Contemplation and Economic Justice in Dante's Paradiso 21

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ダンテの『神曲』天国篇における聖ペトルス・ダミアーニの取り上げ方は、社会的な行動主義とは修道士による瞑想の論理的な帰結とならなければならないことを暗黙の裡に強調している。さらに、聖ペトルス・ダミアーニの著作、特に彼の書簡集に踏み込むことで、そのような行動主義は単に宗教的な事柄のみに留まるべきではなく、貧困層の利益となる形で富を最適化し、再配分するための積極的な努力を含まなくてはならないことも示している。聖ペトルス・ダミアーニによるこの種の経済的正義への弁護は、それゆえ、ある種の社会主義の先駆として想定できる。また『神曲』における聖ペトルス・ダミアーニの利用は、社会の刷新に向けてダンテ自身がどのようなヴィジョンを抱いているかという結論をも効果的に提示しているのである。

Summary

Dante's featuring of St. Peter Damian in *Paradiso* 21 of the *Divine Comedy* implicitly emphasizes that social activism should be a logical consequence of monastic contemplative activity. Furthermore, research into St. Peter Damian's writing, specifically his epistolary correspondence, shows that such activism should not be limited to mere pastoral care, but should also include active efforts to re-appropriate and redistribute wealth to benefit the poorer classes. St. Peter Damian's advocacy for this kind of economic justice can therefore be hypothesized as a kind of socialism *ante litteram*, and Dante's use of St. Peter Damian in the *Divine Comedy* proposes evocative conclusions regarding the poet's own vision for a renewed society.

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In the opening of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, a three-volume epic poem detailing a journey through the realms of the Christian afterlife, the poet makes clear that his aims are as much ethical as eschatological. Figuring himself as an Everyman, he states that he had ended up in a dark wood because he had lost the "straight" or the "right" way ("che la diritta via era smarrita"). A predominant concern for Dante is the distribution of wealth in his society, a discussion that begins with the hoarders in *Inferno* 7 and continues through the rest of the poem. A significant contribution to this theme is in canto 21 of *Paradiso*, where the poet introduces a major monastic figure, St. Peter Damian, who will associate contemplation with the redistribution of wealth towards those who need it. Dante's

¹ Inferno 1.3. Citations of the Divina Commedia are from Giorgio Petrocchi's La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata, 4 vols., (Milan: Mondadori, 1966-67). English translations of the poem, when they occur, are from The Divine Comedy, C. S. Singleton ed., 6 vols., Bollingen Series 80 (Princeton, New jersey: Princeton UP, 1970-75).



representation of this figure is in keeping with the biography of the historical St. Peter Damian, who not only advocated redistribution, but even discussed expropriation of wealth when necessary – a rather extraordinary stance considering his status in Catholic hierarchy (he was a cardinal) and doctrine.

In spite of St. Peter Damian's central place in this canto of *Paradiso*, and the testimony in his writings on wealth and its distribution, Dante studies have until recently paid scant attention to him, and even less to his economic thought.² This paper attempts to highlight this issue that other studies have left undiscussed. To make my argument will require a long meditation on the link both St. Peter Damian and Dante establish between contemplation and social activity (a link not immediately apparent in discussions of contemplation, and thus requiring some elaboration) before proceeding to issues specifically related to economic justice. My investigation will thus be pursued in five steps. After (1) a brief meditation on Dante's opening lines in *Paradiso* 21 and his introduction of St. Peter Damian, I will then (2) outline the saint's real life biography. Following that, I will (3) explain how Dante, drawing from the precedent that St. Peter Damian set in life, retroactively introduces St. Benedict, the founder of Western monasticism, into the realm of contemplatives (St. Benedict was not historically a contemplative). Next I will (4) return to Dante's representation of St. Peter Damian in the latter half of *Paradiso* 21, and argue that the saint's angry reproof of corrupt "modern pastors" takes direct influence from the writings of the historical St. Peter Damian. Having adequately demonstrated Dante's familiarity with St. Peter Damian's epistolary correspondence, I will (5) review the saint's radical proposals for the redistribution of ecclesiastical and secular capital, and propose that Dante would have found these proposals congenial to his own developing ideas of social and political organization.

1. Introduction of Paradiso 21

In *Paradiso*, the third and final section of the *Divine Comedy*, Dante-pilgrim and Beatrice ascend through planetary spheres, moving upward and outward toward their ultimate destination, the Empyrean, and towards a vision of God. In Canto 21, they arrive at the 7th heaven, the sphere of Saturn and the domain of the contemplative spirits, those holy figures dedicated to spiritual meditation. The moment Dante-pilgrim sets foot here he is on very holy ground, far more than ever before. This is the sphere of the "contemplative spirits," those who through prayer and meditation seek visions of the Divine. Here, Beatrice withholds her customary smile, explaining that its beauty is here exponentially greater than it was before, and that Dante's mortal faculties would be demolished, were he to see it.

Già eran li occhi miei rifissi al volto de la mia donna, e l'animo con essi, e da ogne altro intento s'era tolto.

E quella non ridea; ma "S'io ridessi," Mi cominciò, "tu ti faresti quale fu Semelè quando di cener fessi: ché la bellezza mia, che per le scale de l'etterno palazzo più s'accende com'hai veduto, quanto più si sale, se non si temperasse, tanto splende, che 'l tuo mortal podere, al suo fulgore, sarebbe fronda che trono scoscende.

Paradiso 21.1-12

2

A review of the more recent articles in Dante studies that discuss St. Peter Damian testify that interest in the him is growing but relatively recent: Georges Güntert, "Canto XXI," in *Lectura Dantis Turicensis*. *Paradiso*, ed. by Georges Güntert and Michelangelo Picone (Florence: Cesati, 2002), pp.325-337; Giuseppe Ledda, "San Pier Damiano nel cielo di Saturno," *L'Alighieri*, 32 (2008), 49-72; Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Contemplazione e Poesia," in *Esperimenti danteschi*. *Paradiso 2010*, ed. by Tommaso Montorfano (Genoa: Marietti, 2010), pp.201-212; Edoardo Fumagalli, "Dante e Pier Damiani," in his book *Il giusto Enea e il pio Rifeo*. *Pagine dantesche* (Florence: Olschki, 2012), pp.147-157; Andrea Battistini, "Canto XXI. L'incontro con Pier Damiano" in *Lectura Dantis Romana*. *Cento canti per cento anni*. *III. Paradiso*. *2. Canti XVIII–XXXIII*, ed. by Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno, 2015), pp.616-641.

[Already my eyes were fixed again on the face of my lady, and with them my mind, and from every other intent it was withdrawn; and she did not smile, but "Were I to smile," she began to me, "you would become such as was Semele when she turned to ashes; for my beauty which, along the steps of the eternal palace, is kindled the more, as you have seen, the higher the ascent, were it not tempered, is so resplendent that your mortal powers at its flash would be like the bough shattered by a thunderbolt."]

The Semele she refers to is from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (3.259-309). Juno was jealous because her husband Jupiter was dallying with Semele, so she played on Semele's vanity by persuading her to ask Jupiter to reveal himself to her in his full splendor as a god ("quantusque et qualis ab alta / Iunone excipitur, tantus talisque rogato det tibi complexus suaque ante insignia sumat"). Since no mortal could ever tolerate seeing a god in his full glory, Semele was immediately incinerated by Jupiter's deadly "conjugal gift" ("corpus mortale tumultus / non tulit aetherios donisque iugalibus arsit").

Any of Dante's contemporary readers would when reading this also recollect another theophanic moment, this time from the Bible, that did not kill its human subject, but still transformed him so dramatically that he was never the same again. In Exodus Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt, and in the period of wandering the wilderness enroute to Canaan, he would often communicate with the Lord in a makeshift tabernacle. In Exodus 33, among a series of pointed questions regarding the way of the Lord, and right leadership of the people, Moses asked to see the Lord's face ("ostende mihi faciam tuam")³ so that he could better know his Lord, find grace in his eyes, and consider the people as belonging to Him ("ut sciam te, et inveniam gratiam ante oculos tuos respice populum tuum gentem hanc" [13]). A few verses later, Moses asked more directly to see the Lord's glory ("ostende mihi gloriam tuam" [18]). The Lord responded that no man could see his face and live ("non poteris videre faciem meam: non enim videbit me homo, et vivet." [20]), but agreed to show Moses his back after covering Moses' face with his hand – another safeguard against the danger of seeing the Lord in his total Jupiter-like splendor.⁴ In the following chapter, Moses ascended Mt. Sinai, received the Ten Commandments, and saw God. This final experience proved so transformative that, from that moment on, rays of light shot out from Moses's face (or horns, if we take Jerome's translation literally).⁵ This terrified the Israelites so much that after that point, Moses had to cover his head with a veil every time he spoke to them (34:30).

Beatrice's withheld smile here, what Peter Hawkins calls a "striking disruption of the poem's narrative procedure," calls attention to its particular power as something at once desirable and devastating. A smile granted is something of equal meaning and power to the two theophanic moments already described. More like Moses than Semele, Dante-pilgrim will eventually see Beatrice's smile and be transformed.

Throughout the *Divine Comedy*, Dante shows deep appreciation of Moses as a vanguardist, who brings forth change in the realm of the spirit⁷ as well as in the secular sphere.⁸ In his *Monarchia*, Dante specifies that Moses is a "scribe of divine eloquence." These examples suggest that Dante, who himself once called the *Comedy* a "God song," (his own kind of divine eloquence)¹⁰ might feel a deep affinity for Moses. What does come as a bit of a surprise is that

³ Bible citations in Latin derive from the *Biblia Sacra: vulgatae editionis* (Milan, San Paolo, 1995). English translations are from the King James version (Oxford, New York: Oxford U P, 1997) unless otherwise specified.

⁴ "Tollamque manum meam, et videbis posteriora mea: faciem autem meam videre non poteris" ("And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen.") (33:23).

⁵ "Videntes autem Aaron et filii Israel cornutam Moysi faciem, timuerunt prope accedere" (Ex. 34:30). The Douay Rheims Bible (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1971) translates Jerome precisely: "And Aaron and the children of Israel seeing the face of Moses horned, they were afraid to come neere."

⁶ p.256 in: "By Gradual Scale Sublimed'; Dante's Benedict and Contemplative Ascent." *Monasticism and the Arts*, Timothy Gregory Verdon, ed. (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984), pp.255-269.

See, for example *Purg.* 23.80, *Par.* 4.29, and *Par.* 24.136.

⁸ As seen in Par. 32.131-32, and Mon 1.14.9.

⁹ "scribae divinae eloquii," (Mon. 3.4.11).

^{10 &}quot;tëodia," (Par. 25.73).

St. Peter Damian, the first soul Dante and Beatrice meet in this sphere, has special affinities to Moses; in the Old Testament figure St. Peter Damian finds an exemplary model contemplative, who used his divine visions to better serve the people that he led. Moses, St. Peter Damian wrote in one of his letters, repeatedly went in and out of the tabernacle, and these visits instruct us that "he who is carried away by contemplation should, upon leaving it, be constantly occupied with the affairs of his weaker brothers." In other words, the goal of the contemplative is not a vision of God for its own sake (Semele), but rather to see God in order to better guide others towards salvation (Moses).

Although most readers of Dante will likely agree that the poet's own ultimate aim in the *Divine Comedy* is to transform, through word and example, the corrupt society he lives in, they might not at first see what role contemplation should play in this process. Is not a contemplative one who "stays his foot in the cloister," as St. Benedict announces in the next canto (*Par.* 22.50-51)? Perhaps there are those who are called to do just that; however in the sphere of the contemplatives in *Paradiso* 21-22, Dante gives privileged space and ample speech to those who were active in public affairs, and who used their contemplative life as a departure point for their engagement *in saeculo*; the first of these is St. Peter Damian.

After the discussion of Beatrice's smile that we have just visited, Dante describes the heavenly sphere to which he has arrived:

vid' io uno scaleo eretto in suso tanto, che nol seguiva la mia luce. Vidi anche per li gradi scender giuso tanti splendor, ch'io pensai ch'ogne lume che par nel ciel, quindi fosse diffuso. E come, per lo natural costume, le pole insieme, al cominciar del giorno, si movono a scaldar le fredde piume; poi altre vanno via sanza ritorno, altre rivolgon sé onde son mosse, e altre roteando fan soggiorno; tal modo parve me che quivi fosse in quello sfavillar che 'nsieme venne, sì come in certo grado si percosse.

(Par. 21.29-42)

[I saw [...] a ladder rising up so high that my sight might not follow it. I saw, moreover, so many splendors descending along the steps that I thought every light which appears in heaven had been poured down from it.

And, as by their natural custom, the daws move about together, at the beginning of the day, to warm their cold feathers, then some fly away not to return, some wheel round to whence they had started, while others wheeling make a stay; such movements, it seemed to me, were in that sparkling, which came in a throng, as soon as it smote upon a certain step.]

Dante-pilgrim sees a ladder extending apparently infinitely up into the sky, and he sees "splendors" pouring down as numerous as all the stars. He says that they are like jackdaws warming themselves up on a cold day, some leaving, some returning to their places, and others continuing to circle. The ladder means to recall Jacob's ladder in Genesis 28:10-22, which was understood as a symbol of contemplation, and those "splendors" moving up and down are contemplative figures, apparently each on a different itinerary in life, moving from their contemplative heights down to to engagement in the world: some will stay, others will descend and re-ascend, while others will come down from

¹¹ *PL* 144, 282 A-B; Translation is from *Peter Damian: Letters*, by Owen J. Blum, ed. and trans. (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), vol. 1 of 6 vols., pp.239-240. As I will frequently refer to St. Peter Damian's letters in this paper, I will henceforth refer to the English translation simply as *Letters*, following with the volume number and the page number when necessary.

contemplation, and enter the world, never to return back up the ladder. A figure comes to talk to Dante and Beatrice. He is St. Peter Damian, although he humbly waits a considerable time before introducing himself by name. Dante asks him why he in particular was chosen to meet them at the bottom of the golden ladder, to which St. Peter Damian responds with a speech on the enigma of Divine will:

Luce divina sopra me s'appunta, penetrando per questa in ch'io m'inventro, la cui virtù, col mio veder congiunta, mi leva sopra me tanto, ch'i' veggio la somma essenza de la quale è munta. Quinci vien l'allegrezza ond'io fiammeggio; per ch'a la vista mia, quant'ella è chiara, la chiarità de la fiamma pareggio. Ma quell'alma nel ciel che più si schiara, quel serafin che 'n Dio più l'occhio ha fisso, a la dimanda tua non satisfara, però che sì s'innoltra ne lo abisso de l'etterno statuto quel che chiedi, che da ogne creata vista è scisso.

(Par. 21.83-96)

["A divine light is directed on me, penetrating through this wherein I embosom myself, the virtue of which, conjoined with my vision, lifts me above myself so far that I see the Supreme Essence from which it is drawn. From this comes the joy with which I am aflame, for to my sight, in the measure of its clearness, I match the clearness of my flame. But that soul in heaven which is most enlightened, that Seraph who has his eye most fixed on God, could not satisfy your question; for that which you ask lies so deep within the abyss of the eternal statute that it is cut off from every created vision."]

Damian here details the ontology of divine vision. In sum, the spirit of Damian is penetrated with a divine light ("luce divina") whose power, joined with his own vision ("la cui virtù, col mio veder congiunta") causes him to transcend so much ("mi leva sopra me tanto") that he sees the Supreme essence which is the source of that light (veggio / la somma essenza de la quale è munta"). This is an apt description of contemplation, which requires a great degree of selfdiscipline, but which is nothing without the power of God, that must descend to assist the contemplative. Damian adds that no created being can fully understand God's will in the end. Not even with the exalted perception of the highest of created beings, the seraph, could one answer Dante's question why Damian particularly is chosen, for the answer is buried in the deep abyss of the eternal statute, cut off from the sight of all but God ("sì s'innoltra ne lo abisso / de l'etterno statuto quel che chiedi / che da ogne creata vista è scisso"). In short, one cannot know the mind of God, but when his will is demonstrated, it behooves a man to obey it.

After this description of some of the essentials of contemplation, St. Peter Damian describes the Camaldolite monastery where he lived, Fonte Avellana, situated high up on Mt. Catria, part of the central Apennines in the Marches of Italy. He then details the rigors of life there:

Ouivi

al servigio di Dio mi fe' sì fermo, che pur con cibi di liquor d'ulivi lievemente passava caldi e geli, contento ne' pensier contemplativi. (*Par.* 21.113-117)

["There in the service of God I became so steadfast that with food seasoned only with olive-juice I passed easily through heats and frosts, content in contemplative thoughts"]

Service to God is pleasant for Damian. He hardly notices the suffering brought on by torrid summers and freezing winters, and is satisfied with a little olive oil with his meager food. Damian's happy recollection of his time spent in the hermitage demonstrates his contentment with the life he had chosen. Such humility is made manifest when he finally comes to naming himself:

In quel loco fu'io Pietro Damiano, e Pietro Peccator fu' ne la casa di Nostra Donna in sul lito adriano. (Par. 21.121-123)

["In that place was I Peter Damian, and in the House of Our Lady on the Adriatic shore I was Peter the Sinner."]

Curiously, he names himself twice, as "Pietro Damiano" (his name), and "Pietro Peccator," a nickname he often used for himself in nearly all of the openings to his letters. But the inclusion of "la casa / di Nostra Donna in sul lito adriano" is not consistent with Damian's biography. Although he was born and spent roughly the first thirty years of his life in Ravenna, Damian never had any notable association with "la casa / di Nostra Donna," which the critical tradition agrees is the monastery Santa Maria in Porto, in Ravenna. Dante's association of Damian with this place would seem illogical, were it not for an inscription on a tomb in the church, which declares:

Hic situs est Petrus peccans cognomine dictus, cui dedit hanc aulam meritorum condere Christus. 12

Without a doubt Dante would have seen this tomb at some point in his final years spent in Ravenna, but this grave is not St. Peter Damian's. 13 The corpse buried here belongs to Pietro degli Onesti, the founder and prior of the monastery of Sta. Maria in Porto. It is possible that Dante could have mistaken the far more famous "peccator," St. Peter Damian, for the "Petrus peccans" buried here. In fact, it is probable that the nonspecific epitaph was written deliberately vague, to make readers believe that Peter Damian - far and away the more famous of the two Peters - was actually buried there. 14 Yet Dante's use of the epithet "peccatore" instead of a term in keeping with the gerundial form "peccans" on the inscription suggests that he knew of Damian's numerous self-references as "Petrus peccator" in his epistolary. Why then, does Damian in Paradiso 21 refer to the epitaph, and not his writings as the locus for that term? By indicating his grave – or at least what Dante likely thought was his grave ¹⁵ – Damian emphasizes the arc of his life: He lived, and died, a sinner. By confessing that he died still a sinner, Dante's Damian effaces his decades of great deeds in life. In similar humble fashion, Damian also downplays the most extraordinary phase of his life, his tenure as Cardinal Bishop to Ostia, near Rome:

¹² Qtd. in Barbi, "Pier Damiano e Pietro Peccatore" in Con Dante e coi suoi interpreti (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1941), p.262.

¹³ The two different Peters mentioned here had caused quite a bit of argument in the critical discourse in the first half of the twentieth century. I will summarize this problem as briefly as possible: in some manuscripts the verb in line 122 occurs as "fu" in the third person, not "fui" or "fu" in the first person. Some critics, noting that the "Peccator" in line 122 was surely drawn from the epitaph of Ravenna, have argued that Dante deliberately refers to Pietro Degli Onesti here, not Damian. Barbi effectively closes the issue in his essay "Pier Damiano e Pietro Peccatore" in Con Dante e coi suoi interpreti (Florence: Felice le Monnier, 1941), pp.257-296. He most persuasively argues that Dante does not intend to indicate two different Peters, surmising that the poet mistakes the tomb in Ravenna to be St. Peter Damian's. It should be noted that Petrocchi in his edition of the Comedy supports the first person conjugation "fu'," and finds support for this reading in Barbi's "magistrale" essay, "alle cui conclusioni si deve al tutto aderire" (Paradiso 21, n.122). Additionally, there is no contemporary edition of the *Comedy* that supports the third person "fu" reading.

¹⁴ Barbi, op. cit., p.263.

Damian died in 1063 while returning to Rome from Ravenna. It is possible that his proximity to his native city at the time of his death could have caused Dante to wrongly think that he actually died and was buried there.

Poco vita mortal m'era rimasa, quando fui chiesto e tratto a quel cappello, che pur di male in peggio si travasa. (*Par.* 21.124-126)

["Little of mortal life was left to me when I was sought for and dragged to that hat which ever passes down from bad to worse."]

Although St. Peter Damian here says that he was dragged ("tratto") into that occupation when little of his life was left him ("Poca vita mortal m'era rimasa"), his tenure as Cardinal Bishop was actually a prolonged and very active part of his life (as will be shown later), spanning 15 years (1057-1072). The low esteem here shown for his role as Cardinal Bishop is highlighted by the metonymic reduction of the office into a mere "cappello," accompanied by the demonstrative adjective "quel," which implies a psychological distancing from that position that he disdains. He mentions none of his great deeds, and the phrase "di male in peggio" only highlights the bad that can come from that position of great wealth and power, which indeed did come both in his and in Dante's lifetimes.

2. Biography of the historical St. Peter Damian

The biography of the historical St. Peter Damian is exemplary, bearing no stain of that decadence that he hints at in the lines above. He was a dedicated contemplative and a dedicated servant to the people for whom he was responsible. Born in Ravenna in 1007, he studied in Faenza and Parma with the help of his brother, Damianus (from whom he took the name Damian in gratitude), gaining a full education in the liberal arts. Afterwards, he taught rhetoric in Ravenna, which he abandoned for the monastic life around 1035 when he joined the monastery of the Holy Cross at Fonte Avellana. According to his biographer, John of Lodi, Damian selected Fonte Avellana after a chance meeting with two monks of the monastery, whose dedication to Romuald's contemplative and eremitic ideals impressed him. 16 The rigors of the eremitic life at Fonte Avellana were much harder than St. Peter Damian described in the passage from Paradiso. Four or five days a week the monks fasted, allowed only a half-pound of bread alongside water and salt.¹⁷ Wine was forbidden to all but the very ill. The monks went barefoot year round, practiced self-flagellation (a practice pioneered by Damian in fact, though he never enforced it as mandatory) and prayed for hours through the night, standing, with their arms extended in the form of the cross. Twice in his lifetime Damian suffered grave illness resulting from such rigorous practices. The second illness, in the late 1050's, was so exacerbated by his refusal to follow his doctor's orders to take food and wine that he nearly died. 18 After nearly a decade of renunciation, discipline and contemplative solitude, he became prior of the monastery in 1043 and in that office he oversaw improvements on the building, such as the establishment of the library. As prior, Damian's public duties increased, cutting into time for cloistered meditation. Ironically, by the time Damian drafted the Rule for his monks at Fonte Avellana in 1045, which details the regulation of eremitic practices, he himself had less and less time to dedicate to his cell. Around this time, Damian increased his activity in church reform, especially concerning the problems of simony and married clergy. Damian's biography shows that a great portion of his later life was spent outside of the cloister, aggressively pursuing church reform on all fronts. The Church did not overlook Damian's qualities as an administrator and religious leader at Fonte Avellana, for in late 1057 he received his appointment as Cardinal Bishop of Ostia, a city in the vicinity of Rome. Damian resisted this appointment so earnestly that the Pope, Stephen X, had to threaten him with excommunication until he finally allowed himself to be dragged ("tratto") into that occupation as Canto 21 claims. Although as Cardinal he lamented the loss of his contemplative solitude, and wrote numerous letters to Pope Stephen X begging his return to

¹⁶ John of Lodi's biography of St. Peter Damian can be found in *PL* 144, 119 ff.

¹⁷ Blum, St. Peter Damian: His teaching on the Spiritual Life, p.108.

¹⁸ PL 144, 399-402; Letters, vol. 2, pp.355-360.

the cloister, Damian nevertheless executed his office with vigor, using his episcopal authority to advance reform and to encourage his brethren to spiritual renewal. During the pontificate of Alexander II (1061-1073), Damian was even more active as Papal counselor, traveling widely and demonstrating a special talent for conflict resolution and the advancement of reform. In Milan he aggressively sought to settle conflicts arising from a married and simonist clergy. In Germany (1069) he attended a diet in Frankfurt to prevent King Henry IV's divorce from his wife. At Cluny in 1063 and in Florence around 1066-67 he settled manifold disputes. In between these missions, he always returned to his cell in Fonte Avellana for restoration of his soul. He died on February 22, 1072, in Faenza.

3. St. Peter Damian and Benedict

In truth it is his activity more than his contemplation that awards St. Peter Damian a place in Dante's *Paradiso*. And Dante's arrangement of characters in Cantos 21 and 22 demonstrates that one of those noteworthy activities was Damian's importation of eremitic contemplative practice into the structure of Benedictine monasticism. Eremism had been largely unknown in the west until St. Romuald (whom St. Benedict introduces by name in Canto 22) started founding hermitages in Italy in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. By Damian's time many of Romuald's hermitages dotted the Italian landscape, and members of his order became known as known as Camaldolese or Camaldolites, after the location of the mother-house, Camaldoli, near Arezzo. Although St. Peter Damian had always technically been a Benedictine, he was strongly attracted to the life of St. Romuald, penning Romuald's *Vita* and writing a new monastic rule that combined Romualdan contemplation with the time-tested structures of Benedictine monasticism. Because Romuald left no written record, Damian's writings remain an important document of Camaldolese practices; in fact, the Camaldolese monks eventually adopted Damian's rule precisely because they found it so congenial to their own tradition and monastic practices.¹⁹

Damian's introduction of Camaldolese eremitic practices into the Benedictine rule was not without some controversy in his time; a few found it a violation of the integrity of the original intent of the text, which details only the ordering of cenobitic monks, not hermits. And while St. Benedict lauds anchorites and hermits in the first book of his *Regula*, he does not provide rules for those monks, explaining that they have passed beyond any need for a regulated life. Thus Dante's introduction of St. Benedict and St. Romuald together in Canto 22 dramatizes the poet's confirmation of what St. Peter Damian had done. In Canto 22, Benedict introduces the pilgrim to Romuald as one who kept a steadfast heart in the cloister ("Qui è Maccario, qui è Romoaldo, / qui son li frati miei che dentro ai chiostri fermar li piedi e tennero il cor saldo" [*Par.* 22.49-51]). Dante orchestrates Benedict's nod to Romuald as a way to validate St. Peter Damian's monastic innovations with the *licet* of cenobitic monasticism's founder. Furthermore, by mentioning Romuald alongside the early desert solitary, Macarius, Dante's Benedict also brings eremitic practices under his aegis. It is worth noting that only through these mentions of hermits and contemplatives can Benedict

¹⁹ Information on Damian's Rule and monastic affiliation is derived from Owen J. Blum's *St. Peter Damian: His Teaching on the Spiritual Life* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947) pp.10-12.

²⁰ Benedict's words on anchorites and eremites are as follows: "Deinde secundum genus est anachoritarum, id est eremitarum, horum qui non conversationis fervore novicio, sed monasterii probatione diuturna, quae didicerunt contra diabolum multorum solacio iam docti pugnare, et bene extructi fraterna ex acie ad singularem pugnam eremi, securi iam sine consolatione alterius, sola manu vel brachio contra vitia carnis vel cogitationum, Deo auxiliante, pugnare sufficiunt." ("Second, there are the anchorites or hermits, who have come through the test of living in a monastery for a long time, and have passed beyond the first fervor of monastic life. Thanks to the help and guidance of many, they are now trained to fight against the devil. They have built up their strength and go from the battle line in the ranks of their brothers to the single combat of the desert. Self-reliant now, without the support of another, they are ready with God's help to grapple single-handed with the vices of body and mind.") *The Rule of St. Benedict.* Timothy Fry et al, eds. (Collegeville, Minnesota: the Liturgical Press, 1981) pp.168-169.

²¹ I should add, however, that it is not clear which Macarius Dante meant to identify. The critical consensus is that he either refers to Macarius the Egyptian (also known as Macarius the Elder), or Macarius the Alexandrian (known as Macarius the Younger). The former was a late fourth century solitary in the Nitrian and Scetic deserts of Egypt. The latter, who died around 405, was also a hermit and was once credited with drafting a rule for monks. Whether Dante intended one or the other, or indeed if he thought they were the same person, is not pertinent to my thesis, since they both represent the roots of eremitic tradition.

justify his presence in this sphere of heaven. Benedict's rule, as stated, does not accommodate solitary contemplatives, and it is telling that Benedict here mentions no monk from his own order.

St. Peter Damian's renovation of Benedictine practices finds echo also in Dante's treatment of Jacob's ladder, the central symbolic object of Cantos 21 and 22. In his Rule, St. Benedict proposes that the ladder should be interpreted morally, to illustrate humility; we ascend it in humility, and in our pride we descend it.²² This ladder, he says, is our "vita in saeculo," our life on earth, and its two sides represent our soul and body, into which are fixed the rungs of humility and discipline.²³ In one of his letters praising his cell for contemplation, St. Peter Damian interprets the ladder as a symbol of the contemplative process: although humble actions in the world constitute our ascent on the ladder for Benedict, St. Peter Damian more specifically associates this ladder with the contemplative process: "You [his cell] are the Jacob's ladder that leads men to Heaven and brings down to us the assistance of angels" ("Tu scala illa Jacob quae homines vehis ad coelum, et angelos ad humanum deponis auxilium").²⁴ It needs mention here that ascent to both Damian and Benedict represents an approach towards the good, but only for Damian does it lead specifically to Heaven. Furthermore, descent, considered a bad thing by Benedict, is interpreted as a good in Damian's opinion, for angels come down to assist humans. In this same letter, Damian calls his cell "the golden road on which man returns to his fatherland; you are the course that leads to their crown for those who run well" ("Tu via aurea, quae homines reducis ad patriam. Tu stadium, quod bene currentes provehis ad coronam"). 25 The cell is also a Purgatory on Earth: "O vita eremitica, balneum animarum, mors criminum, purgatorium sordidorum. Tu mentium secreta purificas, squalores diluis scelerum, atque ad angelicae nitorem munditiae pervenire animas facis" ("O eremitic life, you are the bath of souls, the death of sin, and the purgatory of all that is foul. You purify the hidden places of the soul, you wash away the squalor of sin, and cause men's souls to shine with angelic brightness". ²⁶ The purgatorial aspects of the contemplative's cell is even more accentuated as Damian notes the specific vices expelled, and the restoration of their complementary virtues:

O cella spirituale prorsus habitaculum, quae de superbis humiles, de gulosis sobrios, de crudelibus pios, de iracundis mites, de odiosis reddis in fraterna charitate ferventes! Tu otiosae linguae frenum, tu luxuriosis renibus nitidae castitatis adhibes cingulum.

["O cell, you are a dwelling totally devoted to the spirit, where you make proud men humble, gluttons sober, cruel men kind, angry men mild, and hateful men fervent in fraternal charity. You are the curb of an idle tongue, and you bind lustful loins with the cincture of brightest chastity." |²⁷

For Damian, the cell purges man's soul of all manner of squalor, restoring his humility and self-discipline, and making him a model not unlike those angels, who descend Jacob's ladder to assist humankind, just as St. Peter Damian himself does in *Paradiso* 21 for Dante's benefit.

This descent from contemplation is revisited in another of St. Peter Damian's letters, which uses Moses as a model, as both an arch-contemplative and a leader of his people. As noted in the beginning of this essay, Moses is not the only one who saw God and did not die, he also served as a model contemplative, whose discourse with God, combined with his ministry to the people demonstrate that contemplation must be joined with public service, or have no

²² "Non aliud sine dubio descensus ille et ascensus a nobis intelligitur, nisi exaltatione descendere, et humilitate ascendere" ("Without doubt, this descent and ascent can signify only that we descend by exaltation and ascend by humility") (*The Rule of Saint Benedict*, pp.192-193).

[&]quot;Scala vero ipsa erecta nostra est vita in saeculo, quae humiliato corde a Domino erigatur ad caelum. Latera enim eius scalae dicimus nostrum esse corpus et animam, in qua latera diversos gradus humilitatis vel disciplinae evocatio divina ascendendo inseruit" ("Now the ladder erected is our life on earth, and if we humble our hearts the Lord will raise it to heaven. We may call our body and soul the sides of this ladder, into which our divine vocation has fitted the various steps of humility and discipline as we ascend") (*ibid.*, p.193).

²⁴ *PL* 145, 248 B; *Letters*, p.283.

²⁵ *ibid.*; *Letters*, pp.283-284.

²⁶ ibid.; Letters, p.284.

²⁷ PL 145, 249 B-C; Letters, p.285.

use. In a letter to Desiderius, the abbot of Montecassino, St. Peter Damian argues precisely this point. ²⁸ He urges the abbot to follow the example of Moses who went in and out of the tabernacle, alternately meditating and guiding his people. Though a good abbot should pass as much time as possible in solitary contemplation, he should follow Moses' example by attending constantly to the needs of those less fortunate than himself:

Et quanquam diversis te negotiis cura regiminis opprimat, ad sinum tamen quietis intimae, cum poterit, mens recurrat. Imitatus scilicet Moysen, qui tabernaculum foederis frequenter intrabat et exibat. Quid est enim quod ille crebro tabernaculum ingreditur et egreditur, nisi ut exemplum praebeat, quod is, qui intus in contemplationem rapitur, foris infirmantium negotiis frequenter urgetur, intus Dei arcana considerat, foris onera carnalium portat.

["And even though you are burdened with various duties inherent in your office as abbot, let your soul retreat to the haven of solitary quiet whenever possible, imitating Moses who frequently paid short visits to the tabernacle of the covenant. What is meant by these frequent visits to the tabernacle but that we should be taught by this example: that he who in God's presence is carried away by contemplation should, upon leaving it, be constantly occupied with the affairs of his weaker brothers; that within that presence he should meditate on the high secrets of God, but when leaving it he should bear the burdens of others who are flesh and bone." 1²⁹

The material burdens of others should be of primary concern to the contemplative when he is not secluded in his cell. For Damian, there is no question that the truths attained in contemplation provide the necessary foundation for the virtuous ministering to others. Damian returns to Moses in this same letter, demonstrating that this most famous and pious leader of men is the highest example to follow:

Noctibus in monte orationibus vacat, die vero in urbibus per miraculorum signa coruscat, imitationis videlicet viam bonis rectoribus sternens, ut si jam summa contemplanda appetunt, necessitatibus tamen infirmantium compatiendo misceantur, quia tunc ad alta charitas mirabiliter surgit, cum ad ima proximorum se misericorditer attrahit.

["He spent his nights in prayer in the mountains, but by day he brilliantly performed miraculous deeds in the towns, thus showing the way that good leaders might imitate. For if they are now engaged in the contemplation of the highest truth, they may still be compassionately involved in the needs of their weak brothers, because charity will wondrously scale the heights when it reaches down in mercy to the lowly needs of our neighbor."]³⁰

The imperative to apostolic work after periods of contemplation is characteristic of Damian's own biography. No matter how much he protested his inadequacy in the highly politicized world of ecclesiastical affairs and proclaimed his desire to retreat to his cell,³¹ his writings and life show that his spirit is indefatigable in the service of the church and people, an energy he could have attained only, it seems, through periods of eremitic solitude.

4. Comparing St. Peter Damian's critique of wealth in Paradiso 21 and his letters

In *Paradiso* 21.124-126, Dante had St. Peter Damian disdaining his secular activity. Damian's following speech fiercely criticizes corrupt pastors, who operate *in saeculo* but benefit no one but themselves.

²⁸ *PL* 144, 278 A – 282 C; *Letters*, vol. 3, pp.233-240.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 282 A-B; *ibid.*, pp.239-240.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 282 C; *ibid.*, p.240.

See letters 57, 72 and 79 in vol. 3 of his *Letters*, in which he begs Pope Nicholas II to release him from his duties as the bishop of Ostia, so that he may return to his hermitage in Fonte Avellana.

Venne Cefàs e venne il gran vasello de lo Spirito Santo, magri e scalzi, prendendo il cibo da qualunque ostello. Or voglion quinci e quindi chi i rincalzi li moderni pastori e chi li meni, tanto son gravi, e chi di rietro li alzi. Cuopron d'i manti loro i palafreni, sì che due bestie van sott'una pelle: oh pazïenza che tanto sostieni!

(Par. 21.127-135)

["Cephas came, and the great vessel of the Holy Spirit came, lean and barefoot, taking their food at whatsoever inn. Now the modern pastors require one to prop them up on this side and one on that, and one to lead them, so heavy are they, and one to hold up their trains behind. They cover their palfreys with their mantles, so that two beasts go under one hide. O patience, that do endure so much!"]

Peter and Paul here epitomize a monastic model most often associated with St. Francis, though it is also congenial to Damian's own ideals: they are "magri" from fasting, "scalzi" out of humility, and take whatever food offered them from "qualunque ostello." Damian calls St. Peter not with his more common name, "Pietro," here, preferring the Aramaic version of his name, "Cefàs," which Jesus gives him John 1:42 ("et adduxit eum ad Iesum intuitus autem eum Iesus dixit 'tu es Simon filius Iohanna tu vocaberis Cephas quod interpretatur Petrus'"). Christ's naming of Peter recalls another more famous version of this story in Matthew 16:18: "tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam," a passage from which the Catholic Church and the Holy See in Rome derive essentially all their authority. The passage in John, on the other hand, makes no such claim. I suggest that Dante deliberately employs the name "Cephas" to call attention to the passage from the book of John. By choosing this over the well-known passage from Matthew, Dante places pastoral duty before papal authority. "Cephas" is Peter's name in Jesus's humble mother tongue, the language used daily to minister to his flock. Ministerial duties are also underscored in the naming of Paul, here called the "gran vasello / de lo Spirito Santo." Paul is elsewhere called the "chosen vessel" in Acts 9:15, when God tells Ananias that Saul (whose name will only later be changed to Paul) is the "vas electionis," who will bring His name to the Gentiles, kings and the Jews. Again, apostolic work is emphasized while authority is downplayed.

After mentioning these humble apostles of Christianity (who like Damian also change their names as they begin their Christian mission), Damian now addresses "li moderni pastori." The term, which highlights pastoral duties following the model of the Good Shepherd himself, is deeply ironic, for current "shepherds" are now engulfed in their own material excesses; they need servants here and there to prop them up ("chi i rincalzi... e chi li meni"), and others to hold their sumptuous clothes up off the ground ("chi di rietro li alzi"). Their mantles are so massive that they cover half their horses so that two "bestie" go under one fur lined cloak; the animal epithet accentuates the baseness and inhumanity of their materialism.

Compare the above to one of Damian's letters to the Cardinal Bishops, in which he inveighs against

papales scilicet infulas gemmis micantibus aureisque bracteolis per diversa loca corruptas. Imperiales equos, qui, dum pernices gressus arcuatis cervicibus glomerant, sessoris sui manus loris innexas indomita ferocitate fatigant. Ommito annulos enormibus adhibitos margaritis. Praetereo virgas, non jam auro gemissque conspicuas, sed sepultas.

["papal vestments sparkling with gems and cloth of gold, spoils from various lands, imperial horses which while prancing with nimble steps and arching necks, by their unbroken liveliness tire their riders

^{32 &}quot;And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone."
33 "thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church."

tugging at the reins. I will say nothing of the rings set with enormous pearls, and will pass over their crosiers, not just conspicuous for their gold and gems, but actually buried in them."]³⁴

This passage and the invective in Canto 21, are perfect parallels, both in their enraged, sarcastic register and in the specific details. The great "mantles" in Dante's lines find echo in the "papal vestments" here. Dante's "palfreys" are by Damian represented as prancing imperial horses. The crozier, the symbol of pastoral duty that Damian mentions as buried under gold and gems, is transformed into the pastor himself in Dante, represented as a beast buried under a mantle.

5. St. Peter Damian's "radical" proposals for the redistribution of wealth in his letters

Elsewhere in St. Peter Damian's writings solutions are proposed to the accumulation of riches into the hands of the few, and those solutions reveal Damian to be a gutsy radical unafraid to consider even expropriation of wealth, so long as it benefits the needy. In a letter to an unnamed bishop,³⁵ Damian argues vehemently against selling church property for profit, equating it with murder:

Perpende igitur, venerabilis frater, quantorum homicidiorum in die judicii reus erit, qui modo tot orphanis diversisque pauperibus, unde vivere debeant, subtrahit. Ad tribunal illius qui pauperes singulariter diligit, qui se in paupere refici, in paupere se perhibet esurire; ad tribunal, inquam, illius qua conscientia venit, qui alimenta se subtraxisse pauperibus recognoscit? Si damnatur ille, qui vel unum hominem peremit ferro, qua sententia dignus erit, qui bona Ecclesiae profligando, quamplures interficit famis et inopiae gladio?

["Carefully consider, therefore, venerable brother, how many murders on the day of judgment will be charged to him who now deprives this great number of widows, orphans, and various poor people of their livelihood. What will be the state of his conscience when he comes before the tribunal of him who has a special love for the poor, before him who declared that he is fed when one feeds the poor, that he is hungry when the poor are hungry; when he comes before the tribunal of him who stated that taking food from the poor is the same thing of taking it from him? If he is to be damned who kills only one man with his sword, what will be the sentence pronounced against the one who, by wasting the goods of the Church, kills many people by the sword of hunger and want?"]³⁶

To emphasize the Church's mandate to care for the poor is no cause for controversy, but St. Peter Damian goes further, exhorting lay people to the same actions. In a letter³⁷ to the young Countess Guilla, wife of Rainerius II, he tells her to "Frange igitur perversi ritus regulam quam invenisti, tolle confiscationes pauperum, [atque] injustos canones et illationes inhibe rusticorum" ("Therefore, break the pattern of customary evil that you have found, abolish the practice of confiscating the property of the poor, [and] prevent unjust taxes and impositions on the serfs").³⁸ Instead of continuing this evil practice against her subjects, Damian commands Guilla to work the land instead, and donate the profits to the poor: "fac agriculturis vehementer insisti, ut ad indigentibus praebenda solatia horrea tua valeant proventuum benedictione repleri" ("You should intensify your farming, and thus your barns will be filled with abundant crops to be used in assisting the poor").³⁹

This care for the poor is not simply a gesture of holy generosity for Damian; it is instead a realization of a larger economic vision, for in his opinion wealth belongs to all, not just select persons. In a well know letter addressed

³⁴ *PL* 145, 538 D; *Letters*, vol. 4, p.80.

³⁵ *PL* 144, 322 A-324 C; *Letters*, vol. 3, pp.151-156.

³⁶ *ibid.* 322 B-322 C; *ibid.*, p.152.

³⁷ PL 144, 458 A-460 D; Letters, vol. 6, pp.143-147.

³⁸ *ibid.* 458 C; *ibid.*, p.144.

³⁹ *ibid.* 459 C; *ibid.*, p.146.

to the hermitage of Gamugno,⁴⁰ Damian tells the monks that the man who gives the riches of the wealthy to the poor commits not an act of charity, but one of justice. Such a man justly redistributes those goods, for they are by nature common and belong to all:

Notandum tamen quia quisquis non sceleratis, sed honestioribus viris aliquid hoc studio tollit, ut subsidia fratribus in egestate provideat, vel pio cuilibet operi sumptus exhibeat; sive etiam, quod insignius est, pauperibus in necessitate succurrat, hic non dicendus est aliena impudenter appetere, sed potius, quae communia sunt, a fratribus in fratres juste transferre. Ad hoc enim unus caeteris ditior est ut non solum commissa possideat, sed ut non habentibus eroget, et non tam pie quam juste minister ipse, non dominus, quae sunt aliena dispenset.

["It should be noted that he who takes from the wealthy rather than from the unfortunate to provide for his brothers who are in need, or who supports some pious work, or, more importantly, who relieves the poor in their necessity, should not be counted an avaricious man, but as one who justly moves common goods from one group of brethren to another. One man is richer than others, not for the reason that he alone should possess the things he holds in trust, but that he disburse them to the poor. He should distribute the goods of others, not as their owner, but as an agent, and not merely through motives of charity, but of justice."]⁴¹

We should note that there exists no "owner" of wealth according to St. Peter Damian, only its "agent," whose ultimate duty is fair redistribution. Later in the letter, Damian sharpens this statement, essentially advocating the expropriation of the wealth of those keeping too much for themselves: "Quapropter qui divitibus auferens, indigentibus exhibet, non alienorum dicendus est appetitor, sed bonorum potius communium distributor" ("Wherefore, he who takes from the rich to give to the poor is not to be thought a thief, but a dispenser of common property"). The meaning of the statement is not absolutely transparent, but the active participle "auferens" in the original Latin suggests not merely accepting gifts from the wealthy, but indeed taking away their wealth, regardless of consent. One can be confident from these statements, however, that Damian sees wealth as a common good, regardless of who has it, how much of it is acquired and by which means. Even if the saint does not advocate some medieval form of Bolshevism, his understanding of wealth as common and his disregard for private property are nothing less than revolutionary for his time.

At the center of Dante's seventh heaven stands figure of great moral importance, and a key to understanding the spectrum of social aims dependent on contemplation. St. Peter Damian demonstrates that contemplation is far more than just solitary meditation. It is a means to serve the common good and to rectify the injustices that follow the excessive accumulation of wealth. How much of Damian's socioeconomic views Dante agreed with is open to discussion; however, it cannot be denied that the vast majority of Damian's writings on the perniciousness of greed, the evils of wealth in the Church, the need to care for the economically disadvantaged, as well as the need for spiritual renewal on all levels of society are in keeping with Dante's views expressed throughout the *Comedy*. By placing Damian over all other contemplatives in Canto XXI, Dante implies that to meditate on the mysteries of God is not enough for any man; one must also return to the world to fulfill his social obligation to mankind. In the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* Bonaventura of Bagnoregio revisits Jacob's ladder, which in his view is ascended for contemplative

⁴⁰ Owen Blum asserts that this is "one of his most widely known letters" (*Letters*, vol. 6, p.127).

⁴¹ *PL* 144, 425 C; *Letters*, vol. 6, p.132.

⁴² *ibid.*, 425 C-426 A; *ibid.*, p.133.

⁴³ In this context, it is understandable that Blum should translate "appetitor" —which in the strict sense means merely one who strives or is ambitious— as thief. I myself I will not say with certainty that Damian means anything more than "greedy" in the word "appetitor," as it is a vague, but the word "auferens" is far less ambivalent.

aims, and descended to minister to others ("ad contemplativam operationem et ad ministrativam").⁴⁴ Bonaventura's words reconfirm that St. Peter Damian's idea about descent was still current in Dante's time. By choosing St. Peter Damian to descend that ladder, who represents not just the regularization of eremitic practices in monasticism and the ultimately social aims of contemplation, but who also vouches for a radical reconsideration of the use and ownership of wealth, Dante makes clear how much value he himself places on such "operatio ministrativa."

⁴⁴ Opera Omnia, Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi), Ex. Typ. Collegii Sancti Bonaventurae, 1901, t. IX, p.615.