

PETER ABELARD*

Principal Works

- Carmen ad Astralabium*. Edited by J. M. A. Rubingh-Bosscher in *Peter Abelard: Carmen ad Astralabium, a Critical Edition*. Groningen: phil. diss. Rijksuniversiteit 1987.
- Collationes* a. k. a. *Dialogus inter Philosophum, Iudaeum, et Christianum*. Edited by Giovanni Orlandi, with introduction, translation, and notes by John Marenbon, in *Peter Abelard: Collationes*, Oxford University Press 2001.
- Commentaria in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*. Edited by Eligius M. Buytaert in *Petri Abaelardi opera theologica*. Corpus christianorum (continuatio mediaevalis) Vol. 11. Brepols: Turnholt 1969, 389–340.
- Dialectica*. Edited by L. M. De Rijk in *Petrus Abaelardus: Dialectica*, Assen: Van Gorcum 1970 (second edition).
- Epistolae*: Ep. 1 edited by Monfrin (see the entry below for the *Historia calamitatum*); Epp. 2–5 edited by J. T. Muckle, *Mediaeval Studies* 15 (1953) 68–94; Epp. 6–7, edited by J. T. Muckle, *Mediaeval Studies* 17 (1955) 241–281; Ep. 8, edited by T. P. McLaughlin, *Mediaeval Studies* 18 (1956) 242–297; Epp. 9–14 edited by E. R. Smits in *Peter Abelard: Letters IX–XIV*, Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit 1983; Ep. 15 edited by Josef Reiners, *BGPTM* 8 (1910) 63–80; Ep. 16, edited by Victor Cousin and Charles Jourdain, *Petri Abaelardi opera* Vol. 1 (Paris 1849) 703–707, corrected against Van Den Eynde, *Antonianum* 38 (1963) 219; Ep. 17, edited by Charles Burnett, *Mittellateinisch Jahrbuch* 21 (1986), 152–155; *Apologia contra Bernardum (Ne iuxta Boethianum)*, edited by Eligius M. Buytaert in *CCCM* 12 359–368; *Epistola contra Bernardum* edited by Raymond Klibansky, *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 5 (1961), 1–27; *Confessio fidei “Uniuersis”* edited by Charles Burnett, *Mediaeval Studies* 48 (1986), 182–189.
- Ethica seu Scito teipsum*. Edited by R. M. Ilgner in *Petri Abaelardi opera theologica*. Corpus christianorum (continuatio mediaevalis) Vol. 190. Brepols: Turnholt 2001.
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- Expositio symboli Apostolorum*. Edited by Victor Cousin and Charles Jourdain, *Petri Abaelardi opera* Vol. 1 (Paris 1849) 603–615.

* The list of Abelard’s works and English translations has been updated (July 2004); the rest of the article remains the same as it was when it was published in 1992. A more philosophical overview can be found online in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/abelard/>.

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- Hexaëmeron*. Edited by Mary F. Romig in *A Critical Edition of Peter Abelard's "Expositio in Hexaëmeron"*, Doctoral dissertation in History, University of Southern California, January 1981.
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- Hymnarius Paraclitensis*. Edited by Chrysogonus Waddell in *Hymn Collections from the Paraclete*, Vol. 2. Trappist Monastery, Ky.: Gethsemani Abbey (Cistercian Liturgy series) 1987.
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- Logica 'nostrorum petitioni sociorum'*. Commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge*. Edited by Bernhard Geyer in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters* 21 (4). Aschendorff: Munster 1933.
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- Marenbon, John. (2001) *Peter Abelard: Collationes*. Complete translation of Abelard's *Dialogus*.
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Life

Peter Abelard was the teacher of his generation: preeminent as a philosopher, theologian, poet, and musician, he captured the imagination of almost all with whom he came into contact. His fame as a teacher was unequalled; students travelled from all over Europe to hear him speak, crowds of ordinary people attended his public lectures wherever he went, and it has been said that he was indirectly responsible for the founding of the University of Paris by creating a permanent ‘deposit’ of students in the city. As a philosopher, he brought the investigation of the “old logic” (*logica vetus*) to its heights; as a theologian, he championed the use of reason and intellect in matters of faith, putting the word *theology* into use with the meaning it still has today. In philosophy and theology, Abelard’s constant and unremitting use of the tools of logic or ‘dialectic’—argument, objection, example, counterexample, and the like—helped define the Scholastic method, of which an early example is his *Sic et non* [“Pro and Con” ca. 1117–1128]. As a poet and musician, Abelard was renowned for his verses, both secular and sacred, composed in the vernacular and in Latin. He is responsible for some of the earliest extant pieces of “authored” music. Abelard’s natural talents alone were formidable. Combined with his quick tongue, undeniable brilliance, sharp wit, dialectical acumen, encyclopædic memory, and flavoured with a large dose of arrogance, the force of his personality impressed itself vividly on all his contemporaries. Even his critics and detractors (whom Abelard always referred to as his “enemies”) admitted that he never lost an argument, and only those who avoided debating him could ever gain the upper hand over him. And, apart from his intellectual achievements, his luckless affair with Héloïse made him a tragic figure of romance. Abelard seemed larger than life to his contemporaries, and he is all the more so in retrospect.

Abelard’s life, unlike those of most mediæval thinkers, is well known. Public events are chronicled in a wide variety of sources, and the details of his inner life are revealed in his autobiographical letter *Historia calamitatum* [“The Story of My Misfortunes” ca. 1132–1133] and in his correspondence with Héloïse. Yet, despite the wealth of biographical data, the dates of composition and even the number of Abelard’s writings remain largely obscure and a matter of controversy among scholars.

Abelard was born ca. 1079 in Le Pallet, a small town about twelve miles southeast of Nantes in the independent duchy of Brittany. His parents, Berengar and Lucia, were of the minor nobility. Abelard was the eldest son (and perhaps the eldest child); he had at least three younger brothers, Dagobert, Porcarius, and Ralph, as well as at least one sister, Denise.

Abelard received early training in letters at the wishes of his father, most likely from a tutor, and took to his studies naturally; he eventually renounced his primogeniture and the consequent knighthood to pursue philosophy. Abelard's writings reveal a thorough 'humanist' grounding in classical literature: he was familiar with the works of Cicero, Horace, Juvenal, Lucan, Ovid, Seneca, and Vergil, as well as post-classical authors such as Augustine, Boethius, Isidore of Seville, and Macrobius.

Abelard's advanced training in philosophy was acquired, following a customary practise of the time, by travelling to study with various thinkers—which may be how he acquired the sobriquet “the Peripatetic of Le Pallet.” He studied with Roscelin of Compiègne at Loches near Vannes, and with Ulger at the cathedral school associated with Saint Maurice in Angers (and perhaps with Geoffrey Babio and Vasletus there as well). In the first years of the twelfth century Abelard travelled to Paris to study under William of Champeaux, archdeacon of Paris, at the Cloister School of Nôtre Dame. As a student there, Abelard was considered a “clerk” (*clericus*): teachers and students alike were tonsured and wore clerical habits. Although no formal system of education had yet been established, the Cloister School of Nôtre Dame occupied the most eminent position among all the regular cathedral schools in France.

The training Abelard received was almost exclusively devoted to the elements of the classical trivium: grammar, logic, and rhetoric; of these Abelard preferred logic by far, although there is evidence that he wrote a work on grammar (now lost) and that he planned, and perhaps wrote, a work on rhetoric. The “logic” was Porphyry's *Isagoge*; Aristotle's *Categories* and *De interpretatione*; Boethius's commentaries on the works of Porphyry, Aristotle, and Cicero: the *Greater Commentary on Porphyry's "Isagoge"*, the *Commentary on Aristotle's "Categories"*, the *Lesser Commentary on Aristotle's "De interpretatione"*, the *Greater Commentary on Aristotle's "De interpretatione"*, and the *Commentary on Cicero's "Topics"*. These works are primarily directed toward theories and problems in formal and informal logic, philosophy of logic, and philosophy of language. The extent to which such theories presuppose a metaphysical basis is controversial, and Abelard, with his genius for controversy, found them fertile ground for argument and debate.

In the early twelfth century there were no clear-cut educational licensing practises, as there were in the late Middle Ages. Teachers gained students simply by ability and reputation, and one way to get a reputation was to win a debate with someone of established celebrity. Abelard, with his outstanding dialectical skills, began to enter into debates with William of

Champeaux and so to make a name for himself. As Abelard's reputation began to rise, William's began to fall. Despite William's interference, with some influential help Abelard set up a school in Melun; he soon moved it to Corbeil so that, he says, "I might prove a greater embarrassment [to William of Champeaux] and offer more frequent challenges to debate." Melun was a royal seat, and Corbeil was at this time declared a royal fief; it is possible that the "men of influence" who helped Abelard against William's attempted interference included King Louis the Fat himself. Abelard says that his own reputation for "dialectical skill" was forged at this time, and hence it seems likely that he was lecturing on logic in his schools. The *Introductiones parvulorum* may date from this period.

Abelard's driving ambition took its toll. After a short period of time he became ill "due to the heavy burden of studies" and returned to his home for several years. The illness may have been a nervous breakdown. Abelard does not discuss his activities during his stay in Brittany, nor of the length of time he was absent from Paris, but he does say that students continued to enquire after him to study dialectic. Abelard returned to Paris sometime between 1108 and 1113 with his ambition intact and his health restored. William of Champeaux had retired in 1108 to the religious centre of Saint Victor in Paris (which became an abbey of canons regular under him) and was giving lectures on rhetoric in the associated monastery school.

Abelard went to hear William's lectures and again entered into debate with him. Abelard describes the content of this debate that firmly established his reputation: the problem of universals. In the *De interpretatione*, Aristotle describes the universal as "what is naturally apt to be predicated of many," a description that applies to general and specific terms. Now predication is at least partly a linguistic affair, since one term is predicated of another, and in Abelard's view the metaphysical issue that underlies the problem of universals is whether predication is *more* than linguistic. Given that Socrates and Plato are human, is there something that is common to, or shared by, Socrates and Plato in virtue of which each is human? William of Champeaux initially maintained that there was something common to Socrates and Plato, and Abelard refuted this position. William then changed his view to hold that there is nothing that is common to Socrates and Plato, but that each has some element that can be called "indifferently" the same. Abelard refuted this position as well, and William's lectures at that point, Abelard says, "devolved into so much carelessness they could scarcely be admitted to be on dialectic at all." Abelard's arguments are preserved in the beginning of his *Logica 'ingredientibus'* which may have been started at this time; some further theological objections are added in

the later *Logica 'nostrorum petitioni sociorum'*. The result of this debate was instant acclaim for Abelard: William's students deserted him to study with Abelard, and William's successor at the Cloister School of Nôtre Dame stepped aside for Abelard to lecture on dialectic. Abelard says that William of Champeaux then manoeuvred to have his successor removed from his appointment and appointed one of Abelard's rivals, an unnamed person with a reputation in grammar, in his stead. Abelard returned to Melun to teach, shortly afterwards transferring his school to the Mont Sainte-Geneviève immediately outside Paris to 'besiege' William's new appointee. Further was preparing to enter a convent (his father had already entered a monastery), and Abelard returned to Brittany for a visit. When he returned to France after 1113 he found that William of Champeaux had become bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne. Abelard then decided to study theology. The reasons behind his decision are none too clear, especially in light of what he was giving up: a successful and remunerative career teaching dialectic. It may be that the example of his parents had turned his mind toward the contemplation of divine things; it may be that he was impressed by William's advancement, which he believed to have been due to his reputation for piety rather than his intellectual ability; it may be that William's departure left room for a master of theology in Paris. Whatever the explanation, Abelard sought out the most eminent teacher of theology of his day, Anselm of Laon, and became his student.

Anselm was one of the compilers of the Ordinary Glosses on the Bible. He followed the traditional *lectio divina* prescribed by the Benedictine Rule: after reading a passage from the Bible, the reigning master would put forward an interpretation (*sententia*) of the sense of the text, which would be expounded and supported by citing various other passages from the Bible and patristic sources (*glossae*). Abelard soon found Anselm's exposition and support of his interpretations to be based on empty rhetoric rather than logical analysis. His attendance at Anselm's lectures became irregular, and he openly voiced his opinion that no instruction was needed to study theology other than the Bible itself and patristic literature. Soon thereafter, perhaps in response to a challenge to these views, Abelard began offering competing lectures on Ezekiel that were well received by many of Anselm's students. According to Abelard, two students, Alberic of Reims and Lotulph the Lombard, convinced Anselm that he should put a stop to Abelard's lectures. Anselm did so on the ground that any error Abelard might make would be attributable to Anselm himself. Anselm's authority to issue such a prohibition is unclear, but it had an unforeseen result: "a few days after this," Abelard writes, "I returned to Paris, to the school that

had long ago been intended for and offered to me.” Abelard became the *magister scholarium* at the Cloister School of Nôtre Dame and was adopted into the chapter as a canon.

On his return to Paris, Abelard completed his commentary on Ezekiel (now lost) and held his position “in peace for several years.” Given the brevity of his formal studies in theology, it is reasonable to hold that Abelard began to educate himself in patristic literature during this period: his later writings are filled with references to Origen, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, and other fathers of the church. It may also be that due to his extensive reading he conceived the project of the *Sic et non*: a series of 158 questions, each of which is furnished with patristic citations that imply a positive answer (*sic*) to the question and other patristic citations implying a negative answer (*non*). Abelard does not attempt to harmonize these apparently inconsistent remarks, but in his preface he lays down rules for proper hermeneutic investigation: look for ambiguity, check the surrounding context, draw relevant distinctions, and the like.

Up to this point, Abelard’s single-minded ambition was directed to intellectual pursuits: reading, teaching, and writing. What little energy was left over he devoted to the political aspects of intellectual life. Consequently, he lived ascetically, and in particular was known for his continence. There was no real reason for him to be celibate: the offices of clerk and canon could be held by the laity, and neither required celibacy. Nor was celibacy universally accepted as a requirement for the clergy itself. Only since the Gregorian Reform, begun in the latter part of the eleventh century, had strictures against married priests been put into effect, and the nature and content of the marriage bond (in particular its sacramental status) were still the subject of lively dispute. Abelard’s celibacy seems instead a by-product of his driving ambition to make a name for himself in the world of letters. Once he was granted the position at Paris, this ambition was fulfilled, leaving him with time on his hands; and, after several years as *magister scholarium*, Abelard became romantically involved with Héloïse. The events which transpired have been an inspiration to artists ever since. Abelard relates the story as a cold-blooded seduction; Héloïse suggests a tale of passionate first love.

Héloïse was a young woman (*adulescentia*), most likely between fifteen and seventeen years of age, when Abelard met her. Héloïse’s mother was named Hersinde; her father and familial background are unknown, though she herself implies that her social status was inferior to Abelard’s. She was raised at least in part at the Convent of Sainte Marie of Argenteuil, near Paris, and had acquired a reputation as that rarity of rarities in the Middle

Ages: an educated woman. Abelard twice refers to Héloïse knowing Hebrew and Greek as well as Latin, which would make her exceptional among all mediæval intellectuals. Héloïse's uncle (likely her maternal uncle) Fulbert was a canon of Nôtre Dame; Héloïse came to Paris and lived with Fulbert, presumably in the cathedral close—traditionally, in a house on the Quai aux Fleurs. Abelard speaks of Fulbert's love for Héloïse and genuine concern for her further education, which seemed largely impossible in the all-male enclave of the schools. Fulbert therefore proposed that Abelard enter the household and oversee Héloïse's studies in exchange for his own domestic needs being taken care of. Abelard assented, and the privacy afforded for studies led rapidly to romantic and sexual involvement. By Abelard's own account, his teaching suffered; his inspiration was directed toward writing love lyrics which became quite popular (none have survived, so it is unknown whether they were written in Latin or the vernacular). After "several months" had passed in this way, rumour of the affair reached Fulbert. Abelard left the household but continued to meet Héloïse clandestinely until Fulbert surprised them while they were engaged in sexual intercourse. The separation was more stringent this time. Héloïse discovered she was pregnant, and Abelard removed her from Fulbert's house one night during Fulbert's absence; Héloïse, disguised as a nun, was sent to Brittany to live with Abelard's sister. She gave birth to a boy, whom she named 'Astrolabe' (perhaps 'Peter Astrolabe' or 'Astralabe'). Abelard later wrote the *Carmen ad Astrolabium filium* ["Poem to His Son Astrolabe" ca. 1140], a series of Catonian distichs full of Polonius-type advice for his son, and Héloïse much later requested Peter the Venerable to help Astrolabe acquire a prebend. His death is recorded in the necrology of the Paraclete, the convent later founded by Abelard; nothing else is known of him.

Since Abelard did not accompany Héloïse, it is likely that he continued to teach during this period. While Héloïse was absent from Paris, Abelard approached Fulbert and proposed to marry Héloïse on the condition that the marriage be kept secret. Fulbert assented, and Abelard went to Brittany for the more difficult task of persuading Héloïse. As Abelard recounts the story, Héloïse objected on two main grounds: a secret marriage would in fact not appease Fulbert, and any kind of marriage would be a hindrance to Abelard. Two difficult questions are raised by Abelard's proposal and Héloïse's resistance: Why should the marriage be kept secret? and, How could marriage be a hindrance to Abelard? It has been suggested that marriage would prove a bar to further advancement within the church hierarchy, and also that the idealized conception of a philosopher included freedom from worldly matters, so that the image of a "married philosopher"

was ludicrous.

Another of Héloïse's objections to marriage may better explain her resistance. She held that pure and free love is more valuable than marriage; marriage is at best a mundane form of prostitution and the negation of the spiritual worth found in love. During these same years, up to this time of his condemnation at Toulouse in 1119, the monk Henry of Lausanne was preaching against the sacramentalization of marriage, arguing that consent in itself constitutes genuine marriage. Such a view finds expression in Abelard's *Ethics seu Scito teipsum* ["Ethics" or "Know Thyself" ca. 1138–1142], which argues that the intention alone determines the moral worth of an action; actions of themselves have neither positive nor negative value. Abelard and Héloïse both subscribed to this view. If, as seems likely, they were acquainted with the preaching of Henry of Lausanne, Héloïse may have believed that marriage was at best a legal formality and at worst a confusion of mere property relations with the spiritual bond of love. This hypothesis would explain why she insisted that marriage would have been a humiliation for both herself and Abelard, despite their amorous liaison's already being a matter of common knowledge.

Héloïse eventually capitulated to Abelard's proposal, and, leaving Astrolabe with Abelard's sister, they returned to Paris and were secretly married in the presence of Fulbert and some friends and relatives. To preserve the secrecy of the marriage, Héloïse returned to live with Fulbert while Abelard took up residence elsewhere; they met sporadically and furtively. But Fulbert and his relatives began to spread news of the marriage about. Héloïse swore publicly that there was no truth to the reports, adding to her uncle's embarrassment. Fulbert apparently beat Héloïse severely on several occasions. When Abelard learnt of the beatings, he removed Héloïse from Fulbert's house and took her to Argenteuil, where he insisted she wear a nun's habit. Fulbert and his friends and relatives were convinced Abelard was going to rid himself of Héloïse by making her take vows. One night they bribed one of Abelard's attendants, entered his lodgings, and castrated him.

Abelard writes movingly of his shame and misery. Several letters of consolation written to him still exist; at least one, from his former teacher Roscelin, is maliciously insulting about his castration. Abelard abandoned his teaching position and entered the Benedictine Abbey of Saint Denis in Paris, an unreformed abbey under the leadership of Abbot Adam with close ties to the French court; in obedience to Abelard's wishes, Héloïse became a nun at Argenteuil.

Abelard quickly found the worldly and fashionable life led by the monks at Saint Denis wanting. Publicly and privately he objected to their behaviour,

becoming, in his own words, “a burden and a nuisance” to all. When students began to clamour for Abelard to resume teaching, an equitable bargain was struck: Abelard journeyed to a priory owned by Saint Denis at Maisoncelle-en-Brie, near Provins, and began to teach and write; students flocked after him, and the abbey must have been glad to get rid of him. Abelard says that at this time he primarily worked on theology, though he also lectured on philosophy. He composed a treatise on the unity and trinity of God, the *Theologia ‘summi boni’* [ca. 1118–1120], in which he explores the central mystery of the Trinity with the tools of dialectic: questions are raised, authorities cited, distinctions drawn, objections proposed and resolved. Abelard’s main argument proceeds through an analysis of the modes of sameness and diversity, and he concludes that the Persons of the Trinity are the same essentially but differ in definition. Many other points are taken up: the identification of Plato’s ‘world-soul’ with the Holy Spirit, the generation of the Word from the Father, the claim that all humans naturally have faith in the Trinity.

The dialectical method of Abelard’s *Theologia ‘summi boni’* must have been taken as a direct challenge to traditional theological studies. Alberic and Lotulph, his former fellow students who by this time presided at the school of Reims, persuaded Ralph, the archbishop of Reims, and Conon, bishop of Praeneste and papal legate in France, to convene and preside over a synod in Soissons to examine the content of Abelard’s book. No records are preserved from this synod, which was held in April 1121, and Abelard’s own account is naturally self-serving, but a few facts are independently attested. First, Geoffrey of Lèves, bishop of Chartres from 1116 to 1149, apparently worked hard on Abelard’s behalf. Second, Abelard was at some point apparently given the impression that he should return to Saint Denis while the council deliberated, but before he had an opportunity to do so he was summoned to appear before the council again, and the papal legate pronounced sentence: Abelard was to cast his book into the fire, make a public confession of his faith, and be detained indefinitely at the Cluniac Abbey of Saint Médard in Soissons. The council’s refusal to allow Abelard to speak in his own defence during the proceedings was probably contrary to ecclesiastical law.

Conon was apparently uneasy at the political manoeuvring that took place during Abelard’s trial, and as public opinion moved to condemn the trial as unjust, Conon denounced the “jealousies” that had sponsored it and returned Abelard to Saint Denis. Abelard did not find a friendly welcome, and after a few uneasy months he inflamed the monks of Saint Denis even further by finding documentary evidence in the works of the Venerable

Bede that the Saint Denis who was patron saint of the Abbey was not in fact the same as Saint Denis (Dionysus), bishop of Athens, known as ‘the Aereopagite’. History has shown that Abelard was correct, but his fellow monks were so upset by his charges they complained to Abbot Adam, who prepared to send Abelard to the King, patron of the monastery, on charges of disrespect for the crown. Abelard fled secretly at night from Saint Denis, taking refuge with Theobald II, Count of Troyes and Champagne (and of Blois and Chartres by inheritance), who allowed Abelard to live in the Priory of Saint Ayoul in Provins. Abelard wrote to Adam in a conciliatory fashion, arguing that it might yet be possible that the founder of his abbey was Saint Denis the Aereopagite. When Adam had some business to conduct with Theobald, Abelard relayed through Theobald a request to lead a monastic life elsewhere. But this request was to no avail, since it would be publicly humiliating for Abelard to join another monastery in preference to Saint Denis; Adam insisted that Abelard return, threatening him with excommunication if he did not.

So matters stood for a few days; then Adam suddenly died. He was succeeded in March 1122 by Suger, who would become famous for initiating the Gothic style of architecture when he rebuilt the monastery between 1137 and 1144. Suger; Burchard, the bishop of Meaux; and Abelard met for a conference in which Abelard reiterated his request to be given leave of Saint Denis. Suger demurred, and Abelard appealed to Stephen of Garland, deacon of Nôtre Dame and royal seneschal, to intercede on his behalf. Stephen brought the matter before the King and his council; they decided that Abelard should be granted leave from Saint Denis under the condition that he not come under the authority of any other abbey.

Abelard settled on a wild and uninhabited section of land presented to him in Troyes on the bank of the river Ardusson, four miles southeast of Nogent-sur-Seine in the diocese of Quincy. The archbishop of Quincy, Hatto of Troyes, gave Abelard permission to erect a reed-and-thatch oratory, which he named the Paraclete (“Comforter”). Abelard says that poverty drove him to return to teaching, and that students flocked to him in such huge numbers that the oratory was rebuilt in wood and stone and greatly enlarged with housing and other buildings. Abelard had returned to the element that suited him best: reading, lecturing, and writing. His reputation continued to spread and increase.

Perhaps in 1125 or 1126 Abelard received an invitation to become abbot of the Monastery of Saint Gildas de Rhuys, on the bay of Quiberon in the diocese of Vannes in Brittany. Abelard accepted after obtaining permission from Suger. It is not known why Abelard again chose to abandon teaching.

He vividly describes his fears while at the Paraclete of becoming the target of some new “persecution” by “new apostles” who had risen up against him; the identity of these ‘new apostles’ is not certain, but it seems likely that he had in mind Norbert of Xanten, founder of the Premonstratensian congregation, and Bernard of Clairvaux, the great reformer. Abelard says that his fears were so great that he considered living in a Muslim country to avoid persecution. This may not have been an empty remark: Abelard’s *Collationes* [“Conversations Among a Philosopher and a Jew and a Christian” ca. 1138–1142] is a fictional debate among a philosopher who is apparently a Muslim, a Jew, and a Christian about the nature of the supreme good and the connection between virtue and happiness; Abelard shows more than a passing familiarity with both Judaism and Islam. The account of Abelard’s student, Hilary, however, suggests a more mundane reason for Abelard’s decision to leave teaching: due to the disorderly behaviour of the large number of students gathered there, Abelard had to dissolve the community that had grown up around the Paraclete. Whatever the reason, Abelard left the Paraclete and became abbot of Saint Gildas.

The choice was not a good one. Abelard found the monks barbarous, uncivilized, and immoral; he did not know the local language; the abbey was being heavily taxed by one of the local lords. Abelard attempted without success to reform the practises he found in Saint Gildas, alienating the monks in the process. He fell into a deep depression at his failure but was roused from it by the plight of Héloïse and the nuns of Argenteuil.

In 1128 Suger claimed that he had uncovered a charter showing that the Convent of Sainte Marie of Argenteuil belonged to the Abbey of Saint Denis. Suger presented the claim to Rome, perhaps alleging improper behaviour of the nuns as well, and in 1129 ownership of the convent was transferred to Saint Denis by the joint action of Pope Honorius II and King Louis VI. Suger promptly expelled the nuns without making any provision for them. At the time of the expulsion Héloïse was Prioress, a position she may have attained as early as 1123. On hearing of the expulsion Abelard left Saint Gildas and handed over the Paraclete and its lands to Héloïse and the nuns who had remained with her, naming Héloïse as Abbess. Initially criticized for not helping the nuns at the Paraclete sufficiently, Abelard later visited so frequently that malicious rumours began to spread about his intentions. At some point Héloïse apparently wrote to Abelard that Bernard of Clairvaux had visited the Paraclete and preached to the nuns, and that he took exception to their use of the Vulgate version of the Lord’s Prayer in *Matthew*. This letter is lost, but a short letter Abelard wrote to Bernard, explaining and justifying the nuns’ practise, exists. On 20 January 1131

Abelard was present at a gathering in the Benedictine Abbey of Morigny, near Étampes, where Pope Innocent II consecrated the high altar during his progress through France. There Abelard met Bernard in person for the first time. On 28 November 1131 the pope presented a charter to Héloïse as abbess of the Paraclete, confirming the nuns' possession of the gifts they had already received and of all later gifts in perpetuity. The Paraclete remained in existence until the French Revolution.

It is difficult to sort out subsequent events, but it appears that Abelard travelled back to Saint Gildas, left again to visit the Paraclete, and returned once more to Saint Gildas. By the time he wrote his *Historia calamitatum*, most likely in 1132–1133, he was at Saint Gildas recovering from a fracture caused by a fall from a horse. He tells a harrowing tale of his existence at Saint Gildas: at least twice attempts were made on his life by poison, once while he was celebrating mass (he must therefore have become a priest by this time), and ambushes were set on the roads. Abelard excommunicated some of the monks, expelled others, and made the remainder re-take their oaths of allegiance in the presence of a papal legate sent for that purpose. (The request for a papal legate had been one of the reasons for Abelard's presence at Morigny.) But oaths were no strong enough. Abelard was again threatened, this time with a sword to his throat; he escaped only through the intervention of an unnamed secular lord.

These are the circumstances in which Abelard wrote the *Historia calamitatum*. It purports to be a letter of consolation to a friend, but this may be just a literary device. Abelard may have written it with an eye to its eventual circulation, in hopes of gaining either support for reformation of Saint Gildas or permission to depart. A copy of the letter came to Héloïse, apparently by chance, and the celebrated correspondence between the two ensued. The first pair of exchanges are notable for Héloïse's intensely personal reflections on and reminiscences of their life together and for cool responses from Abelard, who threatened to break off their correspondence if she continued to write in a personal vein. Héloïse's remaining three letters deal with the direction of the Paraclete, and Abelard's responses indicate that he was serious about overseeing the spiritual welfare of the nuns. He sent thirty-four sermons to be read at the Paraclete, some or all of which may have been composed earlier for the monks of Saint Gildas; a psalterium (now lost); many Latin hymns (of which 133 are extant); and several laments. Héloïse sent forty-two questions of biblical interpretation to which Abelard gave carefully reasoned solutions; and apparently at Héloïse's request he wrote the *Expositio in Hexaëmeron* (ca. 1134–1136), a commentary on the six days of creation. Abelard was in residence at Saint Gildas for at least the early

exchanges, and there may be references in the letters to Abelard's visiting the Paraclete during the correspondence.

It is not known when Abelard finally left Saint Gildas, only that he did so with his bishop's permission and the right to retain his rank as abbot. According to John of Salisbury, by 1136 Abelard was again teaching on the Mont Sainte Geneviève in Paris. A plausible hypothesis is that Abelard left Saint Gildas shortly after his initial exchanges with Héloïse and obtained his teaching position through the intercession of the dean of Sainte-Geneviève, Stephen of Garland, who had helped him to leave Saint Denis earlier. Late in 1137 Abelard had to stop teaching and leave the Mont, possibly because of Stephen's loss of influence after the death of King Louis VI on 1 August. The interruption was only temporary, and Abelard returned to teach at Sainte-Geneviève shortly thereafter.

It is not known what Abelard was lecturing on and writing about, but it is clear that some of his works on theology—maybe the *Theologia christiana* ["Christian Theology" ca. 1122–1127] or some of the recensions of the *Theologia 'scholarium'* [ca. 1135–1138]—were circulating again. In these works Abelard adopts the tone and style of his earlier *Theologia 'summi boni'*: they are exercises in dialectical theology. As before, the style and manner of the work led to conflict with those who had a more conservative approach to matters of faith and dogma. In 1139 William, the abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Signy in the Ardennes, came into possession of Abelard's theological work and was horrified by it. (It is possible that William read a summary rather than a book by Abelard himself.) William was alarmed at the prospect of Abelard's teaching "new things," all the more so because of Abelard's influence and reputation. William sent a list of thirteen heretical points he ascribed to Abelard, accompanied by his own refutations, to the papal legate and to Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard apparently met with Abelard twice to persuade him to alter his views and restrain his students. When this approach failed, Bernard asked Henry, the archbishop of Sens, who had ecclesiastical authority over the diocese of Paris, and the bishop of Paris to intervene against Abelard. They did not do so but granted Bernard permission to preach to the students in Paris himself. Bernard's sermon is a sharp attack on Abelard, though his name is not mentioned. Abelard's response was to circulate a slightly altered manuscript of his theological work in which some notice is taken of William's criticisms, but without any substantial changes. Bernard then wrote to the pope and the papal curia, sending along his own treatise against Abelard's views. In these letters he also links Abelard to Arnold of Brescia, a severe critic of ecclesiastical practices who argued in particular against church possession of private property.

It is possible that Arnold had been a student of Abelard, or that Abelard was sympathetic to Arnold's critique of church property.

Abelard asked the archbishop of Sens to arrange a meeting on 3 June 1140, at which Abelard and Bernard would have a public disputation regarding the points on which they differed. The King and his court were scheduled to be shown the relics in the cathedral that day in the presence of various bishops and dignitaries: Abelard clearly wanted a distinguished audience for what he confidently expected to be his blazing defeat of Bernard in open debate. Bernard initially refused Abelard's invitation on the grounds that one should not debate matters of faith; but his friends prevailed upon him to accept. Abelard wrote to his students to enlist their support at Sens. Bernard, however, had no intention of allowing a disputation to be conducted.

Bernard wrote to the bishops who were planning to attend, arguing for his point of view, and he arranged for several bishops sympathetic to his views to be present. He then travelled to Sens a day early and preached against Abelard to the people already assembled there; next, he convened the ecclesiastical authorities present and, after reading aloud a list of Abelard's supposed heresies, secured assent to an inquisition of Abelard the next day. Abelard arrived to find that no debate was to be held; rather, a kangaroo court was prepared to interrogate him. Bernard read aloud nineteen propositions gathered from Abelard's works and, in accordance with the customary procedure in trials for heresy, called on Abelard to defend them, renounce them, or deny his authorship. This question was usually asked as a mere matter of form prior to the real enquiry, assessment, and verdict of the judges. Abelard, however, refused to play the charade: he declared that he would appeal directly to the pope and walked out of the proceedings.

Since Abelard had not formally admitted authorship, the council was at a loss how to proceed. It condemned the nineteen propositions, despite Abelard's not admitting that he had written them, and adjourned. The members of the council sent their reports to the pope; Bernard wrote several letters to the pope and the cardinals had his followers write several more. (It is likely that Bernard himself drafted the "official" report to the pope from the archbishop of Sens.) Meanwhile, Abelard had begun his journey to Rome. He stopped at the monastery of Cluny at the invitation of its abbot, Peter the Venerable, and began to compose a full-scale refutation of the charges Bernard had brought against him, the *Apologia contra Bernardum* ["Defence Against Bernard" ca. 1140].

On 16 July 1140 a papal rescript was sent to Bernard and the archbishops of Sens and Reims condemning Abelard as a heretic, excommunicating

his followers, ordering the burning of his books, and directing that he be confined to a monastery of Bernard's and the bishops' choosing. The news reached Abelard at Cluny, and there can be no doubt that it was a great shock to him: he would never have imagined that he could be condemned without being heard. According to Peter the Venerable, Abelard immediately submitted to the judgement. With the aid of the abbot of Cîteaux, Peter the Venerable set up a meeting between Abelard and Bernard; Abelard travelled to Clairvaux, where he met peacefully with Bernard. Abelard and Peter then returned to Cluny. Peter wrote to the pope, informing him of these matters and requesting that Abelard be allowed to stay at Cluny. The pope gave his permission and lifted Abelard's sentence without objection.

According to Peter the Venerable, Abelard's behaviour at Cluny was exemplary. His health was poor, and it gradually became worse. He was moved to a daughter house of Cluny at Saint-Marcel, near Chalons-sur-Saône, in the hopes that the more temperate climate would help, but he died on 21 April 1142. Peter the Venerable took his body (illegally) to the Paraclete for burial. On Héloïse's death, on 16 May 1163 or 1164, she was interred with Abelard. Their bodies were moved several times; since the nineteenth century they have been in the Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.

Several of Abelard's works cannot be dated precisely. A scholarly consensus is forming that his major works on logic, the *Logica 'ingredientibus'* and the *Dialectica* ["Dialectic" ca. 1130–1140], were composed fairly close together in time. The *Logica 'nostrorum petitioni sociorum'* and the *Tractatus de intellectibus* ["Treatise on Understandings"] have close textual similarities with one another, and the former work also has affinities with the *Theologia 'summi boni'*. The *Logica 'nostrorum petitioni sociorum'* is also thought to be later than the major logical works. The *Collationes* was composed after the *Theologia christiana*, to which it makes explicit reference. The *Ethica* is generally agreed to be a late work.

Abelard's legacy has yet to be explored in detail. His students were active as philosophers, theologians, poets, and politicians; they include three popes and several heads of state. There are few explicit references to Abelard's thinking in the later Middle Ages, but it is clear that he had a seminal influence on twelfth-century philosophy and theology, and he may well have affected fourteenth-century speculation too. The story of Abelard and Héloïse has been a subject for artists, poets, and writers ever since the twelfth century.

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