*Letter 1*

***On The Arguments of the Jews Against the Blessed Trinity***

**Introduction**

*Letter* 1 was written by Saint Peter Damian in the years 1040 to 1041 at the request of Sir Honestus who begged the holy monk to assist him in his argumentation with the Jews in defense of the Holy Trinity, specifically, the Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.[[1]](#endnote-1)

As Father Owen Blum, O.F.M. explains in one of his early footnotes to this masterwork, it is unlikely that Peter Damian had any personal relationship with Italian Jews, therefore he was dependent not only on *Sacred Scripture* but also on the patristic writings of earlier Christian theologians including Saint Jerome and Saint Augustine.[[2]](#endnote-2) Unfortunately, Blum, whom I suspect was a creature of the Second Vatican Council, refers to these early writings on the Jews as “anti-Jewish literature,” but I believe the members of the League will think otherwise – that Saint Peter Damian, unlike the post-Conciliar popes, simply told the Jews what is necessary for the salvation of their immortal souls. [R.E. Editor]

**St. Peter Damian Accepts the Challenge**

1. To SIR HONESTUS, a most illustrious man in the darkness of Egypt, Peter, the last servant of the monks sends everlasting love in Christ.[[3]](#endnote-3)
2. My dear friend… you recently sent word to me, begging that I should write something for you to use in silencing, with reasoned arguments, the Jews who debate with you; and that when entering a controversy concerning Christ , you could win your case with the clearest testimony from Sacred Scripture.

… I have decided that it is appropriate to comply with your request. Surely it is disgraceful for a man of the Church to hold his tongue out of ignorance when those outside the fold see things in a false light, and that a Christian incapable of giving an account of Christ should retreat, conquered and ashamed, as his enemies vaunt over him. One might add, that often harmful ineptitude and dangerous simplicity in such matters not only excite boldness in the unbelieving, but also beget error and doubt in the hearts of the faithful (emphasis added).[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Confront Opponents With Proper Motives**

1. And since certainly this knowledge relates totally to the faith, and faith is undoubtedly the foundation of all virtues, when the foundation is shaken, the whole structure of the building soon threatens to fall into ruin. One must know, however, that a Christian man should not enter into this fight for reasons of empty glory or for the love of conflict alone, but rather because he hopes to be able to benefit the soul of his adversary through the grace of conversion. … And when someone starts an action in this matter, he should be advised not to anger his adversary by contentious invective or proud conceit, but with kindly love and most patient seriousness should attract his mind, so that by the modest sweetness of his words he might perhaps soften to the point of believing the stony heart, which by an excess of acrimony he would render more obdurate.[[5]](#endnote-5)
2. … Although almost all the books of the Old Testament bear witness to Christ, putting aside this abundance of words, I take pains to set before you a few, clear statements of the prophets, by which however, with the help of God, you may win a victory over all the madness of Jewish depravity and all their garrulous fabrications. And since an arrow is shot more accurately if first the target which it must pierce is set up for us to hit, I here bring on this contentious Jew, that the shafts of my words put into the air may not fly aimlessly, but in a well-aimed barrage, may rather reach the specified objective.[[6]](#endnote-6)

**On Jewish Objections to the Holy Trinity**

1. Tell us therefore, Jew, as you deny the Trinity, and consequently are unaware of unity, if, as you assert, God is one in person, to whom did he say: “Let us make man to our own image and likeness”?[[7]](#endnote-7) For if there were one person in the Godhead, he would not have said “let us make,” but “let me make.” If there were three substances, he would not have used the singular “our image,” but rather “our images.” Therefore, while “let us make” asserts Trinity and “our image” indicates unity, it is clearly obvious that the essentially one God consists of three persons.[[8]](#endnote-8)

[Moses said in Gen. 11.5] “The Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the sons of Adam were building. And shortly after that he added: “Come, let us go down and there confuse their language.”[[9]](#endnote-9)

1. You see, therefore, that “the Lord came down” expresses the one divine essence; but “Come, let us go down” teaches that there are three persons.[[10]](#endnote-10) Also ask Abraham why when seeing three men he adored one? Thus it was written: “The Lord appeared to him in the valley of Mamre, as he sat in the entrance of his tent, while the day was growing hot”; and then he added: “When he looked up, three men appeared to him standing nearby.”[[11]](#endnote-11) Notice that although he first said: “The Lord appeared to him”; when the event was described, it was not said: “a man appeared to him,” but “three men appeared to him.” It is here clearly demonstrated that he who appeared to him is one in divine substance and is threefold in person. Abraham’s words likewise give evidence of this when he says: “Sir,” he said, “if I have found favor in your sight, do not go past your servant. But let me bring a little water and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.”[[12]](#endnote-12)
2. … The prophet Isaiah also clearly and thoroughly taught this Trinity of persons and unity of nature when he reported seeing Seraphim who cried out: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts.”[[13]](#endnote-13) To show the Trinity of persons, “holy” is pronounced three times. But to indicate that the substance of the Trinity is one, he speaks of the Lord of hosts, and not the Lords of hosts.[[14]](#endnote-14)

(10) Take note, then, Jew, as we page through almost all the books of your law, that we quite clearly discover the unity of the divine essence and the Trinity of persons.

**Saint Peter Damian Witnesses To Christ**

In the next segment on the opposition of the Jews to Christ, the Son of God and the long-awaited Messiah, Peter Damian calls upon the many prophets of the Old Testament who foretold His coming including Moses, David, Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Daniel, David, Habakkuk, Abdias (Obadiah), Zechariah, Solomon, Ezechiel, Malachi, Hosea, Joel and Sirach.

Peter Damian had a special love for the prophet Daniel, whose name signifies “The Judgement of God” and who was of royal blood of the kings of Juda. The Hebrews did not consider him a prophet because of his high station in life, but Jesus identified him as such in three of the four Gospels of Saints Matthew, Mark and Luke.

(38) So again we might let Daniel stand forth as a witness and present what he knows of Christ. But first let him report what king Nebuchadnezzar saw after he commanded the three young men to be thrown into the fiery furnace. “But see four men,” he says, “unfettered and unhurt, walking in the fire, and the fourth looks like the Son of God.”[[15]](#endnote-15) Here then, Jew, you have the Son of God; why try any further to deny the Son of God? Speak! Answer me! What can be said more sharply or more clearly of the Son of God than to call him the Son of God? But if you are unable to object, and can find no escape, surrender and humbly give yourself up to the winner, and admit that you have been defeated and thoroughly beaten.

(39) Now, then, let Daniel tell us what he saw of Christ, the Son of God: “I saw a vision during the night, and there was one like the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, and he came to the Ancient of Days, and was presented before him. And he gave him dominion and glory, and kingship: and all nations and peoples and tongues shall serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, and his kingship shall not be destroyed.[[16]](#endnote-16) And again in the eighth vision, the same Daniel said: “Know, listen and understand,” he says: “From the utterance of the word that Jerusalem was to be rebuilt, until Christ the leader, there shall be seven weeks, and the walls (shall be rebuilt) in dangerous times. And after sixty weeks [usually written sixty-two] Christ shall be slain, and a people who shall deny him shall not be his.”[[17]](#endnote-17)

(40) What can be said more clearly, more expressly concerning the death of Christ than to say: “Christ will be slain”? …

(43) Would you care to hear still more and more clear evidence for the death of Christ, set forth without the slightest uncertainty? Then listen to what Solomon has to say about the Jews who were plotting against Christ and planning for his death: “The wicked,” he reported, “said to one another, ‘Come, let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us, and sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law, and charges us with violations of our training. He professes to have knowledge of God and styles himself the Son of God. To us he is the censure of our thoughts; merely to see him is a hardship for us, because his life is not like other men’s, and different are his ways. We are judged by him as triflers, and he holds aloof from our paths as from things impure. He calls blest the destiny of the just and boasts that God is his Father. Let us see whether his words be true, let us find out what will happen to him and learn what shall be his lot. For if he be the true Son of God, he will defend him and deliver him from the hand of his foes. With outrage and torture let us examine him, that we might know his gentleness. Let us condemn him to a shameful death , for according to his own words there will be care for him.’ These were their thoughts, but they erred; for their wickedness blinded them, and they knew not the hidden counsels of God, neither did they count on a recompense of holiness nor esteem the honor of their own souls.”[[18]](#endnote-18)

**Common Jewish Questions Asked of Christians[[19]](#endnote-19)**

The following questions often raised by the Jews are answered by Peter Damian using the writings of the Old and New Testament and early Church fathers including Tertullian, Isidore, and Cyprian:

* If Christ did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it,[[20]](#endnote-20) why is a Christian not bodily circumcised?
* If Christ did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it, why does a Christian fail to honor the Sabbath?
* If Christ came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill the law, why does a Christian not take pains to offer the flesh of animals in sacrifice to God?
* If Christ did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it, why does a Christian not observe the unleavened bread that the law prescribes?
* If Christ came to fulfill the law, why does a Christian not celebrate Easter with the blood of the pascal lamb, since this is so strongly prescribed by the law itself?
* If Christ did not abolish the law, why does a Christian not celebrate the feast of the new moon prescribed by law?
* If Christ did not come to abolish the law, why does the Christian not observe the ablutions that the law prescribes?
* If the law was carried out by Christ, and not abrogated, what reason can be advanced for Christians not celebrating the feast of Tabernacles?
* If Christ did not wish to abolish the law, but to fulfill it, why does a Christian fail to observe the seventh year of relaxation of debt, or even the jubilee?

According to Saint Peter Damian, the general answers to these queries may be summed up thusly:

(56) Obviously, the precepts of the law are truly fulfilled when they are carried out in accord with the spiritual meaning for which they were instituted. Formerly, while they were being carried out physically, they were empty, that is a shadow or image of the thing, and not the thing itself. …[[21]](#endnote-21)

(59) Wherefore, surely divine providence disposed that both the city [Jerusalem] and the temple and all that was in them would be overthrown, lest perhaps one who was still a babe and a suckling in the faith, seeing these things in existence, should be struck with amazement at the rite of sacrifice and the arrangement of services, and be carried away by the very sight of these divergent forms. But aware of our infirmity, and observing that his Church was to multiply, he caused all these to be destroyed and utterly removed, that with the immediate disappearance of the shadows and typical models truth might survive, and that with the leveling of the physical temple, the Church alone might prevail throughout the world.[[22]](#endnote-22)

**The Prophecies of Isaiah**

In the *Epilogue* to his tract, Pete Damian returns to the prophecies of Isaiah:

(61) Isaiah, moreover, declares that he would be a little one in the substance of humanity to make us great by the power of divinity, when he says: “For a child is born to us and a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests, and his name will be called wonderful, counsellor, Mighty God, Father of the world to come, Prince of Peace. His reign shall be multiplied and of peace there shall be no end: over the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and strengthen it by judgments and justice both now and forever.”[[23]](#endnote-23) Now, since he states that the one whom he first called a child would later be known as Mighty God and Father of the world to come, he certainly and with great clarity shows that he is both God and man.[[24]](#endnote-24)

**Peter Damian Poses An Argument from Reason**

(67) So now, Jew, if so many pieces of evidence from Holy Scripture do not attract you to faith in Christ, if such clear and obvious sayings of all the prophets do not change you, I would still like to argue with you from reason, putting aside the statements from the prophets, I should like to raise with you one brief question at the conclusion of this little work, so that whatever might be suitable to your conversion should not be left untied by my efforts.[[25]](#endnote-25)

(68) Listen then, answer me, what was the greatest sin that your fathers were known to have committed, whereby they greatly inflamed the anger of God and violently provoked his vengeance against them? Grumbling, you will say, idolatry, fornication. Now I will agree with you and consider these three crimes of theirs to have been quite worthy of punishment. Still all of these in the sight of the mercy-tempered justice of God would not bring irreparable punishment (emphasis added).[[26]](#endnote-26)

(72) It is clear, therefore, that your ancestors, even though frequently struck down by divine retribution, were at times relieved and refreshed by abundant consolations. But from the time of Christ’s passion until today, you who live in such enduring calamity, observe a prophet come among you nowhere in the world, you hear no message of good times to come sent to you by God. What, therefore, is this incurable crime of yours? Whence is this punishment beyond all remedy that you must endure? What is its source, I ask, if not that you have killed Christ, the Son of God, and after committing this crime you refuse to have recourse to the fountain of life? This deepest hell of your iniquity exceeds every kind of infamy, surpasses in barbarity every sort of crime (emphasis added).[[27]](#endnote-27)

**Peter Damian Exhorts Jews to Conversion**

(73) Now therefore, Jew, heed my advice so that the God you have angered may be merciful to you. Put off the garb of your old self and accept the sacrament of new grace. …Abandon the errors of Jewish blindness and follow the path to the truth of evangelical grace. Without doubt you can be sure of forgiveness, if after turning to faith in Christ you are steeped in the waters of holy baptism. But since, perhaps, I can do more for your soul by praying to God than by preaching to you, may the God of your fathers remove the ancient veil of ignorance from your heart, and dispelling the darkness of error, flood you with the new light of his knowledge, who made this promise through his prophet saying, “For though your people, O Israel, were like the sand of the sea, a remnant of Israel shall be saved.”[[28]](#endnote-28)

**Peter Damian Bids Honestus Farewell**

At the conclusion of his tract on the Jews, Saint Peter Damian writes a farewell message and note of encouragement to his friend and nobleman, Sir Honestus:

(74) … I did not wish to burden you with wordy and extended proofs. Wherefore, in placing before you almost bare texts from Scripture, I have sent you as it were, a bundle of arrows for your quiver. And since from the words of your opponent a good opportunity of replying is provided, I have indeed supplied the weapons. But since the contest is not imminent, I was unable to instruct you fully as to where, when unscathed, you should let loose, and where you should protect yourself with your shield. But you have at your disposal all that is necessary for such an engagement. Use the means before you as you shall judge expedient.[[29]](#endnote-29)

(75) Dear brother, may almighty God in his mercy protect you from the hidden snares of your enemy and bring you safely through the battles of this world to his heavenly kingdom. Amen.[[30]](#endnote-30)

A C0mmentary On The Conversion of the Jews

The so-called “Jewish question” related to the theological foundations of the relationship between Catholics and Jews reached the floor of the Second Vatican Council on November 18, 1963, with the presentation of the schema on Ecumenism.

The fourth section of the final document “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” ***Nostra Aetate***, issued by Paul VI on October 28, 1965, gives an entirely new interpretations of Catholic-Jewish relations especially with regard to the charge of deicide. According to the document cited below, the Jews were not cursed by God and were not guilty of killing the Son of God.

Some Jewish representatives, who lobbied heavily at the Vatican for the change in Catholic doctrine, hailed the fourth chapter of the document as a victory against “antisemitism.”

If one compares the text of Saint Peter Damian’s *Letter* 1 on the Jews with the text of *Nostra Aetate* on the Jews,is becomes clear that the latter represents not only a new doctrine but a new religion *–* a counterfeit religion.

Read and weep. [Randy Engel, Editor]

Saint Peter Damian, pray for us.

***NOSTRA AETATE*  [Chapter 4]**

4. As the sacred synod searches into the mystery of the Church, it remembers the bond that spiritually ties the people of the New Covenant to Abraham's stock.

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ-Abraham's sons according to faith (6)-are included in the same Patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage. The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.(7) Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles. making both one in Himself.(8)

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's main-stay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation,(9) nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading.(10) Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues-such is the witness of the Apostle.(11) In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9).(12)

Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ;(13) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

Full Vatican text with endnotes is available at <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html>

1. Owen J. Blum, O.F.M., *The Fathers of the Church Mediaeval Continuation The Letters of Peter Damian 1-30,* Catholic University of America, 1998, *Letter* 1, pp. 37-83. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., ft. 4, pp. 37-38. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., p.37. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., p.38. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., p. 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Gen 1.26. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Blum, p. 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Gen. 11.7. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Blum, p. 41. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Gen. 18.1-18.2. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Gen. 18. 3-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Is 6.3. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Blum, p. 42. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Dan 3.92, [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Dan 7.13-14. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Dan 9.25-26. The *Douay-Rheims* version of the Bible has sixty-two weeks. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Wis 2.12-22. The last four words, “of their own souls,” is taken from the liturgy. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. League members who would like the complete text of the response of Peter Damian to the following questions can send a SSAE to USCL, Box 315, Export, PA 15632. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Mt 5.17. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Blum, p. 70. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid., p. 71. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. Is 9.6-7. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Blum, p. 73. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., p. 79. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., p.81 [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Is 10.22: Rom. 9.27. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Blum, pp. 82-83. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid., p. 83. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)