora gestiunt nosse quam capiunt, potius aciem suae mentis obtundunt, quia ipsum lucis auctorem offendere non pavescunt.⁷¹

(But those who today take up this ancient problem, while striving to comprehend higher things beyond their capacity, instead blunt the keenness of their minds because they have not feared to offend the very Author of light.)

Careful consideration of logical premises must precede their application to theology – and even so, Peter Damian asserts that he has no need for dialectic, leading him to be termed an “antidialectician to a mild degree” by Holopainen.⁷² What is lacking in Peter Damian’s interlocutors, then, is *humilitas*, *honestas*,⁷³ – dare I say it? – *simplicitas*. With this in mind, how does this compare to Peter Damian’s attitude to the art of rhetoric? This is especially relevant as rhetoric and dialectic are paired in several significant passages in *De divina omnipotentia* that will be discussed below.

2.2 *De divina omnipotentia* on the art of rhetoric

In this letter it is necessary to discuss Peter Damian’s explicit statements about rhetoric, so that we may be able to relate this to his own use of rhetoric. His most theoretical reflections on rhetoric occur in 603 and 604, but I deem it useful to first briefly present Damian’s argument leading up to these sections.

After the *salutatio*, letter 119⁷⁴ starts off with several poetic metaphors describing Peter Damian’s relief at having been able to rid himself of the burden of his episcopate, which had forced him to repress the monk inside him for the benefit of his exterior duties. He goes

⁷⁰ Ibid., 28-30.

⁷¹ *De div. omnipot.* 604A.

⁷² Holopainen 1996, 47. See for a similar judgment W. Hartmann, “Rhetorik und Dialektik in der Streitschriftenliteratur,” in J. Fried ed., *Dialektik und Rhetorik im früheren und hohen Mittelalter: Rezeption, Überlieferung und gesellschaftliche Wirkung antiker Gelehrsamkeit vornehmlich im 9. und 12. Jahrhundert* (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs: Kolloquien 27), München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997, 73-95, at 75 and 84.

⁷³ Cf. 604B below.

⁷⁴ In Migne’s *Patrologia Latina* Opusc. 36, PL 144.

on to describe the secular ecclesiastical career as diverting one from one's true calling, and subverting one's call to monastic life.

Mox enim ad summa tendentis vitae status evertitur, rigor enervatur disciplinae, atque silentii censura dissolvitur, et ad effluendum quicquid libido suggesserit ora laxantur. Unde processit et quod nunc occurrit memoriae...⁷⁵

(Presently, the life of striving for perfection is subverted, austerity is weakened, the severity of discipline and silence is dissipated, and our lips are loosed to pour forth whatever caprice might suggest. This is the background for what now comes to mind.)

As the last sentence demonstrates, this *exordium* leads into the true subject-matter of the letter, and so must somehow be related to it. Apparently, what the outside world is lacking is discipline, *rigor disciplinae*, so that silence gives way to whatever unrestrained desire (*libido*) suggests. How does this relate to the subject of divine omnipotence? Damian does not keep us in the dark for long, for when he recounts the reading of Jerome's comment on God's inability to restore virginity, he remarks:

Nimis scilicet inhonestum videtur ut illi qui omnia potest, nisi sub altioris intellegentiae sacramento, tam leviter impossibilitas adscribatur.⁷⁶

(It seems altogether unbecoming that impotence be so lightly ascribed to him who can do all things, unless it be affirmed on the secret evidence of a higher intelligence.)

Damian finds it 'dishonest' or 'unbecoming' to ascribe an impossibility to God's power so lightly – that is, without the benefit of a higher understanding of the divine (perhaps "dishonest" is to be understood here as saying what one knows not to be in accordance with Scriptural truth). Lack of discipline, then, leads to *inhonestas*. Damian next warns his readers to be careful when discussing such lofty matters, particularly when defending such rash statements that touch upon the very foundations of the faith – God's omnipotence. One should take the utmost care when making use of the Bible to support any such claims:

Si quid igitur tale divinis paginis reperitur insertum, non mox passim procaci ac praesumptiva vulgari debet audacia, sed sub modesta sobrii sermonis proferendum est disciplina.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *De div. omnipot.* 596C.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 596D.

⁷⁷ *De div. omnipot.* 597C.

(If, therefore, statements of this kind are found included in sacred Writ, they must not be quickly and indiscriminately publicized with a daring and self-conceited air, but treated with restraint in temperate and modest language)

Instead of discussing such matters with ‘an unchecked and presumptuous kind of vulgar audacity’ (*procax ac praesumptiva vulgaris audacia*) caused by *libido* and *inhonestas*, ‘a modestly controlled kind of sober speech’ must be employed – referring both to humility as a moral virtue and in a stylistic sense. Not resorting to an overly complex and ostentatiously intricate style, a simple kind of speech is to be preferred in such matters. In a way, Peter Damian commends the use of the rhetorical tool of *simplicitas*. Its goal has here shifted, however, from simply making the orator appear sincere, to making the Christian appear humble and pious.

Using a biblical quote himself to drive the point home a little further on, Damian remarks:

Inspirante Deo responsurus ad haec, in primis exactorem meum verbis Salomonis admonendum video quibus ait: Maiora te ne quaesieris, et altiora te ne scrutatus fueris.⁷⁸
(As I prepare to reply to these objections, as God may inspire me, I feel obliged in the first place to call my critic’s attention to the words of Solomon, where he says, “With what is too much for you meddle not, and do not search out the things which are beyond you.”)

Humility is of the utmost importance, knowing the bounds and limits both of one’s own capabilities and of the secular arts.⁷⁹ It is, moreover, interesting to note that Peter Damian here refers to his opponents in the debate as accusers (“exactorem meum”), sketching the image of a court of law in which he is the accused, which gives the letter much of its rhetorical urgency.⁸⁰

Not only do those who lack humility harm themselves, but they also bother those who ‘walk sincerely and humbly’ with their fruitless queries:

⁷⁸ Ibid., 601D, quoting Sir 3:22-23.

⁷⁹ Cf. 615C: “Animadvertant hoc qui modum suae capacitatis excedunt, et ad ea quae super se sunt superbe temptanda prorumpunt, ne, dum adversus Deum quid loquantur ignorant, incaute se insipienterque locutos etiam per inlatam sibi dignae ultionis sententiam discant.” Cf. also the coupling of *humilitas* with the above-mentioned *sobrietas* (and the prime placement of humility) in *Serm.* 28 (J. Lucchesi ed., *Sancti Petri Damiani Sermones* (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 57, Turnhout: Brepols, 1983): “sit in me fixa humilitas, sobria vita, vera scientia, fortitudo, prudentia, iusticia, temperantia, cursus rectus, finis perfectus, te praestante, Deus noster...”

⁸⁰ For other places where Peter Damian uses the image of ‘accusers,’ see for instance: 601D, 608B, 608C.

Sed quid sibi volunt vani quilibet homines et sacrilegi dogmatis inductores qui, dum aliis quaestionum suarum tendiculas struunt, quod in eas ipsi ante praecipites corruant non adtendunt; et dum simpliciter gradientibus scandala frivolae inquisitionis obiciunt, ipsi potius in lapidem offensionis inpingunt.⁸¹

(But what is the purpose of these vain men, of these sacrilegious innovators on doctrine, who, while devising their ensnaring questions for others, were not aware that they themselves had first been trapped in them; and of those who, while placing obstacles of frivolous investigation in the path of simple wayfarers, themselves stumble over the “stumbling-stone”?)

The phrase *simpliciter gradientibus* is taken from the book of Proverbs, where *simpliciter* occurs four times with either *gradi* or *ambulare*, and where it is contrasted with ‘depravity’ (Prov 10:9 and 11:20) or ‘perversion’ (28:18). The phrase then holds both the meaning of ‘sticking to the right path’, as well as the sense of ‘sincerity’ and ‘humility’ we distinguished earlier. Having presented himself as the accused, Damian expresses his bafflement at those who prepare traps and obstacles for those “walking simply”, only to be ensnared themselves. Never making any explicit claims, Peter Damian manages to place himself among the ranks of those “walking simply,” carrying connotations of moral uprightness, orthodoxy, and humility.

Now we have come to one of the most important passages of the letter, at the beginning of which Peter Damian once again warns his addressees of the dangers of the present discussion:

Videat ergo inperite sapientium et vana quaerentium caeca temeritas, quia si haec quae ad artem pertinent disserendi ad Deum procaciter referant, iam non tantum in praeteritis, sed et in praesentibus ac futuris, eum inpotentem penitus et invalidum reddant. Qui nimirum, quia necdum didicerunt elementa verborum, per obscuras argumentorum suorum caligines amittunt clarae fidei fundamentum, et ignorantes adhuc quod a pueris tractatur in scolis, querelae suae calumnias divinis ingerunt sacramentis, et quia inter rudimenta discentium vel artis humanae nullam apprehendere peritiam, curiositatis suae nubilo perturbant puritatis ecclesiasticae disciplinam.⁸²

(Notice, therefore, how the blind foolhardiness of these pseudo-intellectuals who investigate non-problems, by boldly attributing to God those things that refer to the art of rhetoric, cause him to become completely impotent and deprived of strength, not only regarding things past, but also relating to things present and to come. These men, indeed, because they have not yet learned the elements of style, lose their grasp of the fundamentals of simple faith as a result of

⁸¹ *De div. omnipot.* 602D.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 603C.

the obscurity produced by their dull tricks; and, still ignorant of those things boys study in school, they heap the abuse of their contentious spirit on the mysteries of God. Moreover, because they have acquired so little skill in the rudiments of learning or of the liberal arts, they obscure the study of pure ecclesiastical doctrine by the cloud of their curiosity.)

For if the “blind recklessness of those who are wise but not knowledgeable and in quest of vain things relate those things pertaining to the art of disputation unchecked to God”, they will render him impotent in all matters of past, present, and future. The emphasis in this passage, which is mostly concerned with dialectic, is placed on a number of recurring elements: the unbridled (*procax*) application of an art, coupled with ignorance of elementary knowledge, leads to conclusions not in accordance with the sacred teachings. Damian’s debaters are, on the one hand, wholly inexperienced and unqualified, and on the other hand, do not know the limits of the secular arts in relation to faith. Yet how is it that they are both incompetent and able to use arguments that are too obscure? If they are indeed ignorant of the things ‘boys study in school’, how then are they able to formulate arguments that are too complex? This is, of course, a rhetorical technique Peter Damian employs to disqualify his opponents and to imply that true mastery of an art includes knowledge of its limits in relation to faith. The obscure arguments Damian criticizes are an affront to the divine mysteries, and even lead to a loss of the fundament of faith – which is clear, not obscure. Peter Damian creates a rhetorical antithesis between ‘obscure human art’ and the ‘clear’ and ‘pure’ teachings of the church. Damian presents ecclesiastical doctrine as fixed – were that the case, however, there would be no argument – a classic example of the rhetorical fallacy *petitio principii*.⁸³ Peter Damian elaborates his point:

Haec plane quae ex dialecticorum vel rhetorum prodeunt argumentis non facile divinae virtutis sunt aptanda mysteriis, et quae ad hoc inventa sunt ut in syllogismorum instrumenta proficiant vel clausulas dictionum, absit ut sacris se legibus pertinacter inferant et divinae virtuti conclusionis suae necessitates opponant. Quae tamen artis humanae peritia, si quando tractandis sacris eloquiis adhibetur, non debet ius magisterii sibimet arroganter arripere, sed velut ancilla dominae quodam famulatus obsequio subservire, ne, si praecedit, oberret, et dum

⁸³ “A logical fallacy in which a premise is assumed to be true without warrant or in which what is to be proved is implicitly taken for granted.” *petitio principii*. (2009). In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved July 14, 2009, from [http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/petitio principii](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/petitio%20principii)

exteriorum verborum sequitur consequentias, intimae virtutis lumen et rectum veritatis tramitem perdat.⁸⁴

(Clearly, conclusions drawn from the arguments of dialecticians and rhetoricians should not be thoughtlessly addressed to the mysteries of divine power; dialecticians and rhetoricians should refrain from persistently applying to the sacred laws the rules devised for their progress in using the tools of the syllogism or fine style or oratory, and from setting their inevitable conclusions against the power of God. However, if the techniques of the humanities be used in the study of revelation, they must not arrogantly usurp the rights of the mistress, but should humbly assume a certain ancillary role, as a maidservant to her lady, so as not to be led astray in assuming the lead, nor to lose the enlightenment of deepest virtue, nor to abandon the right to truth by attending only to the superficial meaning of words.)

Once again, it is the unbridled use of an art (*pertinacter*) that causes problems by using its tools – be it the syllogisms of dialectic, or the finely wrought phrases of rhetoric – to impose its so-called ‘necessary conclusions’ on the divine virtue and the sacred writings. The sentence that follows is the most significant: the full knowledge of these human arts is still insufficient to play the leading role when it comes to faith and the secular arts; instead of presumptuously claiming the part of ‘master’ in this relationship, it should instead act like a servant with obedience.⁸⁵ Human art should not proceed first, “so as not to be led astray ... nor to lose the enlightenment of deepest virtue, nor to abandon the right road to truth by attending only to the superficial meaning of words.” The metaphor employed here is taken from Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*:⁸⁶

Et in quibus forte locis agnoscitur a doctis, tales res dicuntur ut verba quibus dicuntur non a dicente adhibita sed ipsis rebus velut sponte subiuncta videantur, quasi sapientiam de domo sua, id est pectore sapientis, procedere intellegas et tamquam inseparabilem famulam etiam non vocatam sequi eloquentiam.⁸⁷

(In passages where scholars do perhaps recognize it, the subject-matter is such that the words used seem to be ones not selected by the speaker but ones naturally associated with the actual topic. You could visualize it as wisdom proceeding from its own home (by this I mean a wise

⁸⁴ Ibid., 603D.

⁸⁵ Cf. 612C, where nature is also compared with a ‘servant’: “Quid ergo mirum si is qui naturae legem dedit et ordinem, super eandem naturam sui nutus exerceat ditionem ut ei naturae necessitas non rebellis obsistat, sed eius substrata legibus velut ancilla deserviat?”

⁸⁶ For the origin of this metaphor, see perhaps Cic. *De orat.* 1.55.236: “Idcirco istam iuris scientiam eloquentiae tamquam ancillulam pedisequamque adiunxisti.”

⁸⁷ *De doctr. christ.* 4.10.30. De edition and translation used is R.P.H. Green ed. & tr., *Augustine: De Doctrina Christiana*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

person's heart) and eloquence, like an ever-present slave, following on behind without having to be summoned.)

Augustine is arguing here for the fact that Scripture contains a certain kind of rhetorical eloquence of its own, which is neither too prominent nor absent but flowing naturally through discourse. Rhetoric in that sense 'follows behind' and is a 'servant' to the Scriptural content.⁸⁸ A little further on Augustine remarks that Paul displayed impressive eloquence in the second letter to the Corinthians:

Sed comes sapientiae, dux eloquentiae, illam sequens, istam praecedens et sequentem non respuens...⁸⁹

(...he spoke with an amazing combination of wisdom and eloquence, but as the servant of wisdom and the master of eloquence, being led by the one but leading the other and not disdainng it as it followed behind.)

Thus, in both Augustine and Peter Damian rhetoric takes its place respectfully behind the sacred or wise content – with a key difference, however: in the statements discussed, Augustine was speaking of rhetoric applied in Scripture itself, where it, although having an ancillary role, was portrayed as being inseparable from wisdom and being its natural consequence; Peter Damian, on the other hand, spoke of rhetoric used in the *study* of Scripture, and uses the *ancilla*-simile to describe its subordination to the wise content that is its object. Damian, in effect, simultaneously makes wisdom and eloquence independent of each other and also changes the role of the latter from accompaniment to strict subordination.

In the subsequent passage, Damian relates the discussion on rhetoric and dialectic back to the main argument:

Haec igitur quaestio, quoniam non ad discutiendam maiestatis divinae potentiam, sed potius ad artis dialecticae probatur pertinere peritiam, et non ad virtutem vel materiam rerum, sed ad modum et ordinem disserendi consequentiamque verborum, non habet locum in Ecclesiae sacramentis, quae a saecularibus pueris ventilatur in scholis. Non enim ad fidei regulam vel morum pertinet honestatem, sed ad loquendi copiam verborumque nitorem. Quamobrem

⁸⁸ Though see the *Confessiones* (e.g. 1.13-15) and especially the *Retractationes* (1.3.2-5) for a critical re-evaluation of his earlier views on the liberal arts and their divine nature: "Verum et his libris displicet mihi ... quod multum tribui liberalibus disciplinis quas multi sancti multum nesciunt, quidam etiam sciunt et sancti non sunt." Cf. G.L. Ellspermann, *The attitude of the early Christian Latin writers toward pagan literature and learning*, diss., Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1949, 185-188.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.12.34.

sufficiat nobis brevi compendio fidem defendere quam tenemus; sapientibus autem huius saeculi quae sua sunt cedimus. Habeant qui volunt litteram occidentem, dummodo per Dei misericordiam Spiritus a nobis vivificans non recedat.⁹⁰

(Therefore, this question, in that it is proven that it pertains neither to the investigation of the power of divine majesty, but rather to the skills of the art of dialectic, nor to the perfection or to the nature of things, but rather to the method and order of speech and to the relationship of words, has no place amidst the mysteries of the Church, which are loosely discussed by young lay students in the schools. This question, in fact, does not relate to the norms of faith nor to the probity of conduct, but to the fluency of speech and to the elegance of language. Therefore, we are satisfied that in this brief summary we have defended the faith which we hold, while granting to the wise of this world the things that are theirs. Let those who wish, retain the letter that brings death, so long as, by the mercy of God, the life-giving Spirit does not depart from us.)

The question under discussion, Peter Damian asseverates, in no way pertains to the discussion of divine power, but rather to the field of the art of dialectic, and, as we just read, to “the method and order of speech and to the relationship of words ... which are loosely discussed by young lay students at schools”. Significantly, Damian appears to shift the emphasis to the art of rhetoric in this passage. The centrally located “ad loquendi copiam verborumque nitorem”⁹¹ evinces that the question at hand has more to do with verbal virtuosity than to the rule of faith or “probity of conduct”. Why the juxtaposition here of *fidei regula* and *morum honestas*? Complex arguments focused on stylistic elegance not only deviate from “the norms of faith”, but apparently also from “probity of conduct”. The use of the term *honestas* here recalls the *inhonestas* mentioned at the start of the letter: it seemed ‘dishonest’ to Peter Damian to impose an impossibility on the Almighty so lightly. This *inhonestas* was caused by the breaking of the silence by *libido*. According to Peter Damian, then, it is ‘libidinous’ to have stylistic elegance as the sole goal of linguistic and argumentative expression.

At this point, the contours of a significant problem come into view. Despite his objections to the application of rhetoric in matters of faith, Peter Damian did – in fact could not – do otherwise, and – even more problematic – if Augustine is to be believed, so did Scripture itself. While we may not be able to solve this problem here, we may be able to find some clues to Peter Damian’s own solution in the last two sentences of the passage just discussed. The paraphrase of 2 Cor 3:6 (“the letter that killeth”), usually used in exegetical

⁹⁰ *De div. omnipot.* 604B.

⁹¹ Note here the dactylic *clausula* with “verborumque nitorem” hammering the point home with subtle irony.

context,⁹² appears to refer to the study of the liberal arts *per se*. But the ‘Spirit’ that is mentioned may offer yet some space for the study of the liberal arts. For Damian, it seems, the solution is to study the arts under the auspices of Spirit, where Spirit has a two-fold sense: in the ‘literal’ sense as part of the triune divinity, inspiring the student and leading him in the right direction; secondly, in the figural sense, in which ‘Spirit’ designates an ulterior signified, in this case meaning that the student ought to study the arts not on account of their concrete teachings, but in the context of a higher, divine purpose. Yet, are Damian’s opponents not already doing this? Peter Damian thinks not, as they do not take the “rules of faith” as the starting-point of their practice of the arts – but the *regula fidei* is exactly the point of discussion! Utilizing the rhetorical technique of *petitio principii*, Damian presents the matter of divine omnipotence as a done deal, fixed and part of the ‘rules of faith’ – even though Peter Damian’s view in this matter runs contrary to that of a church father, Jerome. Thus, by depicting his opponents as applying rhetoric and dialectic for their own sake, Peter Damian employs a rhetorical technique to force his opponents to take his stand on the matter of debate.

The last passage that I would like to discuss is one near the end of the letter:

Illud plane stupendum quod nunc homines, in Ecclesiae gremio non modo renati, sed etiam nati, tam audacter, tam inprudenter, omnipotenti Deo calumniam impossibilitatis obiciunt, et protinus absorberi terreni subsicivi voragine non pavesunt. Erubescat iam lingua frenetica, et quae nescit esse facunda, discat esse vel muta. Nescit aedificationis augmenta depromere, sciat saltem sine fidei destructione tacere. Alioquin abscidatur sibi ferro praeputium per vindictam, nisi sibi frenum adhibeat per silentii disciplinam. Ventilent quaestiones suas qui volunt, iuxta modum et ordinem disserendi, dum modo per ambages suas et scholaris infantiae neias contumeliam non inferant Creatori; sciantque impossibilitatem istam in ipsa rerum esse natura et verborum ex arte precedentium consequentia, non ad virtutem pertinere divinam, nichilque supernae maiestatis evadere posse potentiam, ut dicatur iuxta solius naturae ordinem verborumque conditionem ... Discutiant itaque iuxta modulum suum litterarum dumtaxat quibus adhuc indigent elementa, nec altiora se usurpent divina mysteria.⁹³

(Indeed, it is an amazing thing that men who are now not only reborn within the family of the Church but also born there, should so shamelessly and presumptuously reproach the omnipotent God with the false charge of impossibility and are not afraid to immediately engross themselves in the whirl of incidental worldly affairs. And now let their frantic tongue

⁹² T. Wunsch, *Spiritualis intellegentia: zur allegorischen Bibelinterpretation des Petrus Damiani* (Theorie und Forschung 190, Philosophie und Theologie 14), Regensburg: S. Roderer Verlag, 1992, 22.

⁹³ *De div. omnipot.* 615A.

be ashamed, and if it does not know how to be eloquent, it should learn instead to be silent; if it is unversed in promoting edification, let it know at least how to be silent without subverting the faith. Otherwise, as a punishment, let his foreskin be cut off with a knife if he does not restrain himself by the discipline of silence. Let those who so desire, air their questions according to the manner and rules of dialectic, so long as by their circumlocutions and the trifling song of their school days they do not outrage the Creator, and let them know that the impossibility of which they speak lies in the very nature of things and in the logical consequence of words resulting from this art, that it does not belong to divine power and that nothing can escape the capacity of divine majesty, as one might say in speaking only in terms of the natural order and the use of words ... Let them discuss, therefore, in their own small measure, merely the element of grammar, which they still need to do, and not usurp the field of the higher mysteries of God.)

The passage occurs immediately after a long enumeration of impossibilities and contrarities that occur in nature, to argue that God does indeed ‘bend the laws of nature’ – and so could also restore virginity (contrary to Jerome’s statement – see the introduction to this chapter) and that (in some cases) ‘stranger things have happened’. Damian then once again expresses his stupefaction at the fact that a limit is so lightly imposed on God’s omnipotence. Surely one would have to be audacious, shameless, and unafraid to envelop oneself in the worldly whirlpool. Interestingly, Peter Damian proceeds to discuss all three trivial arts in this passage: first off, the tongues of the speakers of this question should be ashamed – and if they do not know how to be eloquent, they should be silent; second, they ought to know that the so-called impossibility is only the result of their logical word-play and holds no truth about the divine nature; thirdly, “let them discuss ... in their own small measure, merely the element of grammar, which they still need to do, and not usurp the field of the higher mysteries of God”. What catches the eye in this juxtaposition of the arts is the fact that only rhetoric appears to receive a positive treatment; for the questioners’ tongues are not eloquent and thus should stay silent – allowing for the inference that if they would be eloquent, they would have no need to be silent. The mention of silence at this point recalls the beginning of the letter, where lack of silence was attributed to *libido* (unrestrained desire). To that is added here incompetence in the given art (“nescit esse facunda”), for a sufficient mastery of the art would only be beneficial to the faith (“aedificationis augmenta depromere”). To return to our introductory section on dialectic: just as the ability to do evil was no part of true divine omnipotence, so it would seem that Peter Damian does not consider blasphemous speech as true eloquence. True eloquence, instead, follows humbly behind faith.

2.3 Historical context

Having briefly sketched Peter Damian's position on the art of dialectic in *De divina omnipotentia*, and subsequently having analyzed his stance towards that of rhetoric, it will prove useful to situate our findings in a historical context. As it is, the outlines of a central contemporary debate can be seen to be present in the letter.

For instance, we see Peter Damian constantly hammering on the dangers of a 'reckless' (*temeritas*) and 'uncontrolled' (*pertinacitas*) application of the arts to theology. Damian's emphasis on theological methodology is informed by the debates that surrounded the rise of urban schools in the eleventh century.⁹⁴ The importance they accorded to the study and application of rhetoric, and especially logic, was viewed with mounting suspicion by the monastic schools, which held to a long-established practice of the trivial arts as a unity, and as preparatory to the study of Scripture. Monks feared that both components of this practice were now at risk: they were afraid that the focus on the art of dialectic and rhetoric would change their status from preparatory to independent arts, allowing them to be studied not in the context of Scripture but in their own right. To a degree, their fears turned out not to be unfounded, as not only logic,⁹⁵ but also rhetoric⁹⁶ were developed as independent arts in the new urban schools, apart from the *trivium*. Especially rhetoric was to receive vast popularity in the new, specialized form of *ars dictaminis*. It is fascinating to note that Peter Damian, despite his objections to rhetoric's cutting loose from the study of Scripture, was to be included as one of the examples to follow in writing a letter only several years after his death by Alberic of Monte Cassino,⁹⁷ one of the founders of the *ars dictaminis*,⁹⁸ and that several scholars have perceived that his letters appear to be composed according to the rules of

⁹⁴ For a sketch of this debate see e.g. D.E. Luscombe "Dialectic and rhetoric in the ninth and twelfth centuries: continuity and change," in J. Fried ed., *Dialektik und Rhetorik im früheren und hohen Mittelalter: Rezeption, Überlieferung und gesellschaftliche Wirkung antiker Gelehrsamkeit vornehmlich im 9. und 12. Jahrhundert* (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs: Kolloquien 27), München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997, 1-20, at 18-19, and especially Pranger 1995, 205-220 and Leclercq 1982, 154-155, 198-207.

⁹⁵ Pranger 1995, 205: "In de elfde eeuw maakt echter met name de logica zich in toenemende mate los uit dit studiepakket, om zich aan de stadsscholen en later aan de universiteiten tot een zelfstandige discipline te ontwikkelen."

⁹⁶ Luscombe 1997, 15: "The seven arts survived, supported and honoured by many in both theory and fact, but they were not immune from evolution or from criticism. New arts – or to be more precise, new sub-arts or new divisions of the arts – made their appearance, especially in the twelfth century ... Still more perceptible are the new arts that were derived from ancient rhetoric: *ars dictaminis*, *ars notaria*, *ars poetriae*, *ars praedicandi* and *ars disputationis*."

⁹⁷ See n. 10. Yet even during his lifetime, Peter Damian had been in contact with Alberic and written him several letters: Cantin 1972, 48.

⁹⁸ Cantin 1972, 53.

dictamen that were codified only after his death.⁹⁹ Despite the fact that Peter Damian protested against his letters being scrutinized for rhetorical ‘show-pieces,’¹⁰⁰ he appears to have played a curious role in this matter. In the end, it must be concluded that Peter Damian, for all his protests against the independent practice of rhetoric, certainly utters his objections in some of the richest rhetorical styles possible, never escaping the field of rhetoric and even furnishing his ‘opponents’ with numerous examples to follow.¹⁰¹

Having surveyed Peter Damian’s views on rhetoric in relation to faith in *De divina omnipotentia*, we will now turn to another, slightly earlier letter, titled *Dominus vobiscum*.

⁹⁹ Luscombe 1997, 17 and Cantin 1972, 284.

¹⁰⁰ J. van Engen, “Letters, schools, and written culture in the eleventh and twelfth centuries,” in J. Fried ed., *Dialektik und Rhetorik im früheren und hohen Mittelalter: Rezeption, Überlieferung und gesellschaftliche Wirkung antiker Gelehrsamkeit vornehmlich im 9. und 12. Jahrhundert* (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs: Kolloquien 27), München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997, 97-132, at 104: “Peter Damian, who employed the letter mostly to effect ecclesiastical reform, acknowledged that when his letters fell into the hands of ‘worldly men’ they were read critically for displays of rhetorical and dialectical skill – matters which Damian, himself a master of rhetoric, dismissed as so much frivolous ornamentation and even as ‘dung’.”

¹⁰¹ Cf. Pranger 1995, 214: “Mag dan gelden dat, bij Damiani, bijvoorbeeld, zelfs het anti-retorisch en anti-grammaticaal protest blijft ingebed in retorische termen, het feit dat ook de logica, ondanks de schijn van het tegendeel, zich niet fundamenteel uit de context der *artes* heeft losgemaakt, roept des te klemmender de vraag op wat voor proces zich precies in de elfde-eeuwse cultuur heeft afgespeeld.” See also Leclercq 198-199, who names the opposition between cloister and school a literary theme and cites Peter Damian as example.

3. *Dominus vobiscum*

3.1 Introduction

Written sometime between 1048 and 1053,¹⁰² the letter entitled *Dominus vobiscum* commences with a lengthy address to a certain Leo,¹⁰³ in which Peter Damian flatters the recipient and establishes him as an authority to judge the matter at hand. For as it happened, Damian has received certain queries from recluse monks, who wondered if they should adhere to the plural forms in reciting mass or the Divine Office, even though they reside in solitary cells. Not knowing what to answer, Peter Damian decided to turn to his “guardian angel”, who is wiser than he, even though he is not learned in the secular arts. Damian proceeds to write an interesting paragraph in which he rejects the icons of secular learning (e.g. Plato, Demosthenes) and professes to prefer the “simplicity of Christ”. He goes on to support his rejection of secular knowledge with Scripture, before once again uttering his request to “lord Leo”. Anticipating the latter’s reaction, Damian supposes that he should first attempt to answer the “knotty question” himself, explaining that this is a common technique for scholastic schoolmasters to use on their pupils. The largest part of the letter contains Peter Damian’s argumentation supporting his affirmative answer to the monks’ query. The argument is largely based on the doctrine of the church as a mystical body of Christ,¹⁰⁴ in which one member represents and contains the whole of the church and vice versa (the church represents all of its diverse members), allowing for a strictly inappropriate use of grammar. It is this emphasis on the unity of the church that led Adolf Kolping to consider that the true subject-matter of the letter was wholly different from the trifling matter that is presented; instead, it was the unity of the church, a pressing theme because of the schism in the church with three popes vying for the papacy in 1046.¹⁰⁵

In addition to exploring the original contexts in which the *formulae* under discussion were used, Peter Damian provides countless instances from Scripture in which a single person is used in a figural way to represent the entire church. The letter closes with an impressive

¹⁰² F. Neukirch, *Das Leben Petrus Damiani*, Göttingen: Gebrüder Hofer, 1875, 95. Ferretti dates it to 1046: W. Ferretti, “La comunità cristiana secondo S. Pier Damiani o l’opuscolo ‘Dominus Vobiscum’,” in *Studi su San Pier Damiano in onore del cardinale Amleto Giovanni Cicognani* (Biblioteca Cardinale Gaetano Cicognani 5), Faenza: Venerabile Seminario Vescovile Pio XII, 1961, 49-62, at 51.

¹⁰³ Most likely Leo of Sitria, see Blum & Resnick 1989, vol. 1, 255-256, Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 250.

¹⁰⁴ For the origin of this doctrine, see Paul’s *First letter to the Corinthians*. Peter Damian further developed the idea by using the writings of Cyprian, Augustine, and John Chrysostom – see Ferretti 1961, 51-52.

¹⁰⁵ A. Kolping, *Petrus Damiani: das Büchlein von Dominus vobiscum*, Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1949, 11-12.

panegyric of the solitary life,¹⁰⁶ in which Peter Damian displays his full mastery of rhetoric in a continuous series of addresses to his cell.¹⁰⁷

This letter forms a worthwhile object of our survey of Peter Damian's rhetoric as it not only juxtaposes secular knowledge (and specifically rhetoric) on more than one occasion, but also offers a remarkable insight in Peter Damian's own rhetorical practice – most notably in the epilogue.

3.2 The rhetorical situation of *Dominus vobiscum*

Contrary to Peter Damian's letter *De divina omnipotentia*, at the beginning of which he explicitly recounts the circumstances that led to his writing, it is not entirely clear upon a first reading what the rhetorical situation is in this letter. In order to assess Peter Damian's stance on the relation between faith and rhetoric and the statements he makes on the subject, we will first need to establish exactly what Peter Damian is arguing in this letter and (more importantly) to whom.

After the salutation, Peter Damian heaps laudatory compliment upon compliment to the recipient, addressing him as “prudent sanctity” (“sanctitatis prudentia”)¹⁰⁸ and referring to him not merely as a friend, but as a “father, a teacher, a master, and lord, dearer to me than almost all mortals”. These kind of flattering remarks in the opening of a letter were commonly used to make the addressee *benivulus* (benevolent), by means of a rhetorical strategy of *conciliare* (to win over).¹⁰⁹ After the *conciliatio*, Peter Damian succinctly states the question asked by his fellow hermits. He speaks of “quite a few adherents of the hermitic life frequently asking him” (“nonnulli enim fratres heremitice sectatores vitae frequenter interrogant”)¹¹⁰ whether or not to use the plural forms when celebrating mass in solitude. Damian then describes the two answers they have come up with: one group, “as if debating by themselves” (“quidam enim inter se quasi ratiocinantes”)¹¹¹ decides, in a series of rhetorical questions (“numquidnam...?”),¹¹² that it would be ridiculous to start addressing the walls of one's cell in celebrating mass; others, however, are very afraid (“pertimescunt”)¹¹³ that they

¹⁰⁶ Dressler 1954, 42: “Das lange Kapitel: ‘Laus eremiticae vitae’, überschwenglich und uberladen in Sprache und Ausdruck, ein echt rhetorisches Kunststück nach Art spätantiker Enkomia”.

¹⁰⁷ It is found separately in numerous manuscripts, but included in the editions of Migne and Reindel, and also in the translation of Blum & Resnick.

¹⁰⁸ Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 250.3.

¹⁰⁹ Cic. *Inv.* 1.20: “Exordium est oratio animum auditoris idonee comparans ad reliquam dictionem: quod eveniet, si eum benivolum, attentum, docilem confecerit.”

¹¹⁰ Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 251.2-3.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 10.

will sin if they should shorten the length of mass and depart from ecclesiastical tradition. Professing that he is quite as ignorant in the matter as they are, Damian turns to Leo for the answer. Throughout the opening of the letter, there is a continuous reference to Peter Damian as doubtful and ignorant in the matter he is faced with (“in dubiis rebus ... haesitanti ac sciscitanti”; “me ... in obiecta ambiguitate”; “ad percontacionem potius mens eque nescia provocatur”),¹¹⁴ as opposed to Leo, the pillar of wisdom and divine certainty.¹¹⁵

Furthermore, there is also a recurrent reference to Leo as master (“doctorem”, “magistrum”),¹¹⁶ and to Peter Damian himself as a student (“a te docendus”).¹¹⁷ As Damian clearly demonstrates, he is no novice in secular learning (least of all rhetoric and dialectic). The effect these references then have, is that secular science is portrayed as insufficient, and subordinate to a different kind of wisdom – cf. the end of the catalogue of masters of secular learning, where Peter Damian portrays himself as a “discipulum humilitatis Christi”.¹¹⁸

One gets the impression that the letter is directed, not so much at Leo, as at disagreeing monks, who may have used arguments pertaining to secular wisdom and dialectical method to argue against Peter Damian’s opinion. Here it is interesting to note the words Peter Damian uses to describe the activities of the group of monks he eventually disagrees with (those opting for the adaptation of the *formulae*): “quasi ratiocinantes” (“as if debating”), which Peter Damian uses on more than one occasion as a technical term for the application of dialectic.¹¹⁹ This would explain not only the recurrent reprobation of the secular arts, but also why Peter Damian chose to provide such a lengthy argumentation of his own answer, if Peter Damian merely wanted the advice of his “guardian angel”. His puzzling motivation for this, by pointing at the practice of scholastic schoolmasters (which, presumably, Leo had little experience with, as the constant contrast of his simplicity with worldly wisdom suggests – and also the fact that Peter Damian has to explain the tactic),¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 250.8;250.13;251.11.

¹¹⁵ E.g., ibid., 250.7-10: “Quandoquidem meum te angelum esse constitui ... ita protinus indubitanter acciperem ac si vox mihi caelestis oraculi angelitus intonaret”.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 4-5.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 251.1.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 252.20.

¹¹⁹ See for instance the following passage from *De div. omnipot.*, 610D: “Manifestum est igitur alternitatem istam, de qua quaeritur, scilicet utrum possit credi aliquid fuisse simul et non fuisse, esse et non esse, futurum esse et futurum non esse, naturis existentium rerum nulla posse ratione congruere, ad solas autem verborum pugnas, quae de disserendi ac ratiocinandi fiunt consequentiis pertinere.”

¹²⁰ Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 253.1-5: “Sed huius questionis nodum qualitercumque a me prius solvi fortasse praecipies, et sic postmodum proprii intellectus sententiam promes, scholasticorum scilicet more doctorum, qui sciscitantur a pueris ex quacumque propositi thematis difficultate, quid sentiant, ut docilitatis indolem ex eorum prius prolatione deprehendant.” Cf. also the end of the letter, Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 278.15-18: “Ecce, pater karissime, solvendam tibi questionem fraterna pulsatus inquisitione proposui, sed et ipse interim non distuli

would then be explained as a subtle jab of irony aimed at his opponents. The mention of scholastic schoolmasters should perhaps alert us to the fact that this letter may be engaging in the debate sketched at the end of the last chapter, and be acting against the influence of scholastic schoolmasters located in new urban centers of education. It would not be the first occasion Peter Damian saw himself forced to act against such influences in his community – other letters have him deal with monks who wanted to leave the monastery at Fonte Avellana to study grammar, or a hermit who desires to go study the arts of the *trivium*.¹²¹

If we are correct about the polemical nature of this letter, then the excessive flattery at the start would serve not so much as to make Leo ‘benevolent’, but rather to place Peter Damian’s loquacious critics in stark contrast with a sage possessing “the simplicity of Christ”¹²². Having sketched the rhetorical situation of this letter, we will attempt to situate Peter Damian’s comments on the relation between the arts and faith in this context.

3.3 *Dominus vobiscum* on the art of rhetoric

Following the opening of the letter is an intriguing section in which Peter Damian justifies his turning to Leo by emphasizing Leo’s wisdom and rejecting worldly wisdom – which apparently Leo was lacking in:

His itaque questionum vallatus angustiis ad angelum meum iuxta consuetudinem redeo, ad fontem non Tulliane eloquentiae, sed divine potius sapientie trito calle recurro.¹²³

(Since, then, I am encompassed by these perplexing questions, I return to my guardian angel as is my wont, and follow a beaten path not to the fount of Ciceronian eloquence, but rather to the source of divine wisdom.)

Peter Damian cleverly describes his turning to the hermit Leo for help by making use of the metaphor of treading a path to a fount. Interestingly, the metaphors of a path and that of a fount, although commonly used in poetic forewords since Callimachus down to Persius¹²⁴ and

profferre quod sensi. Non videlicet ut alios arrepta doctoris auctoritate docerem, sed tibi potius, quae imperitiae meae haberetur opinio, evidenter exponerem.”

¹²¹ These examples, mentioned in Leclercq 1982, 199, concern the letters *De perfectione monachi* (Reindel 153, Opusc. 13 PL 145.306-307) and *De sancta simplicitate* (Reindel 117, Opusc. 45 PL 145.695).

¹²² Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 252.10-11.

¹²³ The edition used is that of Reindel 1983, vol. 1, the section quoted is on p. 251.11-13. *Dominus vobiscum* is letter 28 in his edition, in Migne’s *Patrologia Latina* Opusc. 11, PL 144. The translation used throughout is that of Blum & Resnick 1989, vol. 1.

¹²⁴ See e.g. the choliambic poem, vss. 1-3: “Nec fonte labra prolui caballino / ... Memini, ut repente sic poeta prodirem”, A. Cartault ed., *Perse: Satires* (Budé), Paris: Société d’Édition “Les Belles Lettres”, 1951.

Stadius¹²⁵ to express poetic originality and to emphasize one's own talent, are here employed to express Damian's lack of original wits to solve the question, while the richly poetic language simultaneously contrasts Peter Damian's eloquence with Leo's lack of it. Also notable is the departure from Augustine, who (as discussed in the previous chapter) considered eloquence the natural companion of divine wisdom (although Augustine is speaking of Scripture in *De doctrina christiana*, Peter Damian attributes to Leo a "sacred prudence" and "divine wisdom", so it would be conceivable that the same would apply), yet Damian pointedly contrasts Ciceronian eloquence with "divine wisdom" – a far cry from the Augustinian notion of rhetoric as the inseparable companion of wisdom.

Peter Damian proceeds to provide an extensive catalogue of icons of secular learning that he rejects, and which I will present in full:

Platonem igitur latentis naturae secreta rimantem respuo, planetarum circulis metas astrorumque meatibus calculos affigentem, cuncta etiam sperici orbis climata radio distinguentem Pythagoram parvipendo, Nichomachum quoque tritum ephemeridibus digitos abduco, Eucliden perplexis geometricalium figurarum studiis incurvum aequae declino, cunctos sane rhetores cum suis coloribus et entimematibus indiscrete praetereo, omnes dialecticos cum suis silogismis et sophisticis cavillationibus indignos hac questione decerno. Tremant gymnici suam iugiter amore sapientiae nuditatem, querant Peripatetici latentem in profundo putei veritatem. Ego summam a te veritatem quero, illam videlicet, quae de terra orta est, non iam in puteo ignobiliter latitantem, sed omni manifestatam mundo, perpetua in caelis maiestate regnantem. Quid enim mihi insanientium poetarum fabulosa commenta? Quid mihi tumentium tragicorum cothurnata discrimina? Desinat iam comicorum turba venena libidinum crepantibus buccis effluere, cesset satiricorum vulgus suos clarnores carptorie detractionis amarum dapibus onerare. Non mihi Tulliani oratores accurata lepide urbanitatis trutinant verba, non Demostenici rhetores capciose suadele argumenta versuta componant. Cedant in suas tenebras omnes terrene sapientie fecibus delibuti, nil mihi conferant sulphureo caliginose doctrine splendore cecati. Christi me simplicitas doceat, vera sapientium rusticitas ambiguitatis mee vinculum solvat.¹²⁶

(I reject Plato who pried into the secrets of hidden nature, ascribed limits to the orbits of the planets, and calculated the movements of the stars. Pythagoras, also, dividing all the regions of a spherical body with his rule, I count for little. Nicomachus, too, worn out by calendars, I reject; and Euclid also I disdain, stooped from his perplexing studies of geometrical figures. I

¹²⁵ See Curtius (1961, 96), who quotes Statius' words on the 'untrodden track': *trita vatibus orbita* (*Silvae* 2.7.51).

¹²⁶ Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 251.14-252.11.

pass by all the rhetors with their embellishments and reflexions without distinction, and all the dialecticians with their syllogisms and sophistic quibbles I consider unworthy of this question. Let the nudist philosophers forever shiver in their nakedness for love of wisdom, and the peripatetics seek truth at the bottom of a well. For I seek from you the highest truth, that which rose from the earth and does not now lie ignobly hidden in a well, but has been made manifest to all the world and reigns in everlasting majesty in heaven. What are the fabled fictions of wild poets to me? Why bother with the buskined crises of the strutting tragedians? Let the rout of comedians stop the flow of poisoned scurilities dropping from their noisy lips, and let the crowd of satirists stop burdening their tables with the bitter banquets of gnawing slander. The Ciceronian orators' studied words of elegant urbanity do not ring true for me, nor should the rhetoricians of the school of Demosthenes compose sly arguments that deceptively persuade. Back into your shadows, all you who are defiled with the impurities of worldly wisdom; they who are blinded by the sulphurous splendor of the learning of darkness do nothing for me. Let the simplicity of Christ instruct me and let the true rusticity of the wise break the bonds of my uncertainty.

After mentioning a few Greek 'celebrities' by name and visually depicting their vain activities ("secreta rimantem", "calculos affigentem", "climata radio distinguentem", "tritum ephemeridibus", "incurvum studiis"), Peter Damian turns to general groups of people: the rhetoricians with their rhetorical figures and enthymemes (which would appear to be more appropriate for the next group), the dialecticians, two groups of philosophers, and poets. It is interesting that Damian chooses to emphasize the rhetoricians by referring to them two more times after this catalogue, mentioning both Cicero and Demosthenes, and letting them rot in their worldly filth, where they are "blinded by the sulphurous splendor of the learning of darkness" – a splendid antithesis. Peter Damian contrasts this detestable eloquence with "the simplicity of Christ" and the "the true rusticity of the wise" – i.e., 'true' as opposed to the affected rusticity of a Cicero or a Demosthenes.¹²⁷ The whole passage is filled to the brim with invective rhetoric, every sentence being laden with pejorative adjective upon adjective. Peter Damian uses the rhetoric of a *priamel*:¹²⁸ 'not from Plato, Pythagoras, Nicomachus or Euclid, but from you do I seek the truth' ("Ego summam a te veritatem quero"). The *priamel* serves to emphatically reject "the learning of darkness" ("caliginose doctrine") gained by the use of the secular arts – the true doctrine is clear as day and simple. Never accusing his

¹²⁷ Cf. Leupin 2003, 127 – as discussed in n. 44.

¹²⁸ The listing of alternatives, leading climactically up to the preferred choice. See W.H. Race, *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius*, Leiden: Brill, 1982.

opponents openly, Peter Damian makes it clear that by resorting to dialectic and rhetorical method in this question (“ratiocinantes”), they have found themselves on a slippery slope.

Peter Damian follows the catalogue up with two Scriptural quotations, the first of which was used in a similar context in *De divina omnipotentia*:¹²⁹

Littera igitur que occidit, abscedat, spiritus vivificator adsistat. *Prudentia enim carnis*, ut idem dicit apostolus, *mors est, prudentia autem spiritus vita et pax, quoniam prudentia carnis inimica est Deo, legi enim Dei non subicitur, nec enim potest*. Si ergo carnis prudentia nequit legi Dei colla submittere, quo pacto suffusa oculos fumo superbiae legem Dei praevallet penetrare? Age igitur, pater, nodum mihi propositae quaestionis otius solve, nec patiaris humilitatis Christi discipulum grandiloqua tumentium philosophorum gymnasia circuire. Dicat mihi angelus meus, quod imperitum dialecticorum vulgus ignorat, dicat sapiens imperitia, quod stulta sapientia non apprehendit.¹³⁰

(Away, then, with the written letter that brings death; let the lifegiving Spirit attend us. “It is death,” as the same Apostle says, “to be concerned with the wisdom of the flesh, but life and peace flow from the wisdom of the spirit, for the wisdom of the flesh is at enmity with God, since it never could and never does submit to God’s law.” Therefore, since the wisdom of the flesh is unable to submit to the yoke of God’s law, how can it ever understand God’s law when its eyes are clouded by the smoke of pride? Come then, father, quickly undo for me the knot of the problem posed to me, and do not permit the long-winded schools of the proud philosophers to circumvent the disciple of the humble Christ. Let my guardian angel tell me that of which all the naive dialecticians are ignorant; let wise naïveté speak of things which foolish wisdom does not understand.)

On the basis of Scriptural quotes on “the letter that killeth” and “the wisdom of the flesh”, Peter Damian makes a number of statements concerning the epistemological limits of secular wisdom, which are filled with rhetoric: first the rhetorical question, in which “the wisdom of the flesh” is personified (“colla submittere”) by means of a richly poetic expression¹³¹; next, the exhortation to father Leo not to allow “the long-winded schools of the proud philosophers to circumvent the disciple of the humble Christ” (either that, or “the disciple of the humility of Christ”); lastly, the anaphora in a final, urgent exhortation (“dicat ... dicat”). Having pointed out his extremely rich rhetorical style, Damian’s objections to his opponents’ “grand and

¹²⁹ See the quote from *De div. omnipot.* 604B on p. 23.

¹³⁰ Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 252.14-25.

¹³¹ The phrase “suffusa oculos” is most likely a reference to Virgil (*Aen.* 1.226-228): “atque illum talis iactantem pectore curas / tristior et lacrimis oculos suffusa nitentis / adloquitur Venus”.

bloated speech”¹³² (“grandiloqua tumentium philosophorum gymnasia”) are inconsistent to say the least.

Relating this passage to the similar one on ‘the letter’ and ‘the Spirit’ in *De divina omnipotentia*, it appears Peter Damian is making the same point: his fellow brothers, instead of practicing the arts under the auspices of Spirit, have attempted to impose the rules of a secular art (in this case that of grammar: grammatical number must agree with the persons involved) on a matter of faith, thereby making themselves guilty of the vice of arrogance. To counteract this dangerous tendency, Peter Damian has taken an extreme position in rejecting all forms of worldly wisdom, preferring “the simplicity of Christ” – which, contrasting with the complexity that dialectic and rhetoric are prone to, also refers to humility (cf. “humilitatis Christi discipulum” above). The incessant hammering on ‘simplicity’ is meant as a rhetorical technique to present Peter Damian as humble and pious while contrasting him with the arrogance of his opponents – and it is revealed as such by Damian’s failure to apply the same criteria to his own rhetoric as he does to that of his opponents: Peter Damian’s rhetoric is anything but ‘simple’ and would certainly apply for the qualification of *grandiloquus*. Put otherwise: unlike the unschooled hermit Leo, Peter Damian cannot lay claim to “true rusticity”.¹³³

Turning to the argumentative part of the letter, we find Peter Damian reasserting his point:

Ego itaque non moror exprimere super hac dubietate, quod sentio salva scilicet fide, ut vel inepte prolata corrigere vel gnaviter absoluta tua debeas auctoritate probare.¹³⁴

(And so I will not delay in saying what I think about this question, with all deference to the faith, so that your authority may correct all what I have said badly, or test what my industry has achieved.)

By claiming that in attempting to answer the question, *he* at least will stay true to the faith, Peter Damian once again implies that his opponents have strayed from the right path, since they have not taken the faith as their starting-point. But, just as in *De divina omnipotentia*, this is a misleading point to make (and could in fact be construed as a *petitio principii*), since the nature of that tradition of faith was apparently not all that clear to begin with. Though there

¹³² I prefer ‘grand’ as a translation of *grandiloquus* as opposed to that of Blum & Resnick (“long-winded”), since it carries connotations of style when applied to rhetoricians and poets; see Lewis & Short s.v. *grandiloquus*.

¹³³ Cf. Ferretti (1961, 55) on Damian’s phrase “Sancta simplicitas me doceat”: “il suo granellino di retorica lo brucia però anche lui, e proprio qui!”

¹³⁴ Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 253.5-7.

was no doubt concerning the *formulae* themselves, Peter Damian takes great pains to explain their original context, and why their grammatical number makes sense. The idea of fixity of these *formulae* has to be explained and proven by Peter Damian through various examples, and we find him having to compare the ecclesiastical tradition to Scripture: just as nothing can be added or subtracted to Scripture, so should the ecclesiastical tradition not be subject to human changes.¹³⁵ The fact that the idea of fixity of such formulas was not a given, but required extensive argumentation exposes not only Damian's praise of simplicity, but also his use of the *littera-spiritus* quote as rhetoric.

In discussing these formulas that are spoken out loud, Peter Damian treats one that pertains to the vice of arrogance:

Lectoribus namque nonnullis vicium arrogantiae familiare est, effrenis lingua percurrit, populari favori cor deditum spiritus elationis invadit. Et dum alios per recti itineris tramitem dirigit, ipse diverticulum erroneae confusionis incurrit. Hinc est etiam, quod mensae lectoribus ex more dicitur: *Auferat a te Deus spiritum elationis*.¹³⁶

(The vice of arrogance is a familiar thing to many readers, especially in one possessed of the graces of eloquence, whose unbridled tongue courses through the open fields of Scripture, allowing the spirit of pride to invade his heart set on popular adulation. While directing others along the right road, he himself is forced to detour into error and confusion. That is why we customarily say to readers in the refectory: "May God take from you the spirit of pride.")

This passage occurs in a short treatment of priestly greetings and the reasons they are used. The current one is described as designed to repel the vice of arrogance from readers in the refectory, but it is interesting that it is coupled with eloquence here – described as an "unchecked tongue" ("effrenis lingua"). What is also interesting, is that it is brought into connection with "the right road" ("recti itineris tramitem"), since we saw "the right path of truth" ("rectum veritatis tramitem") being used in *De divina omnipotentia* of the road lost when the arts of rhetoric and dialectic take the leading role.¹³⁷

At the end of the letter, in what might be termed the epilogue, Peter Damian professes the desire to add some words on the virtues of the solitary life, "in words of praise rather than

¹³⁵ Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 255.7-15.

¹³⁶ Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 271.8-13.

¹³⁷ See the quotation of *De div. omnipot.* 603D on p. 21.

in terms of debate”¹³⁸ (“laudando potius quam disputando”). He immediately depicts the hermitical *cella* as the ideal place where the arts are studied under the auspices of Spiritus:

Solitaria sane vita caelestis doctrinae schola est ac divinarum artium disciplina. Illic Deus est ubi discitur, vita quo tenditur, atque ad summae veritatis ibi noticiam pervenitur.¹³⁹

(The solitary life is indeed the school of heavenly learning and a training in the arts of God. God is there, where one learns where life is heading, and one attains there to the knowledge of the highest truth.)

The cell makes all learning performed therein ‘divine’ instead of secular, practiced as it is in the context of the divine and for a higher purpose. Here we find the perfect application of the arts, as expressed by Peter Damian’s use of the *littera-spiritus* quote. The implied contrast between ‘secular’ and ‘divine’ arts, is of course a rhetorical representation: in actuality, the divine arts are founded upon the secular¹⁴⁰ – much like the rhetorical distinction made between “Ciceronian eloquence” and “divine wisdom” at the beginning of the letter (and, in the less rigorous straying from Augustine’s notion of ‘rhetoric as accompanying wisdom,’ in the depiction of rhetoric as subservient to wisdom in *De divina omnipotentia*). In the midst of all this encomiastic¹⁴¹ rhetoric, the reader is sure to forgive a slight inconsistency: Damian’s fellow monks, who were ‘debating their way through the problem,’ would never have applied the arts of dialectic and rhetoric the way they did (or at least Peter Damian would have no objection to make), if the above were true.

Proceeding further into the praises of the solitary life, we see Peter Damian making several references to the virtues of silence:

Cella nempe est conciliabulum Dei et hominum ... Illic siquidem superni cives ad colloquia humana conveniunt, ubi non tam linguae carnis verba componunt, quam sine vocis strepitu facunda mentium archana patescunt.¹⁴²

(The cell is indeed the meeting place of God and men ... For there the citizens of heaven gather to join the conversation of men, where they speak not with fleshly tongues, but without voicing their words, disclose the eloquent secrets of the mind.)

¹³⁸ Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 272.9.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 10-12.

¹⁴⁰ Pranger 1995, 212: “Men kan er immers niet omheen dat de hier opgeroepen tegenstelling tussen ‘vrije’ en ‘goddelijke’ kunsten retorisch van aard is. Aan de school van de goddelijke kunsten ligt, met andere woorden, de triviale wetenschap ten grondslag.”

¹⁴¹ Pertaining to the *enkomion*, or genre of praise.

¹⁴² Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 274.23-26.

...

Tu ociosae linguae frenum, tu luxuriosis renibus nitidae castitatis adhibes cingulum. Tu facis ... ut vaniloqui se sub districta silentii censura constringunt. Tu ieiuniorum ac vigiliarum nutrix, tu patientiae custos, tu purissimae simplicitatis magistra ac omnino fraudulentae duplicitatis ignara. Tu facis, ut vagos quosque Christi catena coerceat ut indisciplinati moribus a sua se pravitate compescant. Tu nosti homines ad perfectionis culmen evehere atque ad consummatae sanctitatis fastigium sublimare.¹⁴³

(You are the curb of an idle tongue, and you bind lustful loins with the cincture of brightest chastity. You inspire ... garrulous men to restrain themselves in strictest silence. You are the nurse of fasting and vigils, the guardian of patience, the mistress of purest simplicity, to whom fraud and duplicity are quite unknown. You hold the vagrant restrained by the chains of Christ, and cause the morally undisciplined to curb their depravity. You know how to lift men to the heights of perfection and to bring them to the pinnacle of complete holiness.)

In these passages, the praise of silence over against audible words leans towards a depiction of a ‘silent eloquence’, where true eloquence has no need of words, as it is ‘simple’ (“purissimae simplicitatis magistra”) and not ‘double’ (“fraulentae duplicitatis ignara”).¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, the mention of “silence” and “simplicity” on the one hand, and that of “fraud”, “duplicity”, lack of discipline, and “depravity” on the other, tempt us to view the second half of the passage quoted above as referring to the practice of the secular arts. Lack of silence and humility (*simplicitas*) quickly lead to moral lack of discipline and deviation from the right doctrines of faith (*pravitas*).¹⁴⁵ Yet, by applying the arts under the auspices of Spirit, with proper silence and humility, one may be able to reach “the heights of perfection” and “the pinnacle of complete holiness”.

¹⁴³ Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 276.3-11.

¹⁴⁴ See for a similar argument *Serm.* 32 and 70, and cf. further on in letter 28 (Reindel 1983, vol. 1, 277.28-278.2): “...lingua carnis nullatenus exprimere sufficit, quod de te spiritus invisibiliter sentit, et quod tu sapis in interiore gustu atque in medulla cordis, numquam pleniter explicat corporalis organum vocis.”

¹⁴⁵ Cf. *De div. omnipot.* 604B, where the practice of the secular arts for their own sake lead to doctrinal deviation and moral dishonesty: “Non enim ad fidei regulam vel morum pertinet honestatem”.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Summary

At the beginning of his letter *De divina omnipotentia*, Peter Damian complains about a lack of discipline, causing silence to give way to whatever libido suggests. This is the reason for the statements that have been made, which are not in line with faith, and which Damian terms ‘dishonest’. When making use of Scripture to support such statements, Peter Damian warns that “a modestly controlled kind of sober speech” must be employed. In effect, Damian commends the use of rhetorical humility, *simplicitas* employed as a rhetorical tool to appear humble and pious.

Throughout the rest of the letter, the emphasis on humility is continued; Peter Damian implies that he is among the ranks of the “simpliciter gradientes,” which holds connotations of moral uprightness, orthodoxy, and humility. Unlike himself, Damian’s debators are, on the one hand, wholly incompetent and unqualified, and on the other hand do not know the proper bounds of the arts and use arguments that are too complex and obscure. The apparent contradiction in these qualifications reveals a rhetorical technique Peter Damian employs to disqualify his opponents and to imply that true mastery of an art includes knowledge of its limits in relation to faith. The faith, in contrast to his opponents’ obscure arguments, is presented as clear – a rhetorical antithesis that is a *petitio principii* in disguise.

Peter Damian next employs an Augustinian metaphor to describe the proper role of the arts of rhetoric and dialectic as one of a ‘servant’ who is ‘obedient’ to the master that is Scriptural wisdom. Damian changes, however, Augustine’s notion of rhetoric as an ‘ever-accompanying’ servant of wisdom, to a strictly subordinated role.

In another passage, Peter Damian declares that it is ‘inhonestum’ (implying the presence of libido) and unorthodox (deviating from the *fidei regula*) to focus only on verbal virtuosity. The problem that presents itself here is the following: the application of rhetoric in matters of faith is also performed by Peter Damian himself. A possible solution may be found in the quotation from 2 Cor 3:6 (“the letter that killeth and the Spirit that bringeth to life”). The ‘letter’ would then refer to the study of the liberal arts for their own sake (or at least as the starting-point instead of Scripture), as opposed to the ‘Spirit’, which would be the practice of the arts in the context of the divine, with Scripture as the starting-point. But by claiming that his opponents, in discussing the omnipotence of God, should have the faith (Scripture and tradition) as their starting-point, Peter Damian once again commits the rhetorical fallacy of

petitio principii, since the matter that is under discussion is pertaining to faith – it is in fact Damian who departs from faith by running contrary to Jerome’s statement that God could not restore virginity that had been lost.

In the last passage discussed, Peter Damian names all three arts of the *trivium* – but it is only rhetoric that receives a positive treatment, for his opponents “are not eloquent” and thus should “stay silent” – if they were eloquent, they would then have no reason to be silent – hence Peter Damian’s licence for the invective rhetoric he so ubiquitously employs.

In assessing the rhetorical situation of Peter Damian’s letter *Dominus vobiscum*, we noted that Damian’s continuous emphasis on Leo’s simplicity over against secular wisdom early on in the letter pointed towards a polemical context. In emphasizing Leo’s authority, in spite of his lack of secular education, Peter Damian may have implicitly criticized those who used the method of debate to solve the matter at hand. The word Damian uses – *rationari* – is used elsewhere in a pejorative context (e.g. *De divina omnipotentia*) as a technical term of applying the art of dialectic. This would also explain why Peter Damian, who professes to want the advice of his ‘guardian angel,’ chose to provide such a lengthy argumentation of his own solution. The motivation he provides himself, namely that it is common practice among scholastic schoolmasters to ask their pupils first to provide a solution themselves, also points in this direction, as it would be an effective use of irony on Damian’s part, and as it would situate the letter in the eleventh-century debate of monastic vs. scholastic schools.

Peter Damian tells us he has been asked repeatedly by monks whether they should adhere to the plural forms when celebrating mass or performing the Divine Office. Damian professes to be as ignorant as his fellow monks and turns to Leo for help, which he describes by means of a metaphor of treading a path to a fount, not of Ciceronian eloquence, but of divine wisdom. The departure from Augustine is here even greater than in *De divina omnipotentia*, as rhetoric is not just subordinated to wisdom, but even separated from it altogether.

In a lengthy catalogue of icons of secular learning that Peter Damian professes to reject, he utilizes the rhetorical figure of the *priamel* to emphasize that only Leo’s simplicity can provide a true answer to the question, contrasting the “learning of darkness” with the “simplicity of Christ” and the “true rusticity of the wise.” Without accusing anyone explicitly, Peter Damian’s invective rhetoric is vehement enough to imply a strong polemical context, which would fit with the situation sketched above.

Once again paraphrasing 2 Cor 3:6 (as in *De divina omnipotentia*), Peter Damian states that the solution is not to be found in the ‘letter’ (i.e. by taking the arts as starting-point),

but in the ‘Spirit’. Peter Damian’s incessant hammering on *simplicitas* is undermined by his extravagant use of rhetoric, which reveals his call for simplicity as a rhetorical technique to appear simple, humble and pious, as opposed to his complex, arrogant, and unorthodox opponents.

In providing his own solution, Peter Damian asserts that he at least will stay true to the faith. Yet, the effort he spends in explaining the tradition of that faith and the use of *formulae* under discussion proves that this tradition was not as fixed he presents it.

In his praises of the solitary life, Peter Damian presents the cell of the hermit as the place where arts are studied in the most ideal way possible, under the auspices of ‘Spirit’, making the arts ‘divine’ instead of ‘secular’. In the praise of the silence practiced in the cell, Peter Damian contrasts its simplicity with the duplicity, lack of discipline, and depravity of the outside world, calling to mind Damian’s reprobation of his opponents’ lack of silence in *De divina omnipotentia*, which allowed them to make ‘dishonest’ statements not in line with the rule of faith.

4.2 Concluding remarks

What is Peter Damian’s perception of the relation between rhetoric and faith? Readers of Leclercq will be inclined to answer: *sancta simplicitas*. Peter Damian’s explicit statements on the matter reveal that he envisions the role of rhetoric as humbly following faith with obedience. Taking faith as one’s starting-point, one should assume a humble and low rhetorical style in discussing matters of faith, thus being prevented from straying from the rule of faith and avoiding arrogance.

Nevertheless, I disagree with Leclercq’s notion that *sancta simplicitas* informs Peter Damian’s vision of the relation of the arts and faith as one of simplicity, humility, and restraint. Yes, all of his explicit statements on this matter seem to point to this, but one forgets that these are all located in a highly rhetorical context. The rhetorical situation brings Peter Damian to use *simplicitas* – not as a theological or epistemological principle – but as a rhetorical tactic of making himself appear a pious Christian. Although Peter Damian fails to apply *simplicitas* as a rhetorical tool as it was meant by Cicero (his style is anything but simple), he combines the purpose as formulated by Cicero with the moral and doctrinal connotations the word *simplicitas* itself acquired in Biblical and Patristic contexts. To answer the question of how Peter Damian envisions the relation between faith and rhetoric is not just to look at his explicit reflections on the matter, but also to analyze the rhetorical context they are located in. Though Peter Damian advocates the use of restrained language, humility, and

knowing one's own limits and those of the arts, he himself utilizes acerbic invective and pejorative rhetoric at every turn. Rhetoric ought to be 'obedient' to scriptural wisdom and theological doctrine – but only the doctrine as interpreted by Peter Damian. This is what makes *simplicitas* a rhetorical tool to create the impression of and lay claim to Christian piety. To disregard the rhetorical nature of the *simplicitas* propagated by Peter Damian is to buy in to his rhetoric and to fail to turn a critical eye to his statements.

Having established a central inconsistency between Damian's statements on rhetoric and his own rhetorical practice, how do we use this in answering our question? Let us return to Peter Damian's praise of the hermit's cell. One of the main virtues of the cell was that of silence, which was paradoxically described as eloquence, used to converse with God. This tells us several things: first of all, that the *trivium* had shaped Peter Damian's thought to such an extent that even such a divine experience could only be enunciated in terms of the trivial arts;¹⁴⁶ secondly, it recalls Damian's recurrent emphasis on silence in *De divina omnipotentia*, which we might be able to relate to the contemporary debate he was facing with eleventh-century scholastic schoolmasters. Acting against a decidedly 'vocal' current of schools, founded on the technique of oral disputation and instruction,¹⁴⁷ Damian would have been able to excuse his incongruous use of rhetoric on the basis that it was silent, and hence, a pure kind of eloquence. This silence was preferred, as it encouraged the typical inward monastic repose, allowing the monk to focus on the 'Spiritus' instead of the 'littera.' The relation between 'Spiritus' and silence recalls another point: at the end of *De divina omnipotentia*, Peter Damian proclaims that his opponents should remain silent if they are not eloquent. It is clear from the rest of the letter that blasphemous speech is not considered eloquent; ultimately, we must conclude that rhetorical license is given to those who accept ecclesiastical doctrine as interpreted by Peter Damian – i.e., those who have been persuaded by his rhetoric. Here we see the full extent of Peter Damian's rhetoric emerge, and simultaneously the limit of our investigation into Peter Damian's conception of the relationship between rhetoric and faith.

4.3 Suggestions for further investigation

The natural point of continuing this investigation would be to turn to other texts, most notably *De sanctan simplicitate*, which would serve to flesh out our analysis of *sancta simplicitas* as a rhetorical tool. Peter Damian's sermons might also yield fruitful results because of the lively

¹⁴⁶ For an enlightening article on the way the trivial arts shaped men's minds, see Van Engen 1997.

¹⁴⁷ For a description of the debate in terms of 'monastic silence' vs. 'scholastic vocalism,' see Leclercq 1982, 154-155.

rhetoric employed in matters of faith. Especially sermons 42 and 70 are worth a survey, as they provide further treatments of the 'silent eloquence'.

An entirely different, but at least equally worthwhile endeavor would be to investigate Peter Damian's role in the development of the new, specialized kind of rhetoric that was the *ars dictaminis*, arguably developed by Alberic of Monte Cassino, whom Peter Damian had been in touch with on multiple occasions.

5. Bibliography

- Auerbach, E., Manheim, R. tr., *Literary language & its public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Augustine, *Augustine: De Doctrina Christiana*, R.P.H. Green ed. & tr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Blum, O.J., *St. Peter Damian: His Teaching on the Spiritual Life*, Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1947.
- Borges, J.L., Barnatán, M. R. ed., *Narraciones*, Madrid: Catedra, 1980.
- Cantin, A. *Saint Pierre Damien (1007–1072): Autrefois – aujourd’hui*, Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 2007.
- Cantin, A., *Les sciences séculières et la foi: les deux voies de la science au jugement de S. Pierre Damien (1007-1072)*, Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, 1975.
- Curtius, E.R., *Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter*, Bern and München: Francke Verlag, 1961³.
- Dressler, F., *Petrus Damiani: Leben und Werk* (Studia Anselmiana 34), Rome: Herder, 1954.
- Ellspermann, G.L., *The attitude of the early Christian Latin writers toward pagan literature and learning*, diss., Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1949.
- Endres, J.A., *Petrus Damiani und die weltliche Wissenschaft* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters 8.3), Munster: Aschendorff, 1910.
- Engen, J., van, “Letters, schools, and written culture in the eleventh and twelfth centuries,” in J. Fried ed., *Dialektik und Rhetorik im früheren und hohen Mittelalter: Rezeption, Überlieferung und gesellschaftliche Wirkung antiker Gelehrsamkeit vornehmlich im 9. und 12. Jahrhundert* (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs: Kolloquien 27), München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997, 97-132.
- Ferretti, W., “La comunità cristiana secondo S. Pier Damiani o l’opuscolo ‘Dominus vobiscum’,” in *Studi su San Pier Damiano in onore del cardinale Amleto Giovanni Cicognani* (Biblioteca Cardinale Gaetano Cicognani 5), Faenza: Venerabile Seminario Vescovile Pio XII, 1961, 49-62.
- Gonsette, J., *Pierre Damien et la culture profane* (Essais Philosophiques 7), Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1956.
- Hartmann, W., “Rhetorik und Dialektik in der Streitschriftenliteratur,” in J. Fried ed., *Dialektik und Rhetorik im früheren und hohen Mittelalter: Rezeption, Überlieferung und*

- gesellschaftliche Wirkung antiker Gelehrsamkeit vornehmlich im 9. und 12. Jahrhundert* (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs: Kolloquien 27), München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997, 73-95.
- Holopainen, T.J., *Dialectic and Theology in the Eleventh Century*, Helsinki: Limes ry, 1995.
- Laqua, H.P., *Traditionen und Leitbilder bei dem ravennater Reformen Petrus Damiani 1042-1052*, München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1976.
- Leclercq, J., Misrahi, C. tr., *The love of learning and the desire for God: A study of monastic culture*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1982³.
- Leclercq, J., *Saint Pierre Damien: Ermite et homme d'Église*, Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1960.
- Leupin, A., Laatsch, D. tr., *Fiction and incarnation: rhetoric, theology, and literature in the Middle Ages*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Lohmer, C., *Heremi conversatio: Studien zu den monastischen Vorschriften des Petrus Damiani* (Beiträge zur Geschichte des alten Mönchtums und des Benediktinertums 39), Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1991.
- Lubac, H., de, *Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'Écriture*, 4 vols., Paris: Aubier, 1959-1964.
- Luscombe, D.E., "Dialectic and rhetoric in the ninth and twelfth centuries: continuity and change," in J. Fried ed., *Dialektik und Rhetorik im früheren und hohen Mittelalter: Rezeption, Überlieferung und gesellschaftliche Wirkung antiker Gelehrsamkeit vornehmlich im 9. und 12. Jahrhundert* (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs: Kolloquien 27), München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1997, 1-20.
- Miller, J.M., Prosser, M.H., Benson, T.W., *Readings in Medieval Rhetoric*, Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973.
- Neukirch, F., *Das Leben Petrus Damiani*, Göttingen: Gebrüder Hofer, 1875.
- Persius, *Perse: Satires* (Budé), A. Cartault ed., Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1951.
- Peter Damian, *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica), K. Reindel ed., München: Monumenta Germaniae Historia, 4 vols., 1983-1993.
- Peter Damian, *Letters*, O.J. Blum & I.M. Resnick trs., Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 6 vols, 1989-2005.
- Peter Damian, *Lettre sur la toute-puissance divine* (Sources Chrétiennes 191), A. Cantin tr. and ed., Paris: Les éditions du Cerf, 1972.

- Peter Damian, *Opera Omnia* (Patrologia Latina 144-145), J. Migne ed., Turnhout: Brepols, 1979 (repr. 1853).
- Peter Damian, *Sermones* (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 57), J. Lucchesi ed., Turnhout: Brepols, 1983.
- Pranger, M.B., "De school als utopie: van klooster- naar stadsschool," in R.E.V. Stuip & C. Vellekoop eds., *Scholing in de Middeleeuwen*, Hilversum: Verloren, 1995, 205-220.
- Race, W.H., *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius*, Leiden: Brill, 1982.
- Reindel, K., "Neue Literatur zu Petrus Damiani," *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung der Geschichte des Mittelalters* 32, 1976, 405-443.
- Resnick, I.M., *Divine power and possibility in St. Peter Damian's De divina omnipotentia*, Leiden etc.: E. J. Brill, 1992.
- Schönbeck, O., "Peter Damian and the rhetoric of an ascetic," in M.W. Herren, C.J. McDonough, R.G. Arthur eds., *Latin culture in the eleventh century* (Proceedings of the third international conference on Medieval Latin studies, Cambridge, September 9-12 1998), Turnhout: Brepols, 1998, vol. 2, 350-370.
- Veit, W., "Sancta Simplicitas," in J. Riesz, P. Boerner, B. Scholz eds., *Sensus communi: contemporary trends in comparative literature. Festschrift für Henry Remak*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1986, 369-383.
- Watts, W., *Augustine: Confessions* (Loeb Classical Library), 2 vols., Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1912.
- Wünsch, T., *Spiritualis intelligentia: zur allegorischen Bibelinterpretation des Petrus Damiani* (Theorie und Forschung 190, Philosophie und Theologie 14), Regensburg: S. Roderer Verlag, 1992.