***Liber Gratissimus (The Most Gratuitous Book)* *Letter 40***

**Saint Peter Damian on the Crime of Simony**

**Acts of the Apostles** Chapter 8

Douay Rheims Version

[[1]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=1-#x) And at that time there was raised a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all dispersed through the countries of Judea, and Samaria, except the apostles. [[2]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=2-#x) And devout men took order for Stephen's funeral, and made great mourning over him. [[3]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=3-#x) But Saul made havock of the church, entering in from house to house, and dragging away men and women, committed them to prison. [[4]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=4-#x) They therefore that were dispersed, went about preaching the word of God. [[5]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=5-#x) And Philip going down to the city of Samaria, preached Christ unto them.

[[6]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=6-#x) And the people with one accord were attentive to those things which were said by Philip, hearing, and seeing the miracles which he did. [[7]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=7-#x) For many of them who had unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, went out. [[8]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=8-#x) And many, taken with the palsy, and that were lame, were healed. [[9]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=9-#x) There was therefore great joy in that city. Now there was a certain man named Simon, who before had been a magician in that city, seducing the people of Samaria, giving out that he was some great one: [[10]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=10-#x) To whom they all gave ear, from the least to the greatest, saying: This man is the power of God, which is called great.

[[11]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=11-#x) And they were attentive to him, because, for a long time, he had bewitched them with his magical practices. [[12]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=12-#x) But when they had believed Philip preaching of the kingdom of God, in the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. [[13]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=13-#x) Then Simon himself believed also; and being baptized, he adhered to Philip. And being astonished, wondered to see the signs and exceeding great miracles which were done. [[14]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=14-#x) Now when the apostles, who were in Jerusalem, had heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. [[15]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=15-#x) Who, when they were come, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost.

[[16]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=16-#x) For he was not as yet come upon any of them; but they were only baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. [[17]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=17-#x) Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost. [[18]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=18-#x) And when Simon saw, that by the imposition of the hands of the apostles, the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, [[19]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=19-#x) Saying: Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I shall lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said to him: [[20]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=20-#x) Keep thy money to thyself, to perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

[[21]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=21-#x) Thou hast no part nor lot in this matter. For thy heart is not right in the sight of God. [[22]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=22-#x) Do penance therefore for this thy wickedness; and pray to God, that perhaps this thought of thy heart may be forgiven thee. [[23]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=23-" \l "x) For I see thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. [[24]](http://www.drbo.org/cgi-bin/d?b=drb&bk=51&ch=8&l=24-#x) Then Simon answering, said: Pray you for me to the Lord, that none of these things which you have spoken may come upon me.

**Simony – The Offspring of Avarice**

According to *New Advent*, simony, in general terms, is defined as “a deliberate intention of selling for a temporal price such things as are spiritual or annexed unto spirituals including ecclesiastical offices and privileges. While this definition only speaks of purchase and sale, any exchange of spiritual for temporal things is simoniacal. Nor is the giving of the temporal as the price of the spiritual required for the existence of simony. It suffices that the determining motive of the action of one party be the obtaining of compensation from the other.”

*New Advent* lists the following temporal advantages which may be offered for a spiritual favor according to Pope Saint Gregory the Great (590 - 604 A. D.):

* Material advantage including money, all property, and all rights appreciable in pecuniary value.
* Oral advantage which includes oral commendation, public expressions of approval, and moral support in high places.
* And homage, which consists in subserviency, the rendering of undue services, etc.

While according to the natural and Divine laws, simony is applicable only to the exchange of supernatural treasures for temporal advantages, its meaning has been further extended through ecclesiastical legislation.

However, it should be noted that while any transgression of the law of God related to simony is, objectively speaking, grievous in every instance and constitutes a sacrilegious depreciation of Divine treasures, ecclesiastical prohibitions do not all and under all circumstances impose a grave obligation. [The source for this introduction is <http://newadvent.org/cathen/14001a.htm>].

**Saint Peter Damian’s Treatise on Simony**

Saint Peter Damian’s *Letter 40* titled *Liber* ***Gratissimus (The Most Gratuitous Book)* was written in 1052 A.D. It was** addressed to Sir Henry, the Bishop of Ravenna (a center of clerical reform), but was actually written for Pope Leo IX, who held three Roman synods in 1049, 1050, and 1051 (attended by Peter Damian) at which time the issue of the validity of simoniacal orders was hotly debated.

According to translator Owen J. Blum, Pope Leo IX initially ruled that **all** holy orders carried out by simoniacal bishops were invalid , but was forced to reconsider his decision when the Synod fathers pointed out the wide-sweeping disastrous repercussions of that decision on the sacramental life of the Church, and the chaos and disbelief it would create far and wide.

Leo took the warning to heart.

The pope asked Peter Damian, not yet a bishop, to render his opinion on the crisis besieging the Church. As noted above, the holy monk first sent his *Letter 40* to the Bishop of Ravenna, but after getting no response, he sent his work on to the Holy See where it had an immediate and long-term impact.

**Please note that Peter Damian supported the canonical penalties against simony, whereby**  “whoever had obtained his sacred office by payment of money, both he and his ordaining prelate should be deposed.” What he opposed was the growing impious teaching and heresy that priests who received holy orders at the hands of a simoniacal bishop, but were innocent of all simoniacal connections, were not true and valid priests and had to be “reordained.” Thus the burning question:  **ARE HOLY ORDERS IMPOSED BY A SIMONIACAL BISHOP VALID?**

**Peter Damian answered in the affirmative. In doing so he contributed to the establishment of the universal principals upon which the validity of the seven sacraments of the Church are upheld despite the unworthiness of the minister – be he, pope, cardinal, bishop, priest or deacon. Note that paragraph numbers are in parenthesis.**

**God Is the Author of All Graces**

**Peter Damian begins his treatise with the admonition that the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Ghost – is the author and ultimate dispenser of all gifts of divine grace. He states that all sacraments including Baptism and Holy Orders are from God, and not from man. Therefore, … no matter who may exercise the ministry of the sacrament, he is only the servant and steward of the mysteries of God. It is God who produces the sacrament with its profound effect. (6)**

**Unworthy Ministers Do Not Hinder God**

**Repeating a theme present throughout his treatise, Peter Damian weighs in against the “reordination” of priests ordained by bishops who had bought their office:**

**It is therefore a statement of pure and perfect faith that like baptism, priestly ordination is in no way contaminated by the defect of sordid ministers, nor damaged by another’s crime. No matter how scandalous or involved in countless crimes the consecrator might be, the one ordained suffers no loss to his sacred office on this account, nor is he deprived of any heavenly grace. For it is not because of the quality of the bishop, but by reason of the office in which he functions that the mystery of ordination is transmitted to another, nor is it necessary to inquire into the consecrator’s manner of life but only into the ministry he received. … (7)**

**With this is mind, since one who is baptized even by a heretic is not to be rebaptized, I see no reason why one who is promoted by a so-called simonist should be either deposed or reordained. For if baptism administered by a murderer or by an adulterer or even by a heretic must be considered valid, and that, by reason of the Gospel statement, “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest is the one who baptizes,” (John 1.33), there is no reason at all why in ordinations we should not refer to the identical author of both sacraments, and with equal force be able to say he is the one who ordains. (10)**

**Ordination, If Catholic, Is Also Valid**

Citing two simonists from Holy Scripture**–** Gehazi, the covetous and devious young servant of the prophet Elisha who is mentioned three times in the Old Testament and Simon Magnus cited in the introduction to this commentary **–** Peter Damian describes the simonists of his own day who having “no hope of being famous for their miracles, do not desire the Holy Spirit nor his gifts, but inflamed by their ambition of procuring a bishopric, strive only for a place in the sun.” (11)

Yet, Peter Damian continues:

… if their ordination is properly Catholic, even though they approach unworthily, they fully receive the holy office of the priesthood. For the power of the Holy Spirit is the same, both when his grace is sold and when it is given freely. Nor does the power of God lose its proper effectiveness because of transactions that flow from human perverseness. (11)

In the same way also we are compelled to believe of the Holy Spirit, that he possesses the same power, both when it appears, as it were, that he is the victim of venality and when he is bestowed through the gratuitous imposition of hands. And thus, just as our Redeemer, when he was sold and when he suffered, could not be weakened in his majesty, so also the Holy Spirit, even though the same sad specter of venality creeps in, in no way suffers a loss of the power that is his. Even though to all appearances the priest seems to be functioning, it is Christ himself, the true priest and supreme pontiff, who grants the gifts to those who approach him with varying results. **For some, indeed, his gifts lead to salvation, for others to damnation** (bold added). … All of us surely know that the mystery of the Eucharist, which we receive from the sacred altar, is indeed good, whether we be just or sinners. Neither does the good man received something better, nor the bad man something worse. And still the Apostle says that, “the unworthy recipient eats and drinks his own condemnation without recognizing the Body of the Lord.” (Cor 11.29).

… Therefore, one must believe without a doubt that if ordination to any rank is granted within the Catholic Church, namely, within the unity of orthodox belief, and where both possess the true faith, whatever is given by a good minister to a good recipient is also effectively tendered by an evil minister to an evil recipient, because this sacrament does not depend upon the merits of the minister or the recipient, but upon the rite ordained within the Church and on the invocation of the name of God. (13)

**The Holy Spirit Breathes Where He Wills**

In a rather breath-taking statement, Peter Damian addresses the question as to whether or not the Holy Spirit breathes only on the deserving:

It should not, therefore, appear incredible that in the Holy Church which undoubtedly is the throne of God, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, and the repository of all heavenly gifts, an unworthy person should receive sacramental grace with which he fails to conform by intent or by a worthy life. **This is true precisely because it is not deserved by the grantor or the recipient but is a gift of the supreme Benefactor. One does not read that the spirit breathes where he is deserved, but rather it is said, “He breathes wherever he wishes,” (John 3.8), so that actually spiritual grace, which flows from the liturgical practices of the Church, derives from the will of God rather than from the deserts of men** [bold added]**.** (17)

**Early Church Fathers Upheld Teaching**

Peter Damian notes that while there was no question among the early Church Fathers that the Sacraments of Baptism or the Eucharist of the Lord’s Body, whether confected by thieves, or adulterers, or even murderers, differed in no way from the sacraments which holy priests produce, the question of the validity of ordination of clerics by simoniacal bishops had not been a topic of major discussion or debate for them. He said this was because the two prior sacraments were explained in such clear terms that no doubt or hesitation remained about the third.

However, Peter Damian laments that by the mid-1040s, things had changed:

Now… by acting immoderately, human curiosity propounds a new question before the world, and by closer scrutiny that results in lesser vision, tries to impose darkness onto the clear light. How, they ask, is the grace of the Holy Spirit given through evil men or received by them? They are not aware that it is by the grace of the Holy Spirit that orders of ecclesiastical dignity themselves are received, which indeed, the Holy Spirit who disposes the rights of the Church, renders valid, whether an unworthy person bestows or receives them. For as the blessed Jerome says, “Bishop, priest, and deacon are not titles of merit, but of office.” (19)

**Bad Intentions Do Not Block the Gifts of God**

Peter Damian’s knowledge and use of Scripture in his treatise is phenomenal. For example, when complaints reached the holy monk’s ears that certain simoniacal bishops did not act with the right intentions when carrying out ordinations, the holy monk referred back to Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians:

The Apostle complained that certain false brethren because of jealousy and competition, were not preaching Christ with the right intention. But what is the point? Did he decide to stop them? Then listen to what follows: “What does it matter,” he said, “so long as, one way or another, either from pretense or from love, Christ is proclaimed, and for that I rejoice, and shall continue to rejoice .” (Phil 1.18). Christ, moreover, has ministers of the word and ministers also of the sacrament; in both ministries, surely, some are good and faithful, while others are false and wicked, but one receives neither something better from the good, nor something worse from the wicked. The ministers in fact are quite different, but that which is given is obviously one and the same. For the originator of the gifts is certainly good and that which he gives is in no way marred by the service of the ministers. (30)

**Evil Doers Receive Their Just Punishment**

Noting that even unrepented heretics and other betrayers of the Catholic faith are permitted by God, at times, to work miracles, Peter Damian states that this does not mean they escape God’s wrath:

Now these wonderous signs which divine providence works, either through heretics or through unworthy priests of the true faith, since they are granted not because of the worthiness of any of them but by reason of their office, will in no way free them from the punishment they deserve, or excuse them of the crimes they have committed when they come before the bench of the severe judge. For in that from which they seek glory they fall into ignominious confusion, and the more they are praised by the applause of flatterers , the more liable they are to plunge into the depths of eternal damnation. And often such men, as they are struck down by a terrible death, clearly show how truly worthy they were of damnation, who to all appearances seemed so admirable. (50)

**Bishops Advised to Caution the Holy See**

Saint Peter Damian, who was not yet a bishop himself, felt compelled to urge the bishops to warn the Holy See against “this impious teaching” and to take unanimous action to resist this new heresy which would “shake the foundations of the apostolic faith.” (104)

As noted earlier, while Peter Damian did not oppose the canonical decree against simony, that “whoever had obtained his sacred office by payment of money, both he and his ordaining prelate should be deposed,” he held that the limits of justice did not extend to the punishment of innocent candidates who had received holy orders from a bishop guilty of simony.

Not surprisingly, Peter Damian used his treatise to deliver a crippling blow to the practitioners of this crime labeling them worse than Judas:

I lodge complaint against you simonists, who have caused me this grave inconvenience of burning the midnight oil. I have defended your interests, but only that I might condemn you. Thus I admit the things that were done by you and show my judgment of how abominable you are and how worthy of the supreme punishment that befits the incorrigible. Judas , to be sure, believing the Lord to be mere man, sold him; but at once he threw away the blood money as he prepared to pay the penalty that was his due. But you, with no doubt of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, ascribe to him the venal transaction and hold on to the benefits of this sacrilegious deed, and you , who should have been subject to punishment, profit by the crime that you commit. To whom should I rightly compare you, who hold the gifts of God not for yourselves, but for others? That which amasses salvation for them is turned for you into judgment and eternal damnation. (115)

Although Sir Henry, the bishop of Ravenna never issued a formal response to Peter Damian regarding the contents of his treatise, *Liber* ***Gratissimus* made its wayinto the hands of Pope Leo IX and his successors who looked favorably upon the holy monk’s work.**

**Peter Damian Adds an Addendum to His Work**

In 1061, Peter Damian, now **Cardinal Bishop of Ostia,** added an addendum to *Liber* ***Gratissimus*, in which he stated that at the close of the Lateran** ecclesiastical **council** (synod) **convened on Easter 1059 by Pope Nicholas II and closed in April 1061, the matter of the validity of simoniacal ordinations was finally settled.** *Liber* ***Gratissimus* had carried the day.**

**The judicial conclusion was:**

**… Those who were hitherto ordained freely by simonists should remain in the dignity of the office, but that those not yet promoted by them would not in the future be permitted advancement; but with the proviso that as a result of the severity of the sentence neither the ecclesiastical order should be destroyed, nor that in view of its leniency, the plague of simony should acquire, by some lawful provision, the power of conferring the grades of ordination, all with a view that what in past ordinations had been valid, should for future ones be totally forbidden. (122)**

**A Commentary on *Liber Gratissimus***

According to Saint Peter Damian:

The unity of the Church is established on this principle, that Christ retained as his own power of ordaining and did not transfer his title to any of the ministers of ordination. For if ordination were to proceed from the worthiness or the power of the bishops, it would obviously not belong to Christ at all. Even though the bishop imposes hands and by the ministry committed to him recites the words of the blessing, it is certainly Christ who ordains and consecrates by the hidden power of his majesty. (29)

Hence, whether he dispenses doctrine by his words, or confers the orders of the Church, the priest in no way uses his own resources but merely carries out the office and the ministerial functions with which he was endowed. Otherwise, if these effects were to flow from the worthiness of the priest, they would indeed nullify all faith in God’s grace. (31)

While Saint Peter Damian’s *Liber* ***Gratissimus* was directed at the crime of simony, its lessons are applicable to the current crime of clerical sodomy.**

**One could well ask, “Could it be otherwise?”**

**If the validity of the sacraments including Baptism, Holy Communion and Holy Orders were based on the worthiness or unworthiness of sodomite priests and bishops, the entire foundation of the Church – past, present and future – would be negated or destroyed.**

**Thanks to our Triune God, and to the great Fathers and Doctors of the Church like Saint Peter Damian, this is not the case.**

**The reader may also want to ponder how the two crimes of simony and sodomy are intertwined in the recent cases of two notorious clerical sodomites and simonists – the now laicized Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, former Archbishop of Washington, D.C., and Bishop Michael Bransfield, former Ordinary of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, West Virginia.**

**While simony has traditionally been associated with the purchase of ecclesiastic office, McCarrick and Bransfield used their millions (collected from sheeple in the pews and wealthy Catholics) not merely as a form of influence peddling, but more to the point, as an effective measure to insure the silence of the recipients of their filthy lucre as to their unnatural and predatory passions.**

**McCarrick was first famous, and later infamous, for his financial largesse to Vatican officials and the Papal Office, directly through his Archbishop’s Fund and indirectly through the Papal Foundation, and for the long list of bishoprics he acquired for his fellow sodomite clerics.**

**Bransfield, once President of the Papal Foundation and treasurer of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishop, wrote out hundreds of “gift” checks totaling more than $350,000 to a large number of American and Vatican prelates, U.S. papal nuncios, senior Vatican officials and members of the Curia; and lastly, young seminarians and priests whom he sexually molested.**

**Truly, if we ever needed the wisdom, assistance and prayers of Saint Peter Damian, we need them now.**

**The End**