HUMANISM IN THE MIDDLE AGES: PETER ABAILARD
AND THE BREAKDOWN OF
MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Deborah L. Vess, B.A., B.Mus., M.A.

Denton, Texas

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Abailard has often been seen as a second rate intellect who made no decisive contributions to theology. Abailard, however, expanded Anselm's sola ratione methodology, and in so doing he anticipated Renaissance humanism. His theory of abstraction justified the use of dialectic in theology, and was the basis for his entire theological system. He distinguished faith from mere belief by the application of dialectic, and created a theology which focused on the individual. The Renaissance humanists emphasized individual moral edification, which was evident in their interest in rhetoric. Abailard anticipated these rhetorical concerns, focusing on the individual's moral life rather than on metaphysical arguments. His logical treatises developed a theory of language as a mediator between reality and the conceptual order, and this argument was further developed in Sic et non. Sic et non was more than a collection of contradictions; it was a comprehensive theory of language as an inexact picture of reality, which forced the individual to reach his own understanding of scripture. Abailard's
development of the power of reason anticipated developments in the Renaissance.

While Abailard echoed many of the trends of the twelfth century, he developed these new ideas in such a way that foreshadowed the breakdown of medieval theology in the Renaissance. Abailard's work demonstrates that there need be no essential contradiction between the aims of the scholastic theologian and the humanist. More than any other thinker of the Middle Ages, he defined individuality and made faith a living set of beliefs rather than an empty abstraction. He has often been charged with inconsistency, but *Sic et non* contained the essence of all his later works, preceding from faith and reason, to the Trinity, and finally to ethical issues. For Abailard, the use of reason enabled us to truly understand the Trinity, and to apply this insight to our ethical behavior. Abailard was not a second rate thinker, but a man truly ahead of his time.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Jacob Burckhardt's monumental work, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, was one of those rare achievements which characterized an entire age in a way which greatly influenced all succeeding Renaissance historiography. Burckhardt portrayed the Renaissance as a decisive break with the Middle Ages, whose primary manifestation was a renewed interest in the individual. This emphasis on the individual led the humanists away from the medieval church, and colored the Renaissance with secularity. While the medieval mind explored the nature and being of God in abstract speculations, the Renaissance humanist found God right before his very eyes, embedded in the very beauty of his surroundings. For Burckhardt, this emphasis on the world as opposed to transcendental religious truths transformed Renaissance humanism into paganism. The true God of the Renaissance was the secular world, and in this respect, the Renaissance humanists foreshadowed modern man.

Burckhardt and other commentators emphasized the Renaissance as the dawn of a new era, in which the golden age of antiquity was reborn. Greek and Roman statuary was rediscovered, often amidst great spectacle. Before Michelangelo's very eyes, the Laocoön was unearthed, and
other discoveries occurred on a regular basis. Pogio, for example, diligently sought out manuscripts which had been lost since antiquity. On the surface, then, the Renaissance was marked by mania for the literary and artistic works of antiquity. The works of the classical age spoke to the humanists in a way which the medieval world did not. Livy and Tacitus were of great interest to the humanists; so too, were the orations and rhetorical treatises of Cicero and the statuary of Praxitiles. What appealed to the humanist in these works was an interest in the human condition, which they found lacking in the Middle Ages. Livy's *History of the Roman Empire* was in many respects an inaccurate account, for he incorrectly recorded details of geography and often reported the same event twice, not realizing that he had mistaken conflicting accounts of one event for descriptions of distinct events. Nevertheless, his *History* also recorded the thoughts and aspirations of Rome's leaders, and the customs of her people. As such, it was enormously popular in the Renaissance. Cicero focused much of his attention on the oration; as a lawyer, it was his job to persuade his audience of his point of view. His treatises, then, necessarily took account of human emotions and prejudices and focused on swaying the emotions of one's listeners. The humanists were especially fond of Cicero, for they found medieval scholasticism not only dry and boring, but unintelligible to the ordinary reader. Many humanists, like Cicero, focused their attention on rhetoric as opposed to
philosophy in an effort to address the needs of the individual. Due to their renewed reverence for the individual, the works of classical antiquity particularly appealed to them.

Burckhardt's work suggested that these characteristics were unique to the Italian Renaissance, and that the age between the fall of the Roman empire and the dawn of the Italian Renaissance was nothing more than a period between two other great ages, an age of transition spanning the era between the fall of the Greco-Roman world to the dawn of modernity, the Italian Renaissance. This attitude is tacitly shared by many historians who commonly refer to the medieval period as the "Middle Ages". The phrase "Middle Ages" has almost universally been taken as a term of opprobrium, implying that the Middle Ages were a vast gulf in which little or nothing of note occurred other than the complete collapse and subsequent loss of the glorious literary and political achievements of antiquity. The rebirth of these endeavors had to await the humanists of the Italian Renaissance, who fancied themselves the first modern men, as distinguished from medieval man who had been

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deprived of the culture of antiquity. The fourteenth
century humanist Francesco Petrarch expressed this view most
eloquently, or so he thought, when he referred to the Middle
Ages as the "dark ages." By this he meant to imply that the
medieval period was in the dark intellectually, exhibiting
no originality or vitality of thought, and characterized by
rigid systemization. This systemization allowed for very
little individuality, and consequently, many humanists found
no attempt to understand the human predicament in the
medieval period. Humanists generally regarded Aquinas, one
of the greatest medieval theologians, as engaging in endless
verbosity defining useless distinctions which carried the
reader nowhere but where he began.

Charles Homer Haskins was one of the first historians
to note that the idea of intellectual renaissance and
renewal was not unique to the Italian Renaissance. In his
pioneering work The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century, he
argued that many aspects of the Italian Renaissance were
present in the twelfth century, which he defined as the
period between 1050-1250. As in the Italian Renaissance,
there was a renewed interest in works of classical
antiquity, the beginnings of secular literature written in
the vernacular, and a reinvigoration of philosophy and
theology through the use of dialectic. Colin Morris' The
Discovery of the Individual supports this thesis, arguing
that a growing awareness of the individual's inner state
accompanied the new intellectual trends. The romances of
Chretien de Troyes developed characterization by focusing on the intentions of the main characters. Chretien was "clearly fascinated by the differing qualities of people's minds, and especially by their varied attitudes toward love." Many of his characters pursue their chosen path in spite of the objections of other characters. "Their motive is not conformity to requirements, but the desire for personal excellence far beyond normal expectation." Chretien's characters were so individualistic that Perceval is able to remember his name after meditating on three drops of blood in the snow. Perceval, then, seems to demonstrate an awareness of himself as a unique individual.

These new trends were apparent not only in the secular world, but in the sacred realm as well. The twelfth century emphasized religion as an emotional experience, rather than as a set of external acts one must perform in order to be saved. Bernard of Clairvaux described twelve progressive stages of humility through which man achieved the love of God solely for God's sake. To reach the ultimate stage of religious understanding, however, man must begin with self knowledge. In its lowest form, self knowledge was the love of self solely for the sake of self; for Bernard, this was a necessary step along the path to a selfless love for God. Bernard's twelve steps represented a more personal

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3Ibid., 136.
interpretation of the Benedictine Rule, which stated that monks "no longer live by their own judgement, giving in to their whims and appetites; rather they walk according to another’s directions and decisions." Yet the rule also enjoined the monk to ascend the ladder of humility towards heaven. Bernard made this ascent a personal religious journey, which relied on the activity of the individual rather than the religious community. His journey began with self awareness, and ended in the fulfillment of an individual’s love for God.

William of Saint Thierry also emphasized self awareness as the foundation of the religious experience. In On the Nature and Dignity of Love, he defined several different kinds of love, and argued that the lower forms of love, such as earthly love, led to the higher forms, such as love for God. For William, it was only when body and soul and spirit have each been ordered and disposed in their rightful place, each esteemed according to their merits and distinguished according to their qualities, a man may begin perfectly to know himself, and by progress in self knowledge may ascend to the knowledge of God. The Incarnation was necessary in order that man might better understand God’s love. Since our starting point is self awareness and bodily love, Christ appeared as a man:


Since we have fallen into temporal realities, and by loving them we are impeded from eternal realities, a timely remedy was prepared for our cure . . . In effect, we are not moved locally to him who is everywhere present, but by good desires and habits. And that would have been impossible for us, had not Wisdom itself decided to bear our great infirmity, had it not given a model of life in a man, since we ourselves are men.⁶

William, like Bernard, emphasized the individual and his role in the religious experience.

The twelfth century transformed religion from a remote and artificial experience to one which was experienced and understood on a human level. Both Bernard of Clairvaux and Aelred of Rivaulx used human relationships as an analogy for religious truths. Bernard's sermons On the Song of Songs demonstrate that even Cistercians for all their austerity were not completely at odds with human emotions. The Song of Songs described love in very physical terms, but Bernard provided a religious interpretation for the Canticles. Just as "husband and wife become one in marriage, one in mystical ecstasy, the Word and the Soul become one spirit."⁷

Bernard and other Cistercians encouraged a tender religious devotion to Christ: "Your affection for your lord Jesus should be both tender and intimate."⁸ Bernard emphasized


⁷Bernard of Clairvaux, On the Song of Songs, in Szarmach, 80.

⁸Ibid., 81.
love for the body of Christ, since to "know Jesus is to know him crucified." Bernard’s sympathy for the suffering Christ represents an awareness of Christ as a human being; Bernard’s religion started with earthly life, and thus, reflects an awareness of the individual.

Aelred of Rivaulx also emphasized the parallel between religious piety and human emotions. For Aelred, friendship was "the whole aim of the spiritual life," and he argued that "he who dwells in friendship, dwells in God and God in him." For Aelred and Bernard, an awareness of the self and individual emotions and experiences was a prerequisite for true religious understanding. This sort of religious piety strongly contrasts with the approach of the early desert fathers, who practiced an austere form of self denial. Bernard, Aelred, and William of Saint Thierry valued the self. Like men of the early Middle Ages, their attention was focused on God, but their path to Him was based on an awareness of the individual and his emotional responses. The developments in theology during the twelfth century Renaissance demonstrate the arrogance of Petrarch and other humanists of his age; medieval man, just as the Renaissance humanist, displayed intellectual creativity and

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9 Ibid., 81.

10 Colin Morris, 101.

vitality. He was not entirely ignorant of the works of the classical period, nor of the needs of the individual.

There can be no clearer example of Haskins' and Morris' theses than Peter Abailard. In Abailard's works, individuality ran rampant. The Abailardian corpus was based on a modified form of nominalism, which eliminated the eternal realities of Saint Augustine and forced him to develop a theology centered around the individual. In Abailard, the Renaissance Humanists, as portrayed by Burckhardt, would have found a spiritual mentor. Abailard's *Historia Calamitatum* portrayed him as a man whose egocentrism knew no limits, as a man who valued the works of pagan antiquity, and who, in his relationship with Heloise, might arguably have been said to have gravitated far into the secular realm. His veneration of the power of the human mind led him to discover trinitarian theology in the works of the pagans, foreshadowing the Renaissance Humanists, who similarly found no particular conflict between veneration of pagan authors and Christian theology. Like the humanists, he emphasized the moral growth and edification of the individual, and as a result, the power of the human mind to probe the truths of revelation was an integral part of his theological system. His *Sic et non* established the often contradictory and conflicting nature of the scriptures and patristic writings, making the use of philological techniques anticipating those of the humanists absolutely essential for understanding revelation. *Sic et non*
presented a theory of language much like that of the later Italian humanists, and it paved the way for an ethical theory far in advance of his times, which foreshadowed the reform efforts of Erasmus and Luther. In many ways, Abailard was a quintessential scholastic who extolled the power of logic, yet his application of dialectic to theology created an individualistic theology much like that of the Renaissance humanists. Self knowledge was the first step on Bernard of Clairvaux' ladder of humility, but it was Abailard more than any other figure in the twelfth century who "discovered the individual" and provided a systematic theology which clearly articulated a role for human reason.

Abailard's place in the history of thought, however, has been oddly neglected. In large part, this is due to his oversized personality, which continually led him into the midst of controversy, and made him suspect as a theologian. Abailard was born in Le Palais, near Nantes in Brittany in 1079. He may have studied the quadrivium under William of Saint Thierry of Chartres; of this, we are uncertain, as Abailard does not mention having studied with Thierry in the Historia Calamitatum. An anonymous writer claims that Abailard studied with Tirricus at Chartres, and some commentators, for example J. G. Sikes, have identified Tirricus with Thierry.\(^1^2\) We do know, however, that Abailard studied dialectics with Roscelin. Although

Abailard's *Historia* does not mention this episode either, Roscelin himself confirms that Abailard was his pupil.\(^{13}\)

Eventually, Abailard went to William of Champeaux in Paris. His association with Roscelin as a young man already placed him under suspicion, since Roscelin had been condemned by such respected figures as Lanfranc and Anselm of Bec for holding a radical form of nominalism. Abailard's tenure with William of Champeaux did nothing to improve his reputation, since he viciously attacked William's realism as nonsensical. After his debate with William, he was driven out of the city, and he lectured at Melun and Corbeil. In 1113 Abailard took up the study of theology with Anselm of Laon, where he continued to prove himself an obstinate student who showed little respect for the established minds of the age. The school of Anselm of Laon relied on exegesis as a method for studying the scriptures, which Abailard likened to producing "smoke without a flame."\(^{14}\) These statements naturally turned Anselm and others against him, and once again, he was forced to find another place to teach. At this time, the study of theology was only to be undertaken after the study of the trivium and the quadrivium, and often took as long as seven years to

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complete. After leaving the school of Anselm of Laon, Abailard audaciously began to teach theology on his own, without of course, having undergone the customary apprenticeship in theology. Combined with the fact that Abailard was not living the monastic life, his theological endeavors were particularly alarming to conservatives such as Bernard of Clairvaux. His character continued to become more suspect; while in Paris as a canon of Notre Dame, Abailard became romantically involved with Heloise, the niece of Bishop Fulbert. When she conceived their son, Abailard secretly married her and placed her in the convent of Argenteuil. The enraged Fulbert took his revenge on Abailard in a particularly graphic way, by "cut[ting] off the parts of the body whereby [he] had committed the wrong of which they complained."\textsuperscript{15}

After this incident, Abailard retired to the abbey of Saint Denis in 1118. Although Abailard took the vows of a monk, Fulbert’s revenge evidently did nothing to change his native tendency to go against tradition, for while he was at Saint Denis, he tried to convince his fellow monks that Denis, one of the most revered saints in the medieval church, was actually not the patron saint of the abbey. This argument did not endear him at Saint Denis, and in 1125, he left and founded the Paraclete near Nogent-sur-Seine. During the years between 1118 and 1125 Abailard

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 75.
wrote the *Theologia Summi Boni*, which was condemned at the Council of Soissons in 1121 on the basis that it failed to adequately distinguish between the persons of the Trinity. Abailard was able to successfully defend himself against these charges, and while at the Paraclete, again attracted a large following, and eventually was named abbot of Saint Gildas. The situation there proved unsatisfactory, since according to the *Historia Calamitatum*, several attempts were made to poison him. Once again, he returned to Paris, this time to teach at Saint Genevieve, where John of Salisbury became one of his students. The condemnation at Soissons did not discourage him from continuing to write controversial works, and during the following years, he wrote his most important and controversial works, *Sic et Non*, *Ethics, or Know Thyself*, and the *Theologia Christiana*. These works eventually came to the attention of Bernard of Clairvaux, who brought the matter before the Pope. At the Council of Sens in 1140, Abailard was officially condemned for heresy, and excommunicated from the church. He retired to Cluny, where he died in 1142.\(^{16}\)

His controversial biography, especially the well publicized affair with Heloise, has consistently attracted more attention than his theological and philosophical works. Etienne Gilson's important *Reason and Revelation* mentions Abailard only once in his discussion of the role of reason

\(^{16}\)Biographical information is taken from the *Historia Calamitatum*. 
within theology during the Middle Ages, yet he devoted an entire book to the story of Abailard and Heloise. Perhaps this is due to the fact that modern historians, like Bernard of Clairvaux, view the theology of a man who had so clearly gravitated into the secular realm with suspicion. Moreover, his correspondence with Heloise after the tragic events which ended their affair consistently ignored her impassioned pleas to respond to her emotional distress, and urged her instead to become his sister in Christ. Modern readers tend to interpret Abailard's responses as callous, and in light of his earlier disputes with the respected masters of Europe, view him as a man whose ego outweighed all other concerns, and who would stop at nothing in order to pursue his own fame and glory. On this reading, Abailard was incapable of any deep emotions or serious commitment, and as such, his alleged conversion after the experience with Heloise is viewed with suspicion. His impulsive change of career to theology after establishing himself as a renowned dialectician, his migrations from monastery to monastery, and his "abandonment" of Heloise are often seen as manifestations of an insincere temperament. Consequently, his attempts at theology are often regarded as no more than simply another intellectual game, and just as Bernard dismissed him as a "logician lately turned theologian," so too many modern historians fail to attribute any significant contributions to Abailard in the field of theology.
Abailard's conspicuous personal life has, then, in many ways detracted from a serious examination of his theology. Although few have seen his personality as praiseworthy, almost no one would deny that as a logician, he made significant contributions. His attack on William of Champeaux's ultra-realism was so successful that it was no longer accepted as a viable theory. He was one of the first to develop a sophisticated theory of predication which relied on logical context, and to explain the meaning and use of universal terms. So successful was he as a logician that his theology has often been interpreted entirely in light of his logical theories.

His logical theories relied solely on the use and meaning of words rather than a consideration of the objects to which words referred, and many commentators have argued that this approach is evident in his theology as well. Etienne Gilson, for example, argued that Abailard's theology never went beyond the scope of the use and meaning of words, and failed altogether to probe metaphysical questions.

Proceeding on the basis that logic is the science whereby we think, Abailard argued that all disciplines were governed by the rules of logic, "hence the reckless way in which he applied it to theology . . . and to philosophy." Abailard's veneration of logic led him to mistake logic for philosophy, and grammar for logic. For Gilson, there is a

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17Etienne Gilson, The Unity of Philosophical Experience (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 7.
definite dividing line between logic and philosophy. Logic
deals with the relation between words and concepts, whereas
philosophy is more concerned with the relation of words to
objective reality. "It was Abailard's misfortune to cross
"this line" . . . and to discuss those philosophical
questions as if he were still standing on logical
ground."  

His famous gloss on Porphyry answered
philosophical issues which Porphyry had been astute enough
to avoid; so successful was he in logically refuting all
possible answers to the problem of universals that he was
forced, in Gilson's view to beg the ontological question.

Had he been as prudent as he was [intellectually]
honest, our logician would have stopped asking
questions about what a signification can be where there
is nothing to be signified. But prudence was so little
one of Abailard's virtues, that, having thus eliminated
all possible answers, he nevertheless proceeded to
answer the question.  

Abailard had demolished William of Champeaux's contention
that universals signified essences in things, yet was
himself forced to concede that there was a common likeness
in things which accounts for our use of universal terms, but
which nevertheless was not a thing. For Gilson, his failure
to adequately answer those questions which Porphyry avoided
demonstrates the folly of mistaking logic for philosophy.
The end result of Abailard's system was skepticism, as he
had convincingly shown that universal terms do not

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18 Ibid., 11.
19 Ibid., 21.
correspond to reality. Gilson attributes Abailard's failure
as a theologian to this reckless use of logic as a model for
answering philosophical questions, for here too, he equated
logic with the search for metaphysical reality. Not "even
the logical genius of Abailard was an excuse for his
blunder," 20 and for Gilson, it was this blunder above all
others that led to the collapse of medieval philosophy.
Gilson, while recognizing the importance of Abailard as a
logician, thus argues that it was logic itself which
trivialized the rest of his output.

Clearly, in some respects Gilson's view can be
sustained. Abailard's application of dialectic to theology
led to two condemnations for heresy, and many commentators
maintain that he was simply not adequately trained in
theology and was, therefore, led astray by his logical
principles. His metaphor likening the Trinity to a wax
impression aroused the ire of William of Thierry and Bernard
of Clairvaux. J. G. Sikes argues that Abailard was so
carried away by dialectic that he simply did not grasp the
theological implications of the metaphor. Like Gilson,
Sikes interprets Abailard's difficulties as the product of a
rash application of dialectic to theology. 21

For many commentators, Abailard's skill as a logician
led him to extol reason over revelation, and as a

20Ibid., 8.

21J. G. Sikes, Peter Abailard (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1932).
consequence he developed heretical theories. S. M. Deutsch expressed his view of Abailard by calling his theological system a "critical theology of the twelfth century." Deutsch argued that Abailard extolled the value of logic over that of the authority of the church, and as such was one of the first to advocate free thought. A. Harnack likened Abailard to early critics of the church, such as Paul of Samosata, and G. N. Bontwetsch claimed that Abailard intended to replace Anselm's motto "credo ut intelligam" with the motto "intelligo ut credam."

Other authors have been more reluctant to see Abailard as a rationalist. Martin Grabmann, for example, points out that *Sic et non* proceeded on the assumption that conflicting texts could be reconciled, and did not, as such, attempt to undermine the authority of the church. E. Kaiser similarly attempts to defend Abailard against the charge that he was a rationalist, by arguing that his methods were orthodox, operating within the boundaries of faith, in

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contrast to his doctrines, which were often heretical.\(^\text{26}\)

This, however, seems to be an unsatisfactory solution, as most of the heretical doctrines Abailard espoused were based on assumptions about the role of reason within the faith. J. Cottiaux, therefore, attempts to harmonize not only Abailard's methodology, but also his doctrines with orthodox theology. Cottiaux rightly pointed out that many of Abailard's statements do not seem consistent. For example, he strongly defended the role of grace in salvation, yet just as vigorously argued for the validity of logic as a method for probing revelation. Cottiaux extricates Abailard from inconsistency and unorthodoxy by emphasizing the hypothetical nature of Abailard's conclusions. For example, in his works on the Trinity, Abailard consistently claimed that language is not a perfect reflection of reality, and can only present a similitude of the divine nature. He never argued that his dialectical explanations fully captured the nature of the Trinity, only that they might help to clarify the relation between the persons.\(^\text{27}\)

None of these interpretations, however, create a very positive impression of Abailard. On Kaiser's reading, Abailard's use of dialectic was not the explanation for his heretical doctrines, and as a result, he appears as simply


another example of heresy in the twelfth century.

Cottiaux's interpretation is no more satisfactory, as he emphasizes the hypothetical nature of Abailard's theology, thus creating the impression that Abailard never formulated a positive theological system, and never reached any firm conclusions. Abailard thus appears eager to destroy the theories of others, and unable to propose any of his own.

Some authors have not only seen Abailard's theology as inconsequential, but have questioned his impact on the scholastic method as a whole. Grabmann, for example, argues that Abailard neither originated the scholastic method of disputation nor was the primary influence on the canonists and others who contributed to its development. M. D. Knowles praises the achievement of Abailard in the field of logic, yet argues that most of his ideas were soon out of date after the introduction of the new Aristotle. This perception of Abailard has led many commentators to argue that he was simply a second rate thinker. Knowles expressed this view most eloquently, when he argued that

Abelard falls short of the highest achievement... in logic and dialectic, he came too early to enjoy the complete legacy of Aristotle, and he practiced a logic that was soon to fall out of favor. In theology, he lacked both the constructive power and the depth of spiritual insight that informed an Augustine, an Anselm, a Bonaventure and an Aquinas. While they enriched and deepened the exposition of the Christian mysteries, Abelard could only explain and criticize on the lower level of human wisdom and experience.²⁸

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Unlike Anselm and Aquinas, Abailard "never succeeded in raising dialectic to the level at which it ceases to be an ingenious art of words." For those who adhere to this interpretation, he never transformed his profound skill at logic into a penetrating metaphysical system; as such, he remains a curiously enigmatic figure, whose prodigious abilities never reached fruition.

Such an interpretation of Abailard's work, however, would be to neglect its most important features. There is no doubt that Abailard failed to probe theology in search of metaphysical reality; he simply failed to devote attention to proving those truths of the faith which he took for granted. His failure in this respect, however, need not necessarily imply that his was a second rate intellect. Abailard, like the humanists of the Italian Renaissance, focused his attentions on the moral life of the individual. He was intensely interested in the nature of faith and salvation. More than any other thinker of the twelfth century, he used his logical skills to elucidate the nature of human reason and faith, and to use this new understanding to develop an ethics which was centered on the human mind and its interpretation of faith. Abailard gave new meaning to Anselm's "credo ut intelligam;" while Anselm applied logic to far reaching metaphysical proofs, Abailard brought

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logic into the realm of experience, and used it to develop a concept of faith which truly had an impact on human ethical conduct. While Anselm expressed the firm conviction that reason could not conflict with revelation, Abailard developed a logical explanation of experience which necessitated the application of dialectic to theology. Anselm may have been a more sophisticated metaphysician, but Abailard strengthened the rationale behind Anselm’s metaphysics, and found applications for it in human experience.

In so doing, Abailard went well beyond the confines of the scholastic tradition and of medieval theology as a whole. He, more than any other figure of his age, addressed the ethical and religious life of the individual. In many ways, he anticipated the humanists of the Italian Renaissance, and was the clearest example of the trends highlighted by Haskins and Morris. Abailard was a pioneer in the field of logic, yet he used it to develop a theology which emphasized the role of man’s understanding in the growth of faith, whose fullest expression was true love for God. The work of Abailard demonstrates the folly of thinking of the medieval period as simply the "Middle Ages," and worse yet, as the "dark ages." If ever a historical figure stood out as an individual, it was Peter Abailard. His work, although it began with orthodox assumptions, was startlingly original. His was indeed an original contribution to theology, and it was the final irony of his
career that his otherwise boundless ego failed to recognize that his theological system was in fact a departure from orthodox theology, and paved the way for a deeper understanding of the nature of faith and morality. Burckhardt portrayed the Italian Renaissance as a great and glorious age in which modernity was born, yet had he examined the career of Peter Abailard, he might have realized that humanism was not the exclusive creation of the Italians of the trecento and quattrocento, but was indeed alive and well in the twelfth century.
CHAPTER 2

FIDES QUARENS INTELLECTUM: THE ROLE OF REASON

IN THEOLOGY BEFORE ABAILARD

Bernard of Clairvaux condemned Abailard for "promising understanding to his hearers, even on those most sublime and sacred truths which are hidden in the very bosom of our holy faith." The philosophes of the Enlightenment saw in Abailard a kindred spirit, and later commentators such as S. M. Deutsch have hailed him as an advocate of free thought and criticism. Although his views, in fact, were not nearly as radical as these comments might suggest, he did extend the scope of reason within theology. Abailard attempted to apply logic to theology at a time when the use of reason as tool for probing revelation was still highly controversial. His place in the history of thought cannot be evaluated without an assessment of earlier views on the relation of reason to revelation. Abailard was one of the pioneers of the scholastic movement, a movement which represented a departure from the practices of the early Middle Ages. This fact alone made his theology an original contribution to the intellectual life of the twelfth century. The nature of his contribution, however, cannot be

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assessed without an understanding of those who preceded him. His application of reason to revelation departed from early medieval views, but he used logic in a radically different way than did the great Saint Anselm, or later scholastics such as Aquinas. Although he was at the vanguard of the scholastic movement, ironically his thought departed from that of other scholastics in a way which anticipated the Italian Renaissance.

I.

The conflict between reason and revelation

The role of reason within the Christian faith had been problematic from its inception. Faith concerns things we have no proof of, and hence, many scriptures condemn the use of reason in the guise of philosophy. Paul admonished the Colossians to "Beware lest any man cheat you by philosophy, and vain deceit; according to the tradition of men . . . and not according to Christ."\(^2\) This passage suggests a dichotomy between the "traditions of men", or reason, and the "traditions of Christ", or faith. Not only is there a dichotomy between faith and reason, but philosophy and reason are useless within faith, for "in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God . . . to save them that believe."\(^3\) Belief here is superior to

\(^2\)Colossians 2:8.

\(^3\)I Corinthians 1:21.
revelation; indeed, this passage argues that God, in his wisdom, prevents us from knowing anything about him. Belief, rather than wisdom, is extolled in these passages.

Accordingly, the second century Christian apologist Tertullian rejected the learning of the ancient world altogether, asking "what has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic?" In the *Apologeticus*, he spoke sarcastically of various cultures of antiquity who professed to be spiritual, while condemning the Christians as revilers of truth.

The Egyptians, . . . in their empty superstition . . . make gods of birds and beasts . . . Every individual province, every city, has its own god; . . . among [them] it is lawful to worship anything at all, so long as it is not the true God!

The Romans were no better, for they made gods of kings, while the Greeks believed that philosophy "with its rash interpretation of God’s nature and purpose" was the culmination of wisdom. Philosophers pervert the truth, as did Epicurus when he argued that the soul was mortal. Since philosophy "supplies heresies with their equipment," Tertullian condemned Aristotle,

who taught them dialectic, the art which destroys as much as it builds, which changes its opinions like a coat, forces its conjectures, is stubborn in argument,

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works hard at being contentious and is a burden even to itself.\footnote{Tertullian, 182.}

Philosophy and dialectic were dangerous tools, which might lead one astray from the true faith. Reason and philosophical arguments have nothing to do with the Christian faith, and hence, revelation is independent of philosophical speculation.

Many commentators, like the Renaissance humanists, view Tertullian's disdain for philosophy as reflective of ideology in the Middle Ages as a whole. Certain aspects of the medieval period do indeed lend support to this view. The presumptions of Tertullian's school of thought fostered a lack of tolerance for dissent in favor of institutionalized religion and politics. Tertullian lived in an uncertain age; Christianity was not widely accepted and worse yet, there were periodic persecutions of Christians who were blamed for all the woes of the decaying empire. It was necessary for Christians to achieve unity in these circumstances, especially as concerned doctrine. As a result, the early church attempted to define orthodoxy in the various pronouncements of the councils, and especially after the conversion of Constantine, was less and less tolerant of heresy and dissent. Beginning with the Council of Nicea in 325, Constantine assumed a leading role in the affairs of the church, not only summoning the bishops to the council, but participating in its proceedings as well.
Constantine, the role of the emperor was to preserve the kingdom of God which had been placed in his power. By the grace of God, he had won the Battle of Milvian Bridge, and for the rest of his career, he believed that he must maintain the church in order to maintain his empire. As a result, he rigorously attempted to quell the Donatist and Arian heresies.

In the east the emperor became the interpreter and guardian of Christ; in the west, this role was assumed by the church itself. The disintegration of the empire in the west left it without the protection of an emperor, and the bishop of Rome quickly became the leading political figure. Gregory the Great was the first to take advantage of this situation. Rome was besieged by the Lombards in the sixth century, and it was Gregory who negotiated for Rome rather than the imperial prefect. Gregory established the bishop of Rome as a political figure, and the coronation by later popes of Pepin as King of the Franks in 756 and Charlemagne as Roman emperor in 800 strengthened this role. The pope emerged as the leading moral authority in the west, and his authority rested on his status as the vicar of St. Peter. Just as Christ had promised Peter the keys to heaven, so Peter had passed them on to his successors. The pope was the moral custodian of the power of the church, which was founded on the authority of the gospels. As a result, the church attempted "to sustain as accurately as possible the
teaching of the Fathers," and tolerated no dissent from scripture.\(^8\)

This lack of toleration became a pervasive feature of the early Middle Ages, as reflected in the dominance of monastic life during this period. Monasticism was in many ways an intellectually static culture dominated by the Benedictine Rule. The Rule not only emphasized the vows of poverty, charity, and chastity, but also the vow of obedience. Benedict required strict obedience to the abbot of the monastery, who assumed the role of Christ and became an earthly master to his noviciates. Obedience to the abbot and strict adherence to the rule was intended to foster the growth of humility in the monk. The day was completely ordered from beginning to end, the monks being told what and when to eat, when to rise, when to retire, how and when to observe the Divine Office, and how to study. Such regimentation left little room for intellectual curiosity. Although the Rule set aside a third of the day for studying, study itself took the form of labor. Monks were to read their books straight through, and there was to be no skipping, no laying of it aside and taking up of something else, nothing lighthearted about it . . . the reading envisaged by the rule was a painful business -- it was meant to be.\(^9\)

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Such a way of life, so prevalent in the Middle Ages, did not encourage speculation, but rather submission.

This attitude was reflected in medieval methods of studying scripture. "The reduced repetitions of earlier commentaries and the florilegia of patristic excerpts . . . constitute[d] a large part of the intellectual diet of the early Middle Ages."  

During the Carolingian Age, compilers were frequently content to enlarge existing sets of quotations, rather than excerpting from original works. Beginning in the early tenth century, even this activity dropped off, and there was "no important commentary, and a dearth even of compilations, for about a century and a quarter."  

This disruption may have been caused by the Viking invasions, but might also have been influenced by the growth of the Cluniac movement, which emphasized the liturgy at the expense of study. At any rate, the growth of the papacy and the monastic tradition contributed to a tendency towards intellectual stagnation and reliance on authority in the early Middle Ages.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, this atmosphere began to change. A renewed interest in learning and ancient thought took place. Although the translations of Boethius had preserved a few of Aristotle's works, most notably the

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Categories and De Interpretatione, it was not until the eleventh and twelfth centuries that theologians began to apply Aristotle's methods to revelation. Several factors contributed to an intellectual "renaissance" in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. During this period, society began to change in several important ways. The foundation of Cluny in 910 inaugurated a series of reforms in monastic life. Many monasteries had become too involved in the feudal system through donations of land and monetary gifts, and thus, had assumed secular responsibilities. Cluny claimed to be under no authority but that of the Pope, and this innovation set in motion a reform movement which gradually encompassed the entire church structure. Leo IX worked to free the church from secular control by attempting to assert the primacy of the pope in church affairs; Gregory VII further strengthened the papacy by trying to free the church from secular control in the form of lay investiture.

There were several important consequences of the investiture controversy. Gregory argued that the church should control her own affairs, and that in ecclesiastical matters, the authority of the pope took precedence over that of the king. The efforts of the papacy to assert its authority over church and state necessitated a larger bureaucracy to manage church affairs. The efforts of Leo IX to force the bishops of the west to submit to his authority stood no chance of success if some agreement on church doctrine could not be reached. As a result, the church
began to codify canon law during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This was no easy task, as authorities often were in disagreement over matters of dogma. The efforts of the canon lawyers thus brought into question the place of reason within faith. Given that there was a need to reconcile the authorities, what was the proper use and scope of reason? The effort to systematize canon law encouraged theologians to use the same methods to probe revelation.

This revival of learning was most apparent in Italy and France. Italy benefited from the fact that Sardinia was recovered from the Saracens in the early eleventh century; Sicily was reconquered in 1090 and Corsica in 1091. These events reopened the Straits of Messina and the central Mediterranean to European shipping. Trade routes to Asia, as well as Africa and India, were opened. As commerce increased, contact with other peoples and ideas contributed to the reawakening of Europe. Italy was also the center of the papacy, which as we have seen was undergoing tremendous changes during this period. While the intellectual life of Europe had been dominated by the monasteries, Italy had never ceased to have a large number of secular schools. Many important theologians of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were from Italy, most notably Lanfranc and Anselm. Italy quickly became the center of legal and canonical scholarship during this period.

France also became an important center of learning. It was certainly the center of political turbulence; Le Mans in
1069, Cambrai in 1076, and Rheims in 1139 had attempted to form communes, and the nobility of Provence was in open rebellion against the church. That new thoughts should arise in France is not, therefore, surprising. The monastery at Bec was a major center of learning in Europe at the time; it was also the center for one of the earliest controversies in which reason and dialectic played an important role. During an age in which the use of reason as an instrument for understanding faith was just beginning to be discussed, one theologian, Berengar of Tours, had the audacity to claim that reason, and not authority, should be "mistress and judge." Berengar argued that man most closely resembled God in the use of reason. Dialectic, as the art of arts, was not only the highest form of reason, but also preferable to authority in questions of doctrine. Berengar firmly believed that reason could contradict nothing about God or articles of faith; if so, reason could legitimately be used to probe the mysteries of the faith.\(^\text{12}\)

These views earned him notoriety when he applied dialectic to the doctrine of the Eucharist. According to the monk Ratramnus in the ninth century, when the bread is blessed by the priest it actually becomes the body of Christ. His body is not merely present as a symbol of the divine, but is physically present. Berengar was perplexed

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\(^{12}\)See Lanfranc's account of the dispute in his *De corpore et sanguine domini*, in *Patrologica cursus completus series Graeca et latina sive bibliotheca universalis*, vol. 150, ed. Jacques Paul Migne (Paris: Migne, 1844-1882), 427.
by the relationship of the visible elements, the bread and wine, to the spiritual elements. How could anything physical become something spiritual? If the Eucharist merely represented spiritual reality, then how was it meaningful? For Berengar, there were several logical problems with any interpretation of the Eucharist. After consecration, the physical properties of the bread were still visible, and since for Berengar it was impossible for accidents to subsist without their subject, the substance of the bread must still remain. The bread, then, could not simply be transformed into the body of Christ, but rather, his body became an additional form of the bread. This argument was in part the result of sprachlogik, the doctrine that "words and things have a real, and not merely a conventional correspondence."¹³ In the sentence "this is the body of Christ," "this" refers to the substance bread. If so, the sentence is nonsensical, since the predicate contradicts the subject. Dialectic proved for Berengar that the doctrine of transubstantiation was not viable.

Berengar's arguments created a storm of protest. Lanfranc, the abbot of Bec, was instrumental in having him condemned in 1059. For Lanfranc, "dialectic was no enemy of the mysteries of God, rather it confirms them, if rightly

used, when the matter demands it." Though Lanfranc used dialectic to refute Berengar, he was, for the most part, a traditional theologian whose only desire was to preserve the unity of the church. Lanfranc's collection of books along with his notations show that he was a master of traditional scriptural commentary who only resorted to the use of dialectic to refute what he perceived to be a serious threat to orthodoxy.

The controversy over Berengar illuminates the issues surrounding the application of reason to faith. Was reason, in the form of dialectic, superior to authority? Few theologians were willing to agree with Berengar. Through the use of dialectic, Berengar had been forced to contradict dogma. Was dialectic, then, to be entirely distrusted? Peter Damian, in *Divine Omnipotence*, argued that dialectic is only the "handmaid of theology." In Damian's view, human reason was incapable of probing the mysteries of faith. God operates totally outside the realm of human reason; the laws which apply to our lives do not apply to Him. It is possible for God to make it true that what has already happened never happened, or that what exists now has never existed. Since the laws of logic do not apply to God, it is useless to try to understand Him through the use of reason.

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Damian, like Berengar, represents an extreme view on the use of reason.

Many other theologians, however, while not willing to accept Berengar’s position, began to explore the question of whether there might, after all, be a legitimate use for reason. The work of the canonists highlighted the fact that there were conflicting interpretations among the authorities. Reason, it was argued, provided a way to reconcile these contradictions. The proper use of reason might also provide a rational basis for revelation. If the doctrines of the faith could be sustained by the use of reason against Berengar and other heretics, how could it be harmful? This was the intellectual and social atmosphere when Anselm arrived at Bec in 1060. Anselm was the first theologian systematically to apply the principles of dialectic to revelation, and was the heir of Lanfranc’s dialectical abilities. His aims, however, went much further than Lanfranc’s — Anselm sought to prove not only the basic reasonableness of articles of faith, but also their necessary truth. Anselm was very much a product of his times; his work, however, ushered in the intellectual developments of the twelfth century.

II.

Anselm of Canterbury: Fides quarens intellectum

Anselm’s earliest works, the Monologion and the Proslogion, were written during his priorship at Bec, from
1063-1078. His most systematic treatise, the *Cur Deus Homo*, was written after he became Archbishop of Canterbury. These works form the core of Anselm's theology. The title of the *Monologion* was originally "An Example of Meditating about the Rational Basis of Faith."\(^{15}\) The methodology of the meditation was such that nothing in the Scripture should be urged on the authority of Scripture itself, but that whatever the conclusion of independent investigation should declare to be true, should, in an unadorned style, with common proofs and with a simple argument, be briefly enforced by the cogency of reason, and plainly expounded in the light of truth.\(^{16}\)

The unbeliever, who has no knowledge of the "one Nature which is the highest of all existing beings", can "at least convince himself of these truths in great part, even if his mental powers are very ordinary, by the force of reason alone."\(^{17}\) These statements represent a radical departure from traditional theological methodology -- Anselm completely abandoned the use of authorities, even that of scripture, and proved the truths of faith in such a manner that even the infidel could accept his conclusions. These statements assigned a powerful role to reason -- Berengar fell into heresy by following such a methodology.


\(^{16}\) Ibid., preface.

In order to escape Berengar's dilemma, Anselm argued in the *Proslogion* that

I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe -- that unless I believed, I should not understand.\(^{18}\)

This statement "more than any other embodies Anselm's programmatic version of faith's relationship to reason."\(^{19}\)

There is a dichotomy between this remark in the *Proslogion* and the methodology of the *Monologion*. On the one hand, Anselm argued that faith is necessary for understanding; on the other hand, he suggested that those without faith can be convinced of its truth by his arguments. For Gerald B. Phelan, "the wisdom of St. Anselm" lies in his solution of this paradox.\(^{20}\) For Anselm, reason without faith is unreliable and subject to error; faith which does not seek understanding is empty. Faith and reason are, then, intimately related in the thought of Anselm.

Anselm originally entitled the *Proslogion* "*Fides Quarens Intellectum*: Faith Seeking Understanding."\(^{21}\) This title suggests that faith, or Revelation, then, is distinct from true understanding. Anselm, unlike Augustine, did not

\(^{18}\)Anselm, *Proslogion*, 7.


\(^{21}\)Anselm, *Proslogion*, preface.
attempt to distinguish faith from mere belief. The relation between faith and understanding in the work of Anselm is, therefore, often unclear. What is given to us through revelation is true; our faith, then, gives us knowledge. Revelation does not need to be justified by proofs in order to be believed. Belief arises through grace: "Faith comes into being when, by grace, uprightness of willing is added to the conception, because then a man believes what he hears." For belief to occur, there must be rectitude of the will -- that is, the will must will rightly. This definition of faith and belief implicitly proves that revelation is not in need of arguments in order to establish its validity, for the concept of rectitude is related to truth. When things are as they ought to be, then they are also true. Truth, in turn, originates from God: "there is truth in the essence of all that exists, because all things are what they are in the Supreme Truth." Since Truth has no beginning or end, truth can be nothing other than God Himself. Right willing, or faith, then, is implicitly related to truth -- it does not need to be validated by reason before it can be believed.

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24 Ibid., 102.
Faith in God provides the believer with knowledge of truths, but it is incomplete unless it is accompanied by understanding:

As the right order requires us to believe the deep things of Christian faith before we undertake to discuss them by reason; so to my mind it appears a neglect if, after we are established in the faith, we do not seek to understand what we believe.\(^\text{25}\)

Faith without understanding is empty: "living faith believes in that in which we ought to believe; while dead faith merely believes that which ought to be believed."\(^\text{26}\)

The Proslogion opens with a plaintive prayer to God asking God to make himself known: "come thou now, O Lord my God, teach my heart where and how it may seek thee, where and how it may find thee."\(^\text{27}\) The believer "longs to come to [God]... [and] was created to see [God], and [has] not yet... done that for which [he] was made."\(^\text{28}\) Faith, then, by its very nature longs for a vision of God. For Anselm, this vision is achieved through understanding. Anselm wrote the Proslogion "in the person of one who strives to lift his mind to the contemplation of God, and seeks to understand what he believes."\(^\text{29}\) Understanding brings mere faith


\(^{26}\)Anselm, Monologion, 141.

\(^{27}\)Anselm, Proslogion, 3.

\(^{28}\)Ibid., 4.

\(^{29}\)Ibid., 2.
closer to the ultimate goal of every Christian — an experience of God.

Reason, then, plays a vital role in faith. In part, this arose out of Anselm's belief that reason is a reflection of God. In the *Monologion* he argued that God is "ineffable, because [He] is incapable of description in words or by other means." As a result, he argues that since it is clear that nothing can be ascertained concerning this Nature in terms of its own peculiar character, but only in terms of something else, it is certain that a nearer approach to knowledge of it is made through that which approaches it more nearly through likeness.

Since the human mind itself alone among all created beings is capable of remembering and conceiving of and loving itself, [therefore] I do not see why it should be denied that it is the true image of that being which, through its memory and intelligence and love, is united in an ineffable Trinity.

Reason, then, has a legitimate place within faith, since "no faculty has been bestowed on any creature that is so truly the image of the Creator."\(^{30}\)

Faith, however, is necessarily prior to reason. Without faith, reason is incapable of attaining true knowledge and is subject to error. Anselm attacked heretics such as Berengar and Roscelin because their use of reason was "so clouded over by corporeal images that it [could not]..."\(^{30}\)

\(^{30}\)Ibid., 131-2.
extricate itself from them."\textsuperscript{31} These men "should remain anathema\textsuperscript{ized} as long as [they] persist in this obstinacy -- for [they] are not Christians at all."\textsuperscript{32} True understanding can only be achieved with faith as a foundation:

He who does not believe will not experience, and he who has not had experience will not know. For the knowledge of one who experiences is superior to the knowledge of one who hears, to the same degree that knowledge of a thing is superior to hearing about it.\textsuperscript{33}

Not only is the mind prevented from rising to the understanding of higher things when it lacks faith and obedience to the commandments of God, but by the neglect of good conscience even the understanding which has already been given to a man is sometimes removed and faith itself is overturned.\textsuperscript{34}

Reason is not only subject to error when it operates without faith, it is incapable of true understanding.

Reason is only accurate in so far as it submits to the authority of scripture. Anselm insisted that "if I say anything which plainly opposes the scriptures, it is false."\textsuperscript{35} "Even though our reason may seem unassailable


\textsuperscript{33}Anselm, \textit{On the Incarnation of the Word}, 10.

\textsuperscript{34}Anselm, \textit{Cur Deus Homo}, 220.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., 220.
to us, we should not believe that it is supported by any truth if Scripture is obviously opposed to our understanding." Roscelin and Berengar erred because they failed to rely on scripture to determine the validity of their reasoning. Anselm was arguing along very traditional lines here. He assigned reason a prominent place in his theological system; he never allowed it, however, to contradict scripture. In the preface to the *Monologion*, Anselm suggested that reason must also not contradict other authorities:

> After frequent consideration, I have not been able to find that I have made in it any statement which is inconsistent with the writings of the Catholic Fathers, or especially with those of St. Augustine."

Though Anselm was criticized by Lanfranc for not citing authority in the *Proslogion*, these statements make it clear that Anselm was not interested in putting scripture and authority aside. His aim was to demonstrate the underlying rationality of faith — reason, for Anselm, was in complete accord with faith.

Faith, then, had primacy for Anselm. It legitimized reason and served as a corrective force for it. The innovative nature of Anselm's theology, however, was due not so much to the fact that he advocated the use of reason — Augustine had already suggested this in the fourth century. Anselm was unique in the extent to which he allowed reason


to penetrate faith. In *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm distinguished necessary reasons from fitting reasons. Necessary reasons are those which prove their conclusions by incontrovertible arguments: "What is clearly made out by absolute [necessary] reasoning ought by no means to be questioned," even if the reason why it is true is not understood.\(^{38}\) In *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm argued that the Incarnation could be proved by such reasoning: "infallible reasoning has brought us to this necessary conclusion, that the Divine and human natures must unite in one person."\(^{39}\) Necessary reasoning, then, is reasoning which is cogent and not contradicted by authority. In general, necessary reasons seem to be reasons which would convince the nonbeliever as well as the believer. Fitting reasons, on the other hand, can be likened to the painting of a picture. Anselm argued that it was more fitting that Christ was born a woman, since woman was the source of the original fall.\(^{40}\) Jasper Hopkins argues that the function of fitting reasons is to suggest and summarize: "at this juncture [in the argument] there can be no rigor: the marshaling of strict arguments has reached a boundary point, and didactical analogies intervene."\(^{41}\) Although fitting reasons would not

\(^{38}\)Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 238.

\(^{39}\)Ibid., 251. The emphasis on "necessary" is mine.

\(^{40}\)Ibid., book II, ch. 8.

\(^{41}\)Jasper Hopkins, 49.
necessarily convince the nonbeliever, for a believer they paint a "very beautiful and reasonable" picture.\textsuperscript{42}

Though necessary and fitting reasons are distinct, there are cases where fitting reasons acquire the force of necessity. If, for example, it is unfitting to attribute an action to God, then necessarily, he could not have done that action. In \textit{Cur Deus Homo} Anselm argued that human sin must be atoned for because it would not be fitting for God to forgive sin without having His honor restored — His justice prohibits Him from wiping away sin without punishment.\textsuperscript{43}

When Boso suggested that these arguments need to be grounded on necessary reasons, Anselm replied: "does not the reason why God ought to do the things we speak of seem [necessary] enough when we consider that the human race was wholly ruined?"\textsuperscript{44} Fitting reasons are also sufficient in cases where there is no statement one way or the other on a given point. Then, "we do not reject the smallest reason if it be not opposed by a greater ... any reason, however small, if not overbalanced by a greater, has the force of necessity."\textsuperscript{45} On occasion, we can "explain the Divine words so as to make them favor different sides, and [if] there is nowhere found anything to decide, the opinion that

\textsuperscript{42}Anselm, \textit{Cur Deus Homo}, 225.

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., 201.

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., 184.

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., 200.
should be held, ... there is no censure to be given." In such a case, fitting reasons often are enough to enable us to decide between competing interpretations.

If at times we cannot clearly show that a view we affirm by reason is also in Scripture, or if we cannot prove it from what Scripture says, then in one way we can still learn through Scripture whether such a view should be accepted or rejected... if a view is derived on the basis of a clear reason and if this view is not contradicted in any part of Scripture, then it may be said to be supported by the authority of Scripture because of the fact that Scripture does not deny it. 

Fitting reasons are, therefore, very effective — in the absence of better explanations, they are sufficient to prove one view over another. Anselm, however, qualified this claim:

If I say something which a greater authority does not confirm, then even if I seem to prove this point rationally, it should be accepted as only tentatively certain — awaiting the time when God somehow reveals something better to me.

The claim that scripture and authority could be extended by reasons which are, in some instances, merely fitting, was a strong one. Even though reason must operate within faith, its scope was quite wide.

Anselm's use of necessary reasons was equally strong. In Cur Deus Homo he attempted to prove "by absolute [necessary] reasons, the impossibility that man could be

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46 Ibid., 220.

47 Anselm, On the Harmony, 182.

48 Anselm, Cur Deus Homo, 220.
saved" without the Incarnation."  On the Procession of the Holy Spirit claims to prove "by means of the most certain arguments" that the filioque doctrine was the correct way of interpreting the Trinity. In the Monologion and Proslogion Anselm attempted to prove the existence of God beyond a doubt, as well as that "he is as we believe him to be." These proofs all concern things which were traditionally regarded as the ultimate mysteries of the faith.

Anselm's proof of the existence of God in the second chapter of the Proslogion is his most controversial argument. It occupies a central place within Anselm's thought -- the role of reason in his work cannot be understood without discussing this argument. The Proslogion must be viewed, however, in the context of the Monologion. The Monologion relied on Augustinian notions to prove the existence of God. Anselm argued that in observing our world, we notice that there are many things which are good. They must all be good through one thing, since

it is most certain and clear, for all who are willing to see, that whatsoever things are said to possess any attribute in such a way that in mutual comparison they may be said to possess it in greater, or less, or equal degree, are said to possess it by virtue of some fact, which is not understood to be one thing in one case and another in another, but to be the same in different cases.\(^{50}\)

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\(^{49}\) Ibid., 178.

\(^{50}\) Anselm, Monologion, 38-40.
All good things are necessarily good, then, by virtue of one thing which is "a good through itself, since every other good is through it." This being is supremely good, since all other good things are good through it. What is supremely good, however, is also supremely great. "There is, therefore, some one being which is supremely good, and supremely great, that is the highest of all existing beings," and is that through which all other things exist. Anselm later identified this highest being with God; this idea of God would be further developed in the Proslogion.\(^{51}\)

The eternal nature of God can be demonstrated by realizing that He is that through which all things exist. God cannot have a beginning or an end in time; both suppositions are contradictory. If God did have a beginning in time, then He had to come from something or nothing. The latter possibility is nonsensical. If God came to exist through something, either He gave Himself existence or something else did. God could not have given Himself existence, since He would have had to exist before he existed in order to do this. If something else caused His existence, then God would no longer be the only being which exists through Himself. God could also not have an end in time. Truth, for Anselm, is eternal -- whatever is true now was always true and will always be true. Truth cannot exist without God, since he is the being through which all other

\(^{51}\)Ibid., 40.
things exist.\textsuperscript{52} Therefore, God could not have an end in
time. The Monologion begins with certain observations we
make about the world and deduces the existence of God. Each
successive stage of the argument depends on previous
material. It is a tightly woven example of the power of
reason to penetrate faith.

Anselm, however, was not satisfied with the Monologion.
In the Proslogion he claimed to have agonized over
whether there might be found a single argument
which would require no other for its proof than
itself alone; and alone would suffice to
demonstrate that God truly exists, and that there
is a supreme good requiring nothing else, which
all other things require for their existence and
well-being; and whatever we believe about the Divine
being.\textsuperscript{53}

In chapter II we find out what this "one argument" is:
Anselm argues that our very concept of God proves that He
exists. The Proslogion does not rely on sensory evidence,
but solely on reason. Briefly, the argument is as follows:

1. We properly conceive of God as something than
which no greater can be thought.
2. Even the Fool who believes that there is no
God understands what the words "something than
which no greater can be thought" describe.
3. What is thus described exists either in the
understanding alone or both in the understanding
and reality.
4. Assume that this thing than which no greater
can be thought exists in the understanding alone.
   Then:
   a. Existing both in the understanding and in
      reality is greater than existing solely in the
      understanding.

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., chapter xviii.

\textsuperscript{53}Anselm, Proslogion, preface.
b. If this thing exists in the understanding
alone, it can also be thought to exist in reality,
which is greater -- therefore, "that than which no
greater can be conceived" could be thought to be
greater than it is.
c. It is not, therefore, something than which no
greater can be thought.
5. Therefore, something than which no greater can
be thought exists in reality as well as in the
understanding.54

More attention has been devoted to this argument than to any
other aspect of Anselm's thought, and it "has been pored
over and commented upon more than any other text of equal
brevity in medieval philosophy."55 It has been refuted by
John Locke and Immanuel Kant; the modern name for the
argument -- the Ontological argument -- is in fact derived
from Kant. It has been accepted by philosophers who defend
Realism, such as Descartes, Leibniz, and Hegel. One cannot
read the argument without being struck by the simplicity
with which it proves such a far reaching conclusion. The
first reaction of most people is to dismiss it as an
outright fallacy. Guanilon, a monk at the Convent of
Marmoutier, argued that there is nothing in the nature of a
concept which implies anything about reality:

Could it not be said with equal justice that I have in
my understanding all manner of unreal objects, having
absolutely no existence in themselves, because I
understand these things if one speaks of them?56

54This statement of the argument follows Jasper
Hopkins, 71.

55David Knowles, 103.

56Guanilon, Reply on Behalf of the Fool, in Saint
Anselm: Basic Writings, ed. S. N. Deane (LaSalle: Open
In other words, it is impossible to learn anything about extramental reality from the concept of an object.

There is not space here to discuss the validity of this argument, but there are several other aspects of the argument which are relevant to the present discussion. Anselm addressed the argument to "the Fool who believes that there is no God." Many commentators, such as Karl Barth and Anselm Stolz, argue that Anselm had no intention, and indeed did not believe in the possibility, of proving God's existence to the nonbeliever. In *Fides Quaerens Intelluctum* Barth argues that Anselm's purpose was theological, not philosophical. Anselm was operating within the confines of faith and in his view, no understanding of God could be achieved without faith. It is useless, therefore, to try to prove God's existence to the nonbeliever: "the possibility of a discussion with the unbeliever on the latter's ground was ... excluded or forbidden -- it was no possibility at all." Barth argues that the argument in *Proslogion* II is not an argument for the existence of God as such. Rather, it is an argument which shows that the question of God's existence is not unintelligible. Anselm could not have been

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so foolish as to use the Fool's idea of God to prove His existence.

For Barth, the true focus of the Proslogion is to be found in chapter III. Here, Anselm argued that "that than which no greater can be conceived" cannot even be thought of as not existing. God is, therefore, that which "truly is". Unlike all other things, God's nonexistence cannot even be conceived. God's existence is necessary while that of everything else is merely contingent. The primary effect of these arguments is to strengthen the faith of the believer. Once we have an experience of God through faith, the Proslogion demonstrates that we cannot, with any coherence, think of God without understanding that he necessarily exists.

This interpretation is similar to that of Anselm Stolz. Stolz points out that the Proslogion is organized around prayers to God. In his opinion, these prayers group related arguments together. Proslogion II is preceded by a lengthy exhortation to God; the next prayer occurs immediately following Proslogion III. For Stolz, this indicates that Anselm thought of II and III as a unit. The ontological proof for the existence of God, then, was not meant to stand without the proof in chapter III. The

argument, therefore, served as a preliminary stage for the proof that God cannot be thought not to exist in chapter III. If the emphasis is indeed on chapter III, the Proslogion cannot be interpreted as apologetic. The argument of chapter III demonstrates that faith in God, once it is had, cannot waver and be consistent. Stolz believes that the Proslogion is an attempt to prove that God really is "that than which no greater can be conceived." The work, then, emphasizes the nature of God rather than his existence. Only chapters I, II, III, and IV talk about the existence of God -- the bulk of the work is concerned with demonstrating that all the other attributes which we believe God to have follow from the definition proposed in chapter I. In chapter IV, Anselm summarized what he had proved by virtue of this definition. First, he claimed to have discovered that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived. God is life itself and light itself and wisdom itself, which is proved in chapters V - XIII. In chapter XIII, he proved that God is everywhere and always. Stolz notes that this summary does not claim to have proved the actual existence of God, only that he is "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." The Proslogion, then, does not claim that reason can prove the existence of God to the Fool. The Fool merely serves to contrast the lack of belief with the strength of the believer's faith.

There is an element of truth in the accounts of both Barth and Stolz. Anselm does insist that faith is a
prerequisite for understanding. Their interpretations of the *Proslogion* are, however, ultimately unconvincing. In his letter to Bishop Fulco Anselm argued that

> our faith ought to be defended by reason against the impious, but not against those that admit that they delight in the honor of being called a Christian. For while to the former it should be shown rationally that they irrationally despise us, from the latter it is right to require that they hold firmly to the pledge taken at baptism.\(^{60}\)

The *Proslogion* is addressed "to the Fool who believes that there is no God." The entire argument of Chapter II hinges on establishing that even the fool understands what the phrase "that than which no greater can be conceived" means. Chapter II demonstrates that this minimal comprehension alone is enough to show that God exists; chapter III goes on to prove that he exists "more truly" than everything else.

Anselm's methodology was to proceed *sola ratione*, a method more appropriate for apologetics than theology. In *Cur Deus Homo*, we are told that nonbelievers "seek a reason because they do not believe but we because we do believe, nevertheless we seek one and the same reason as they."\(^{61}\)

Rational arguments, contrary to what Barth says, can be used to enlighten the Fool. Faith, for Anselm, must be grounded on minimal understanding of what one is to believe: "No one can will what he does not first conceive in his heart."

"What the mind apprehends or conceives through hearing the

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\(^{60}\)Anselm, "Letter to Bishop Fulco," 4.

\(^{61}\)Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 182.
word, is the seed planted in the mind by preaching."⁶²

Apologetics can plant the seed of reason within the Fool; along with rectitude of the will, this can lead to faith. The difference between the Fool and the believer is not, as Barth claims, that one can understand while the other cannot. Rectitude of will distinguishes the believer from the nonbeliever. There is no doubt that the Proslogion does serve the purpose that Barth and Stolz ascribe to it — the believer's faith will be greatly strengthened by understanding the necessity of God's existence. The Fool, however, is also addressed — Anselm's arguments were meant to implant the seed which was necessary for belief to grow.

The Proslogion, then, assigns a powerful role to reason. If the argument just offered is accepted, Anselm was claiming that even the minimal understanding which all men share in common enables us to know that God exists. The main point of the argument, in my view, seems to be that in the case of God, there is unity between the conceptual order and the extramental order. The point of departure for the arguments in the Monologion was our experience of good things. Anselm was dissatisfied with these arguments; he wrote the Proslogion in search of a tighter argument. The argument of chapter II fulfills this requirement. Through our concept of God, we can know that he exists. Anselm does not argue that this is true for all concepts. In the Reply

⁶²Anselm, 180-1.
on Behalf of the Fool, Gaunilon argued that the argument might just as easily show that by having a concept of the most perfect island, we can know that it exists. Anselm's Apologia to Gaunilon clearly showed that he regarded God as a special case. Our idea of the perfect island may not correspond to reality, since there may, in fact be no perfect island. God, however, is different. Gaunilon's island was described as merely being more perfect than all the other islands. God is more perfect than anything which can be conceived; in fact, he is "greater than can be conceived." God is not simply greater than anything which already exists, He is greater than anything we can conceive, and greater than those things we cannot conceive. In this respect, He is unique.

Having established that God is essentially different from all other things, it is easier to see the thrust of the Proslogion's argument. The ontological argument demonstrates that there is a special being which transcends all barriers between our conception of things and our knowledge of their existence. Our knowledge of the existence of objects is usually derived from experience — Augustine's knowledge by sensation. I can have an idea, for example, of a table which is rectangular and five feet long. I can know that such a table exists if I see it or feel it. My knowledge of the existence of this table is something

63Anselm, Proslogion, xv.
that is "tacked onto" my concept of it. My concept of God, however, is a radically different sort of concept -- my knowledge of God's existence does not depend on experience, but is already embedded in my concept of him. We can know He exists because our concept is, in a sense, an experience of Him. Whether the Fool believes this or not depends on right willing. The Fool really is a Fool, however, if he does not believe the argument. Barth's interpretation cannot make sense of the Fool -- if belief is necessary in order to understand the argument, then the Fool is incapable of accepting any arguments, and hence, cannot really be a Fool. If we accept the ontological argument as an attempt to convince the Fool, then we can more clearly perceive one who continues to reject the argument as a Fool. Although faith is necessary for true understanding, the Proslogion is a strong validation of reason. The ontological argument operates solely in the realm of reason, and suggested a role for reason independent of faith.

Anselm's views were a radical departure from earlier theology. His work pushed reason to the limit, yet it did not generate much controversy during his life. This is primarily due to the fact that Anselm was first and foremost a traditional theologian operating out of a traditional framework. His method of abandoning authority was novel; his theories and presuppositions were not. The arguments of the Monologion and Proslogion were basically drawn from Augustine. The Monologion proved the existence of God by
relying on the principle that if there are several good things, there must be a greatest good. God has no end in time because he can be identified with truth. These are strictly Augustinian principles. Even Anselm’s definition of God in the Proslogion was taken from Augustine. Although Anselm contributed a new theory of the Atonement, this was not in itself controversial since there was no defined dogma on this issue. The content of Anselm’s works, then, was not new. What was revolutionary was the refined use of dialectic to prove theological points. Where Augustine had relied mainly on analogies, Anselm relied on proofs. No other theologian before him had relied so heavily on reason. Anselm kept reason within the bounds of tradition by giving faith primacy; at the same time, however, he gave it far reaching power to obtain understanding. Theologians in the twelfth century were to make much of his example.

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64 Augustine, Catholic and Manichean Ways of Life, 2.11.24.

65 Anselm suggested that the Incarnation had the effect of offering God ransom for our sins and thus, restoring the lost honor of God. The traditional view argued that the Devil had gained rights over man, which Christ supereceded when he died.
ABAILARD THE LOGICIAN: LOGICAL NOMINALISM
AND THE PROBLEM OF UNIVERSALS

The life of Peter Abailard stands in complete contrast to that of Anselm. Anselm was, for all his originality, a product of the monastic life. He bitterly opposed the heresy of Roscelin, whose acceptance of nominalism forced him into tritheism. As Archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm contributed much to the papal reform movement. His works, although highly original in their methodology, were never regarded as controversial, since in content, they never departed from orthodoxy. While Anselm fought heresy, Abailard was condemned twice for promoting heretical doctrines. His Historia Calamitatum portrays him as a man whose egocentrism knew no limits, and who, in his relationship with Heloise, gravitated far into the secular realm. Although Abailard’s career certainly took a different course from that of Anselm, his theological positions were similar in many ways to those of Anselm. He too, sought to apply logic to theology, yet his belief in the power of human reason pushed Anselm’s framework to its logical conclusions. In so doing, he reinterpreted the mottos fides quarens intellectum and credo ut intelligam.
His logical theories extended the scope of human reason and were crucial for the development of his theology.

Abailard first acquired a reputation as an outstanding logician when he defeated the realism of his master William of Champeaux. One of the central problems in medieval philosophy was the meaning of universal terms when applied to individual objects of reality. Universal terms, in contrast to particular terms, can be applied to several different things, as for example, the word "man" can be predicated of Socrates and Plato, and the word "animal" can be predicated of Socrates and my mule Sara. Almost all judgments involve the use of universals, as they categorize a particular entity in relation to other similar objects. For example, as I am walking I notice trees and also several varieties of flowers along the way. I decide that all the trees are oak trees. The trees are each entirely different in appearance. Each oak tree is unique and physically distinct from the other trees. Each tree is composed of different bark than the other trees; one tree has no leaves, one has purple leaves, and another has brown leaves. Each tree is, then, distinct from the others, yet to classify it as an oak tree is to emphasize its similarity to other oak trees. To further complicate the example, the flowers are all of a different variety, some are roses, others are gladiolas, and the rest are petunias. All these varieties have a different physical appearance, yet I judge that they are all flowers. All of the flowers are entirely
different from the trees, yet I judge that both the trees and the flowers are all plants. Since the trees and the flowers can be distinguished from each other, and each plant can as well be distinguished from every other plant, what is the nature of their commonality? That is, what is it about them which accounts for the fact that they are all plants? Is there something actually in each tree which is exactly like something in the other trees and flowers? On such a view, common terms are applied to different individual entities because there is actually something in each of them which is exactly alike. This explanation of the use of universals is known as Realism, according to which each plant possesses a nature exactly like that of other plants, not merely in that it has certain common characteristics, but that the nature of the oak tree in my front yard is numerically and essentially the same as the oak trees and flowers in my back yard. Several trees are called oak trees because the same nature exists in all of them; several trees and flowers are called plants for the same reason. This view, however, makes it difficult to account for the diversity of the trees and flowers. If their nature is numerically the same, why do we consider them to be numerically distinct? In response to this problem, some philosophers argue that universal terms do not refer to anything actually existing in the plants, and that such terms are mere words. This theory, known as nominalism, is equally problematic, as it cannot account for the similarity
between the tree in my front yard and the one in my back yard.

Medieval philosophers devoted a great deal of attention to analyzing this problem, and Abailard's analysis of universals proved to be the foundation of all his later theological and ethical works. Early in his career, Abailard studied with Roscelin of Compiegne (1050-1120), whose claim that universals were mere "flatus vocis" resulted in his condemnation for heresy in 1092. Roscelin's writings have been lost, but according to Anselm of Canterbury, he argued that universal terms were nothing more than mere words, which led Anselm to remark that such dialecticians could not free themselves from images and contemplate abstract objects.¹ This remark suggests that Anselm understood Roscelin's view as denying that universal terms signified reality, either in the form of extra mental objects or as concepts in the mind. John of Salisbury described Roscelin as "maintain[ing] that universals are word sounds," having reality only in the physical act of expressing them, which adds support to this interpretation.² The influence of Roscelin's nominalism on Abailard's thought was enormous, and led to the first major dispute of his career. Although the exact chronology


of Abailard’s early career is uncertain, sometime between 1092 and 1108 Abailard left Roscelin and went to Paris, where he became a pupil of William of Champeaux. He cannot have studied with Roscelin at Loches before the latter’s condemnation in 1092; William of Champeaux took his vows in 1108, shortly after having founded St. Victor, and according to Abailard’s *Historia Calamitatum*, this event occurred prior to the latter’s return to Paris and subsequent renewal of studies with Champeaux.³ Irrespective of the exact chronology, Abailard’s acquaintance with William firmly established his reputation as a master of dialectic and prompted the formulation of his theory of universals.

William of Champeaux was one of the most celebrated logicians of the early twelfth century, and although only a few fragments of his *Sententiae* survive, he seems to have held a version of ultra-realism. According to the *Historia Calamitatum*, William

> maintained that in the common existence of universals, the whole species was essentially the same in each of its individuals, and among these, there was no essential difference, but only variety due to a multiplicity of accidents."
In his *Glosses on Porphyry*, Abailard argued that this view was nonsensical and led to absurdities. Although Porphyry had refused to comment on the nature of the relation of universal terms to individual entities in his *Isagoge*, Abailard’s treatise attempted to answer this question by refuting the position of William of Champeaux and proposing an alternative theory of universals based on their logical properties. Following Boethius, the beginning of the treatise set out three basic questions concerning universals: whether genera and species are things or simply concepts; if they exist independently of the intellect, whether they are corporeal or incorporeal; and whether they exist separately from sensibles or are actually in them. For Abailard, all three questions could be reduced to the question of whether universals, such as species and genera, apply to words alone, or to things as well. That is, "that which is predicated of many" may be a word, or it may be what is designated by the word.

Pursuing the latter possibility first, Abailard argued that no universal can be a thing, since no thing or collection of things is predicated of many individual entities. There are several ways of defining the universal when taken in the latter sense. First, one might argue that there is a substance which is essentially the same in

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different individuals to which the universal refers. This
substance is the material essence of the individuals, which
would then differ from one another only by the diverse forms
which they acquire. Without such forms, the objects would
be exactly the same. For example, one might make a statue
of a man out of a piece of wax, and later make the same
piece of wax into a cow. This example proves to be
inadequate, however, for proponents of such a theory argue
that it is one and the same piece of wax which at the same
time constitutes several different individuals.

This theory suffers from the fact that given the
premises, one and the same substance would admit contraries.
For example, there are rational as well as irrational
animals. Since on this assumption the substance "animal"
remains one and the same in both, the same substance would
possess contrary properties. This argument applies not only
to the genus and species, but also to individual substances.
Socrates and an ass are both animals; hence, their nature is
essentially the same. Whatever is in Socrates other than
his forms, is "animal", and whatever is in the ass other
than its forms, is also "animal". Socrates is rational,
while the ass is not. Socrates, however, stripped of his
rationality, is "animal"; and the ass stripped of his
irrationality, is "animal". Since the nature of animal is
one and the same in both, Socrates is the ass. Rationality
and irrationality, therefore, both subsist in Socrates.
Aristotle's *Categories* argued convincingly against such an
assumption, and consequently, Abailard rejected it. One can imagine William of Champeaux's reaction upon being confronted with these arguments; small wonder that many of Abailard's contemporaries were tempted to substitute his name for that of Socrates in the above argument.

The problem becomes more acute when one considers that on this view all the categories would reduce to one essence. Just as "man" and "lion" reduce to "animal", which further reduces to "substance", so "red" and "blue" reduce to color, which ultimately reduces to quality. Not only is it impossible to differentiate Plato and Socrates based on the category of substance, but it is now impossible to differentiate them based on any of the other categories, since whatever accidental forms they possess would be held in common. Socrates is dark skinned, while Plato is light skinned, but these characteristics reduce to saying that two things with essentially the same nature, that of "animal", have colored skin, a quality.

Further, if individuals are differentiated merely by their diverse forms and not their substance, it follows that substance is not prior to accidents. Without accidental forms, Socrates is the same thing as an ass. If so, Socrates cannot be Socrates without accidents, and as such, he cannot be the subject of accidental forms. If accidents are not in individual substances as in subjects, then surely they cannot be in universals as in subjects. The supposition that universals are things, therefore, is
nonsensical. One cannot understand the Aristotelian notion of accidents existing in a subject, nor can one understand the diversity of Socrates and an ass.

In response to such arguments, William of Champeaux modified his original thesis, arguing that the things to which universal terms were applied were "the same not in essence but through non-difference." In other words, individuals are differentiated by more than their diverse forms; their essences are also diverse. Although this move solves the arguments above, it fails to explain the similarity of Socrates to Plato.

In an effort to rescue the reality of universals, William argued that Plato and Socrates are similar in that their essences are indifferent. That is, their essences are not identical, but they do not differ in that both Socrates and Plato are men. Abailard found this position to be even more nonsensical than the first, and as a result, William's "lectures fell into such contempt that he was scarcely accepted on any other points of dialectic." There are several ways in which "indifference" can be understood. Since the essence in question is no longer numerically the same in each man, then the nature of the universal is again called into question. In such a case, what is the common thing being predicated of Plato and Socrates? It might be

6Ibid., 60.

7Ibid., 60.
argued that universals are the collection of the different things of which they are predicated. Abailard rejects this argument as well. Suppose this theory is taken to imply that the universal is predicated of different things in that each of its parts apply to a particular individual; that is, each man is a "man" because that part of the whole which represents his manhood is predicated of him. In such a case, the generality of universals would be destroyed. One does not predicate Plato, Anaximander, and Thales of Socrates when it is said that he is a man; yet if only Socrates is being predicated when we say Socrates is a man, how is it that the entire collection of men is being predicated by the universal?

Further, if any collection of individuals is called a universal, since there are several subsets of individual men, there would be several universal "men". Alternatively, all members of each genus and species might be combined to form a "generalissimum" substance, and the removal of one substance at a time would form subset species of the new genus. In such a case, it would be impossible to explain distinctions between the species, since they would share the same individuals or contain the same species of individuals. The difficulties of construing universals as composites of their parts can be illustrated in the following example. A chair consists of several parts, but one cannot say that each part of the chair is itself a chair. Universals are predicated to explain the commonality of several diverse
individuals; yet if the diverse individuals themselves make up the universal as parts in a whole, there is no one thing which all parts share in common. This model of predication is, therefore, unsatisfactory.

To counter these difficulties, it might be argued that each single individual of the composite can be predicated of many, since each part is similar to every other part of the universal whole by virtue of indifference. If this is the case, however, then the individuality of each part cannot be explained, since it agrees with many things and particular things must agree with only one thing. That is, there is no difference between Socrates in so far as he is Socrates and Socrates in so far as he is man. Both Socrates and man, then, "agree with others." Socrates in so far as he is Socrates does not agree with others, and since he is the same as man in so far as he is man, neither Socrates nor man appears to be universal. Socrates and man, then, are and are not universal terms. Further, if the commonality of Socrates and Plato is only explained by virtue of their indifference from one another, then it might equally be said that they do not differ from one another in that neither is stone. If "there is no greater agreement between them noted in man than in stone," what meaning does the universal now have?8 Moreover, on this view it cannot be correctly said that Socrates and Plato do not differ in being man, since

Socrates is said to be a discrete individual. "If he differs in himself from Plato, but is himself the thing which is man, certainly he differs from him also in the thing which is man." Universals, then, cannot be things, since all attempts to elucidate such a theory reduce to absurdity.

Universals, then, must be words. Even if a universal, such as the word "man" is a mere *vox*, it is still problematic to determine to what things the word applies. The word "man" and other universal terms do not name any particular thing, as they signify what is common to several diverse things. The word "man", therefore, does not name Socrates, nor Plato, nor any other man. From the sentence "A man sits in this house", it is impossible to deduce that "Socrates sits in this house." If so, then what is the relation of the word "man" to the subject "Socrates" in the sentences "Socrates is a man" and "a man sits in this house"? These difficulties can be solved by distinguishing what the universal names, which are individual things, from what the universal signifies, which is a concept. Universals are more than mere words, or *voces*, they are meaningful expressions, or *sermones*, since they are imposed on things due to a "common cause". Plato and Socrates are not united in any thing "man", but rather in the status of "being man". "Being man" is not a thing, just as "not to be

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in a subject" is not a thing.\textsuperscript{10} There is, then, no essence
which both Socrates and Plato possess.

This argument would seem to suggest that universals are
meaningless, but Abailard argued that although a universal
\textit{vox} does not name anything, nevertheless it signifies
something which exists in the understanding. Man not only
has the faculty of sensation, but also the faculty of
imagination, or the ability to retain images of things once
perceived, and the faculty of understanding, or the ability
to reflect on images received through sensation and
imagination. The senses rely on corporeal instruments, such
as the eyes, and perceive only "bodies or what are in
bodies." The senses cannot apprehend their object unless it
is present, as when "sight perceives the tower and its
visible qualities."\textsuperscript{11} The imagination retains an image of
what is perceived, and hence can transcend the senses in

\textsuperscript{10}This solution to the problem of universals seems
inadequate, for Abailard simply appears to find a convenient
linguistic expression which posits a reason for the
predication of universal terms, but nevertheless denies the
existence of any common entity in objects which accounts for
their commonality. Etienne Gilson argues that Abailard's
solution begs the question at hand:
To his own mind, "to be a man" was not nothing, and yet
it was not a thing, it was a \textit{state or condition}; let us
say that, rather than a being, it was a certain way of
being . . . Of course, we understand every word
Abailard uses . . . but if he really means to say that
there is a something, that is not a thing, and
nevertheless is a cause, I for my own part must confess
that I fell utterly unable to see his point.
Etienne Gilson, \textit{The Unity of Philosophical Experience} (New
York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 23.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 180.
that its object need not be present. One can imagine the tower one has previously seen after it has been destroyed by retaining an image of it. In contrast, the understanding neither relies on the senses, corporeal instruments, nor is limited to the perception of bodies and things in them. It operates through the images supplied by the imagination. It is, however, distinct from the imagination in that it considers the natures and properties of things. The imagination is necessary for the operation of the understanding, since it receives and retains images from the senses.  

Our understanding is, then, distinct from that of God, whose concepts are not "confused" and do not originate in sensation. While the "exterior sensuality of accidents prevents [man] from conceiving the natures of things purely," concepts are perfect in God, since all creation is modeled after these ideas in the Divine Mind, and hence, presupposes their existence.

Abailard has demonstrated that information received from the senses only concerns particular entities and hence, cannot supply any notion of a universal. Our knowledge, however, is not entirely dependent on sensation; man's understanding transcends images received from the senses, and can abstract universal concepts from particular things. The senses perceive by virtue of receiving the form of a

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\(^{12}\) Ibid., 180.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 182.
thing, while the understanding operates on a likeness or image of an object independently of its presence. The common status of "being man" generates a concept, which accounts for the meaningfulness of universal terms.

Abailard was one of the first philosophers to provide an explanation of how this process works. Whereas Porphyry avoided the question of universals altogether, and Boethius contented himself with explaining Aristotle's views on genera and species, Abailard argued that concepts of universals are formed by abstraction. For example, matter and form always subsist together, but the understanding has the ability to consider either the matter or the form alone. Abstraction is distinct from the formation of empty concepts which do not represent reality in any way, for although the process of abstraction represents reality in a different way than it subsists, nevertheless, it represents some mode of actual existence. When we hear the word "man", we do not "recall from the meaning of the noun all the natures or properties which are in the subject things.""\(^{14}\) We do not conceive of "man" in terms of the characteristics of every individual man, but by considering the "nature simply in itself not related to any one.""\(^{15}\) The understanding is, then,

spoken of as alone and naked and pure, that is, alone from the senses, because it does not perceive the thing

\(^{14}\)Ibid., 185.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., 185.
as sensual, and naked in regard to abstraction of all
and of any forms, and pure with respect to discreteness
because no thing, whether it be matter or form, is
designated in it; in this latter respect we call a
conception of this sort confused.¹⁶

Universal concepts, then, do represent reality, yet they do
not represent any entity held in common between all
particular things named by them. They represent reality in
a confused way in that they are not concepts of discrete
things, but of their natures as abstracted from particular
instances. They are not, then, merely empty concepts which
have no reference to reality. Universals are more than
merely voces, or sounds of utterances. They are sermones,
or words which have meaning in their logical context. They
"signify by nomination things [which are] truly
existent;"¹⁷ universals name the same things as singular
nouns do, in that the word "man" names or applies only to
individuals such as Socrates and Plato. As such, they do
not name any entity other than the individuals named by
singular nouns. As demonstrated above, however, they cannot
be explained merely by reference to the collection of things
which they name. Universals are general terms, and as such,
must differ from terms which apply only to particular
things. Abailard argued that universals "signify" concepts,
which are general in the sense that they are not discrete,

¹⁶Ibid., 185-6,
¹⁷Ibid., 186.
but are abstractions from particulars and representations of certain aspects of reality.

Returning to the three central questions of the treatise, Abailard argued that universals do, in fact, signify by nomination things which truly exist, and hence, they are not fictitious constructions which exist in the understanding alone. In a certain sense, however, they do exist in the understanding as "naked and pure" concepts. This approach also answers the second question, in that universals are corporeal since they name discrete entities which are corporeal, but they are incorporeal as they signify concepts in the understanding, which do not name things discretely. The third question is also resolved, since universals in a certain sense do subsist in sensibles as the common cause of their imposition is the common status of individuals; yet they do not subsist in sensible things in the same way in which they are conceived, which is non-discrete and indeterminate.

Abailard’s approach has the advantage of providing meaning to general terms even when there are no individuals named by the universal. For example, if all roses were destroyed, the universal sermo "rose" would still have meaning, since universals not only name things, but signify concepts in the understanding. Abailard’s answers to these three questions foreshadowed his later theological methodology. To each question, he answered "yes and no"; universals both exist in sensibles and do not, are corporeal
and are not, and so on. In theology as in logic, Abailard would continue to resolve problems in such a fashion, and would make an important contribution to the scholastic method of disputation.

Abailard's solution to the problem of universals betrayed the influence of Roscelin's nominalism. Like Roscelin, Abailard argued that universals do not represent essences existing in things which are numerically the same, and assigned ontological reality exclusively to individuals. There were, for Abailard, no Platonic essences which exist independently of either the mind or individual instances of them. According to Roscelin's nominalism, the reality of universals was limited to the sounds made when they were uttered. Universals, then, have no meaning; they are mere sounds and nothing more. On this point, Abailard departed from his teacher. He ardently wished to preserve the meaning of universals, since almost all discourse and logical judgments make use of universal terms. As well, Roscelin's nominalism led to unorthodox theories on the Trinity. In opposition to the orthodox view that the Trinity was essentially three separate persons united in one essence, Roscelin maintained that there were no common essences in things, and hence, the Trinity was more truly three separate persons than one essence. This conclusion was unacceptable for Abailard, and in his own theory of universals, he attempted to preserve the realist theory of
the signification of general terms while maintaining a Roscelinian theory of universal nomination.

There is nothing in individual things which they possess in common; nevertheless, if language is to have any meaning at all, universals must be meaningful. Universals are more than mere voces; they are sermones whose meaning is derived from their logical context. Since words, in particular universal words, derive their meaning from their use in propositions, that is, their logical context, the logician must know how words function in propositions. The Glosses on Porphyry discussed the use of universal words; in his later treatises, most notably the Dialectica, he studied combinations of words or propositions. Words can be combined in various ways, and Abailard extensively discussed the nature of the copula. Just as he argued that universal words do not name anything, so he argued that joining words together by means of the copula did not signify any actual relationship, but only a "state of affairs." The statement that the proposition makes is a "dictum", and for Abailard this was not a "thing", but only referred to a state of being.\textsuperscript{18} Propositions say something, but they do not name anything.\textsuperscript{19}


\textsuperscript{19}It follows, then, that the validity of inferences does not rest on a logical connection between the concepts which propositions signify, since one can have a concept of the major terms without having a concept of the minor term. Validity follows simply from connections between words.
The function of logic is to specify the inferences which can be legitimately made from combinations of words; unless one understands how words are joined together, there can be no legitimate criterion of truth. Any science, then, depends on logic for the discovery of truth, and hence, logic is an all important tool for any field of study. Logic is the science of discerning valid arguments from invalid ones, and therefore, logic is primarily concerned with language, as opposed to physics, which is concerned with things as they are in themselves. Nevertheless, it is not simply a word game, since the truth of propositions depends on whether the state of affairs which they express exists or not. Just as words are derived from experience, so too, propositions, as combinations of words, ultimately depend on reality for their truth or falsity. This is an important point often neglected by modern commentators. Etienne Gilson, for example, argues in The Unity of Philosophical Experience that Abailard modeled theological truths after grammatical structures. Although Abailard did emphasize the fact that logic was primarily concerned with words, Gilson neglects the fact that the truth or falsity of propositions, and hence, the meaning of words, was grounded in reality.

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Dialectica, III, 372.

20 Abailard, Dialectica, III, 286.

21 Ibid., III, 372.
Logic is, then, more than a mere tool; it is an integral part of philosophy. Following Boethius, he distinguished three species of philosophy: speculative, which is concerned with the nature of things, moral, which considers the honorableness of life, and rational, which "compounds the relation of arguments, which the greeks call logic." Logic is not merely an instrument of philosophy, as there is "nothing to prevent the same thing from being both an instrument and a part of a single thing," just as the hand is both an instrument and a part of the body. Logic may only deal with words, but words are imposed because of things and states of affairs; to perfectly understand words, one must understand the "common causes" of their use and their signification. For Abailard, words mediate between reality and the understanding. Reality is the cause of our use of words, which in turn, generate concepts in the understanding. Words become more than mere conventions on this view, since they signify generalities or particulars which exist in the understanding. The understanding represents reality through the mediation of language. Logic, therefore, presupposes reality for its validity, and as such, is an integral part of philosophy.

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23 Ibid., 170.
Abailard's approach was not entirely incompatible with Realism, as he argued that there is a common cause or status in Plato and Socrates which accounts for our application of the word "man" to both of them. The word, however, does not represent a thing apart from Plato and Socrates, but signifies our understanding of them. Abailard strengthened his account of abstraction by pointing out that this process is not peculiar to universals, since our ideas of individuals are also the result of abstraction. For example, when we think of Socrates as "this man", we are thinking of "the nature of man related to a certain subject."24 This is an important point, since both realists and nominalists accept the meaningfulness of particular terms. Abailard, however, demonstrated that abstraction is a fundamental process of our understanding not only of universal terms, but also of particular terms. If any terms are to be meaningful, we must accept the validity of abstraction.

Abailard, then, advocated a nominalistic account of things which exist, while proposing a modified realist view of our understanding of universal terms. His theory of the logical meaning of universal words was the foundation of all his later philosophical and theological views. Abstraction is a process of the understanding whereby it obtains general concepts which transcend the limits of the senses. It

24Ibid., 186.
relies solely on the understanding alone, and as such, again reflects the influence of Roscelin’s nominalism. Knowledge, for Abailard, did not result from the simple apprehension of essences which exist in particular things; it is the result of an active process of the individual mind.

His theory was a significant departure from the traditional medieval view of knowledge put forth by Augustine. Augustine argued that although we obtain knowledge from the senses, this sort of knowledge is on a very low level and is distinct from rational knowledge. Knowledge by sensation is reliable if we take it as it is. For example, when we see an oar in a glass of water it appears bent. Our knowledge is infallible as long as we recognize this as an appearance of the oar while it is in the water, but we are mistaken if we take our sensation of it in this case as reflecting its nature.

Rational knowledge, however, is not transitory and is held in common by many different people. Sensation is proper to the person experiencing it, and is not communicable. Rational knowledge, however, can be communicated. Ideas are transmitted through the use of language, but words are only signs of things. In De Magistro, Augustine explored the nature of communication using the analogy of teacher and pupil. The process of teaching demonstrates that words are often unreliable signs of ideas in our minds, since a speaker often fails in trying to communicate his message to an audience. For example, a
professor may be convinced that Epicurus' doctrine that the soul is mortal, and to further clarify Epicurus' position, he presents doctrines on the immortality of the soul. His students, hearing both sides, are convinced that Epicurus is wrong, despite the fact that their professor intended to convey the opposite opinion. The same words were in the minds of the students and the professor; hence, words do not always convey the same meaning to different people. In addition, we frequently misapprehend the sense of what a speaker is saying because we mistake one word for another. Words, then, do not always succeed in conveying ideas. Even when a student is convinced by a teacher, it is usually because he recognizes the truth of what the teacher says. If this is the case, however, how is it that the teacher has taught the student anything? Knowledge of the truth must already have been present.

If so, then how is it possible that teaching occurs? According to Plato, knowledge is the result of remembering Ideas which it contemplated before birth and subsequently forgot as a result of its union with the body. As a Christian, Augustine could not accept the notion that the soul preexisted before its union with the body, and hence, could not accept the doctrine of reminiscence. Nor could he accept the idea that the soul manufactures its own knowledge. Knowledge is of eternal truths, and since the soul is temporal, it can never produce eternal truths. It is evident that there is knowledge, in that there are
mathematical laws, for example, which several people know in the same way. For Augustine, this is due to the fact that we find Truth -- teachers do not teach Truth as much as students are taught by Truth. This very Truth is the only teacher, and Truth is nothing other than God.

When the interior truth makes known to [students] that true things have been said, they applaud, but without knowing that instead of applauding teachers they are applauding learners.\(^{25}\)

We learn only because we consult truth within us, and "He who is said to reside in the interior man is Christ, that is, the unchangeable excellence of God and His everlasting wisdom."\(^{26}\) God, then, is the only true teacher.

In other works, Augustine clarified how we are taught by God. Augustine was heavily influenced by Plotinus, who often used the analogy of light to explain God’s relationship to the soul, and as a result, he often spoke of God’s teaching as illumination. Just as corporeal objects need to be illuminated before we can perceive them, so too, the mind must be illuminated by God before it can grasp truth. God is "the Father of intelligible light, the Father of our awakening and illumination."\(^{27}\) God infuses us with the light of truth, and it is only because of this fact that

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\(^{26}\) Ibid., 390.

we are able to discern eternal truths and attain knowledge.

Different is the light itself by which the soul is illumined that it may see everything it apprehends with truth through the intellect . . . for the light of God Himself, and the soul a creature although made rational and intellectual in his image, and whenever it tries to look upon that light it struggles feebly and fails. Nevertheless from this light comes all that it apprehends by the intellect as well as it can . . . it sees above itself also the light with whose help it sees everything it sees in itself through the intellect.  

Although our knowledge is found within us, we do not create it; knowledge comes about as a result of Divine Illumination. By God’s grace, we can attain the understanding of truth. Such knowledge transcends sensory experience, and is utterly subject to the Inner Master.

Augustine’s theory of knowledge is completely at odds with Abailard’s theory of abstraction. For Augustine, rational knowledge not only transcends that of the senses, but is independent of it. Knowledge of truth comes through illumination by God. For Abailard, however, all knowledge begins with sensation; even the understanding relies on images supplied by the imagination. Abstraction is a process which can be accomplished by the unaided understanding, and which results in valid judgments. Augustine’s timeless truths such as beauty, become merely another instance of the Aristotelian category of quality,

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another instance of genera and species for Abailard which are known by abstraction. Although Abailard was willing to posit the existence of Divine Ideas, he did not admit that they were necessary for our knowledge. Words are names of real entities and signs of concepts, and there is no need of Divine Illumination for one man to communicate to another.

Abailard’s logical theories emphasize the power of the human mind to apprehend the structure of reality and to synthesize it under the categories. For Abailard, human reason had the integrity it lacked in Augustine. His logical theories were strikingly original for the time, and remain relevant even today. His distinction between signification and nomination is still employed, and he anticipated Ludwig Wittgenstein in arguing that words derive their meaning from their logical context. Wilfrid Sellars, one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century, follows Abailard’s view that universals such as "man" express nothing more than states of existence, or in Sellars’ words, instantiations of man. After Abailard, few indeed have dared to defend ultra-realism. His impact and originality cannot be denied in the field of logic if the endurance of his approach is a reliable criterion.

His theory of abstraction emphasized the role of the individual mind in obtaining knowledge and led him to justify the use of dialectic and logic in theology, which was of even greater significance in his own time. Augustine argued that words were not infallible signs of reality;
Abailard argued that they were the only path to knowledge. The mediating function of words between reality and the understanding was not only a vital part of Abailardian logic, but the assumption on which his entire theology rested.
CHAPTER 4

DIALECTIC AND THEOLOGY: GOD THE LOGICIAN
AND THE POWER OF HUMAN REASON

Logic is the science of discerning true arguments from false arguments, based on the study of meaning within propositions. Since logic is the means by which knowledge is organized, in the Glosses on Porphyry Abailard argued that logic is an integral part not only of philosophy but indeed of all disciplines. Abailard's theory of abstraction explained the meaning of universal terms based on our experience of individual entities. Words describe experience, and in turn generate concepts in the understanding.

This theory seems reasonable for explaining the meaning of experience, but what of those "truths" we hold which transcend experience? Christianity is based on revelation, as its truths do not appear to be accessible to human reason or experience. According to the book of Hebrews, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen."\(^1\) Likewise, Haimo, commenting on the epistle of Paul to the Romans, described faith as that "qua veracitur credimus id quod nequaquam videre valemus. Sin autem quod

\(^1\)Hebrews 11:1.
Gregory the Great also emphasized the distinction between faith and knowledge:

*Profecto liquet quia fides illarum rerum argumentum est quae appare non possunt. Quae enim sunt apparentia, fidem non habent sed agnitionem; sed aliud vidit, aliud credidit. Hoc veraciter dicitur credi quod valet videri; nam credi iam non potest quad videri potest.*

Christians believe in the resurrection of Christ and in his return to earth, and that God is three persons united in one essence. We do not experience the truth of these articles of faith, and hence, we must accept them on faith. In the eyes of the early church fathers, it is this very fact which accounts for the meritorious character of faith. "Faith which is proved by reason has no merit;" indeed, for many of the early fathers, it is no longer faith at all, but knowledge.

With the work of St. Anselm, these views began to change. Anselm argued that one must believe before one can understand the truths of faith; yet faith without understanding was empty. Anselm pioneered the use of logic in theology, and paved the way for Abailard's dialectical

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4Gregory the Great, *Homilia in evangelio*, in PL 76, 1197C.
version of faith seeking understanding. Abailard’s point of departure was Anselm’s motto "credo ut intelligam." Like Anselm, he argued that revelation transcends reason:

God can only come to earthly minds as his revelation is made plain . . . no one knows things of God, but the Spirit of God . . . and unless God instructs the mind from within, he who teaches simply beats the air. 5

Unaided reason can never achieve complete knowledge of God, since He far exceeds what can come under human discussion or the powers of human intelligence . . . whatever, therefore, I advance in this highest of philosophies will be a shadow, and not the truth itself, a similitude and not the thing itself. 6

Just as St. Anselm argued that God is a being "greater than can be conceived," so Abailard argued that many truths of the faith remain ineffable.

Like Gregory the Great, Abailard defined faith in terms of things which are not seen: "fides est quippe existimatio rerum non apparentium, hoc est sensibus corporis non subjacentium." 7 Bernard of Clairvaux strongly denounced this definition of faith, thinking that Abailard meant to reduce faith to mere opinion. 8 Abailard, however, meant to

6Ibid., 68-9.
contrast *existimatio* with *cognitio*, not to deny the truth of faith. Belief is distinct from comprehension, since "aliud est intelligere seu credere, aliud cognoscere seu manifestare."9 *Existimatio* and *intelleqere* refer to knowledge of things which are not experienced but understood, while *cognoscere* is knowledge obtained through experience and comprehended. For this reason, he argued that we cannot *comprehend* God by means of ordinary language, since words as we ordinarily use them are not directly applicable to God. His logical treatises developed a theory of nomination based on experience; God, however, transcends experience, and therefore, the words which are derived from experience do not apply to him in the same way as they apply to objects of experience. In the *Theologia Summi Boni* and later in the *Theologia Christiana*, he anticipated Aquinas and argued that language is applied to God analogously; when we say that God is good or is three persons in one, we cannot understand these words in their ordinary senses, but must magnify his attribute of goodness and use similes to understand his triune nature.

That which is far removed from all creatures must be described in a manner far otherwise than human definition. That unique majesty cannot be brought within common and popular forms of language . . . Speech in time designates what began with the world . . . Men use words to describe created things that they understand, and to make their own intelligence clear through them . . . [man] cannot adequately describe in terms God and ineffable goodness. Everything, then,

9Abailard, Ibid., II.iii. 1051D.
Abailard, then, distinguished the unique nature of faith and of our understanding of God from ordinary knowledge, yet his connection of faith to *intelligere* suggested that it was an intellectual process. Though one can never have scientific knowledge (*cognoscere*) of God, nevertheless, faith is an act of the understanding. Faith concerns those things of which we have no experience, and as the understanding is the only faculty capable of transcending experience, faith is a function of the understanding. Since dialectic is the science by which the understanding operates, it is not surprising that Abailard applied dialectic to the act of faith.

Abailard’s definition of faith went well beyond that of Anselm, who never distinguished faith from other acts of belief. For Abailard, faith was clearly distinct from mere belief based on ordinary sensory experience, yet it was also distinct from scientific knowledge. His definition of faith built on his earlier logical treatises, where he had already established the understanding as the faculty by which we obtain knowledge which cannot be derived directly from experience. The logical theories provided a firm foundation for his definition of faith, as well as a ready argument for the validity of the dialectic method in theology. Anselm justified the use of reason by arguing that man most

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resembled God in the use of his reason; Abailard gave logical reasons for the use of dialectic in theology, based on the nature of the human mind. In his view, it would have been illogical to reject the use of dialectic and logic in theology. Here as in other areas, Abailard's logic worked hand in hand with his theology.

Abailard's notion of faith is extremely important in understanding his works, for it led Bernard of Clairvaux and others to argue that he was "a scrutinizer of majesty and a propagator of heresies." Bernard argued that Abailard attempted to subject the mysteries of the faith to rational analysis, thus leading him into heresy, but this charge was the result of an incomplete understanding of Abailard's theological program. Abailard in fact did argue that faith was an act of the understanding and, hence, different from mere belief, yet did so not only as a result of his logical theories, but in order to adequately explain the saving grace of faith. Abailard was one of the first theologians to develop a sophisticated psychological theory of faith; his aim was not to subjugate faith to logic, but to provide a deeper understanding of the individual Christian experience. Many of his contemporaries and most modern commentators fail to notice that Abailard's entire theology was based on God, the "Summum Bonum", whose perfect love

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draws us to him by the act of faith. Abailard's definition of faith as an intellectual process enabled him to explain the bond of love between man and God, and to develop a theology which for the first time, emphasized the inner nature of man. His rational approach to faith was not simply the result of a logician gone mad -- it was the result of a deeply felt commitment to God, and a belief that only through understanding is faith made complete.

In order to understand the role of dialectic in strengthening faith, we must discuss Abailard's defense of its use in theology. Faith is an act of the understanding which is nevertheless distinct from true comprehension of God. Having established that God is beyond our comprehension, and that our language is limited in its applicability to God, Abailard nevertheless argued that logic is applicable to theology. It is through our reason that we most closely resemble God, and thus,

\[\text{cum per insigne rationis imaginis Dei specialiter homo comparetur, in nihil alid homo pronius eam figere debuerat, quam in ipsum, cujus imaginem, hoc est expressionem similitudinem, per hanc obtinebat, et in nullam fortasse rem percipiendam pronior esse credenda est, quam in eam cujus ipsa amplius adepta sit similitudinem.}\]

Reason, which is governed by logic, is the image of God, who must therefore Himself be immanently logical. God's logical

\[^{12}\text{"Man ought to direct his reason to nothing more readily than to God in whose express image he was made . . . And he must further believe that reason is fitted to investigate perhaps nothing more suitably than him of whom it has received a likeness." Abailard, Introductio ad Theologiam, III.i. 1086C.}\]
nature is further demonstrated by examining the structure of
the world. Abailard argued that the ordered structure of
the world presupposes the existence of God. Although God as
He is in Himself transcends our senses, and, therefore, our
reason, He exhibits His nature in His works.

Abailard never developed sophisticated metaphysical
proofs of God's existence, choosing to argue instead that an
inspection of nature made his existence evident. He
frequently cited Romans I:20, according to which "the
invisible things of him from creation are clearly seen,
being understood from the things that are made." Abailard
interpreted this verse to mean that

Facile etiam erat, ut omnium optimus conditor atque
dispensator Deus, per ea quae tam mirabiliter et faciat
et ordinat, ex ipsis suis quantus sit operibus
indicaret, quia et per qualitatem operum quae videntur,
absentis artificis industriam dijudicamus.  

We observe that the world is well ordered, and since things
are ordered better when the "supervision is entrusted to one
rather than to many . . . reason rather than chance as the
source of creation is suggested by every one's conscience."
The world as we know it, then, reflects the nature of God.
It would be ludicrous to suppose that an illogical being
would create a logical world, since created things must bear
some likeness to their creator. God, then, is the most

13"God, the excellent creator and disposer of all,
proclaims his nature by creation, through those things
which he makes and ordains, for we judge the activity
of an artist by the effects that we see." Ibid., III. i.
1086D.
logical being of all. Abailard further argued that God's actions are the result of logical necessity. "In our judgement we consider that a reasonable cause for doing something good should be followed by action." If this is the case with men, it is surely all the more true in the case of God, since He is perfect Goodness. "God cannot be put off by the labor imposed by work. Hence, if He will and is able to do, He performs." If He did less good than He was able to do, then He would not be perfectly good. Therefore, God does everything that He is able to do, and He cannot stop what He does, as He would by this fact show that He is not perfectly good. God is, then, "influenced . . . by this personal and ineffable goodness of His own to will what of necessity He wills; and what He does, He does of this same necessity." Abailard, Christian Theology, 97.

God behaves in a logical manner, and human reason, which is the image of God, is, therefore, able to understand certain truths of revelation. Our knowledge begins with experience; "the evidence of the senses is necessary to lead us to things intelligible by reason." If God is present to our experience, albeit in a veiled way through His effects, then our understanding, which operates on experience, has limited access to theological truth.

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14 Abailard, Christian Theology, 97.
15 Ibid., 91.
These arguments led Abailard to conclude that reason was not misapplied to theology. Logic and dialectic are rightly employed in theology. The word "logic" is derived from "Logos", or the name of Christ. Since "we call ourselves Christians from the name of Christ, the true wisdom, ... we can also be called philosophers if we truly love Christ." Since the meaning of the word derives from the name of Christ, logic is valid as a science; it is especially valid for Christians to use since a true Christian is also a true philosopher. For Abailard, dialectic was not an art in conflict with revelation. God and the world order were rational, and since dialectic was the primary tool of reason, its use in theology was justified.

On one level, it was useful simply to clarify Christian doctrine, so as to defend the church against heresies. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, heresy was omnipresent. Peter de Bruys attacked worship of images, arguing against the veneration of the cross, and the real presence in the sacrament of eucharist. Tanchelm of Antwerp argued that the sacraments were no better than pollutions if administered by unworthy hands; he considered himself to possess the Holy Spirit in the same degree as Christ. Worse yet, the church was also plagued by heresies which resulted from the use of dialectic in theology. Roscelin had been condemned for tritheism in 1092 as a result of his application of nominalism to theology. Earlier, Berengar of Tours had
insisted that dialectic was the "art of arts," and had gone on to argue that transubstantiation was nonsensical.

This controversy, along with the heresies of Roscelin, Tanchelm, and Peter de Bruys, prompted many theologians to reevaluate the use of dialectic within the faith, to use it for the refutation of heresy and to demonstrate the reasonableness of truths of revelation. Abailard argued that heretics "do not use art, they abuse it. For I utter no condemnation of the science of dialectic or any liberal art, but of the falsity of sophistry."\textsuperscript{16} Berengar and Roscelin misapplied dialectic; dialectic should not, on this account, be rejected as a valid theological tool. Insisting that "it is right to learn from your enemy," Abailard argued that

\textit{non enim haereticorum, vel quorumlibet infidelium infestationes refellere sufficimus, nisi disputationes eorum dissolvere possimus, et eorum sophismata veris refellere rationibus, ut cedat falsitas veritati.}\textsuperscript{17}

Following Tertullian, many churchmen argued against the use of dialectic. In the prologue to Tractatus IV of the \textit{Dialectica}, Abailard responded to this charge:

\textit{At vero mirabile est cur non michi liceat tractare quod eis permissum sit legere aut quid tractare sit malum quod legere sit concessum.}

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 67.

\textsuperscript{17}"We are not able to refute any disturbance of the heretics or unbelievers unless we can solve their disquisitions and refute their sophisms by true reason in order that falsehood might give way to truth." Abailard, \textit{Epistola XIII}, in \textit{Patrologia cursus completus}, series Graeca et Latina, sive bibliotheca universalis, vol. 178, ed. Jacques Paul Migne (Paris: Migne, 1844-1882), 354D.
Dialectic cannot destroy faith, for "veritas autem veritati non est adversa." Just as falsehood is not contrary to falsehood, and evil not contrary to evil, so good cannot be contrary to good. All knowledge is good, since we cannot be warned against evil unless we first know what evil is. To know what evil is is not the same as to do evil, otherwise God Himself could have no knowledge of evil. All knowledge is good, and it is dialectic which is especially suited to instruct us, as it is that to which "quidem omnis veritatis seu falsitatis discretio ita subiecta est." Logic and dialectic are of great value for apologetics; in the heretical atmosphere of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Abailard saw it as absolutely necessary.

Dialectic, then, is useful as a tool against heretics and its use in theological disputes can be justified. Even if we grant that reason operates on the evidence of experience and that God displays his nature in his works, how can we be sure that reason functions properly in seeking to understand God, since human language does not adequately reflect Him? This problem is already implicit in Abailard’s logical treatises, where he discussed the nature of the mind’s understanding of universals and propositions. Although abstraction represents actual modes of existing, it nevertheless represents reality in a way other than it truly is. Since the meaning of propositions is dependent on their logical context, which in turn relies on abstraction, it would seem that some further validation of the reasoning
process is necessary in order to avoid Tertullian’s conclusion that logic ought to be consigned to the flames.

Abailard pointed to a number of examples in history which demonstrate that the understanding can in fact attain knowledge of God through experience. In the *Theologia Christiana* he argued that the philosophical and theological works of the Greeks and Hebrews contained a rudimentary knowledge of the Trinity. "The Incarnate Wisdom, who is Christ, described the perfection of the Highest Good, which is God, by three names." Abailard, 45. He is called the Father by virtue of his power, the Son by virtue of his Wisdom, and the Holy Spirit by virtue of his goodness. "This distinction of the persons in the divine Trinity did not begin with Christ, but was handed on more clearly and carefully by him." Abailard, 92. For Abailard, the prophets of the Jews and the philosophers of the Gentiles were divinely inspired, and as a consequence revealed aspects of the Trinity in their writings. Moses revealed the Trinity through the structure of language in *Genesis* 1:1. The verse reads: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The Hebrew word for God is a plural noun which is used with a singular verb; for Abailard, the grammatical structure of this passage emphasized the multiplicity of

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19 Ibid., 92.

20 Ibid., 46.
persons which are united in one essence. In Genesis 1:2, we are told that "the spirit of God moved on the waters," which refers to the eternity of the Holy Spirit. When God said "let it be so," the Word or Son was connected to the Father. After creation was completed, God "saw that it was good," pointing out that creation was good, and the Holy spirit or Goodness loved it for that reason.\textsuperscript{21}

The psalms also refer to the Trinity, and in particular reveal an awareness of the Son as the Word. According to Psalm 33, "by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth;" the Lord "spoke and it was done." Abailard argued that these phrases indicate a prechristian awareness of the nature of God's Wisdom. "The Word is called Wisdom by a transference of effect to cause, since a person's intelligence and skill are shown by his words."\textsuperscript{22} Words represent the contents of the mind and "a certain speaking forth of intelligence."\textsuperscript{23} Psalm 136:5 distinguishes the Word of God from audible and transitory words, as the Lord "hath made the heavens in understanding," which implies "creation through a perpetual foreseeing intelligence." Augustine referred to the Word as the Son to indicate that it had its being from him. The Word is God's "intellectual and perpetual speaking and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}, 47.
\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}, 48.
\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}, 49.
\end{flushright}
through him in this way the operation and order of the world exists providentially." The Son as the eternal wisdom of God as was realized even in Ecclesiastes:

> All Wisdom is from the Lord God, and was ever with Him from the beginning. Who has found out the Wisdom that precedes all things? Wisdom was created before all things and the understanding of wisdom from the first. The fount of Wisdom is the word of God.\(^{24}\)

The Old Testament prophets were also cognizant of the eternity of the Son, while realizing that the Incarnation occurred in time.

> Thou Bethlehem Ephrata, art small among the cities of Judah; but out of thee shall come a governor in Israel. His ways are from the beginning, from eternity.\(^{25}\)

The Trinity, then, was revealed in the writings of the prophets.

Not only did the Hebrew prophets have knowledge of the Trinity, but through the use of reason the Gentile philosophers also understood God’s triune nature. Abailard argued that the Greeks led exemplary lives, and displayed a moral temperance akin to that of Christians; even though they had lived before the Incarnation, he was unwilling, therefore, to concede that they were not saved.

> We should, in fact, expect that God would mark them out for some gift of Grace since their sober life would be more acceptable to Him than that which is immersed in pleasure and abandoned to vices.\(^{26}\)

\(^{24}\)Ibid., 49.  
\(^{25}\)Ibid., 50.  
\(^{26}\)Ibid., 51.
An examination of the lives and writings of the Greeks proves that many of them led exemplary lives.

In their care for the state and its citizens we shall find that, in life and doctrine, they give evidence of an evangelical perfection and come little or nothing short of the Christian religion.

Their states were "associations of families with specified rulers of the state" bound together by charity, a Christian virtue expressed by Matthew when he admonished Christians to "love thy neighbor as thyself." In Greek states, all possessions were held in common so that they might truly serve the common good of the state. Their rulers also abided by Matthew’s command, being servants of the people rather than their masters. Many of their philosophers led very austere lives,

renounced their possessions and lived lives of restrictions and labor, preparing their needs by their hands. They suggest to us that they had the perfection of anchorites in abstinence and manual work.

The philosophers "set themselves to a life of continence," and avoided the distractions which marriage might bring. Socrates advocated sharing wives communally, not as a result of incontinence, but in order to avoid "another union adulterously to that with philosophy herself." Some Greeks who were not philosophers also displayed such virtues. Jerome recorded the story of the daughter of Demetio, leader of the Areopagites, who was a virgin. Upon hearing of the death of her betrothed, she killed herself, arguing that although she was still a virgin, she had already been married in intention. To marry would have been to commit adultery. The
Greeks, then, displayed virtue and moral continence; "the kind of life which monks now claim to live was defined by the philosophers as suitable for all society."\(^{27}\)

Given these facts, it was difficult for Abailard to believe that the Greeks were not saved, and to support this position, he argued that many of their writings refer to the Trinity. Plato spoke of mind (mens), which [was] call[ed] Nous (vous), as born of God and being coeternal with God. That is, [he] refers to the Son, Whom we call the Wisdom of God eternally generated from God, the Father.

Plato also posited a soul of the world "as a third person coming from God and mind," which Abailard likened to the Holy Spirit. According to Plato, the soul of the world was either begotten or had its existence from God before the foundation of the world, and "we can detect in these words the perpetual procession of the Holy Spirit from God the Father." Plato used the word "begotten" just as Christians do, arguing that God did not give beginning to the world soul in the order of time. The world soul was also said to be undivided substance, but "in so far as it is the inseparable companion of corporeal entities, it is thought of as splitting itself up into these corporeal things." Similarly, the Holy Spirit itself is undivided, but manifests itself in a multitude of things. We may compare the concord and unity of the whole Church referred to by St. Paul which he calls the one body.

\(^{27}\)Ibid., 62-5.
of Christ, joined together by bonds of faith and love
made up by diverse members.

Plato, "the greatest of philosophers, would appear as the
greatest of fools if we took literally his statement that
the world is an animal (being) with a soul." Both the
prophets and the philosophers spoke figuratively,

but these apparent fables, which seem superficially to
lack a purpose, may be seen to abound in mysterious
truth and to contain the construction of essential
doctrine . . . it is obvious that [they] use a
comparison to cover more abstract truth. 28

The ancient philosophers were not alone in their grasp
of the essential principles of the Trinity. Virgil
describes the coming of a child "to be sent from heaven to
earth," who would take away the sins of the world and
miraculously bring a new age to the world." Even the
Brahmins held trinitarian beliefs, arguing that "the Word is
God and created this world, ruling and cherishing everything
in it. We venerate this Word, love it and from it draw our
breath." 29 Before the New Testament was recorded, then,
philosophers who lived an exemplary life were able through
the use of reason to attain knowledge of the Trinity. "By
no argument, then, can we be prevented from assigning
salvation to Gentiles who lived before the Savior's
coming." 30

28 Ibid., 52-4.
29 Ibid., 56.
30 Ibid., 60.
These arguments were highly controversial. At the council of Sens, Abailard was denounced, among other things, for comparing Plato's world soul to the Holy Spirit. Bernard of Clairvaux vigorously denounced these attempts to find an understanding of revelation in the prechristian era as "stultology", and argued that "while [Abailard] exhausts his strength to make Plato a Christian, he proves himself a heathen." Bernard, like, Tertullian, saw no value in the study of the ancient philosophers. Worldly philosophy distracted one from the pursuit of God. The goal of the Cistercian monk was to abstain from earthly pleasure, and hence, secular learning was unnecessary. In his third Sermon for the Feast of Pentecost, Bernard argued that philosophers were "slaves of curiosity and pride;" by following the school of the Holy Ghost, the supreme teacher, one could truly say "I have understood more than all my teachers." One could not make such a boast as a result of studying Plato and Aristotle, but only because one has "sought thy commandments, O Lord!" In like manner, Peter Damian advised monks to avoid the "feigned schools of grammarians" which made men too earthly; they ought instead to concentrate on spiritual wisdom, which made them true sons of the church. Honorius of Autun also wondered how the

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31 Bernard of Clairvaux, Epistola 190, 576.

soul profits "by the strife of Hector, or the elegies of Ovid, who, with others like them, are now gnashing their teeth in the prison of the infernal Babylon, under the cruel tyranny of Pluto." For these men, pagan literature seemed to have little relevance to the pursuit of Christian virtues.

Bernard and Peter Damian represent extreme views on the study of the classics. In many ways, Abailard's arguments were part of a general revival of interest in the works of classical antiquity throughout the twelfth century. On the lowest level, there was a renewed interest in the study of the Latin language. The grammar books of Priscian were widely used, and humanists such as John of Salisbury argued vigorously for the cultivation of eloquence. John of Salisbury was amazed that anyone would neglect the study of eloquence, as "speechless wisdom may sometimes increase one's personal satisfaction, but it rarely and only slightly contributes to the welfare of human society."33 "Nothing, or at least hardly anything is to be preferred to this [precious] gift of nature," and to this end, he cited numerous precepts from Latin authors known for their eloquent speech.34 Salisbury's historical works also relied heavily on works such as Suetonius' Twelve Caesars and Orosius' History. From the historians of antiquity, he


34John of Salisbury, 27.
gleaned example after example of benevolent rulers, as well as of the Neros who ought to be avoided. In some cases, he even manufactured false passages from the ancient authors to illustrate his point.\textsuperscript{35}

Alan of Lille also quoted the classics prolifically. In \textit{The Art of Preaching}, he modeled the sermon after the classical oration, citing oratorical techniques of Seneca, Lucretius, Horace, and Cicero. Over and above the use of classical structural models, he referred to the moral teachings of Aristotle and Socrates to enable the preacher to provide examples of the Christian virtue of patience for his listeners.

His \textit{Anticlaudianus} was a Platonic account of the formation of the New Man, who is guided by Phronesis, or Prudence or Wisdom. The seven liberal arts come to her aid, designing the vehicle, drawn by the five senses, which carries Prudence and Reason to heaven. Reason cannot go past the stars, but Theologia appears to serve as a guide for Prudence. Prudence is blinded by the wonderful sights she sees, and passes out, only to be revived by Faith, who gives her a mirror in which she can see a reflection of heaven's splendor. Faith takes Prudence to God, where he gives her a new soul for fallen man. The \textit{Anticlaudianus} is

\textsuperscript{35}Janet Martin, "John of Salisbury as a Classical Scholar," in \textit{The World of John of Salisbury}, ed. Michael Wilks (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 194. Martin argues that the \textit{Institutio Traiani} which Salisbury attributed to Plutarch in books 5 and 6 of the \textit{Policraticus} was very likely a fabrication.
an allegorical argument for the value of an integrated
curriculum as a means to spiritual regeneration — theology,
faith, and reason operate in conjunction with prudence and
the five senses. Alan of Lille highly valued the seven
liberal arts, and the place of classical studies in this
context. Alan's description of the seven arts reads like a
veritable lexicon of the classical world and provides an
indication of his zeal for the culture of the ancient world:

This band paints like Zeus, shapes like Milo, speaks
like Fabius, perorates like Tullius, gives opinions
like the Samian, philosophizes like Plato, catechizes
like Hermes, makes distinctions like Socrates, draws
conclusions like Zeno, perseveres like Brisso, studies
like Critias, sees like Argus, corrects time
discrepancies like Caesar, investigates the stars like
Atlas, balances like Zethus, deals with numbers like
Crissipus, measures like another Euclid, sings like
Phoebus, plays the harp like Orpheus, draws circles
like Perdix, constructs citadels like Daedalus, forges
like Cyclops, fashions arms like Lemnian, teaches like
Seneca, flatters like Appius, insists like Cato,
inflames like Curio, conceals like a second Perseus,
pretends like Crassus, disguises like a second Julius,
condenses like Soldius, explains like Nasso, blooms
like Statius, composes like Maro, understands,
explains, imitates, assumes, completes the capacities
of Mercury, the rage of our Demosthenes, the flow of
Ovid, the flash of Lucan, the depth of Virgil, the
sting of Satire, the refuge of Solon.  

So much for Petrarch and the Italian humanists.

Hugh of St. Victor also encouraged the study of the
liberal arts. Like Abailard, Hugh argued that philosophy
was the search for divinity in the form of Wisdom. "Of all
things to be sought, the first is that Wisdom in which the

36 Alan of Lille, Anticlaudianus (Toronto: Pontifical
Institute of Medieval Studies, 1973), 80-3.
form of the perfect good stands fixed."\textsuperscript{37} The soul, however, has been

stupified by bodily sensations . . . [and] has forgotten what it was . . . but we are restored through instruction, so that we may recognize our nature and learn not to seek outside ourselves what we can find within.\textsuperscript{38}

The restoration of the soul, and its path to the Divine Wisdom, began with the study of the liberal arts, which Hugh described as being invented by the ancients. As did Abailard, he particularly praised the study of logic, "for no man can fitly discuss things unless he has learned the nature of correct and true discourse."\textsuperscript{39} The trivium and quadrivium served to prepare one for the study of Scripture, since scripture can be interpreted historically, allegorically, and topographically. In order to begin such a study, one must understand the use of words. Hugh displayed his acquaintance with the works of the Greeks in the Didascalicon on numerous occasions, commenting, for example, on Platonic interpretations of the soul and the cosmology of the world. For Hugh of St. Victor, the study of the classics was valuable preparation for the study of theology.

Gratian's Concordance of Discordant Canons perhaps best sums up the issues surrounding the twelfth century revival


\textsuperscript{38}Ibid., 47.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 58.
of antiquity. The *Concordance* discussed the question of whether priests should be acquainted with profane literature, and cited authorities which encouraged the "spoiling of the Egyptians," and interpreted the three gifts of the Magi as the three parts of philosophy. Although Gratian did not decisively spell out the works that priests should study, he concluded that priests must not be ignorant. Abailard's interest in the Greeks, then, was not entirely atypical of his age.

Abailard's justification of the Greeks, however, went far beyond the views of other figures of the time. Even among those who defended the relevance of secular studies to theology, the argument was never made that pagans understood Christian doctrine, much less that they were saved. Anselm defended the use of logic in theology, yet he insisted that understanding begins after revelation is accepted as true. He never attempted to argue that pagans understood the Trinity, nor that they might have received the gift of salvation. The tools of the pagans were useful, but reason was only reliable within the framework of Christianity, and as such, their beliefs were to be rejected. Although John of Salisbury made prolific use of Latin literature and praised Aristotle as the greatest of logicians, nevertheless he conceded "both by reason and the authority of faith" that Aristotle erred on certain points.\(^4^0\) Despite the fact that

\(^{40}\) John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, 244.
Hugh of St. Victor was clearly familiar with the Platonic, Stoic, and Aristotelian schools of thought and valued many aspects of their scholarly achievements, nevertheless he argued that the writings of philosophers, like whitewashed walls of clay, boast an attractive surface all shining with eloquence; but if sometimes they hold forth to us a semblance of truth, nevertheless, by mixing falsehoods with it, they conceal the clay of error, as it were, under an over spread coat of color.41

Hugh attributed their errors to over emphasizing the natural world. The resurgence of interest in antiquity, then, did not lead many to claim along with Abailard that the pagans had been saved through the use of their reason.

Abailard's justification of reason here can be seen as an extension of Anselm's framework. Anselm had argued that man resembled God through the use of reason and that faith was essentially rational. If these two points hold, then one could easily argue that even the pagan mind employing reason could grasp truths of Christian revelation. After all, the Trinity is eternal; why should human reason, working properly, not be able to apprehend its truth? Abailard allowed for the fact that prechristians could not have known of the Incarnation before it occurred,42 and likely did not understand the full import of the Trinity.

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41 Hugh of St. Victor, Didascalicon, 102.

42 "id est de natura divinitatis modo revelatum est mundo per legem scriptam . . . quod Deo non serverant quem sine lege scripta, ut aiebant, cognoscere non valebant." Peter Abailard, Commentaria in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos, in Corpus Christianorum: continuatio medievalis vol. XI, ed. Eligius M. Buytaert (Turnholt: Brepols, 1969), 67.
Yet if God truly manifests Himself in nature, the philosophers of the ancient world must have understood the timeless truths of revelation.

Abailard strengthened Anselm's use of reason by providing an argument which demonstrated not only the inherent rationality of God and the world order, but the reliability of reason throughout history. Anselm had assumed that faith could never conflict with reason and proceeded to prove the major tenets of the faith. Abailard, however, laid the groundwork for the application of reason to theology. He improved on Anselm's notion of faith seeking understanding by demonstrating that understanding was, indeed, the proper faculty under which faith was subsumed.

Abailard's arguments have other extremely important implications, for they suggest that written law is unnecessary for salvation. If the philosophers and Hebrews could understand the Trinity without the benefit of the Gospels, then perhaps written law was inferior to reason. In fact, Abailard's concept of credal assent relied on such a notion; mere obedience to law is not sufficient for salvation. In the *Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian*, Abailard argued that the laws which Jews follow cannot be a guarantee of their salvation, since Noah and other patriarchs were clearly saved before the Lord made his covenant with the Jews:
It is certain that before the handing on of the law or the observance of legal sacraments most people were content with the natural law which consists in the love of God and neighbor.\textsuperscript{43} These purifications [in Jewish law] are more adapted to a certain respectability of this life than to the salvation of the soul.\textsuperscript{44}

Written law, then, is only a means to an end. Without the aid of scripture, the Gentiles had discovered God:

\textit{ostendens etiam sine scripto a gentibus per naturalem legem Deum antea notum fuisse, ipso eis de se ipso per rationem quam dederat, hac est legem naturalem, ac per visibilia sua opera notitiam conferente.}\textsuperscript{45}

One might, then, gain knowledge of God without the use of scripture. If this is so, is not reason, or natural law, a higher authority than written law? And if written law is no guarantee of salvation, is Christianity, in the form of the Gospels, merely another interpretation of natural law? In his first theological treatise, the \textit{Theologia \textsuperscript{Summi} Boni}, Abailard had already argued that words are inadequate to describe God. Are the words of the Gospel any different? \textit{Sic et Non} established that the scriptures and patristic writings often contradicted each other, and given these arguments, it is not surprising that Abailard justified the use of reason and was led to find revelations of the Trinity in the works of the pagans. Anselm never argued that

\textsuperscript{43}Peter Abailard, \textit{Dialogue of a Philosopher With a Jew and a Christian} (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1979), 36.

\textsuperscript{44}Abailard, 70.

\textsuperscript{45}Abailard, \textit{Commentaria in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos}, 67.
scripture was in any way inadequate; it was our task to seek to understand it, and any shortcomings were due to our lack of ability to penetrate the deeper mysteries of the faith.

The implications of Abailard's justification of reason in the *Theologia Christiana* are quite radical. His understanding of the natural law as "love thy neighbor as thyself," however, was based on his theology of the Trinity. It is precisely this sort of love and commitment to the faith which propels one toward God. His arguments here went hand in hand with his notion of true faith; if one really understands what God is, one progresses well beyond mere obedience to words. The apprehension of natural law leads to a deeper commitment to the written law. His justification of the Greeks and other prechristians, then, raised a number of important issues which would be more fully developed in later works. The coherence of his arguments on this point demonstrates that Abailard was not a dialectician who simply expounded confusing and contradictory arguments. He was a gifted theologian, who, from the first logical study until the last theological treatises, developed a consistent system which made an original contribution to theology.

Although Abailard's arguments were indeed radical, they cannot be fully understood outside of the context of his theology as a whole. Abailard was particularly concerned with the nature of the act of faith. His theological writings are concerned not only with defending the faith
against heresy, but with promoting a deeper understanding of the saving grace of faith. It is at this point that Abailard begins to diverge from commonly accepted theories. Other theologians, such as Anselm of Canterbury, had successfully applied logic to theology without generating much controversy. Had Abailard merely insisted on the use of dialectic as a means of refuting heresy, he might have escaped the condemnation of Sens. In attempting to strengthen our understanding of man’s relationship to God, he increasingly emphasized the understanding, while drifting away from the authoritative role of the church, which led Bernard of Clairvaux and William of Thierry to object to his account of credal belief. They failed to understand that his emphasis on faith as an act of the intellect was due to his belief that only a fully developed faith was sufficient for justification. Only by rationally probing the mysteries of faith could we hope to understand the perfect love of God, and return that love in the bond of faith. Abailard’s rationalism was not the end result of his theology; dialectic was only the means which brought our love for God to full fruition. Abailard’s use of dialectic redefined the nature and purpose of faith, and in so doing, led him to ethical theories which foreshadowed the Protestant Reformation.
CHAPTER 5

TO BELIEVE IS TO UNDERSTAND: DIALECTIC, FAITH,
AND DIVINE LOVE

Abailard's validation of the power of reason raises several issues concerning its role in his theology. His account of the Greeks, for example, implied that the written law was unnecessary for salvation, as many of them were saved solely on the basis of their apprehension of the natural law. If philosophers of the prechristian era could grasp truths of revelation without the authority of scripture, then is there a role for grace and the Incarnation in Abailard's theology? Since the Second Council of Orange in 529, the church had emphasized the fact that grace was needed not only for the original act of faith, but for every succeeding act as well.

Abailard's defense of dialectic suggests a very strong role for human reason along the path to salvation. By looking at the world around us, we can infer the existence of God, and moreover, we can know that God Himself is a logical being. Our own reason is the image of God, and hence, we are able to penetrate many truths of revelation. For Abailard, reason is an essential component of the initial act of faith. Nowhere in the account thus far have we seen any mention of grace, and for this reason, many of
Abailard's contemporaries misunderstood his use of dialectic. Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, accused Abailard of Pelagianism. For Abailard, however, dialectic enriched the meaning of the act of faith; the application of dialectic to faith distinguished those who merely recited creeds from those whose faith truly informed their hearts and worked in their lives. For Abailard as for Anselm, faith which does not seek understanding is dead. Abailard argued that faith explored by dialectic was a prerequisite for justification. Faith which justifies man with God is infused with charity, which loves God only for his own sake and which is not motivated solely out of fear of retribution. Grace is all important in this process, for it is grace which enables man to lift himself from sin and love God as he ought. For Abailard, the use of dialectic supplemented and fulfilled grace.

Abailard was, therefore, no Pelagian. The atonement occupies a prominent place in his theology, as it is due to the atonement that man is able to achieve charitable faith. Given the prominence of the atonement in Abailard's system, several problems arise. First, how can we reconcile Abailard's emphasis on dialectic with his account of the necessity of grace? What is the relationship between faith explored by dialectic and faith infused with charity? If the atonement is necessary for the development of charitable love, what need is there of dialectic? Most commentators treat the issue of reason and revelation as distinct from
Abailard’s theory of atonement, acknowledging the role of dialectic in strengthening faith, yet ignoring it in discussions of the atonement. Richard Weingart calls grace "the logic of divine love," yet fails to explain the connection between grace and dialectic on anything more than a superficial level. The result of analyses like Weingart’s is that Abailard appears on the one hand as a Pelagian who extolled the power of human reason, and on the other hand, as a quick witted dialectician who paid tribute to grace in order to appear orthodox, thus contradicting his defense of logic.

Both interpretations are mistaken, and it is possible to rescue Abailard from this dilemma. He had both a strong belief in the power of reason and a firm commitment to the necessity of grace. His concept of the act of faith made the use of dialectics necessary, and by examining his theology of the content of faith, one can arrive at a solution to the problem of grace. Abailard’s first theological treatises were written on the Trinity, which he conceived of as Power, Wisdom, and Love. Dialectic clarifies the essential union of these three persons in one person, and leads us to see that Wisdom is Love is Power. Man is the image of the Trinity, and in him wisdom can also become love. A close examination of Abailard’s concepts of faith, love, and grace reveals an intimate connection between these terms, and extricates Abailard from all charges of inconsistency and general lack of theological
commitment. His theology was perfectly coherent from start to finish, and, although he moved away from orthodox positions, he nevertheless managed to strengthen the notion of faith. Like the great Anselm, his theology was based on fides quarens intellectum. He went far beyond Anselm, however, in his interpretation of the meaning of belief. For Abailard, true belief involved understanding, and moreover, true understanding manifested itself in true love. His credere was intelligere. In man, just as in the Trinity, grace enabled wisdom and love to become one.

I.

The Abailardian act of faith

For Abailard, the object of faith was the Trinity and the commands of God as described in the Apostle's Creed and the creeds of the holy fathers:

Fides autem Catholica partim circa ipsam divinitam naturam, partim circa beneficia et quascunque Dei necessarias dispensationes vel ordinationes consistit, quae nobis diligenter apostolorum vel sanctorum Patrum symbolis expressa sunt.\(^1\)

On this level, faith is simply belief in the doctrines of the church and the Trinity. This notion of faith, however, was inadequate for Abailard. One cannot create a Christian out of a heathen by simply forcing him to recite the creeds.

True faith goes beyond simply saying "amen" at the end of the creeds, it even transcends simple obedience to the doctrines accepted within one's religion.

In the *Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian*, Abailard outlined problems with this account of faith. The Jew and the Christian allow the philosopher to speak first, a less than subtle hint that the philosopher's opinions represent the views which Abailard himself held and which he regarded to be true. The philosopher taunts both the Jew and the Christian, arguing that their children are brought up from infancy to accept the beliefs of their parents, thus "turning custom into nature." Just as a jar retains the scent of whatever is poured into it, so too "whatever children have learned they hold to obstinately as adults." As adults, members of these religions are encouraged to hold as sacred everything which they learn as children, since philosophical treatises often contradict their youthful views. Despite the fact that we progress in understanding in almost every other discipline, when it comes to matters of faith we hold fast. Thus it is that "before they are able to understand what is said they claim to believe it." Since both the educated and uneducated Jews and Christians believe in the same way, "the result of this is that no one is allowed to inquire into what should be believed among his own people or to doubt what everyone affirms, without fear of punishment." Only those who doubt their own strength avoid conflict, and "they take the
greatest glory in their apparent belief in what can neither be expressed in words nor conceived by the mind." Their defense of faith often results in sheer nonsense, and "they are not ashamed to declare that they believe what they admit they are unable to understand." Nevertheless, they assume that whoever differs from them is "estranged from God."

Having despaired of such foolishness, the philosopher expresses a desire for divine mercy to lead him "to the port of salvation," and declares himself intent in learning from his discussion with the Jew and Christian.²

There is little to learn from the Jew, however, since the Jew relies on observance of the Law; according to the philosopher, this cannot be a guarantee of salvation. In response to the philosopher’s first tirade, the Jew answers that if the law is from God, as his people believe, they should not be castigated for obeying it. Against the philosopher, he points out that "even if [the Jews] cannot convince you that [the law] was given by God, you, on the other hand, are unable to refute the position." As such, it would be sheer foolishness to forsake the commands of the law, as they are believed to have the authority of God and are based on the reliable testimony of the patriarchs. Supposing that the Law is not from God, to obey it is meritorious, since the Jew, as does the philosopher, has a

"common faith in the truth of the one God, and besides . . . exhibit[s] this love through works."³ These works, such as commanded by the law, are not harmful, and therefore "who would censure [the Jew] if [he works] more generously for the Lord, even when [he] is not bound by any precept?"⁴ Further, the Jews have suffered greatly due to their zeal for the law. They have been scattered among nations without an earthly king or prince, own neither vineyards nor landed estates, and are governed by princes who desire their deaths. In order to obey the law, they endure the pain of circumcision, avoid delicious foods, and suffer severe penalties for encroachments against the law. For the Jew, then, obedience to the law is a sufficient guarantee of God’s favor.⁵

The philosopher considers mere obedience to law irrelevant, since

there is certainly no school of religious thought which does not believe itself to be a friend of God and which does not perform those actions for his sake which it thinks please him.⁶

Further, solely in terms of the Jewish law itself, it can be shown that salvation is not assured by obedience. To begin with, many men were regarded as meritorious by God and shown special favor before the law was instituted. The Lord

³Ibid., 29-32.
⁴Ibid., 32.
⁵Ibid., 32-4.
⁶Ibid., 35.
demonstrated his love for Noah by selecting him "to be the seed of the human race after all others were drowned in the flood." Enoch was especially favored and taken alive into paradise, and Moses was able to convince the Lord to show mercy to his people by reminding him of the merits of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel who were their forbearers. Abraham was not saved because of the sacrament of circumcision; rather, he was justified by faith. In fact, if one examines the scriptures, one finds that the Lord only promised to reward obedience with earthly success, not eternal beatitude. Earthly rewards are not equivalent to beatitude, since

a reward consisting only of earthly things would so little measure up to beatitude that the life you could expect would be no different for you than for beasts of burden.

In the case of the Jews, even this reward is uncertain, as by their own admission they endure enormous burdens in this life.

Not only is obedience to the law not a guarantee of salvation, but it serves to increase transgression. Without the law, there can be no violations of law. Even the Apostle Paul admits that he only came to know sin through the law. Abraham, Isaac, and the other patriarchs were

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7 Ibid., 36-7.
8 Ibid., 40.
9 Ibid., 39.
10 Romans 7:7.
not saved through the law, but by "spontaneous obedience . . to which no law constrained them." Many praiseworthy deeds are commanded by God of his servants, yet are in no way contained in the law. The philosopher argues that external acts, commanded or not, are of no benefit to the soul if not done out of love, a point further developed in Abailard's Ethics. For the philosopher, then, mere acceptance of the beliefs of one's ancestors is in no way meritorious, and cannot account for salvation.

Blind recitation of the law and lifeless obedience to its precepts did not constitute faith for Abailard. The well rehearsed definition of faith as "lex orandi, lex credendi" was not a meaningful definition of the personal religious experience. If recitation of the law did not explain salvation, what of the faith of the Christian? In the Dialogue, the philosopher treats the Christian with much more tolerance and respect than he does the Jew. His amiable discussion with the Christian is indicative of Abailard's theological position -- philosophy was no enemy to Christianity. The exchange between the philosopher and Christian begins on a friendly note, the philosopher claiming that Christianity must have more merit, as it is the most recent addition to law. In the first part of the Dialogue, the philosopher emphasized the primacy of natural

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11Abailard, 37.

12Ibid., 67.
law over the written law of the Jews. Here, he intimates that Christianity is an addition to the body of written law, which suggests that it is, like the law of the Jews, another rendering of natural law. Is mere obedience to Christianity, then, of the same character as obedience to Jewish law? The answer to this question, arrived at by both the philosopher and the Christian, clarifies Abailard's notion of the act of faith.

The philosopher and the Christian discuss the conversion to Christianity of the ancient Greeks, some of whom were philosophers. The preaching of the Christians "is most highly commended because it was able to convert to the faith those who were well grounded in and rich in reasons." Philosophers do not accept arguments which are merely based on authority, and refuse to give their assent before subjecting words to rational scrutiny. The philosopher, however, wonders if some of the ancients might have been converted by force, since Christians are "not able to discuss the faith which they affirm." Christians argue that they are true philosophers since they are instructed by the Wisdom of God in the person of Christ himself. The philosopher, in an almost agonizing plea, urges them to clearly prove what [they] say and that through the supreme wisdom itself which you call in Greek logos and in Latin verbum Dei, [they] might show [themselves] true logicians and armed with reasons to go with your words!

Gregory the Great's claim that faith has no merit if it is proved by reason is a convenient excuse for not meeting the
arguments of opponents. The Christian agrees with the philosopher on this point, since

no one in his senses would forbid rational investigation and discussion of our faith, nor is there any reasonable assenting to what is doubtful before having a rational basis for doing so.

Arguments from authority would not convince a philosopher, since "no one can be shown the truth except on the basis of what he accepts." The Christian concedes then that "the faith must sometimes be built up or defended by reasons," and in a humorous vein points to Abailard's Christian Theology as a good example of the use of reason to strengthen faith.\(^{13}\)

This exchange indicates that for Abailard, there was no essential opposition between the Christian and philosopher. The Christian can learn the power of argumentation in conversion from the philosopher; the philosopher can learn about the salvation for his soul from the Christian. This reciprocity clearly indicates that for Abailard, the act of faith must begin with some sort of rational understanding of Christian doctrine, since otherwise, no one would choose to forsake their old customs. Reason, then, plays a leading role in faith from its very inception. The philosopher admits in the very beginning of the Dialogue that he is interested in the salvation of his soul, yet he will accept neither the claims of the Jew nor those of the Christian without a demonstration that their views are cogent, and

\(^{13}\)Ibid., 74-88.
moreover, that they possess enough merit to convince the philosopher of their truth without reference to works of authority which must be uncritically accepted.

Abailard’s philosopher is suggestive of Anselm’s sola ratione approach. Anselm had such a firm belief in the truth of the Christian faith that he argued it could be proven to be necessarily true without reference to scripture. Abailard’s philosopher asks for no more than this; if, he says, the doctrines of Christianity or Judaism are true, one ought to be able to demonstrate their truth with rational arguments which would convince a nonbeliever. Just as Anselm suggested that even the fool could be convinced of God’s existence by merely reflecting on the meaning of our concept of God, so too, Abailard’s philosopher demands to be convinced solely on the intrinsic merits of each position. Although Anselm’s approach as a whole begins after one has accepted the truth of Christianity, his methods indicate a role for reason independent of revelation. Anselm would never have argued, however, that one could truly understand Christianity before he is able to say "I believe." In Anselm’s work, belief is clearly superior to unaided reason, and without it, one can never claim to understand. His ontological argument and his remarks on fitting and necessary reasons, however, seem to suggest a stronger role for reason. If indeed, one can convince the fool by reason alone, if one can prove that the Incarnation was necessary by reason alone, and if one can
add to our knowledge of the scriptures by fitting reasons, then reason is a very powerful tool indeed. Abailard's Dialogue indicates a willingness to accept the use of reason even before Anselm's _credo_ comes into play. For him, it was simply nonsensical to accept any doctrine without proof of its intrinsic reasonableness; hence, he emphasized the use and importance of dialectic in refuting heresy. No conversion is possible without the use of reason, and although he builds on the groundwork laid by Anselm, he goes much farther -- for Abailard, Anselm's _credere_ is not possible without prior _intelligere_.

Not only is blind belief not an adequate notion of faith, but for Abailard, it is blasphemy to simply reiterate "amen" after recitations of the Creed or Lord's prayer.14 Faith is more than mere recitation of dogma, it was "that which we hold firmly in our minds."15 Faith comes through reason, not by compulsion.16 Mere obedience, based on an uncritical acceptance of dogma, or motivated out of a desire


for earthly rewards was not faith at all for Abailard. The sort of faith which justifies itself simply "because God said it" is not faith, but mere action by rote. "Faith is not believed in because God has spoken, but because its truth convinces."\(^\text{17}\) Most men do not have the faith of Abraham, who "believed in hope against hope."\(^\text{18}\) Abraham and the authors of the gospels were either privy to direct revelation, or they actually witnessed the life of Christ. We, on the other hand, must get our faith through human teaching. Given the importance of teaching in bringing about faith, Abailard was compelled to distinguish vacuous assertions from true belief, which could be explained and transmitted to others:

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\text{Quid denique magis ridiculosum quam si aliquis alium docere volens, cum requisitus fuerit de his quae dicit utrum intelligat, neget seipsum intelligere quae dicit vel se nescire de quibus loquitur?}\(^\text{19}\)
\]

If Christian beliefs are not accompanied by understanding, then we are as the blind leading the blind. Moreover, faith which is not strengthened by understanding will quickly become corrupt and whither away.\(^\text{20}\) Real belief is "held

\(^\text{17}\)"Nec quia Deus dixerat, creditur, sed quia hoc esse convincitur, recipitur." \textit{Introductio II.} 3. 1050D-1051.

\(^\text{18}\)"Distinguitur itaque fides talis a fide Abrahae, qui contra spem in spem creditit." \textit{Introductio II.} 3, 1051.

\(^\text{19}\)"Quid denique magis ridiculosum quam si aliquis alium docere volens, cum requisitus fuerit de his quae dicit utrum intelligat, neget seipsum intelligere quae dicit vel se nescire de quibus loquitur?" \textit{Introductio II.} vii. 1054C.

\(^\text{20}\)\textit{Introductio II.} iii.
firmly in the mind;" it is only belief when it is understood and can be explained to those who do not accept it.

Abailard's definition of belief in Christian dogma, then, went beyond Anselm in identifying belief with understanding. For him, there could be no belief without understanding. His logical theories emphasized the fact that all knowledge is derived from experience; so too, our knowledge of revelation comes through experience and through the teaching of others. The human mind plays an active role in this process; for Abailard, there is no Divine Illumination to provide us with knowledge of eternal truths. The truths of revelation are presented to us as propositions, as for example, the claim that Christ is fully human and fully God. Consequently, revelation can be treated as any other proposition; whether we believe the body of propositions known as Christianity or not depends on whether they can be shown to be logically coherent and reasonable. To state a proposition does not entail believing it; one can claim that there is a round square, knowing full well that no such thing is possible. Belief results when we also hold that the proposition represents a true state of affairs, and this can only come about for Abailard when we understand the meaning of the words we use. If we do claim to believe that there is a round square, what sense could this possibly make? We cannot even explain what such an entity would be like, since "round" contradicts
"square". Our supposed belief in such a case reduces to a mere joining of words which is devoid of meaning. For Abailard, then, understanding is essential to the act of belief.

Abailard’s definition of the act of faith was a significant departure from earlier views. In the Old Testament, faith is commonly used to denote trust and fidelity. One of the most common Hebrew roots used to express the notion of faith is 'mn, whose basic meaning is trustworthiness. Other Hebrew words, such as quwweh, indicate hoping for things to come, or by implication, believing in God’s promises. As we have seen, Abailard rejected mere trust and hope as definitions of faith; we hold faith "firmly in our minds" by understanding what it is we are talking about.

Another important interpretation of faith before Abailard was that of Augustine. Although he defined belief as "thinking with assent," he never developed this definition into an intellectualist concept of faith along Abailardian lines. Augustine’s notion of belief was a rather loose one. He argued that we often believe things

which we do not know. For example, young children believe that their parents are their natural parents without any firm evidence to support this belief. The child must accept his mother's word that the man he thinks is his father actually is his father; and the mother herself may simply be deceived in thinking she is his natural mother, as it is possible that someone may have stolen her baby. It would, however, be immoral not to believe one's parents.\textsuperscript{22} Belief on the testimony of reliable witness is a pervasive feature of our lives, and Augustine argues that there is nothing inherently unreasonable about such a process. Belief in things which are not present to our senses is a common feature of our lives, and if the evidence offered for such beliefs is sufficient, there is nothing unreasonable about continuing to believe them.

For Augustine, there are two ways of obtaining knowledge. First, one can know things on the basis of what one has in fact seen himself. Second, belief itself is a kind of knowledge, based on reliable testimony.\textsuperscript{23} Religious knowledge is of the second kind. We did not witness the life of Christ, but we have reliable testimony


from those who did. Belief in their testimony is no more unreasonable than our belief in the testimony of far less reliable witnesses. It is reasonable, then, to assent to faith. Further, reason is in a sense a prerequisite for faith. Only man, who is created as a rational being, is capable of belief. For Augustine, as for Anselm and Abailard, man is created in God's image. It is by virtue of our reason that we differ from the rest of creation, and by virtue of reason that we most closely resemble God. Reason, then, should not be excluded from the realm of faith.

In fact, it is reason which first enables us to make the leap of faith. Of all creatures, only man can believe. In the case of the Christian faith, reason not only makes belief possible, but presents us with arguments for giving our assent. For example, secular philosophers all disagreed on the nature of God; they, therefore, cannot claim to provide any answers. On the other hand, those who accept Christianity are unanimous in their views. Further, reason recognizes that it is defective; after the Fall, we are no longer able to know what we wish to know. It is, therefore, simply a matter of prudence to ask God for enlightenment, and this request takes the form of assent to the faith. In order to give one's assent to the doctrines

of faith, one must know what these doctrines are. Reason, then, plays an operative role in leading us to faith.

Further, after we have accepted faith, understanding is our reward. Merely giving our assent to faith inspires us to achieve greater understanding, for faith is directed towards truth, but only in an unclear way. The soul seeks knowledge of God, not simply belief in him. Understanding is never achieved without faith; our knowledge of eternal truths come from Divine Illumination. True faith, however, may be transformed into true understanding by fully obeying God's commands and fully accepting his word as true.

Reason, then, plays a role in Augustine's theology, but nowhere did he develop an account of its role which compares with that of Abailard. For Augustine, reason leads us to accept the creeds based on reliable testimony and the notion that no better arguments can be found. For Abailard, reason creates belief, since to believe is to "hold firmly in our minds" the propositions in question. We must know more than which propositions are Christian doctrines and which are not; we must be able to explain them, at least to the degree that they appear logically coherent. Faith as "that which is held firmly in our minds" goes well beyond Augustine's "thinking with assent." For Abailard, we do not merely give assent to the articles of faith; to do so is idle obedience. Belief involves understanding; otherwise, we do not choose to give our assent. Abailard rejected those arguments of the Jew which mimic Augustine's position. The philosopher
refuses to accept the Jew's argument that since no better example of the written word can be found, and there are no examples to the contrary, his Law is the optimum form of religion. Mere belief and acceptance of doctrine, no matter what the testimony in its behalf, was not sufficient to create faith for Abailard. Abailard developed a stronger notion of faith as understanding; in so doing, he went well beyond Augustine and strengthened the meaning of Anselm's \textit{credo ut intelligam}. Unlike Anselm, Abailard explained the genesis of belief, and his account was one which placed a great deal of emphasis on the power and integrity of the human mind.

II.

Grace and dialectic

Although the act of faith begins with understanding, it is not yet the kind of faith which justifies the believer with God. Abailard developed an intellectualist definition of faith, but there was nevertheless a role for grace in his theology. Following Augustine, Abailard distinguished three kinds of faith: \textit{credere Deum}, \textit{credere Deo}, and \textit{credere in Deum}.\footnote{Abailard, \textit{Expositio in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos}, II.iv. 840A.} To believe in the sense of \textit{credere Deum}, is to believe that God exists. To believe God, in the sense of \textit{credere Deo}, is to believe that the things God says are
true. For Abailard, the first two kinds of faith are insufficient for salvation, since even the demons and fallen angels can be said to believe that God exists and that what He says is true:

Credunt itaque daemones quoque et reprobri Deum, credunt Deo, sed non in deum, quia non diligunt nec diligendo se ei incorporant, id est ecclesiae, quae eius corpus est, per devotionem aggregant.\(^{26}\)

Their belief in the doctrines of Christianity does not move them to the appropriate actions, such as joining God’s church. In the Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian, Abailard rejected mere recitation and uncritical acceptance of creeds as faith. What the demons and fallen angels lack is belief in God, and this sort of belief requires more than understanding alone. Belief in God is faith which is infused with charity, in which all things done are done solely out of love for God. It is "amare, credendo diligere, credendo tenere ut membrum ejus efficatur."\(^{27}\) The Dialogue consistently emphasized the meaninglessness of mere subservience to law, especially given that obedience usually arises out of fear or the promise of earthly rewards. True love for God, the most complete form of faith, is based only on our love for God Himself, not out of our fear of Him. The first two levels of faith are unformed, and do not lead to salvation. The

\(^{26}\)Ibid., 840B.

\(^{27}\)Ibid., II.iv.
addition of charity, however, causes faith to become meritorious:

at nunquam si fidei nostrae primordia statim meritum non habent, ideo prorsus inutilis est judicanda, quam postmodum charitas subsecuta, obtinet quod defuerat.  

Although the Law commanded the Jews to love their neighbors, they did not do so in the proper spirit of love, but solely out of desire for earthly rewards. Charitable faith, based on love of God, is selfless. Loving God for the promise of reward is to place the emphasis of faith on ourselves, not on God:

certus tamen debet esse qui sic agit de amplissima tantae dilectionis remuneratione: nec tamen hac intentione hic agit, si perfecte diligat, alioquin sua quæreret, et quasi mercenarius, licet in spiritualibus esset. Nec jam est charitas dicenda, si propter nos eum, id est pro nostra utilitate, et pro regni ejus felicitate, quam ab eo speramus, diligeramus potius quam propter ipsum, in nobis videlicet nostra intentionis finem, non in Christo statuentes.  

With charity, however,

finis est deus, id est finalis et suprema causa, ad quem nostra dirigitur intentio, quando videlicet tam ipsum quam proximum diligimus propter ipsum, nec tam nostram quam ipsius sequimur voluntatem.  

Faith which is enriched by dialectic and understands God’s commandments carries one to the threshold of salvation; only by the addition of charity can faith justify one with God.

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26 Introductio, II.iii. 1051A.
29 Ibid., III.vii. 891BC.
30 Introductio, I.i. 983AB.
In the Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian, Abailard emphasized the need to perform works according to the spirit of the natural law. As a result, he was accused by contemporaries such as Bernard of maintaining a Pelagian position on the role of grace in salvation. This accusation, however, was far from the truth. Although Abailard emphasized the role of dialectic in one’s moral life and the role of the individual in performing good deeds with the spirit of charity, he argued that without grace, we could never develop charity. Before the Fall, man lived in an idyllic setting, in which there was no death and provision for all his needs. Man was created in the image of God, and because of the perfection of his beginning, he fully returned God’s love and was perfectly obedient. Adam and Eve, however, committed a wilful act of disobedience, Adam even assuming that God in his mercy would ignore the act. Adam was personally responsible for his sin and as such was punished with mortality. His punishment had serious repercussions for his progeny; all men, although not incurring the taint of original sin from Adam, suffer his punishment. God "inflicted the punishment of death of the body for all, signifying through this that we should avoid our own sins since we suffer this on account of another."  

31 "Et licet peccatum ante legem, ut dictum est, non imputetur ab hominibus, tamen etiam tunc imputabatur a Deo, quoniam pro ipso poenam corporalis mortis omnibus inferebat, insinuans per hoc nobis a propriis maxime peccatis esse cavendum, cum hoc sustineremus propter alienum." Expositio in Epistola ad Romanos, II.v. 862C.
After the Fall, man was permanently estranged from God. Man’s will became corrupted by constant sinning\textsuperscript{32}, and reason itself was weakened and overshadowed by sin.\textsuperscript{33} Man’s flesh and spirit are constantly in conflict, as neither the will nor the reason is able to provide guidance.\textsuperscript{34}

Only the grace of God saved man from this predicament. God is pure love, and his grace manifested itself as love for man. In order to free man from the bondage of sin, God sent Christ, Incarnate Wisdom, to us as a man so that we might relearn the proper way of loving God. Without this event, man would still be in bondage to sin; returning to the state of perfection before the Fall was impossible through our own powers: "Nec nostris nos viribus a dominio peccati liberari possimus, sed gratia Redemptoris."\textsuperscript{35} Adam’s sin corrupted our reason and will, and only through grace and the Incarnation was right willing restored.

For Abailard, right willing is restored to man by the example of Christ. God’s nature is perfect goodness.\textsuperscript{36}


\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Exspositio in Epistola ad Romanos}, IV.xii. 938C.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., I.ii. 813B.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., III.vii. 894A.

\textsuperscript{36}"cum autem sicut in principio operis assignavimus, in tribus divinis personis, Patre videlicet, Filio, spiritu sancto, tota boni perfectio consistit, et omnia quae ad boni
God’s goodness is complete, and fulfills itself within the Trinity.\textsuperscript{37} Therefore, there is no need for God to create, since his nature is completely self fulfilled.\textsuperscript{38} The essence of love, however, is to communicate that love to creatures:

God is said in some way to go out from Himself to His creatures. He does this through the condition or result of His Goodness. This Goodness operates through God’s active charity towards His creatures.\textsuperscript{39}

Abailard argued that the world was ordered in an eminently rational way, and that God Himself is constrained by logical necessity. He cannot act otherwise than he does, and, thereafter, could not have created a better world than he did:

Si enim ponamus ut plura vel pauciora facere possit, vel ab his quae facit cessare, profecto multum summae ejus bonitati derogabimus. Constat quippe eam non nisi perfectionem perinent, in his tribus comprehenduntur."

Theologia Christiana, 1258D-1259A. Abailard argued that it was the nature of perfect Goodness "to go out into the world;" that is, to express itself as love to its creations. See note 38.

\textsuperscript{37}"quia nihil unquam natura Divinitatis in se habet, quo aliquando careat." Ibid., 1250B.

\textsuperscript{38}"Posset quippe esse ut nulla creatura unquam esset, cum nulla ex necessitate sit." Ibid., 1311B. These arguments bear a striking similarity to those of Plotinus in the Enneads. Like Abailard, Plotinus argued that the One, being utterly perfect within itself, had no need to create the universe. Since all things have the power to create, however, so too must the One, as it is the source of all things which have being. The One’s utter perfection spills out into the world, not from the necessity of adding to its perfection, but as a result of the overflow of its perfection.

God’s essence is love, which resulted in the creation of the world. The world is ordered, and hence, it must be ordered by Divine love. The special manifestation of this love, and the event which reorders creation according to Divine Love, is the Incarnation. Christ’s life demonstrates the limitlessness of God’s love. Many of Abailard’s sermons emphasize the degrading events of Christ’s life, such as the scourging, the suffering along the Via Dolorosa, and the final agonies on the cross. Not only did he endure intense physical suffering, but in his agonies he was taunted and mocked. These indignities indicate the special value of man in God’s eyes:

Quo enim dominus indigniora pro homine sustinuit, digniorem apud se et gratiam eum haberi demonstravit. Nullum autem patibulum exsecrabilius cruce antiquitus censebatur, nulla mors adeo turpis et detestabilis judicabatur.

The Word became man, then, so that salvation might truly be pro nobis. He endured all the agonies of manhood, yet he was nonetheless different from all preceding men. In his wisdom, "God predestined that there should be a creation of

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40 Introductio, III. v. 1094A.


42 Ibid., 479D.
man dissimilar to all others," who was descended from an ancient lineage of man with sin, yet was himself without sin. The Word became man so that he might teach us the proper paths of righteousness. Christ selflessly and perfectly loved his Father, fully obeying his every command despite the fact that he did not always desire these things himself. Although he cried out to God to spare him from the ordeal, he continued to suffer out of pure obedience to God. Christ was fully aware of God’s plan, and consented to become man and suffer pro nobis. "Desideravit quidem anima hominis illius salutem nostram quam in morte sua consistere sciebat, et propter illam quam desiderabat hanc tolerabat." No one was able to take him against his will: "Nemo quippe vim ei facere potuit, ut tanquam invitum et coactum occidere, vel etiam comprehendere potest." He freely offered himself to the crowds, who were ignorant of his identity, thus proving his willingness to obey the Father. Christ’s perfect love for God was manifested in his

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44 Exspositio in Epistolam ad Romanos, II. vi. 876C.

human life: "Cum pro nobis moriendo, illam dilectionem exhibuit, qua major esse non possit."\[^{46}\]

His selfless obedience was perfect love, and through his life and death, mankind is freed from sin. Christ’s role as man was to show us the proper way to love God, to instill in us the same sort of undying love for the creator:

Ad ostensionem suae justitiae, id est caritatis, quae nos, ut dictum est, apud eum justificat, id est exhibendam nobis suam dilectionem, vel ad insinuandum nobis quantum eum diligere debeamus, qui proprie Filio suo non pepercit pro nobis.\[^{47}\]

By suffering and dying for us, Christ redeems our fallen will by binding us to Him, and to God, in love:

quod per hanc singularem gratiam nobis exhibitam, quod Filius suus nostram susceperit naturam, et in ipsos nos tam verbo quam exemplo instituendo usque ad mortem perstitit, nos sibi amplius per amorem astrixit.\[^{48}\]

By keeping the example of Christ constantly before us, we are more truly bound to God by faith which is infused with charity or love. Christ’s life brings us closer to him in love, in order that "tanto divinae gratiae accensi beneficio, nil jam tolerare ipsum vera reformidet charitas."\[^{49}\] We love God all the more because this gift we have been given is truly unmerited, and is a gift far


\[^{47}\] Exspositio in Epistolam ad Romanos, II.iii. 833AB.

\[^{48}\] Ibid., II. iii. 836A.

\[^{49}\] Ibid., II. iii. 836B.
greater than we could desire. By Christ’s death on the
cross, we are made sons of God and freed from the bondage of
sin. Christ frees us from bondage to the law, which is
imperfect love for God motivated out of fear. Christ’s
death institutes a new period of grace, in which we are
truly sons of God and serve him out of love rather than
fear:

Redemptio itaque nostra est illa summa in nobis per
passionem Christi dilectio, quae solum a servitute
peccati liberat, sed veram nobis filiorum Dei
liberatatem acquirit, ut amore ejus potius quam timore
cuncta impleamus, qui nobis tantam exhibuit gratiam qua
major inveniri ipso attestante non potest.  

Our adoption as sons of God is the beginning of a new age.
The old age, in which man was subject to the law, was
imperfect. God is love, and true faith expresses itself in
selfless love for our neighbors for the sake of God.
Although the Old Law commanded us to love our neighbors, an
examination of the actual terms used in the Old Testament
proves that the law only commanded us to love friends
(amici) or benefactors (benefactor). The Old Law served
to set off the Jews from the rest of society; one never
finds the precept to love one’s neighbors (proximi) in
general. The Law, then, was imperfect:

Unde et illud servitutis, hoc Testamentum dicitur
liberatis; illud timoris, hoc amoris; illud

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Ibid., II. iii. 836C.

Ibid., III. vii. 884CD.
Christ was born under the law in order to free us from it. As a result of God's ultimate gift of grace, we become sons of God and are able to believe in God, developing faith infused with divine Love.

Abailard's account of the Incarnation and atonement was a departure from other theories of the medieval period. The most commonly accepted view of the atonement was articulated by Origen in the third century. Origen argued that man had sold his soul to the Devil by his sin, and God repurchased man by offering Christ's life as a ransom to the devil. This theory was further developed by Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century. Gregory argued that the Devil did not recognize Christ as Divine, since his divinity was clothed in human nature. Christ could not be conquered by death, and when the devil attempted to appropriate Christ, he lost his rights over man. Thus, man was redeemed. In the eleventh century, Anselm rejected these arguments, proposing an alternative theory based on feudal concepts. God was the supreme feudal overlord, and all lesser beings owed him

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53Ibid., 417C.
their allegiance. Man's sin dishonored God, but as a result of man's lesser nature, he was not capable of restoring the honor he had taken away. Because God is merciful, he chose not to damn the entire human race, but rather, to send his Son as man so that he might render satisfaction. Only Incarnate God could atone for the sins of man. As a result of the Incarnation, God was free to forgive without exacting punishment.

Abailard rejected both these theories, arguing instead that Christ's death enabled man to will rightly, just as he had before the Fall. The example of Christ draws us closer to God; through Christ's self sacrificing love, we are led to return God's love as we ought. Without this gift, man could never come to believe in God. The role of grace is to draw man back to a loving relationship with God. God's grace is continually in operation, as he continually spills out his love into the world in order to draw man closer to him:

quia tanto damnabilior es quanto majori patientia Deus te exspectat, et exspectando diu ad poenitentiam ejus invitat benignitas et hanc ejus benignitatem patientiae in contemptum ejus convertis, et tanto minus eum vereris quanto amplius sustinet offensas tuas, nec statim punit.\textsuperscript{54}

It cannot, therefore, be said that Abailard was a Pelagian. He argued that man's will could never will rightly without God's grace, and that further, this grace

\textsuperscript{54}Abailard, \textit{Exspositio in Epistola Pauli ad Romanos}, 809C.
was in continual operation. Abailard, unlike Pelagius, did not believe that man could elevate himself to a state of salvation without grace. Although man might obey the law as perfectly as possible, and he might perform an infinite number of "good" works, he could never truly love God as he should without God's grace. Man would never have developed faith infused with charity without the example of Christ and the Holy Spirit's infusion of divine Love. His will and reason would have remained corrupt, and as a result, his faith would never have been the sort of faith which justifies man with God. Man absolutely does not merit such a gift, but by the grace of God, his will and reason were restored and transformed once again into love for God. Bernard neglected to read Abailard's works thoroughly; had he done so, he would have noted the emphasis placed on grace in Abailard's theology.

Although grace plays a prominent role for Abailard, the individual nevertheless had a considerable role in his own salvation. Abailard's description of the atonement suggests a subjective response to God's love, one in which the individual examines the example of Christ and is thus drawn to God. Such a reading again raises the issue of Pelagianism. In an attempt to defend Abailard from charges of unorthodoxy, some commentators, such as Richard Weingart, argue that the love instilled in us by the atonement is solely the result of Grace, and the regeneration of man does not depend on his subjective reaction to Christ's death on
the cross. Weingart discusses Abailard's use of dialectic at length as well as his emphasis on the nature of charitable love. Despite this fact, he chooses to read Abailard's arguments concerning the atonement in a traditional way, attributing the formation of charity solely to the grace of God.

This argument is true to a certain extent, but Weingart's reading is unsatisfactory as it stands. His interpretation would make nonsense out of Abailard's insistence on the validity of human reason and dialectic. If the individual must rely solely on the atonement for acquiring the charity necessary for salvation, what sense can we make of Abailard's justification of the Greeks and Hebrews? In general, what sense can we make of Abailard's claim that the nature of God manifests itself in all of creation, and that our reason is, therefore, valid? Either Abailard was a hypocrite when he declared his belief in grace, or his arguments in support of the use of dialectic in converting nonbelievers to Christianity are nonsensical. In other words, Weingart's interpretation of the atonement is not satisfying as it does not seem to be able to bridge the gap between Abailard's arguments concerning the nature of belief and those concerning charity.

There is a way to reconcile these conflicts. Abailard was neither a hypocrite nor an inconsistent logician. He fully believed in the necessity of grace, as well as in the power of human reason. Weingart's reading does not take
account of Christ's role as teacher; Bernard's reading does not take account of the necessity of grace in order to fulfill faith. There is a fundamental connection between Abailard's arguments concerning dialectic and the transformation of *credere Deum* and *credere Deo* into *credere in Deum*. To adequately grasp this connection, one must examine Abailard's theology of the Trinity and his reconciliation of predestination with free will. These two aspects of his theology demonstrate a very strong connection between the three types of faith and a very strong role for the human mind employing dialectic.

Grace is necessary for infusing man with love for God. Abailard, however, argued that the atonement only instilled love in those who have believed in Christ and hoped for him.\(^{55}\) That is, it is effacacious only in those who have already progressed in faith to *credere Deum* and *credere Deo*. Abailard did not deny that even the first act of faith is inspired by grace: "quod quidem efficit primo lucem fidei inspirando."\(^{56}\) Yet his account of dialectic implies an important role for the individual in the act of faith. Grace does not carry the individual the entire way; in Abailard's theology, free will and reason must help man achieve charitable faith.

\(^{55}\)Ibid., II. iii. 833A.  

Although Abailard argued that God predestined some for salvation and others for damnation, he did not find this inconsistent with free will. Predestination is an example of God’s grace: "Predestinatio quippe dicitur divinae praeparatio."\(^{57}\) We cannot fully understand God’s motives in drawing some to Him and forcing others away.\(^{58}\) God is perfectly Good, and we must assume that everything he does works for good as well. We cannot condemn Him, then, for showing mercy only to a few.\(^{59}\) We have absolutely no power to redeem ourselves: "Id non est in potestate nostra eam accipere, sed in manu ejus eam dare."\(^{60}\) Since we are incapable of effecting our own redemption, predestination is an example of God’s mercy. Predestination is grace, as without it, no one would be saved.

The predestination of the elect, however, does not abrogate man’s free will. If God’s predestination were equivalent to preordination, then if he foreknew that a man would commit adultery, this act would necessarily have to be committed, and the man could not be held accountable for his action:

quod si eum necesse est esse meochaturum, hoc est inevitable, jam non est libero ejus arbitrio seu potestate peccatum hoc evitare. Non ergo propter hoc

\(^{57}\)Exspositio in Epistolam ad Romanos, I. i. 749C.

\(^{58}\)Ibid., II. iv. 854D.

\(^{59}\)Ibid., IV. ix. 919B.

\(^{60}\)Ibid., IV. ix. 915A.
peccatum, quod nullatenus evitare potuit, reus est constituendus.  

If man has no free will, then he cannot be held accountable for his evil deeds. Abailard's emphasis on human reason rejected this argument; he would argue in the *Ethics* that each man was personally accountable for his sins. God's foreknowledge of future events is not equivalent to His foreordination of the future. God may see that Socrates will be walking, yet this does not mean that he will necessarily be walking. Events such as Socrates walking are, therefore, contingent, even if there is no contingency for God. Although God cannot err and His knowledge is infallible, our actions are contingent:

> Certum quippe est omnia antequam fiant eo modo quo futura sunt a Deo esse praevisa, sive bona sint sive mala, nec in aliquo providentiam ejus posse falli.  

Abailard goes on to defend free will by arguing that there are two ways in which God's will operates. First, there is the *disputatio* of God’s will, according to which he orders creation. Nothing can resist the *disputatio* of God. There is another sense, however, in which God wills things

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61Ibid., III. viii. 907C.

62Ibid., III. viii. 907B. This argument anticipates that of St. Thomas Aquinas, who by distinguishing God's will that certain things happen necessarily from his will that certain things happen contingently, allowed for God's necessary foreknowledge of events which nevertheless remained contingent. God knows all things simultaneously, and hence, all things are eternally present to him. Contingent events, are then, known infallibly by God, yet in themselves, because their causes are themselves contingent, they do not occur necessarily. *Summa Theologiae* I. 19. 6. and I. 14. 13.
to occur which do not happen. This is God's praeeptum, according to which he wills that all men obey him, but does not restrict their free will to comply. Not everything that God wills in this way comes about, as for example, the salvation of all men. Although God predestines the elect for salvation, this act of grace does not abrogate the use of free will.  

Man's ability to will rightly is restored through grace; the exercise of his free will in a meritorious fashion is made possible by the atonement. Free will is consistent with Abailard's entire theological system, which emphasized the use of reason. Beginning with his theory of abstraction and his application of dialectic to theology, he consistently implied that the power of the human mind was essential to faith. His defense of free will further strengthens this argument. What, then, is the relationship of grace to the free exercise of reason? Abailard's theories can be made consistent by arguing that reason and the use of dialectic does not disappear once faith has been infused with Divine Love; rather, the use of reason leads to charity.

For Abailard, it was significant that Christ was chosen to redeem man rather than any other person of the Trinity. Since Christ is Divine Wisdom, only he could "grant the light of true wisdom to His predestined people," and this

63Abailard, Christian Theology, 92.
was the purpose of the Incarnation. Here, Abailard describes Christ in terms of wisdom, not in terms of producing Divine Love in man. "In the Incarnate Wisdom God brought a knowledge of Himself to which no creature by himself could rise." Christ taught us by word and by example; as divine wisdom, he was especially suited to this task. These passages seem problematic for Weingart’s view that our response to the atonement is not subjective, but solely due to grace. Christ brings us the knowledge we lack, allowing us to rise to a level of knowledge beyond our ordinary capacities. In the Dialogue, Abailard’s Christian claimed that

> the glory of the divine majesty is so great that . . . the longer we gaze on it, the more fully it reveals itself to us . . . [and] the more blessed it makes us the better God is understood, the greater our beatitude is increased in the vision of him.

These passages emphasize the role of Christ’s wisdom in enabling us to achieve greater knowledge of God, and thus, greater beatitude in the life to come. In the Theologia Christiana, Abailard placed a great deal of emphasis on the character of the Trinity as Power, Wisdom, and Goodness.

This definition of the Trinity not only describes the Highest Good. It is also a means of persuading men very strongly to the pursuit of religion, and it was

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64 Ibid., 84.
65 Ibid., 74.
66 Exspositio in Epistola ad Romanos, II. iii. 836B.
67 Abailard, Dialogue, 131.
for this reason that the Incarnate Wisdom assumed His work of preaching. 68

By understanding the definition of the Trinity, man is propelled in the proper direction. How can we understand Abailard's contention that grasping the definition of the Trinity leads to faith? God the Father is Power, while Christ is Wisdom. This produces fear, since God knows all and is able to punish all. Yet God is also Goodness, from which love originates. If we understand the Trinity, we not only fear but love God. Christ is the perfect vehicle for transforming our wisdom, or understanding of the faith as expressed by this definition of the Trinity, into love. He is both Incarnate Wisdom, and the teacher of Divine Love. He teaches us that Divine Wisdom is Divine Love; perfect Wisdom, or Christ Incarnate, is also perfect Love, as seen by Christ's selfless obedience. In Christ, then, the logos is united to love. If we truly understand what the Trinity is, that is, the essential unity of Power, Wisdom, and Love in one substance, our wisdom or reason leads us into faith which is true love for God, or credere in Deum. Abailard's emphasis on the power of reason is clearly seen in the Theologia Christiana, where he argued that The pagans "do not profess the faith with their lips as we do. This is due to the implications of our terms which they do not understand." 69. If they understood the tenets of

68Abailard, Christian Theology, 46.

69Ibid., 90.
Christianity, this understanding would lead them to the proper practice of the faith.

In the Dialogue, Abailard argued that not all men were equally good or equally bad.

Although charity confers [virtue], it does not grant all to each individual in whom it exists . . . not all are equally enriched by all the virtues."  

"We become more like [God] . . . to the extent that we become more like him in goodness or we are more in conformity with his will."  

Dialectic enables man to understand God's commands and to be more aware of what is good or bad. Knowledge enables us to practice virtue in order that our will may become more like that of God. As a result, we may come to a greater understanding of God. God "communicates the knowledge of himself in a better and more perfect manner to one than to another in proportion to merits, and reveals himself more fully."  

These passages all emphasize knowledge of God and the role of the individual in coming to a greater understanding of God through the practice of virtue.

The relation between knowledge and virtuous faith becomes clearer when we consider that for Abailard, the individual was a microcosm of the Trinity:

si quis autem diligentius ac perfectius hanc imaginem vel similitudinem dei ad quam homo factus dicitur considerare velit juxta ipsarum personarum distinctionem, videbit hominem ipsum tam Patris quam Filii vel Spiritus sancti ex sua conditione.

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70 Abailard, Dialogue, 103.

71 Ibid., 140.

72 Ibid., 132.
similitudinem maximum adeptum esse. constat quippe Deo Patri, qui a seipso non ab alio esse habet, juxta hanc ejus proprietatem, id quod ad potentiam pertinet divinam specialiter ascribi, sicut est Filio, qui ejus Sapientia proprie charitas dicitur, id quod bonitatem divinae gratiae spectat tanquam proprium tribuitur. Homo itaque, ut dictum est, secundum animae dignitatem ad similitudinem singularem personarum factus est, cum per potentiam et sapientiam et amorem caeteris praelatus animantibus Deo similius factus sit.  

This passage is extremely important, for it enables us to reconcile Abailard’s emphasis on reason and knowledge with the necessity of grace. Man is the image of the Trinity, which is Power, Wisdom, and Love united in a single essence. In the Trinity Wisdom is Love, as was manifested to us by the Incarnation. Grace regenerates our reason and will, so that we may become infused with love for God. We obtain charity through our understanding, that is, through understanding the nature of the Trinity as well as Christ’s Incarnation. The Holy Spirit imparts grace to our hearts; our understanding carries us the rest of the way. Without grace, without the Incarnation, our reason would never achieve the understanding required to develop charity. With grace, our reason is regenerated, and just as Reason and Love are one in the Trinity, so too, reason and love may become one in man. Grace is a necessary prerequisite for charity; our reason, however, is also necessary, and with the aid of grace, it can be transformed into faith which realizes charity.

72Abailard, Expositio in Hexaemeron, 761AB.
Abailard's *Confessio Fidei* was not a hypocritical assertion of dogma meant to overrule his previous work. True understanding of the Trinity leads man to true love. For him, grace did not abrogate the use of free will and reason; conversely, the use of reason did not eliminate the need for grace. He attempted to work out a theology which recreated the unity of the Trinity within the mind of man. Anselm had argued that man's reason was the truest image of God; Abailard's theology gave a more concrete expression to this belief. For Abailard, man's reason fully developed was love for God. Consequently, he had a deeper insight into Anselm's claim that faith which does not seek understanding is dead. For Abailard, this sort of belief is not belief at all, and it is dead because only through the use of reason can man come to truly love God. The Incarnation and the grace of God make this possible for man; as God is truly love and truly wisdom, it is only fitting that faith seeking understanding should draw us closer to God, not only in knowledge, but in a true love which transcends the human condition and looks back to its maker.
CHAPTER 6

SIC ET NON: ABAILARD’S DIALECTICAL VISION OF THEOLOGY

*Sic et non* was one of Abailard’s earliest works, written shortly after the council of Soissons in 1122. It consists of a prologue and a compilation of 158 theological propositions on which there were conflicting opinions in the scriptures and the writings of the fathers. In many ways it was a continuation of his logical treatises, as the prologue suggested several dialectical methods by which these contradictions might be resolved. The methodology of *Sic et non* heavily emphasized the role of the individual in the growth of faith. As such, it is a concrete example of the impact of his logical and semantic theories on his theology.

*Sic et non* also provides insight into the evolution of Abailard’s theology, as it articulated several problems which he would address in later works. Its importance, however, has often been overlooked. Since Abailard made no effort to resolve the 158 contradictions within the body of the work itself, it has often been seen as an attempt to detract from the authority of the church or as an attempt to justify the use of dialectic within theology. These interpretations overlook the structure of the work in
relation to the output of his later career. *Sic et non* was far more than a simple collection of contradictory theological positions; it was a map of Abailard's later career which indicates that as early as 1122 he had thought about many of the issues which he would become well known for, and that his theology was a coherent and cohesive structure. Bernard denounced Abailard as a "logician lately turned a theologian"; *Sic et non* demonstrates that Abailard's theological career was not a mere whim and that his thought, in contrast to the biographical details of his early life, displayed a purpose and consistency which was directed toward the development of a harmonious theological system.

The basic problem which *Sic et non* addressed was the many contradictions and inconsistencies in the scriptures and writings of the church fathers:

> in tanta verborum multitutdine nonnulla etiam sanctorum dicta non solum ab invicem diversa verum etiam invicem adversa videantur.\(^1\)

For example, according to the books of Matthew and John, the lord was crucified in the sixth hour, but according to Mark, in the third hour.\(^2\) Not only do certain passages conflict with each other, but they also contain many inaccurate citations. For example, according to Matthew, Judas

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\(^2\)Ibid., 92.
received 30 pieces of silver for his betrayal of Jesus, thus fulfilling the prophecies of Jeremiah. In fact, however, this prophecy is found in Zachariah.\textsuperscript{3} In another place Matthew wrote that the Lord spoke in parables in order that the prophecy of Isaiah might be fulfilled. Isaiah, however, did not say this, but Asaph, and the gospels have continued to inaccurately record the author of the prophecies until today.\textsuperscript{4}

Along with problems such as these, Abailard also included contradictory writings from the works of the fathers and the scriptures on 158 different theological issues. Such a large collection of contradictions might have led to skepticism about the authenticity of the Bible and the validity of Christian revelation. Given Abailard's early career, it would be natural to think that this was indeed the thrust of \textit{Sic et non}. By 1122, Abailard had acquired a reputation as an outstanding master of dialectic. He had defeated the realism of his teacher William of Champeaux, and also ridiculed the work of Anselm of Laon. In addition, his attempt to apply dialectic to trinitarian theology had been condemned as heretical at the synod of Soissons in 1120. Clearly, this was a man whose love of logic and dialectic had already caused him problems, and in

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 70.

\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., 91.
addition, whose personal reputation had been darkened by the cloud of his romance with Heloise.

These factors caused many people of his own age to be suspicious of his sincerity and suitability for theology; modern appraisals of him have often been no different. Dr. Martin Grabmann succinctly captured this sort of approach to Abailard:

Man hat vielfach behauptet und behauptet es auch jetzt noch, daß Abaiard mit seiner Schrift "Sic et non" und mit seiner im Prologus programmatisch entwickelten Sic et non Methode die Autorität der Tradition, der Vater erschüttern und im Geiste seiner Leser den Zweifel an der Festigkeit und Einhelligkeit der kirchlichen Überlieferung wachrufen wollte.\(^5\)

This is certainly the interpretation of G. Reuter and S. M. Deutsch. Reuter argued that \textit{Sic et non} was designed to prove that die Väter, deren Aussprüche der Voraussetzung nach die Glieder einer Kette bilden sollen, statt sich zusammzuflugen, offenbar auseinandergehen, nicht bloß in den nebensächlichen Dingen, sondern in den wichtigsten.\(^6\)

For Reuter, \textit{Sic et non} displayed "eine skeptische oder oppositionelle Tendenz inne."\(^7\) According to S. M. Deutsch, the very fact that Abailard collected such a mass of contradictions expressed a critical attitude and a tendency toward free thinking.

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\(^5\)Martin Grabmann, \textit{Die Geschichte der Scholastischen Methode} (Freiburg: Herdersche Verlagshandlung, 1911), 204.

\(^6\)G. Reuter, \textit{Geschichte der religiösen Aufklärung im Mittelalter I} (1875), quoted in Grabmann, 205.

\(^7\)Ibid., 205.
Dass selbständige Untersuchung mit dem Rechte freier Kritik, erneute und fortgesetzte Kritik notwendig sei, das ist es, was Abälarnd durch jene Schrift darzutun beabsichtigt. Die Bahn wollte er dem Denken frei machen, indem er zeigte, das es nicht möglich sei, ohne selbständiges Urteil auch nur in der Tradition sich zurechtzufinden.  

A. Harnack also argued that *Sic et non* expressed a critical tendency, and likened Abailard to Paul of Samosata and other early critics of the church.

Er wollte wissen, was er glaubte, und er wollte zeigen, wie unsicher und widersprüchvoll die unkontrollierte Orthodoxie und die für unfehlbar ausgegebene Überlieferung sei.

These interpretations, however, cannot be sustained. Although the opening sentence of *Sic et non* emphasizes the many contradictions and inconsistencies in the writings of the saints, the following sentences caution us not to make rash judgments concerning the authenticity of the writings nor to immediately condemn those "through whom the word itself is to be judged" as erroneous:

> non est temere de eis iudicandum per quos mundus ipse iudicandus est . . . nec tanquam mendaces eos arguere aut tanquam erroneos contemnere praesumamus.

Rather than condemn the saints or their writings as erroneous, we ought rather to assume that our understanding of these texts and writers is faulty:

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9A. Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte*, quoted in Grabmann, 205.

10Abailard, *Sic et non*, 89.
Ad nostram itaque recurrentes imbecillitatem nobis
potius gratiam in intelligendo deesse quam eis in
scribendo defuisse credamus.\textsuperscript{11}

We ought not to reject any of these writings because they
appear to be erroneous, since concerning these very authors
"ab ipsa dictum est Veritate: non enim vos estis qui
loquimini, sed spiritus patris vestri qui loquitur in
vobis." We often fail to understand these writings, since
the spirit which inspired the saints is absent to us. From
the beginning of the prologue, then, Abailard insisted that
the authority of the scriptures and the saints should not be
rejected.\textsuperscript{12}

The opening of the prologue, then, does not assume a
skeptical attitude toward the authority of the church and
scripture, but rather suggests that our understanding of the
various texts needs to be improved. Toward this end,
Abailard suggested many techniques for resolving
inconsistencies and contradictions in the canonical texts.
Many contradictions may simply be due to errors in copying
the texts, or sometimes inscriptions attribute passages to
the saints when in fact they were written by other
people.\textsuperscript{13} For example, the conflicting times for Christ’s
crucifixion may simply be the result of errors in copying,

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{13}"Illud quoque diligenter attendi convenit ne, dum
aliqua nobis ex dictis sanctorum obiciuntur tamquam sint
opposita vel a veritate aliena, falsa tituli inscriptione
vel scripturae ipsius corruptione fallamur." Ibid., 91.
one letter being mistaken for another.\textsuperscript{14} These problems should not lead us to believe that the saints were not erroneous, or worse yet, deceitful; we only need to discover the truth behind these apparent errors, and to do this, we must use dialectic, or the science of words and their meanings.

The prologue is, then, very much a continuation of Abailard’s earlier logical works which developed a theory of meaning based on logical context. The methods outlined in the prologue often emphasize the context and use of words. Abailard argued that misunderstanding commonly occurs as a result of unusual uses of words and the fact that the signification of one and the same word may not always be the same in every context.\textsuperscript{15} The emphasis of the prologue is on understanding the writings of the saints, and consequently, Abailard advocated methods which clarified the meaning of words to each individual. For example, different people have different levels of understanding, and therefore, words which are appropriate for one group are not appropriate for another. Sometimes, the proper signification of the words are unknown to the hearer or are less than customary. If we wish to speak to such people

\textsuperscript{14}"sed multi pro episomo graeco putaverunt esse gamma, sicut ibi error fuit scriptorum." Ibid., 92.

\textsuperscript{15}"Ad quam nos maxime pervenire impedite inusitatis locutionis modus ac piperumque earundem vocum sigificatio diversa, cum modo in hac modo in illa significacione vox eadem sit posita." Ibid., 89.
according to doctrine, that is, if we wish to convey orthodoxy, we may have to vary the usage of these words.\textsuperscript{16}

Rather than allowing the same word to be used in several different ways, we ought to refine our use of words.\textsuperscript{17}

Augustine himself urged ecclesiastical doctors to "avoid all things which hinder the understanding of those to whom they speak." He who teaches should avoid words which do not teach, since the aim of discourse is to make another person understand your thoughts:

\begin{quote}
\textit{quid enim prodest locutionis integritas quam non sequitur intellectus audientis, cum loquendi omnino nulla sit causa si quod loquimur non intelligunt propter quos, ut intelligant, loquimur?}\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Rather than concentrating on eloquence, one ought to love the truth behind words. Just as a key of gold is of no use if a lock cannot be opened, so too eloquence is of no use if it does not lead to truth: "Insignis est indolis in verbis verum amare non verba. Quid enim prodest clavis aurea si aperire quod volumus non potest?" A wooden key can accomplish the same task as the key of gold, as we seek nothing but to open what is closed. In certain cases,

\textsuperscript{16}"Quibus quidem si ad doctrinan, ut oportet, loqui volumus, magis eorum usus quam proprietas sermonis aemulandus est." Ibid., 90.

\textsuperscript{17}"in omnibus identitas mater sit satietatis," id est fastidium generet, oportet in eadem quoque re verba ipsa variare nec omnia vulgaribus et communibus denudare verbis." Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 90.
therefore, variant uses of words are preferable to communicate the truth.¹⁹

Abailard goes on to cite several examples of this sort of teaching. Sometimes the gospels and prophets spoke more according to opinion and custom than according to truth.²⁰ When Mary called Joseph the father of Christ, she did so according to opinion and custom rather than according to the actual truth of the matter.²¹ The apostle says that Melchisedech was without father and mother and that the days have no beginning and end.²² When we say that Samuel appeared to the pharaoh as a phantasm, again we are speaking more according to custom than to the truth of the matter. According to Augustine, this apparition was called Samuel because it exhibited the form of Samuel, very much as one says that he sees Rome in his sleep because he has conceived the similitude of Rome in his mind.²³

In certain disciplines it is customary to speak poetically, as when Ovid wrote that "Fertilior seges est alienis semper in agris, vicinumque pecus grandius uber habet." We say that a box which appears to have nothing in

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¹⁹Ibid., 90.

²⁰"Nonnulla etiam in Evangelio iuxta opinionem hominum magis quam secundum veritatem rerum dici videntur." Ibid., 94.

²¹Ibid., 94.

²²Ibid., 95.

²³Ibid., 95.
it is empty, even though there is no place which is not
either filled by a body or by air. Likewise, we speak of a
starry sky on some occasions and on others not, a full moon
on some evenings and on others a smaller moon, and a hot sun
on some days and on others no sun at all. In all of these
cases, our language varies, yet the actual things about
which we speak do not change at all. These uses of language
are common, and it should not surprise us to learn that they
are also found in the writings of the saints:

Quid itaque mirum si a sanctis quoque patribus nonnulla
ex opinione magis quam ex veritate nonnumquam prolata
sint aut etiam scripta?24

Many of the most vexing problems can be solved by diligently
studying the various instances where different things are
said concerning the same thing. Rather than rejecting these
conflicting statements, we should draw the various precepts
together, since they were intended to improve our lives.25
We can solve many contradictions by looking at the intent
behind the writings of the saints. For example, some
precepts are directed to all commonly and others to specific
groups or individuals. Again, language is often determined
by those to whom we speak, and hence, what is a precept at
one time for one group of people may not be intended to
apply to all times and to all groups of people. "Saepe quod

24Ibid., 95-7.

25"Diligenter et illud discutiendum est, cum de eodem
diversa dicuntur, quid ad praecepti coartationem, quid ad
indulgentiae remissionem vel perfectionis exhortationem
intendatur." Ibid., 96.
uno tempore est concessum alio reperitur prohibitum; et quod
ad rigorem saepius praecipitur ex dispensatione nonnumquam
temperatur." Rather than assuming that the saints erred,
then, we should investigate the context in which the words
were used as well as the purpose of the writings.26

Abailard also pointed out that the saints often changed
their opinion on issues. Augustine, for example, issued a
book of retractions. Before attributing an opinion to one
of the church fathers, one ought to make sure that it is an
opinion which they actually held. According to Jerome, it
was the custom of the fathers to refer to ancient works, and
in so doing they occasionally introduced the opinions of
heretics in their writings. Feeling unequal to the task of
commenting on the epistle of Paul to the Galatians, Jerome
himself relied on the commentaries of Origen:
"imbecillitatem virium mebarum sentiens Origenis commentarios
sum secutus."27 Jerome urged his readers to investigate
whether objectionable statements were actually said by the
Greeks, and if they were not, each reader must determine for
himself whether his writings were themselves proper or
improper.28 Jerome saw nothing improper in this
methodology, as many others had proceeded in the same

26 Ibid., 96.
27 Ibid., 93.
28 "ut lectoris arbitrio derelinquere utrum probanda
esset an improbanda." Ibid., 94.
Augustine wrote the retractions in part, because he realized that in earlier works he was often conveying the opinions of others more than his own theories. By closely examining the context and purpose of the writings of the holy fathers, many contradictions can be easily resolved:

Facilis autem plerumque controversiarum solutio reperietur si eadem verba in diversis significationibus a diversis auctoribus posita defendere poterimus.  

These techniques for resolving textual difficulties do not seem to agree with the interpretations of Reuter and Deutsch. Abailard went to great lengths to argue that contradictions should not cause us to reject the writings of the saints, and to defend their intentions as honorable. The fathers and saints were not deliberately falsifying the gospels: "non per duplicitatem sed per ignorantiam dicant." One can only lie who claims something to be true which he thinks is false: "ille mentitur qui dicit verum quod putat falsum." The prophets and saints cannot be accused of deceit, as they truly believed what they said. Rather than rejecting their writings, then, Abailard

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29"si hoc crimen est, arguatur confessor Hilarius." Ibid., 94.

30"Beatus quoque Augustinus . . . multa se ibi ex opinione magis aliorum quam ex propria posuisse sententia profiteetur." Ibid., 94.

31Ibid., 96.

32Ibid., 98.

33Ibid., 94.
suggested several methods by which these problematic texts might be clarified. His examples of speaking about the sun, moon and empty boxes pointed to the fact that language often does not reflect the nature of things in themselves. Consequently, contradictions and inconsistencies in the holy scriptures and the writings of the church fathers need not necessarily imply that the eternal truths about which they wrote were false. These inconsistencies simply highlighted the function of language as a mediating factor between thought and the world.

The prologue of *Sic et non*, then, did not depart from the framework Abailard had established in the logical treatises. Universal terms do not name any entity which exists in reality, but rather signify concepts which exist in the individual mind. The understanding operates by abstracting these concepts from reality, and the prologue of *Sic et non* strengthens Abailard’s linguistic theories by emphasizing the fact that it is the nature of language to communicate and to inspire understanding. To communicate ideas, or to bring about understanding in the mind of another person, one must, as Abailard argued, choose language judiciously. Eloquent, scholarly language will not communicate knowledge to an uneducated group of people; likewise, poetic expressions often convey more than verbose technical language.

The function of language, then, is not always to describe reality exactly as it is. Otherwise, we could
never use universal terms in discourse. Obviously, however, these terms do have meaning for us, and this results from the ability of our minds to abstract generalizations from reality. So too, we often "abstract" truth from inexact language because we are more familiar with such usage. The nature of the person we are speaking to or trying to teach determines how we ought to speak, and since, above all else, the scriptures were designed to teach us a way of life, the saints and church fathers employed language in the most judicious fashion. Although this resulted in what appear to be contradictions, Abailard clearly believed that these problems could be solved, and that the integrity of the Bible and the writings of the fathers were not effected.

The methods for resolving contradictions discussed up to this point were relatively uncontroversial. Abailard admitted, however, that occasionally these methods might be unsuccessful, and in such cases, other techniques must be used. In such a case, one should collect the various writings, and retain those whose authority is the oldest and most generally respected:

Quod si forte adeo manifesta sit controversia ut nulla possit absolvi ratione, conferendae sunt auctoritates, et quae potioris est testimonii et maiores confirmationis potissimum retinenda.\(^34\)

Not every text written by the holy fathers is to be esteemed equal to other texts, and the writings of the fathers are to be distinguished from the authority of the canonical

\(^{34}\)Ibid., 97.
scripts. Augustine enjoined his audience not to revere his works as much as the holy scriptures, but to read them with a critical mind. Should anything be found in his writings which conflicted with beliefs which were understood as certain, one ought to reject his writings in favor of one's beliefs. If, on the other hand, one was not certain of the truth of his beliefs, then in such a case, one might profit from his writings.

Noli meis litteris quasi scripturis canonicis inservire, sed in illis quod non credebas cum inveniris, constanter crede. In istis autem quod certum non habebas nisi certum intellexeris, noli firme retinere.  

Likewise, Augustine also urged presbyters not to collect evidence from his writings or those of Cyprian and other church fathers against divine testimony; these writings, in general, were to be distinguished from the authority of the canonical texts: "hoc genus litterarum ab auctoritate canonis distinguendum est." Such texts should be studied "non cum credendi necessitate sed cum iudicandi libertate legendum est." The scriptures, then, should be consulted first when conflicts arise, for they are the most authoritative texts. "Scripturas itaque canonicas veteris et novi testamenti dicit instrumenta, in quibus a veritate aliquid dissentire haereticum est profiteri." In his

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35Ibid., 100.
36Ibid., 100.
37Ibid., 101.
later works, Abailard distinguished between the authority of the Old Testament and that of the New. In the Dialogue, for example, he rejected the law of the Jews as a guarantee of salvation. The New Testament, then, was more authoritative than the Old Testament.

In Sic et non Abailard had, however, already pointed out inconsistencies within the New Testament itself. This fact lends credence to the arguments of Deutsch and Reuter that Sic et non betrayed an inherently skeptical attitude towards the authority of the scriptures and that of the church. Abailard, however, clarified this issue in later works, arguing that some accounts were preferable to others, as their authors had first hand knowledge of the events they described. When Bernard of Clairvaux criticized the use of the Matthean text of the Pater Noster at the Paraclete, Abailard responded that Matthew had actually been present when the lord recited it. Hence, his account was preferable to that of the other gospels:

Matthaeus vero Dominam orationem apostolis tanquam doctoribus et perfectioribus perfectius traditam, eam interserit sermo in monte habito, quem et perfectionem esse constat quam ille fuerit, quem Lucas referit in campestribus ad turbas factum.\(^{38}\)

The arguments of the Dialogue and with Bernard over the Pater Noster are not especially controversial, but in the Sic et non he attempted to explain the apparent errors and

inconsistencies of the New Testament in a much more controversial fashion. Occasionally, the prophets thought they were inspired and made prophecies, when in fact they lacked the spirit of inspiration at that time:

Constat quippe et prophetas ipsos quandoque prophitiae gratia caruisse et nonnulla ex use prophetandi, cum se spiritum prophetandi crederent, per spiritum suum falsa protulisse.39

Even in those who are inspired, truth is not always fully revealed:

Qui etiam habetur, sicut non omnia uni confert dona ita nec de omnibus mentem eius quem replet, illuminat sed modo hoc modo illud revelat, et cum unum aperit alterum occultat.40

Different evangelists present different versions of the gospels, for example, because they were inspired in differing degrees. In Sic et non, Abailard argued that revelation is often incomplete in order to teach its recipient humility. The prophets sometimes spoke under the mistaken conviction that they were inspired, and to demonstrate to those who were inspired that their gifts did not originate from them but from the Holy Spirit, sometimes inspiration was incomplete or absent altogether:

Et hoc eis ad humilitatis custodiam permissum esse ut sic videlicet verius cognoscerent quales per spiritum Dei et quales per suum existerent.41

39 Ibid., 97.
40 Ibid., 97.
41 Ibid., 97.
Contradictions and inconsistencies, then, arise in part because inspiration is not the same for all people at all times.

In later works, Abailard more fully explained his theory of revelation. The Holy spirit is the source of all revelation, and "teaches by the inner voice":

Quod et ipse Spiritus ad honorem sui vobis suggerere dignetur, qui, ubi vult spirans, sive sono docet interius, sive calamo scribit in mentibus, nec moras patitur in docendo, nec dilationem habet in scribendo.\(^{42}\)

Inspiration, however, does not come to us in a form which can be immediately communicated to others; it must first be translated into human language:

Spiritus autem Sanctus cum in electis loquitur, primum intus illuminat ipsos, quam exterioribus eorum verbis alios. Unde bene loco voci divinae, ut dictum est, vox humana dicitur addita, ut quod per inspirationem aliis nuntietur.\(^{43}\)

Revelation, then, is transmitted to us through the medium of language, and this involves human fallibility. Sic et non presented a theory of language which was a continuation of Abailard’s earlier logical theories. Language mediates between the conceptual order and reality; in the case of universal terms, it often captures reality in an inexact way which does not necessarily reflect reality as it is. In Sic et non and the later sermons, the relation of language to

concepts is further developed, and here, language appears to be inexact as well. The entire prologue focuses on the inexact nature of language, emphasizing poetic uses, custom and opinion as reasons why contradictions emerge in the writings of the saints. Abailard’s remarks concerning the nature of revelation also emphasized language as a mediator, rather than as a reflector of revelation or reality. In *Sic et non*, Abailard claimed that prophets sometimes erred in thinking that they are inspired, and even the prince of the apostles was mistaken about the necessity for following ancient customs. Revelation, like the conceptual order, is another form of inner reality, and it too, relies on language in order to be expressed and communicated to others. Not all those inspired are inspired to the same degree; further, the truths of revelation far exceed our ability to grasp them in all their aspects, and as a consequence, different saints interpreted this inner inspiration in different ways. What one writer fails to understand, later commentators may grasp more fully:

Nam sancti prophetae cum aliqua Spiritus sanctus per eos loquatur, non omnes sententias ad quas se habent verba sua intelligunt, sed saepe unam tantum in eis habent, cum spiritus ipse, qui per eos loquitur, multas ibi providet, quatenus postmodum alias aliis expositionibus, et alias aliis inspirat.⁴⁵

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⁴⁴*Sic et non*, 97.

These remarks suggest a skeptical attitude toward the authority of the scriptures, implying that even the truths of revelation are not exempt from human error. Abailard, however, never denied that even inconsistent accounts were representations of God’s eternal truth, and he was adamant in his belief that these passages could be harmonized. The prologue, then, was not a work of skepticism designed to impugn the authority of the church and its doctrines, but rather, it was based on the belief of a logician that his craft could work for the benefit, rather than for the detriment of the church. Inconsistencies in the Old and New Testaments do not detract from their authority, but rather indicate that our understanding is limited, or that there have been errors in copying the texts:

Ibi si quid velut absurdum moverit non licet dicere, auctor huius libri non tenuit veritatem; sed aut codex mendosus est aut interpres erravit aut tu non intelligis.46

Abailard argued that these inconsistencies are not useless:

Quod si forte sanctis etiam ipsis, ut diximus, accidere Deus permittat, in his quidem quae nullum fidei detrimentum habent, nec id etiam illis infructuose accidit quibus omnia cooperantur in bonum.47

At the end of the prologue, Abailard clarifies this remark:

"Dubitando quippe ad inquisitionem venimus; inquirendo

46Sic et non, 101.

47Ibid., 99.
veritatem percipimus."  

The intent of *Sic et non* was not, then, to call the authority of the canonical texts into question, but to lead us to a deeper understanding of them by prompting us to think about these problems, and hopefully to solve them. The prologue is an early expression of the Abailardian concept of faith and belief discussed previously. Without some sort of understanding of the scriptures, one does not truly have belief and certainly cannot achieve the sort of faith which justifies. His logical theories had demonstrated that only the understanding, which operates via abstraction, can transcend sensation and deal with things which are not present to our senses. Since the truths of faith transcend experience, only the understanding is capable of grasping revelation. Just as Anselm had earlier argued that faith without understanding is dead, so Abailard argued that the more these problems are studied, the more the authority of scripture itself is commended:

> Cum autem aliqua scripturarum inducuntur dicta, tanto amplius lectorem excitant et ad inquirendam veritatem allicunt quanto magis scripturae ipsius commendatur auctoritas.\(^{49}\)

Christ himself taught more by questioning than by preaching, even though he himself was the perfect wisdom of God:

> Quae nos etiam propio exemplo moraliter instruens, circa duodecimum aetatis suae sedens et interrogans in medio doctorum inveniri voluit, primum discipuli nobis

\(^{48}\)Ibid., 103.

\(^{49}\)Ibid., 104.
formam per interrogationem exhibens quam magistri per 
praedictionem, cum sit tamen ipsa Dei plena ac perfecta 
sapientia.\textsuperscript{50}

Questioning can only serve to strengthen our faith, not to 
destroy it. As Martin Grabmann points out,

\begin{quote}
Von einem allgemeinen oder absoluten Zweifel im Sinne 
der von Descartes ist hier keine Rede . . . Es est hier 
von einem Zweifel im Sinne der aristotelischen 
Dialektik die Rede, zudem handelt es sich um eine 
Empfehlung der interrogatio.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

Abailard, unlike Descartes, never called the foundations of 
his belief system into question, but rather proceeded on the 
assumption that the canonical texts were authoritative. 
Like Anselm, Abailard believed that reason properly used 
could never destroy faith, but only strengthen it. The 
prologue, then, closes on an affirmative note. Abailard’s 
intent was not to destroy faith, but rather to build it up 
with understanding. Faith which is supported by 
understanding does not wither as easily as unexplored 
belief. Doubting strengthens faith and leads us closer to 
the truth.

Moreover, the examples which Abailard presented suggest 
that the use of reason is absolutely necessary, as the 
written records in which revelation is revealed are often 
couched in inexact language. Questioning the meaning behind 
these documents and applying the methods he sketched in the 
prologue can strengthen our understanding of the faith.

\textsuperscript{50}Ibid., 104.

\textsuperscript{51}Grabmann, 209.
Otherwise, we would be left in doubt concerning the authenticity of the canonical texts and ultimately, about the authority of the church. The prologue, then, sets the stage for Abailard’s later works, in which he more completely articulated his theories about the nature of faith and belief.

As we have seen, the individual played a large role in the process of faith. The prologue, written in 1122, established the groundwork for Abailard’s mature theories, in that it already stressed the puzzling character of revelation and the inconsistent accounts not only among the writings of the fathers, but in the scriptures as well. Given these facts, the need for dialectic is almost a presupposition for the development of faith -- how can we have faith when we are not even sure which truths we are supposed to believe? The prologue argues that God allowed for the presence of this uncertainty and that it is, in fact, advantageous. It is doubt which leads us to truth; it is doubt which brings about solid and unshakable faith.

Reuter and Deutsch are correct in asserting that the prologue contains an element of skepticism, yet they fail to note that for Abailard the critical attitude in the prologue was only the first step toward a deeper understanding of revelation and a fuller experience of faith. Dr. Grabmann points out that Abailard proceeded all along with the conviction that these contradictions could be harmonized, and notes that this work was not cited by either Bernard of
Clairvaux or William of Saint Thierry in their polemical
treatises. If it were taken as controversial, which it
almost surely would have been had it truly represented a
skeptical attitude, especially in light of Abailard's
condemnation for heresy at Soissons, then surely Bernard and
William of Thierry would not have failed to mention it.
Although the prologue began by noting the many
contradictions and inconsistencies in the writings of the
fathers and scriptures, it immediately asserted a belief in
the authority of these writings which is maintained
throughout. The prologue concludes with a statement that a
study of these problems will only confirm the authority of
the scriptures. If this were truly an attempt to discredit
the church, then it was a rather feeble one indeed.

The prologue was one of Abailard's first expressions of
the validity of the application of dialectic to theology,
and as such, it paved the way for his mature works. Its
methods placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of the
human mind even within the scope of revelation; it clearly
indicated that revelation was not simply given to us as
true, but was expressed by human language in forms which
were often inexact. It was thus up to each individual to
examine the evidence for himself, and by applying the
methods which Abailard recommended, to come to a greater
understanding of faith.

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52Grabmann, 206.
Reuter and Deutsch argued that *Sic et non* represented a skeptical attitude toward authority, and as argued above, this claim must be rejected. They have, then, seen Abailard's logical interests as confounding his theology. Other authors, however, discount the importance of *Sic et non* altogether, arguing that it was of minimal significance not only for succeeding generations, but also in terms of Abailard's total output. J. G. Sikes devotes relatively little space to *Sic et non*, and his interpretation of its place in the Abailardian corpus is betrayed by the fact that it is discussed before the logical theories. These considerations suggest that Sikes attributes little or no importance to the work, and that he does not see it as a part of Abailard's theological system as a whole. Sikes notes that

Abailard does not attempt to defend the use of logic, nor does he claim for it the right to make independent decisions in cases where the authorities of the church are found to be in disagreement.  

He goes on to argue that *Sic et non* was primarily written for didactic purposes, and that Abailard never intended to solve the contradictions:

there is nothing to show that the book was left in an unfinished state, or that he intended to complete it later by the addition of his own conclusions to each of the several chapters.

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54 Ibid., 81.
According to Sikes, Abailard left the book unfinished so that his students might better be able to practice the methods he taught in the prologue. Richard Weingart also claims that

The *Sic et non* is a study manual for students; this is its primary intention... since the student was to harmonize the divergences in the particular instances cited, Abailard did not provide the answers.  

*Sic et non*, however, was much more than simply a didactic tool; it was an integral part of the Abailardian corpus. Weingart argues that all other aspects of the work were secondary, but in fact, it did represent the beginnings of Abailard’s theological system. Sikes, for example, is surely mistaken in thinking that the prologue had nothing to do with Abailard’s logical theories, as in fact, from start to finish, it is a description of the nature of logic, precisely as he described it in the *Dialectica* and other works. Logic is the science of discerning good arguments from bad ones, and this cannot be done without an adequate understanding of words. Logic, Abailard tells us, is not concerned with what words refer to so much as to the relationship between words. In *Sic et non*, he presented several instances of contradictory accounts, and what science is better able to resolve these difficulties than dialectic? Revelation comes to us in the form of

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propositions, and dialectic is uniquely qualified to deal with relationships between propositions.

Sikes is correct in maintaining that Abailard does not explicitly refer to logic or dialectic in the prologue. This, however, does not imply that it has no connection with logic. Logic and dialectical methods are the subject of the prologue, and in his logical treatises, such as the Dialectica, he consistently affirmed the validity of applying logic to theological difficulties. That the prologue does not explicitly mention logic is no surprise; after all, Abailard had only recently been condemned at Soissons. The condemnation at Soissons was based on his Theologia Summi Boni, in which he attempted to clarify the relationship between the persons of the Trinity using logic and grammar as a model. It is not unreasonable to assume that Abailard wrote the prologue as a justification of his application of logic to theology, citing examples where, in fact, dialectical methods might clarify, rather than destroy, revelation. Although logic is not explicitly mentioned, it is the subject of the prologue. Sikes emphasizes the fact that Abailard did not attempt to solve the following 158 problems himself, and takes this as implying that he did not intend Sic et non to be a logical or theological treatise, nor did he mean to establish any kind of positive theology with the work. In support of this position, he points out that only the first chapter deals with the issue of faith and reason, and "as no special
emphasis is laid upon it, no significance can be attached to its leading position." Further, there were a number of conflicting opinions on this issue which "apart from his own difficulties, Abailard would have been bound to cite." These assumptions are also incorrect, as the issue of faith and reason actually is discussed in the first four chapters. The first is explicitly devoted to faith and reason, and at 172 lines, is one of the longest chapters in the work.

Quaestio two discusses whether "fides sit de non apparentibus tantum et contra;" quaestio three concerns whether "sit credendum in Deum solum et contra," and begins by discussing the difference between the faith of the demons that Christ is the son of God, and true faith which acts on this belief by joining the church; quaestio four deals with the issue "quod agnitio non sit de non apparentibus sed fides tantum et contra." The first four quaestiones, then, are directly concerned with the nature of faith and its relation to reason. The logical theories had earlier emphasized the ability of the understanding or reason to transcend experience, and the first quaestiones deal with this issue within the realm of theology.

Further, this argument neglects the immediate background of the work. Abailard had been recently condemned for heresy as a result of his application of logical methods to theology, and it would not have been

56Ibid., 81.
unreasonable of him to want to make a case for his methodology, but to do so in a moderate fashion which would not create any further controversy. Hence, he did not explicitly mention logic, although that was his subject; he neglected to solve these contradictions, which might generate further controversy, in favor of simply presenting a number of techniques by which these contradictions might be resolved. The mere presentation of such a large number of problematic issues within church doctrine was support for his position. At the council of Soissons, he had been condemned for unorthodox metaphors about the Trinity. In *Sic et non*, he presented a number of conflicting opinions on the nature of the Trinity, in fact the Trinity is the subject of *quaestiones* 5-35; the specific nature of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the subject of *quaestiones* 35-90. By far the largest portion of the work, then, is devoted to precisely those issues which had recently caused Abailard difficulties. By presenting such an impressive collection of conflicting opinions on subjects which he had previously addressed, he implicitly strengthened his own case -- if even the most respected authorities were in conflict with each other over these issues, then Abailard's own account might be considered as simply one opinion among many, and not as a work of outright heresy. *Sic et non*, then, strengthened his own position, and was an argument for the use of dialectic in theology. What better argument could be devised for the necessity of employing dialectic
within theology than a compilation of 158 theological problems? As such, *Sic et non* played a part in the Abailardian corpus as a whole. It continued the theories found in his logical treatises, and it was not only a justification of the use of dialectic in theology, but it gave several concrete examples of exactly how dialectics ought to be used in resolving theological issues.

Further, the structure of the work as a whole amounted to a blueprint for the rest of Abailard's career. Most authors pay very little attention to *Sic et non*, perhaps because they share Weingart's view that all aspects apart from the didactic intent of the work were of secondary importance. This is far from the truth, for a close examination of *Sic et non* demonstrates that as early as 1122 Abailard had formulated a rudimentary plan for an entire theological system, a plan which was methodical and logically coherent from start to finish. Prior to Soissons, Abailard had written several logical treatises and the *Theologia Summi Boni*. *Sic et non* included *quaestiones* on all the issues he would discuss in his later works, and contained the rudimentary elements of his own theories.

The first four *quaestiones* discuss the issue of faith and reason. Although Sikes argues that the leading position of this discussion was not significant, in fact these *quaestiones* could not have been placed elsewhere in the work. *Sic et non* is not simply a collection of diverse opinions on random issues, but each issue is logically
related to what precedes it and to what follows it. A discussion of faith and reason is placed at the beginning of the work, for without some opinion on this issue, it would make no sense to continue to discuss the other issues. If reason had no place within faith whatsoever, then *Sic et non* would indeed have reduced theology to a shambles, as it would then be a mere collection of contradictory evidence with no positive outlook at all. The relation between faith and reason, however, was an issue which Abailard addressed throughout his entire career. The first *quaestio* addresses the question of whether faith indeed can be supplemented by reason, and begins with the famous remark of Gregory the Great that "nec fides habet meritum cui humana ratio praebet experimentum."\(^{57}\) Not only is faith said to have no merit when it is supported by human reason, but God’s glory is beyond the scope of reason. Gregory’s view is countered by that of Augustine, "sed disputationis disciplina ad omnia genera quaestionum, quae in sanctis litteris sunt, penetranda plurimum valet."\(^ {58}\) Abailard’s later works responded "yes and no" to this problem; he argued that reason could never fully penetrate the mysteries of the faith, but that nevertheless, it played a role in strengthening faith and was in fact able to solve many

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\(^{57}\) Gregory the Great, *Homilia in Evangelia XX*, in *Sic et non*, 113.

\(^{58}\) Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, in *Sic et non*, 116.
problematic issues. Faith supported by reason did have merit, as it was only by exploring faith that one could truly understand revelation and as a result, develop faith infused with charity.

Quaestio two treats the problem of whether faith only concerns those things which are not seen, that is, those things which cannot be known for certain. Augustine wrote

Non quia cognoverunt crediderunt, sed ut cognoscerent crediderunt. Credimus ut cognoscamus, non cognoscimus ut credamus. Quid est enim fides nisi credere quod non vides? Fides ergo est quod non vides credere; veritas, quod credidisti videre; veritas est sed adhuc creditur, non videtur.  

This passage distinguishes faith from truths which are known by direct evidence, such as the evidence of our senses. Faith transcends the sensual order, and as such, is distinguished from knowledge, but nevertheless it is true. Gregory the Great argued that if the truths of faith were proved by certain evidence, then we would have knowledge and not faith about these truths:

Quae enim sunt apparentia, fidem non habent sed agnitionem; sed aliud vidit, aliud credidit. A mortali quippe homine divinitas videri non potuit.

The quaestio closes with other views, however, which assign a role to reason within faith:

Quousque unam fidem habeamus post resurrectionem et omnes aequaliter Deum cognoscamus. In praesenti siquidem saeculo, sicut est diversitas scientiae ita est diversa fides, quia aliud plus, aliud minus de Deo intelligit et, secundum quod intelligit et cognoscit,

59 Augustine, Homilia XXXIX, in Sic et non, 120.

60 Gregory the Great, Homilia VI, in Sic et non, 118.
habet fidem. Post resurrectionem autem iam non erit diversitas fidei quia, sicut omnes aequaliter Deum videbunt, ita omnes aequaliter Deum videbunt, ita aequaliter fidem habebunt.⁶¹

When we all finally see God, we will all have the same knowledge of God. In the present life, however, faith differs from one person to another according as each one knows and understands God. Abailard responded to this dichotomy in later works by defining faith as an "existimatio non apparentium," thus taking into account the remarks of Augustine and Gregory the Great. Yet his logical treatises had defined the understanding as the only faculty which is able to transcend the level of sensation, which deals with those things which do appear to our senses. Reason is the most valuable tool of the understanding, and, therefore, Abailard argued that it is by reason that we are able to grasp faith at all. In such a way, he was also able to take account of Haimo's views, arguing that different people have stronger or weaker faiths according as they have sought to understand faith.

The tone of both quaestiones is quite moderate, emphasizing traditional views over those which suggest a role for reason. This is undoubtedly due in part to a desire to avoid controversy, but it also reflects the mature views of Abailard. As noted earlier, Abailard never denied the necessity of grace and consistently maintained that

⁶¹Haimo, Super Epistolam ad Ephesios, in Sic et non, 121.
dialectic was never able to fully grasp the mysteries of the faith, but only able to elucidate and clarify them by providing similes and metaphors, and in this case, rules for studying difficult texts. Since his later works synthesized these different views rather than advocating one side while rejecting the other, this provides support for interpreting Sic et non as the beginning of his attempt to create a theological framework which actively sought to harmonize contradictions and to strengthen the Christian faith. That he did not solve these conflicts within the work perhaps indicated that he saw no need to, as his mature theological position consistently asserted "yes and no" to these questions. The moderate tone of the quaestiones concerning reason and revelation does not suggest, as Sikes argues, that they had no significance. Rather, it should suggest that Abailard's system in fact was never that of an eighteenth century rationalist, and operated for the most part within the confines of traditional theology. Like Anselm, he attempted to strengthen faith by the use of reason, but accepted the unique nature of faith as an "existimatio non apparentium." Faith is not knowledge, but nevertheless there is a role for reason. These first two quaestiones were the groundwork for Abailard's entire theological system, and contrary to the opinion of Sikes, that they are placed first is profoundly significant. They are intimately related to Abailard's entire output, and betray the essentially conservative nature of his approach.
Quaestio three is logically related to the first two quaesitiones, discussing the nature of belief. Abailard cites Augustine, who noted that even the demons believed Christ, and distinguished the mere knowledge of who Christ was and that what he said was true from belief in Christ. "Daemones credebant ei, et non credebant in eum. Credimus Paulo, sed non in Paulum; Petro, sed non in Petrum." This sort of belief is distinguished from "credere in eum," which is "credendo amare, credendo diligere, credendo in eum ire et eius membris incorporari." We have already seen that this latter remark became Abailard's notion of faith infused with charity. Mere belief in the truth of God's teaching is held even by the demons, yet they are clearly not saved.

True faith diligently loves Christ in such a way that one's entire life is infused with these principles. Charitable faith also diligently cares for the church, and the rest of the quaestio is devoted to the relation of belief in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to belief in the church and her saints. Again, the tone of the quaestio is entirely traditional, the remaining passages asserting that belief in the Trinity also mandates belief in the saints and their writings:

Hoc autem non solum in Moyse sed in omnibus sanctis est, ut quicunque credit Deo, alter eius fidem recipere non queat nisi credat et in sanctos eius.

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Augustine, Super Iohannem, Tractatu XXVIII, in Sic et non, 122.
Quod autem dico tale est, nisi prius crediderit de sanctis eius vera esse quae scripta sunt.\textsuperscript{63}

The approach here, then, would seem again to cast doubt on the thesis of Reuter and Deutsch. The tone not only of the prologue, but of the quaeestiones dealing with faith and reason is conservative, and never implies a far reaching role for reason nor the rejection of the church or the scriptures. This quaeestio, however, like the other two before, establishes the foundation for all of Abailard's work. Quaeestio two suggested a role for reason, and three more clearly spells out this role. "Credere eo" is distinct from "credere in eum" -- mere belief is distinguished from charitable faith, and in the later works, this transformation arises through the use of reason.

Quaeestio four strengthens this account by citing several authorities which call faith a certain kind of knowledge:

\begin{quote}
Quod dixi multum interesse utrum aliquid certa mentis ratione teneatur, quod scire dicimus, vel fama an litteris credendum posteris utiliter commendatur . . . Quod scimus igitur debemus rationi, quod credimus, auctoritati, non sic accipiendum est ut in sermone usitatiore vereamur nos dicere scire quod idoneis testibus credimus. Proprie quippe cum loquimur verbis consuetudini aptoribus, non dubitemus dicere nos et quod percipimus nostri corporis sensibus et quod fide dignis credimus testibus . . . Constat igitur nostra scientia ex visis rebus et creditis.\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{63}Jerome, *Commentaria in epistola ad Philemonem*, in *Sic et non*, 124.

\textsuperscript{64}Augustine, *Retractions*, in *Sic et non*, 125.
Faith thus appears as a kind of knowledge. It does not arise from sensation, but rather from reliable testimony. Those things which we believe on reliable authority are, then, known in a certain sense. The first four quaestiones, then, establish the principles by which Abailard’s entire theological career was to proceed. The fact that they appear first is significant, for without taking account of these issues, his entire system would have been invalid. On these issues, he argued “yes and no” in a way that enabled him to extend the framework of traditional theology without overstepping its limits of reason. The moderate character of these quaestiones illuminates his aims — he intended only to shore up the faith, never to destroy it.

The remaining 154 quaestiones also reveal much about the structure of Abailard’s later works. The next thirty chapters discuss the Trinity. When Sic et non was composed, Abailard had already written one work on the Trinity, the Theologia Summi Boni which was condemned at Soissons. To a certain degree, the compilation of differing opinions on this issue must have been intended to bolster his image — if well respected authorities disagreed on this issue, then surely his work could not be as dangerous as was maintained. Abailard included several citations from the authorities which approached the Trinity very much as he did in the Theologia Summi Boni and as he would do in the Theologia Christiana and the Theologia Scholarium. These chapters,
then, not only strengthened his own case, but indicated the ways in which he would proceed in later works.

Quaestio five discusses "quod non sit Deus singularis et contra." Each citation emphasizes the unity of the Trinity, while maintaining the diversity of the persons. One citation is particularly interesting, taken from Hilarius. Hilarius argues that the Trinity may not be understood as simply singular, since in the passage "et dixit Deus: Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram" a plural rather than a singular verb is used. As noted earlier, this was one of the arguments Abailard put forth to demonstrate knowledge of the Trinity in the prechristian writers. Plurality of name, however, does not imply plurality in essence. According to Isidore:

Trinitas in relativis personarum nominibus est; deitas vero non triplicatur sed in singularitate est . . . De patre autem et filio et spiritu sancto, propter unam et aequalem divinitatem non nomen deorum sed Dei esse ostenditur.\(^{65}\)

In his later works, Abailard too emphasized this point. In the Theologia Christiana, he argued that the predication of three words or names does not imply that the essence of the Trinity is threefold:

Et cum multa nomina vel multae affinitiones incidunt in unam vocem, omnis autem affinitio et omne nomen sit vox

\(^{65}\)Isidore of Seville, Etymologiarum, in Sic et non, 127.
sive essentia, non tamen ideo multas voces dicimus, sive multas essentias.\textsuperscript{66}

Just as we say that a wine barrel is in a certain place and a house is in a certain place without implying that they are in different places, so too we can speak of the Trinity using different names without implying that it is three different persons.

The next several chapters of \textit{Sic et non} continue to treat problems associated with the Trinity. Whether there are three eternities or one in the Trinity\textsuperscript{67}; whether there are a multitude of things in the Trinity or it is altogether a unified whole.\textsuperscript{68} Many of the opinions which he cites foreshadow arguments which he would make in later works. \textit{Quaestio} eight discusses the diverse names of the persons. According to Boethius:

\begin{quote}
In rerum vero numero non facit pluralitatem unitatum repetitio, velut si de eodem dicamus gladius unus, mucro unus, ensis unus, repetitio quaedam est eiusdem, non numeratio diversorum, velut si dicam sol, sol, sol. Non igitur si patre et filio et spiritu sancto tertio praedicatur Deus idcirco trina praedictio numerum facit.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

Boethius' commentaries on Aristotle played an important role in the development of Abailard's logical theories, as they


\textsuperscript{67}Peter Abailard, \textit{Sic et non}, \textit{quaestio} 6.

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., 8.

\textsuperscript{69}Boethius, \textit{De Trinitate}, in \textit{Sic et non}, 130.
were the source of his knowledge of Aristotle. His remarks on the Trinity were evidently also influential, as this argument is almost precisely the approach Abailard takes in the *Theologia Christiana*.

Like Boethius, Abailard argued that the use of different names for the persons of the Trinity did not imply plurality in the essence of God. Abailard argued that identity and diversity could be described in five ways. There is identity of essence when two or more things have the same essence and are numerically identical, as for example a sword and a blade. There is identity of property when one thing participates in the proper character of another, as when a white thing is also a hard thing and vice versa. There is identity by definition when things are the same by definition, as a sword and a blade. Finally, there is identity when a thing remains forever the same, as does God. Things may be identical in essence and number, but not in property. "This may be the case even when their substances are the same, their proper functions alone making a fundamental distinction between them."\(^7\) For example, an image made of wax is identical in essence and number with the wax of which it is made, yet there is no relation between the nature of the wax and the proper nature of the

\(^7\)Peter Abailard, *Christian Theology*, 75; *Theologia Christian*, 1247D-1248B.
image.\textsuperscript{71} This was a key metaphor in Abailard's explanation of the Trinity, for the diverse persons also are identical in essence and number, but yet differ in their proper functions. The distinctions we make between the persons of the Trinity are based on reason not on differences of essence. Such distinctions, however, are commonplace even in grammar, where we speak of the same man as speaking, being spoken to, and being spoken about.\textsuperscript{72} Different definitions can be given to the persons of the Trinity, but these are different only in terms of meaning, not in terms of the actual content of the definition.\textsuperscript{73} God is diverse in definition, but not in essence. Just as "twenty first" does not imply that there is a twentieth and a first, so too, the use of three names for the Trinity does not imply division in God's essence. Compare the citation from Boethius in \textit{Sic et non}:

\begin{quote}
In rerum vero numero non facit pluralitatem unitatem repetitio . . . Ita igitur substantia continet unitatem, relatio multiplicat trinitatem. Nam idem pater qui filius non est nec idem uterque qui spiritus sanctus. Idem tamen Deus est pater et filius et spiritus sanctus.\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

\footnote{Both William of Thierry and Bernard attacked Abailard's metaphor, arguing that it suggested that the Father, being likened to the wax, was prior to the Son; for Bernard and William, this implied that the Son was not coeternal with the Father.}

\textsuperscript{71}\textsuperscript{74}Boethius, \textit{De Trinitate}, in \textit{Sic et non}, 130-1.
The citations in *Sic et non* all emphasize the unity of the Trinity, but not at the expense of the distinction in persons. *Quaestio* eight, then, contains the essence of Abailard's later trinitarian speculations.

In fact, Abailard's exposition in the *Theologia Christiana* follows almost exactly the exposition in this chapter. In *Sic et non*, after discussing the diverse uses of words, he goes on to address the issue of whether the persons are themselves substances. Likewise, in the *Theologia Christiana*, after taking a Boethian approach to the persons of the Trinity, he deals with the Greek usage of substance and hypostasis, quoting the exact passages which he used in *Sic et non*.\(^7^5\) *Sic et non* discusses the Greeks and their knowledge of the Trinity in *quaestio* twenty five before proceeding to discuss the foreknowledge and other attributes of God; this is also the structure of the *Theologia Christiana*. In the *Theologia Christiana*, Abailard argued that it might be easier to convince pagans of the truth of the Christian Trinity if its similarity to their own views was made clear; the inclusion of article twenty five in *Sic et non* suggests that Abailard was already thinking along these lines, for this discussion follows twenty four articles on the nature of the Trinity, and precedes a discussion of the nature of God. This is not a haphazard arrangement of topics, for in the *Theologia Christiana*.

\(^7^5\)See Ibid., 1268-1269.
Christiana Abailard argues that God's nature is immanently logical, which is displayed in the structure of the world. Quaestio twenty five, then, is placed after a discussion of the Trinity, asks whether the pagans knew of the Trinity, and "answers" with a discussion of the foreknowledge and nature of God.

The discussion of God in the Theologia Christiana also parallels that of Sic et non; article thirty two of Sic et non begins with citations arguing that there are certain things, such as lying, which cannot be attributed to God. The chapter ends by defining God's omnipotence as

\[ \text{non quod omnia possit facere sed quia potest efficere quidquid vult, ita ut nihil valeat resistere eiusmodi voluntati quin compleatur, aut aliquo modo impedire eam.} \]

In like manner, the Theologia Christiana argues that God is constrained by his goodness, so that he may only will those things which are consistent with his nature. His omnipotence results from the fact that he can do whatever he wills, not that he can will anything at all. Sikes and others make much of the fact that Abailard did not solve the issues put forth in Sic et non; but this argument overlooks his later works, in which he took note of virtually every citation which appeared here. The articles on the Trinity and the nature of God foreshadow his own theological works,

\[ ^{76} \text{Augustine, De Spiritu et Littera, in Sic et non, 181.} \]

\[ ^{77} \text{Ibid., 1324B-1325C.} \]
and indicate that as early as 1122 he had thought out his approach to these issues.

The theology of the Trinity was central to Abailard's entire theological system. Through an understanding of the Trinity as Power, Wisdom, and Love pagans might be converted, especially when the similarity of the Trinity to their own conceptions was made clear; a deeper understanding of the nature of the three persons could help create charitable faith in Christians. A true understanding of the nature of Christ as the Wisdom of God united with human nature could inspire us to greater obedience and a more perfect realization of faith. In man, as in the Trinity, power, wisdom and love could become one, and for Abailard, this was achieved through the use of reason and dialectical methods.

The structure of *Sic et non* supports the interpretation of the relation between grace and dialectic given earlier. Abailard discusses the issue of reason and revelation, goes on to discuss the nature of the Trinity, asking whether it was revealed to or grasped by the pagans, and ends by discussing the logical constraints on the nature of God. If we understand the Trinity, we are led to greater obedience to God, which is displayed in our actions. Acting properly depends on our knowledge of what it is proper to do, and, as a result, the discussion of the Trinity in *Sic et non* is followed by an extended discussion of various ethical
issues. The following list is a fair sampling of the issues which are included:

CXXX: Quod nullus humanus concubitus possit esse sine culpa et contra.
CXXXVI: Quod dilectio proximi omnen hominem complectatur et non.
CXXXIX: Quod bonam voluntatem nostram gratia Dei non praecedat et contra.
CXL: Quod legis praecepta non perfecta sint sicut sunt evangelii et contra.
CXLII: Quod opera factorum non iustificent hominem et contra.
CXLIII: Quod peccatum actus sit non res et contra.
CXLIV: Quod peccator sit ille tantum qui assiduus est in peccatis et contra.
CXLV: Quod aliquando peccamus nolentes et contra.
CXLIX: Quod gravius sit aperte peccare quam occulte et contra.
CLI: Quod sine confessione non dimittantur peccata et contra.
CLIV: Quod nulla de causa liceat mentiri et contra.
CLVIII: Quod poena parvulorum non baptizatorum mitissima respectu ceteram poenarum damnatorum sit et contra.

Given the emphasis which Abailard's theological treatises placed on reason and the role of the individual, it is not surprising that ethics became the focal point of his career. In Ethics, or Know Thyself, Abailard was concerned with the nature of sin and individual responsibility. As we have seen, his notion of faith presupposed a role for the individual. Without reason, there was no belief at all, and hence, no faith at all. In the Ethics, the role of reason is further clarified, for we do not sin unless we have intended to do so. Intent requires understanding, which presupposes the use of reason. The last section of Sic et non collects diverse opinions on the very issues which Abailard would later address in the Ethics. Is sin a thing
or an action? Is there original sin? Do we sin against our will? Is it worse to sin openly than covertly? What is the role of confession in the remission of sins? That Abailard should be concerned with the nature of sin was a natural consequence of his belief in the power of human reason within the Christian faith.

The prologue of *Sic et non* established a role for reason in theology by emphasizing the often ambiguous nature of revelation as recorded in human language. It was necessary for us to interpret the scriptures, not merely to receive them as finished products. Reason thus played a role in faith from its very inception, not only due to the nature of belief itself, but also to the nature of revelation. Even the church fathers and councils were interpreting the scriptures, as many articles of dogma could not be explicitly found in the scriptures. Reason, then, was a prerequisite of faith, and these theories emphasized the element of human responsibility. If revelation is not simply given to us, then we do not simply follow it blindly. Sin is also the result of reason, in the sense that sin is determined by our conscious motives and intentions.

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Abailard’s ethical theories will be discussed later, but for our purposes here it is sufficient to note that these views were a logical consequence of the issues which were presented in the earlier parts of *Sic et non*. The discussion of the ethical issues in the closing sections of the work, then, thus reflect the logical progression of Abailard’s theological work as a whole. An understanding of the Trinity leads us to practice faith with charity, and hence, ethical issues emerge out of trinitarian concerns. *Sic et non* was not simply a random collection of diverse opinions on various subjects, it was a blueprint for the entire Abailardian corpus. He may not have explicitly solved these issues within the body of the work, but in his later career, he addressed each and every question and created a positive theological system which, true to the title of this work, sought to capture the truth by harmonizing the various opinions.

The elements of his mature system, then, were present in 1122, and if Bernard of Clairvaux had known this prior to the condemnation in 1140, perhaps he would not have called him a "logician lately turned theologian." For Abailard, logic and theology were always intimately related; without a logical, rational approach, there was no faith at all. *Sic et non* began with a discussion of faith and reason and proceeded to spell out the progression of reason through the Trinity and finally to ethical concerns. Consequently, it provides valuable insight into the structure of Abailard’s
theology, and is worthy of much more attention than it is usually given. On its own, it was a theological treatise — it was, in fact, an entire system under one cover. It justified Abailard's earlier work, and began his later work. If one accepts *Sic et non* as the beginnings of a theological system, it exonerates Abailard of the charge that he was simply a logician toying with theology; his theological system was logically connected from start to finish. For Abailard, logic and theology were not mutually exclusive; indeed a theology which took adequate account of the notions of faith and belief presupposed an account of logic. *Sic et non* is concrete evidence that a thread of unity runs from the logical treatises, through the works on the Trinity, to the *Ethics*. A logician's mind would not have worked in a haphazard fashion, and *Sic et non* was no haphazard work. It is a significant work in the Abailardian corpus if for no other reason than that it illuminates the relation of each part to the whole. It was a concrete example of how reason might function in theology, and Abailard spent the rest of his career elucidating the issues he put forth in 1122.
CHAPTER 7

THE IMPACT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF *SIC ET NON*:
RENAISSANCE HUMANISM IN THE MIDDLE AGES

*Sic et non* was significant in terms of Abailard's career as a whole, for it foreshadowed his later works. Its approach was basically positive in outlook, and so goes a long way toward refuting those who hold that Abailard intended to destroy the authority of the church through a dialectical examination of the scriptures and works of the church fathers. Its importance, however, goes beyond its significance in the Abailardian corpus as a whole, for it has been maintained that *Sic et non* was extremely influential in the scholastic method of disputation. Abailard played an important role in the rise of the University at Paris, and the methodology of *Sic et non* was central to the new style of schooling. Beyond these considerations, the approach of the prologue foreshadowed the interest of the humanists of the Italian Renaissance in rhetoric and in the ability of each individual to decide religious issues for himself. In many ways, Abailard was the first humanist, and even if it cannot be said that he originated the methodology of *Sic et non*, his thought as a whole was nevertheless strikingly original. Petrarch referred to the Middle Ages as the dark ages, but perhaps he
would not have been so quick to do so had he seen the parallels to Renaissance rhetorical practices and philological techniques in the work of Abailard. If so, he might have recognized a kindred spirit who valued the role of the individual in faith, and as a result, was accused by his contemporaries of perverting the Christian faith, much as the Renaissance humanist was accused of paganism. Abailard’s theology strained the limits of traditional theology, and as such, *Sic et non* is important not only for assessing the character of Abailard’s work as a whole, but for assessing his place in the history of thought.

Many commentators have maintained that the methodology of *Sic et non* created an intellectual revolution. Heinrich Denifle and J. A. Endres argued that Abailard laid the groundwork for the scholastic method in theology, philosophy, and civil law:

> daß die Abälardische Methode die Grundlage für die Art und Weise der Quästionen und Disputationen der späteren Epoche auf theologischem, philosophischem, kanonistischem und zivilrechtlichem Gebiete wurde.¹

Denifle argued not only that Abailard and his methodology exerted a strong influence on the development of the University of Paris, but also on the work of Gratian:

> Es entbehrt nicht der Wahrscheinlichkeit, daß Abälards Methode auch Gratian bei Ausarbeitung seines Dekrets beeinflusst hat. Er wollte ein Werk leifern, welches eine "concordantia discordantium canonum" sei und die

zwischen früheren canones herrschenden contrarietates zur Darstellung bringen und auflösen sollte.  

Thaner also argued that "Gratians Concordia discordantium und Abälards Solutio controversarium ein und dasselbe seien." For Thaner, "Die Methode das Sic et non wirkte revolutionär, wie die Erfindung einer Maschine revolutionär wirkt." Like Denifle and Thaner, H. Singer argued that Abailard's rationalistic approach to the canonical texts was widely influential, and had an impact on the work of Rufinus:

daß die Mängel dieser rationalistischen Behandlung der canones (welcher man mit Recht zum Vorwurf gemacht hat, daß sie in ihrem Bestreben, möglichst alle Autoren zu retten, deren Ausspruche um ihren besten Gehalt bringt und mit Hilfe einer trugerischen Dialektik den Quellen einen a priori feststehenden Sinn unterlegt) auch in Rufins Werke unverkennbar hervortreten.

G. Robert argued that die Quaestiones des Otto von Ourscamp, eines Abälardschulers, bezeugen . . . in ihrer dialektischen Anlage und Eigenart den genannten Einfluß der Sic et non Methode auf das theologische Unterrichtwesen.

The influence of Sic et non can also, according to Robert, be found in the sentences of Roland, Robert Pulleyn, Robert

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2Denifle, in Grabmann, 214.

3Thaner, Abalard und das kanonische Recht, in Grabmann, 214.

4Thaner, in Grabmann, 213.

5H. Singer, Die Summa Decretorum des Magisters Rufinus (Paderborn, 1902), quoted in Grabmann, 214.

of Melun, Peter Lombard, and the *Summa Sententiarum* of Hugh of Saint Victor.

Other authors, however, have been more reluctant to credit Abailard either with originality of method or with exerting such a profound influence on later generations. Due to the work of Martin Grabmann and P. Fournier, the general consensus of recent scholarship is that the methodology of *Sic et non* was not originated by Abailard, and that its general influence was not nearly as profound as Denifle and Thaner suggested. Fournier noted that the methodology of *Sic et non* previously had been used by Ivo of Chartres.  

Grabmann attributed the development of the scholastic method to Bernold of Constance:

> die Sic et non Methode in keiner Weise Abalards originelle Arbeit ist, sondern sich schon bei Bernold von Konstanz in ausgebildetur Form vorfindet. Dieser hat nicht bloß eine Fülle von einander entgegenstehendend Autoritäten angehäuft, er hat vielmehr auch die Regeln und Grundsätze für eine Konkordanz solch scheinbarer Widersprüche zusammengestellt.

Further, Grabmann argued that Ivo of Chartres had already laid the groundwork for the scholastic method in the prologue to his concordance, and it was this work, rather than *Sic et non*, which Gratian followed. He also pointed to Alger von Luttich as a strong influence on Gratian. The

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methodology of Sic et non was not originated by Abailard, nor was it the predominant influence of the era, as others, such as Ivo of Chartres, exerted more influence over Gratian and the later canonists than did Abailard.

Abailard's role in the development of the quaestio and disputatio method in the universities is also unclear. Grabmann argues that this method existed before Sic et non: "so war ohne Zweifel diese disputatio schon vor Abälard in den theologischen Schulen bekannt und gebräuchlich."\(^9\) William of Champeaux and Anselm of Laon had both used this method in their sentences and quaestiones. Abailard developed this method to a greater degree than it had been developed before, but he did not originate it:

Daß nun diese theologische disputatio im weiteren Sinne durch Abälards Sic et non Methode neue Impulse erhalten hat, ist bei dem dialektischen Akzent dieser Abälardischen Arbeitsweise selbstverständlich. Aber die disputatio im engeren und technischen Sinne . . . ist durch die Schrift "Sic et non" in die theologischen Schulen nicht eingeführt worden.\(^10\)

Moreover, the scholastic method as fully developed in the schools was the result of the introduction of the new Aristotelian logic, to which Abailard did not have access:

Besonders gab das achte Buch der Topik eine detaillierte Technik der quaestio an die Hand und erwies sich durch die genaue Anweisung, wie und in welcher Ordnung Fragen zu stellen und zu beantworten sind, als formliche Hodegetik der disputatiosmethode.\(^11\)

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\(^9\)Grabmann, 219.

\(^10\)Ibid., 219.

\(^11\)Ibid., 221.
Grabmann's argument is confirmed by so astute an observer as John of Salisbury, a former student of Abailard. He pointed to Aristotle, not to his former teacher, as the supreme teacher of dialectic, whose skill at logic he found most exemplified in his *Topics*. The influence of *Sic et non*, then, was at best indirect. It did not originate the scholastic method, nor was it even the primary influence on later figures such as Gratian; rather, it gave a new impetus to the use of the methodology, paving the way for the introduction of the new Aristotle.

Both Grabmann and Fournier offered convincing proof that Abailard did not originate the method of collecting opposing citations from the patristic texts and scriptures. Many of the techniques which he proposes for solving these contradictions were also not original. In *On Christian Doctrine*, Saint Augustine had already discussed many of the philological techniques which Abailard proposed in the prologue of *Sic et non*. Augustine argued that there were two kinds of signs, those that were natural and those that were conventional. Of the first kind, he gave the example of smoke rising in the distance, from which we infer the existence of fire. Words are the best example of conventional signs, which acquire meaning because we have chosen to interpret them in a certain way:

Conventional signs are those which living creatures show to one another for the purpose of conveying, in
so far as they are able, the motion of their spirits or something which they have sensed or understood.\textsuperscript{12}

Conventional signs, then, are used for the sole purpose of communicating the thoughts of one person to another person. Often, communication does not occur as planned. Augustine's treatise, Concerning the Teacher, was entirely devoted to this problem. Concerning the Teacher concluded that all learning occurs because of Divine Illumination, which provides us with eternal standards by which we judge the transitory things of this world. On Christian Doctrine addressed the problem of interpreting scripture and the writings of the Holy fathers, in which presumably revelation was expressed. Augustine spelled out several different techniques for unraveling the mysteries of the Bible, which correspond to the techniques suggested by Abailard in Sic et non. Abailard was obviously familiar with this work and quoted from it numerous times in the prologue.

Like Abailard, Augustine argued that scripture comes to us in the form of human language. Since the aim of scripture was to correct our evil ways,

it happened that even the Sacred Scripture . . . was set forth in one language, but so that it could be spread conveniently through all the languages of the world it was scattered far and wide in the various languages of translators.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 36.
As a result, the Scriptures are often ambiguous. This ambiguity results from the use of signs which are either unknown or obscure. Signs are either literal or figurative:

They are called literal when they are used to designate those things on account of which they were instituted. Figurative signs occur when that thing which we designate by a literal sign is used to designate something else.¹⁴

By a thorough knowledge of languages, one can avoid unknown literal signs. Those who know Latin, Greek, and Hebrew can study the translations, and in so doing, unravel ambiguous passages. Often translators "err from the sense of the original authors" because they are unfamiliar with the use of a word in a given language. "One figure of a letter X set down in the form of a cross means one thing among the Latins, another among the Greeks."¹⁵ Due to the fluidity of signs, "whatever evidence of past times in that which is called history helps us a great deal in the understanding of the sacred books."¹⁶ The historical context, as well as the verbal context, clarifies problematic passages.

Scripture is also ambiguous because there are several different meanings imbedded in a single passage. Different interpretations of the same passage are possible, and "certainly the Spirit of God, who worked through that author, undoubtedly foresaw that this meaning would occur to

¹⁴Ibid., 43.

¹⁵Ibid., 60.

¹⁶Ibid., 63.
the reader or listener."\(^{17}\) Since the scriptures are
designed to teach more than one truth, teachers should vary
their methods of teaching to accommodate their audiences.

The prologue of *Sic et non*, then, did not suggest any
ways of approaching the scriptures which had not already
been discussed before. The methodology and techniques of
*Sic et non* were neither novel nor responsible for
scholasticism in its most fully developed form. Was
Abailard, then, simply an unoriginal thinker who copied his
methods from others and whose theories remained largely
uninfluential? These views can simply not be maintained.
Even Grabmann, who goes to great lengths to show that
Abailard did not originate the scholastic method of
disputation, maintained that Abailard's work was important
in giving new impetus to the study of dialectical methods.
That scholasticism came into full bloom only after the
introduction of the new logic can certainly be no argument
against the importance of Abailard. Without the work of
Abailard, perhaps the new Aristotle would not have been as
ejagerly received. Few would deny that Abailard attracted a
large following, and that his logical theories had a lasting
impact on the intellectual life of Europe. So successful
was his refutation of ultra-realism that it ceased to be
held among any prominent scholars even during his own
lifetime. Abailard was one of the first to develop a theory

\(^{17}\)Ibid., 102.
of supposition, as well as more sophisticated concepts of predication. His impact in the field of logic, then, cannot be denied. Despite the fact that he was not the originator of the scholastic method, he certainly contributed much to its development.

His very success as a logician, however, has led many commentators to undervalue his theological work. Many see the methodology of Sic et non as simply concerned with words rather than metaphysical reality, and argue that Abailard reduced theology to a mere shuffling of words. This opinion, however, neglects the profound implications of Sic et non. It is true that Abailard believed many contradictions could be resolved by studying the science of words. He believed that the Trinity could also be elucidated by applying grammatical models to descriptions of the three persons. He never, however, believed that language could capture the essence of revelation. He consistently emphasized the fact that God far exceeded human comprehension, and that language could only express a similitude of the divine nature, never fully capture its mysteries. Sic et non was in fact, more than simply a method for studying the scriptures. Like Augustine's On Christian Doctrine, it was a theory of language as well as a theory concerning the nature of revelation. Revelation was never completely imparted, and often ambiguous simply due to

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the fact that there were several different layers of meaning. It was expressed in human language, which was fluid and flexible from one person to another and from one generation to another. The insight of one author, then, might be transformed by another author. Our attempts to capture revelation by means of language are inexact, and hence, the actual words of the scriptures are not sacred, but are only a window to truth. Consequently, dialectical methods are properly applied to the scriptures.

The implications of this reasoning were profound. Although revelation is given to us by God, it is transmitted by human language. Humans are subject to error, and hence, errors in transcription or translation can occur. Some prophets realized only certain aspects of revelation, and so often there is more truth to be discovered in other writings. If the words of scripture and of the authorities can err, then perhaps the gospels and other canonical texts are only versions of some higher law which ought to govern our lives. In the Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian, Abailard distinguished between the law of the Jews, the law of the Christians, and natural law. The laws of the Jews were inadequate as guarantees of salvation, since blind obedience does not constitute morality. Although more credence is given to the Christian than to the Jew, nevertheless the Dialogue implies that Christianity too is but another set of written laws which attempt to capture natural law.
The admission that written law differs from natural law suggests that the truths of revelation might be apprehended without the use of the gospels, and in fact, in the *Theologia Christiana*, Abailard argued that the pagans and Hebrews understood aspects of the Trinity before the New Testament era. Although Anselm had argued that the truths of revelation could be proven without the aid of scripture, he never argued that reason could operate outside the scope of the Christian faith. Abailard’s views in *Sic et non* and in the *Dialogue* push the Anselmian framework to its limits. Abailard’s methods and other remarks suggest that reason need not be tied to the canonical texts, as they are mere representations of truth, and that Christianity is only one attempt to capture natural law, albeit the most perfect one. Consequently, his system became entirely focused on the individual, and allowed him great freedom in interpreting the scriptures. Scripture was meant to teach, and as a result, often its language was inexact and conveyed several different meanings depending on who was addressed. Scripture communicated some higher truth, which due to the nature of language, could never be fully expressed. The need for interpreting scripture suggested a more fluid and flexible approach to theology centered upon the understanding of each individual.

These views were fully consistent with Abailard’s claim that rational processes preceded belief. The methodology of *Sic et non* focuses on the role of the individual in judging
which passages are to be accepted and which are not, and indicates that the faith of each individual is a personal system of belief. It is one person's perspective on the scriptures; others might reach different conclusions. For Abailard, the fluidity of language also meant the fluidity of the religious experience. There was not simply one meaning to scripture, but several; not one authoritative interpretation, but several. Although he assumed that the canonical texts were true, nevertheless truth had many dimensions.

The interpretive techniques found in Sic et non foreshadow many concerns of the Renaissance humanists. The Renaissance humanist, like Abailard, emphasized the role of the individual and was willing to allow for several different interpretations of the religious experience. Anselm proceeded on the assumption that reason properly used would always reach the same conclusions; his system began with certain premises and proceeded deductively. For Anselm, once the fool agrees that "that than which no greater can be conceived" exists in the understanding, he must concede the rest of the argument. Anselm's approach reached its culmination in Aquinas, who, like Anselm, began with certain premises and constructed an entire system based on deduction. Aquinas was considerably more sophisticated than Anselm, making distinction after distinction, discussing in fine detail what we can know about God in contrast to what we can comprehend, and from what we can
never grasp at all. Certainly Aquinas, as did Anselm, thought that his proofs concerning, for example, the essence of God reached conclusions which any reasonable person would arrive at given the same premises.

Abailard, on the other hand, did not focus as much on proving by deduction the nature of God or other truths of revelation. Rather, he tended to proceed on the assumption that these truths were true, and to use dialectic and language to elucidate theological concepts. These techniques were directed towards fostering understanding and greater faith in those that used them. Unlike Aquinas and Anselm, Abailard never developed a sophisticated proof for the existence of God. God’s existence could be inferred from the orderly nature of the world, which was a principle used by Aquinas in his five proofs of God’s existence. Abailard, however, was content to leave his argument as it stood, whereas Aquinas developed sophisticated arguments relying on contingency and necessity, first causes, and so on.

Abailard’s discussion of the Trinity was similarly not meant to prove theological truths, but to explain how these truths might be understood. Anselm, in contrast, put forth several arguments in the Monologion and Prosloqion which attempt to deduce trinitarian theology, and in Cur Deus Homo he claimed to be able to prove the necessity of the Incarnation. Abailard never developed such sophisticated arguments primarily because this was not his concern. His
system was entirely focused on the role of the individual within faith, and, therefore, he devoted all his attention toward enabling the individual to achieve greater understanding. Aquinas' system is, for the most part, inaccessible to those not trained in philosophy. Sic et non, in contrast, described certain techniques which were aimed at clarifying scripture and the writings of the fathers, and a great deal of attention is devoted to how knowledge of revelation may be communicated to others. Rather than developing a rigid system based on deduction, he spoke of the flexibility and fluidity of language, and emphasized the fact that words which are suitable in one circumstance are not suitable in another. Anselm and Aquinas explored revelation systematically, and these systems were meant to stand for all time. When Aquinas remarked that his great Summa was only a manual for beginners, he did not necessarily mean that he might reject its conclusions in later works, but simply that he intended to spell out his arguments in more detail. Abailard, on the other hand, clearly believed that one person's perspective on revelation might differ from another's, and that a person's understanding of texts might grow. Abailard's failure to produce a comprehensive metaphysical system need not indicate lack of intellectual ability. Rather, it indicates a concern for teaching in contrast to proving. Consequently, he consistently emphasized dialectic as a tool for converting heretics and pagans. Reason enabled them to
understand that Christianity was similar to many of their notions; dialectic fostered the growth of their understanding, and hence, of their faith. His aim was to communicate the truths of Christianity, not to produce an abstract metaphysical system.

These concerns distinguish Abailard from other scholastics, and foreshadow developments in the Renaissance. Abailard’s interest in the art of communication had much in common with the interest of the Renaissance humanists in rhetoric. The humanists reacted negatively to the work of Aquinas, arguing that it was unintelligible and attempted to probe mysteries which were beyond the scope of human reason. The individual and his moral growth were the focal point of humanism, and consequently, they tended to emphasize rhetoric at the expense of philosophy. This shift was apparent even in the work of Eckhart, who although a Thomist himself, employed dialectics in theology but with the intent of inspiring an intuition of truth in his listeners rather than constructing a logically coherent system.

His work, as well as that of the humanists who followed him, is similar in aim to the Abailardian corpus. His methodology and work reveal a great deal about the nature of Abailard’s work, not because Abailard exerted a direct influence on Eckhart, but because it illuminates Abailard’s place in the history of thought and in the context of his times. He was a humanist in the twelfth century, and while there was an increasing interest in the individual in the
twelfth century, no figure developed the role of reason and individuality to as great a degree as did Abailard. There was no interest in rhetorical issues comparable to Abailard’s in the twelfth century; no one whose concerns were as similar to those of the humanists. His thought was a forerunner of Renaissance humanism, and it will not be unfruitful to examine the nature of the Renaissance, and the work of some representative figures in detail. In so doing, many features of Abailard’s work will become clearer; the similarity of his work to that of the Renaissance humanists and to a transitional figure such as Eckhart demonstrates that Abailard’s system was, in many ways, strikingly original in the context of his times. Although Abailard did not invent the scholastic method nor many of the philological techniques of Sic et non, nevertheless, the use which he made of these techniques created a system which was far ahead of any other thinker of his time, and in many ways, he was one of the first to define a meaningful place for the individual within the medieval hierarchical world view.

II.

The breakdown of medieval scholasticism: Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Renaissance humanism

Since the age of Classical Greece, the nature of the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy as means of attaining knowledge has been the subject of much debate.
Rhetoric primarily aims to please, teach, and move an audience, and thus, must take into account the characteristics and beliefs of the individuals present, while philosophy seeks only the truth irrespective of who is addressed. For this reason, many of the ancient Greeks, such as Plato, rejected rhetoric as a way to reach truth. During the Renaissance, however, many humanists began to argue that truth must somehow involve beauty, and philosophy which was expressed without eloquence could make no claim to be wisdom. It has often been said that one of the hallmarks of Renaissance humanism was that it valued the individual and his needs. Rhetoric, as an art, was specifically addressed to the individual, being designed to convince rather than simply to prove. The emphasis on rhetoric in the Renaissance, then, can be viewed as consistent with other aims of the humanists.

A critical examination of the humanist views on the relative merits of philosophy and rhetoric provides insight not only into the character of the Renaissance as a whole, but also into the nature of the Renaissance in the North. Jacob Burckhardt argued that the Renaissance was primarily a product of the Italian genius, and later developments in the North were simply a result of the transmission of the Italian influence across the Alps. The German mystics, however, do not seem to fit Burckhardt’s scenario in many ways. Mystical theology begins with the quest for an individualized relationship with God; this clearly was a
departure from the medieval church, which emphasized ritual and the role of the church as mediator, as represented by its belief in the power of the keys. Moreover, as early as the thirteenth century, even Thomistic theologians such as Eckhart were beginning to move away from reliance on dialectic, and more toward an intuitive approach to religion. Eckhart’s interpretive techniques and his theory of scriptural exegesis closely resemble many later remarks by the Italian humanists on the use, meaning, and importance of words. If the emphasis on rhetoric can be taken as one of the hallmarks of Renaissance humanism, then the techniques of mystics such as Eckhart point to a shift of values in the North which parallels that of the Italian Renaissance. It might be argued, then, that the Renaissance in the North was not simply the result of the importation of Italian ideals, but rather the result of a gradual shift away from scholasticism towards a more fluid and flexible theology. The rhetorical interests of Eckhart and the humanists characterize the breakdown of medieval theology, and expressed ideas which Abailard had already articulated in *Sic et non* and other works. An examination of the conflict between rhetoric and philosophy in the late scholastic period and the early Renaissance demonstrates that although Abailard’s logical theories and emphasis on dialectic were reflective of many trends in the scholastic era, the primary thrust of his theories pointed towards the
Renaissance, and the focus on the individual and his quest for religious fulfillment.

i.

The conflict between rhetoric and philosophy

The conflict between rhetoric and philosophy began as early as Classical times, and arose from the definition of wisdom accepted by Plato and Aristotle. Plato was opposed to the sophists, who divorced argumentation from the quest for truth. One can choose to persuade an audience of things which are not true, and thus, true wisdom could only be reached through philosophy. Philosophers were those people who had succeeded in maintaining a properly balanced soul, in which reason ruled the appetitive and spirited aspects. When reason controlled the soul, its attention was focused on the true objects of knowledge — the timeless, unchanging world of the Forms. Both Plato and Aristotle argued that true wisdom and knowledge involved immutable truths; knowledge could only be had of those things which were certain, and whose truth would never change. For Plato, the world of experience was only a world of being and becoming. In the Republic, Plato likened our lives to existence in a cave, in which the people were bound so that they might never move, and their attention was constantly fixed on a screen. Real objects, such as people and animals, walked behind a screen, and their shadows were reflected on the front. These images were all that the people in the cave
ever saw, and they believed them to be real objects. Plato argued that our belief in the reality of objects of experience was equally illusory; true reality is the world behind the screen, the eternal objects of which sensory experience is only a reflection.

Aristotle also defined wisdom solely in terms of that which was eternal and immutable. In *The Metaphysics*, Aristotle distinguished the man of experience, the man of art, and the truly wise man. The man of experience knows that a certain medicine cured Callias and Socrates of a specific illness in a specific circumstance; the man of art knows that this medicine will cure all individuals of this illness in certain circumstances. True wisdom, however, is divorced from specific instances, or the need to apply knowledge to specific situations. Wisdom "is knowledge about certain principles and causes" — the first causes which explain why things are the way they are. These principles are "the most universal, [and] on the whole, the most difficult for men to know; for they are farthest from the senses." In the *Organon*, Aristotle argued that true knowledge is arrived at by demonstration, a form of syllogism in which "certain things being stated, something other than what is stated follows of necessity from their

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20 Ibid., 691.
being so."

Demonstrations, as opposed to dialectical arguments, proceed from premises "which are true and primary ... [and of which] it is improper to ask any further for the why and wherefore of them; each of the first principles should command belief in and by itself." Consequently "the proper object of unqualified scientific knowledge is something which cannot be other than it is." For Aristotle, we only possess knowledge when "we think that we know the cause on which the fact depends, as the cause of the fact and of no other, and further, that the fact could not be other than it is." Demonstrative syllogisms proceed by means of necessary connections, and since they begin with premises which are commensurately universal, "the conclusion of such demonstration must also be eternal. Therefore no attribute can be demonstrated nor known by strictly scientific knowledge to inhere in perishable things." Knowledge for Aristotle, then, is only of necessary truths, whose content remains immutable.

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22 Ibid., 188.


24 Ibid., 111.

25 Ibid., 121.
Plato's and Aristotle's definitions of wisdom and knowledge placed them at odds with the Sophists. Aristotle argued that sophistical arguments did not proceed from premises which were necessarily and immediately true, but from commonly accepted opinion, or worse yet, from opinions which are mistakenly thought to be commonly accepted. For Aristotle, "the art of the sophist is the semblance of wisdom without the reality."26 He further argued "that there are few facts of the necessary type that can form the basis of rhetorical syllogisms."27 This claim immediately placed rhetoric apart from philosophy and the true pursuit of wisdom, as it was "concerned with the modes of persuasion."28 Rhetoric was useful, since for some audiences not even exact possession of knowledge will make it easy for what we say to produce conviction . . . [for there] are people whom one cannot instruct. Hence, then, we must use modes of persuasion.29 Successful persuasion involved three things: the character of the speaker, the audience's frame of mind, and the proof provided by the words themselves. Character is important for we more readily believe a man of good character than one


28Ibid., 1327.

29Ibid., 1328.
who is not; the emotions of the audience are important, for we more readily believe a speaker when we are in a pleasant frame of mind than when we are hostile to him; and finally, the arguments themselves are important, for we are more readily convinced by cogent reasoning than by fallacious reasoning.

Clearly, then, the art of rhetoric, while useful, differed from that of true knowledge for Aristotle. Since it proceeds from premises which are not immediately evident, rhetorical persuasion can never aspire to true wisdom; knowledge is only of eternal truths, and wisdom alone does not insure that one will be able to persuade an audience. For these reasons, Plato and Aristotle did not accept rhetoric as a means of achieving lasting knowledge.

The character of the Renaissance

During the Renaissance, however, this attitude, which had prevailed throughout the Middle Ages, began to change. Burckhardt argued that individuality was a hallmark of the Renaissance. Certainly most Renaissance artists, literary figures, and philosophers all seemed to devote more attention to man and his place within the cosmos at this time. Medieval art was flat, two dimensional, and stylized; Renaissance art took an interest in reality as it appeared. Leon Battista Alberti developed techniques which allowed the artist to capture the world more realistically; Leonardo Da
Vinci argued that the best paintings could not be differentiated from reality when held before a mirror. Michelangelo Buonarroti argued that a beautiful body was a reflection of a beautiful soul; Marsilio Ficino argued that God's grace was to be found in the beauty of the world. For these men, the world was not separate from God, but rather, a reflection of his beauty. Man was part of this order of things. Michelangelo venerated the human condition by finding God in the human body; Pico della Mirandola glorified humanity by arguing that man stood outside the natural order of things, and almost in a God-like fashion, could form his character and nature as he pleased.

All of these men took an interest in the role of man in his world, and the emphasis by many humanists on rhetoric was consistent with these goals. Petrarch's theology emphasized the role of the individual, and, therefore, rejected scholasticism. In The Ascent of Mont Ventoux, Petrarch described a long and arduous trip up a mountain, which he likened to man's quest for spiritual fulfillment. Both were fraught with difficulties, but "you must either ascend to the summit of the blessed life under the burden of hard striving . . . or lie prostrate in your slothfulness in the valleys of your sins." At the summit of the mountain, Petrarch read Augustine's Confessions, which

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described Augustine's conversion to Christianity from the dualist sects. For Petrarch, Augustine's search for faith indicated that spirituality begins with introspection: Though "men go to admire the high mountains, the vast floods of the sea, the huge streams of the rivers, the circumference of the ocean, and the revolutions of the stars [they] desert themselves."\textsuperscript{31} The mountaintop "seemed to [Petrarch] hardly higher than a cubit compared to the height of human contemplation."\textsuperscript{32} Religiosity began from the perspective of the individual, and was achieved by a process of contemplation.

This argument led Petrarch to reject scholasticism. The medieval scholastics attempted to probe faith by the use of reason. Anselm argued that truths of the faith could never conflict with reason, and as long as reason operated within the faith, it could prove revelation to be necessarily true. Thomas Aquinas followed in this tradition, writing voluminous \textit{summae} which attempted to reconcile Aristotelianism with Christian revelation. Despite this effort, Aquinas was compelled to argue in the end that since man's mind is finite, he will \textit{never} truly understand the nature of God, because God is infinite. Much of Renaissance humanism focused on a critique of scholasticism; perhaps Aquinas' failure to achieve his goal

\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, 44.  
\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, 45.
after such a prodigious amount of writing suggested to the humanists that reason and dialectic were ultimately of little use in the realm of spirituality. For Petrarch, the attempts of the scholastics to prove the truths of revelation missed the point of Christianity, which accept[ed] in humble faith the secrets of nature and the mysteries of God, which are higher still; they [the Aristotelians] attempt to seize them in haughty arrogance. They do not manage to reach them, not even to approach them; but in their insanity they believe that they have reached them . . . Let them certainly be philosophers and Aristotelians . . . I do not envy those brilliant names of which they boast.  

Petrarch’s spirituality was based on an individual’s quest to purify his life, and this quest could proceed without Aristotelian dialectic.

Many treatises written during the Renaissance, such as Pier Paulo Vergerio’s On Noble Manners and Liberal Studies, included in their programs all studies "through which one exercises and cultivates virtue and wisdom, and which lead the body and soul to their highest good." Petrarch’s emphasis on the inner nature of the spiritual quest caused him to emphasize, as Vergerio did, the moral nature of philosophy’s didactic qualities. Petrarch argued that true philosophy of necessity involved eloquence, since

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Petrarch, On His Own Ignorance, in Renaissance Philosophy of Man, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oscar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 76.

the true moral philosophers and useful teachers of the
virtues are those whose first and last intention is to
make the hearer and reader good, those who do not
merely teach what virtue and vice are and hammer into
our ears the brilliant name of one and the grim name of
the other, but sow into our hearts love of the best and
eager desire for it, and at the same time, hatred of
the worst and how to flee it. 35

Such a program could not be accomplished without eloquent
rhetoric; Aristotle, Petrarch argued, failed in his moral
program because "his lesson lack[ed] the words that sting
and set afire and urge toward love of virtue and hatred of
vice, or, at any rate, [did] not have enough of such
power." 36 Aristotle’s immense skill in logic and
dialectic, then, did not make him a good moral philosopher,
for he failed to teach his audience anything. For Petrarch,
philosophy, no matter how well worked out, must be coupled
with eloquence if it is to be meaningful.

Desiderius Erasmus also wrote several treatises on how
to prepare eloquent letters and sermons. His Opus de
conscribendis epistolis was an exhaustive treatise on the
proper way to write letters, an art form which implicitly
related one’s thoughts to another. Erasmus argued that all
art forms could be encompassed by letter writing, a less
than subtle criticism of the esoteric works of Aquinas and
others. In De ratione concioandi, Erasmus stressed the
rhetorical gifts which were necessary for effective
preaching. Erasmus rejected the complex four layered

35 Ibid., 105.

36 Ibid., 103.
structure of medieval allegories; rather, he structured his sermons on the basis of classical models of oration. Like Aristotle, he argued that the moral character of the speaker and his natural gifts were an important prerequisite for effective speaking, which "was concerned with teaching the emotions proper to Christian piety and the means of arousing them."\(^{37}\)

Lorenzo Valla categorized logic as merely another subset of rhetoric, whose importance far outweighed that of philosophy. Valla argued that "no such ardent admirer of philosophy can please God,"\(^{38}\) and that "the ancient philosophers had failed in the understanding of virtue while pretending to seek it."\(^{39}\) The ancient philosophers sought not virtue, but vanity, and "they would have done better to give themselves to pleasure, if in fact they did not give themselves to it."\(^{40}\) For Valla, rhetoric which was uncorrupted by philosophy was the way to truth.

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\(^{40}\) Ibid., 149.
Perhaps Dante Alighieri best sums up the humanist preoccupation with language. Dante argued that a true language could never be fixed in meaning and artificial, as Latin was, "but only one in which men work, act, and live -- that language in which they express their strivings and passions that stem from a concrete situation."\textsuperscript{41} "This language . . . must use images and metaphors because this is the only way it can affect the passions."\textsuperscript{42} Accordingly, such a language could only be developed by the poet. A genuine language must be illuminating and have curiale, or in other words, be involved in human actions. For Dante, as for Petrarch, language should be used to communicate. By nature, it involves social interaction. The emphasis of the humanists on rhetoric and the use of language reflected their concern for civic and moral life, as opposed to scholastic theology which was unconcerned with didactic purposes, but rather focused on timeless immutable truths. The humanists were concerned with man and his moral edification; for them, rhetoric and the use of language inevitably eclipsed speculative philosophy.


\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., 79.
Rhetoric and the Renaissance in the north

A keen interest in rhetoric, then, was one of the characteristics of the Renaissance. This interest in the possibilities of language was also shared by the northern mystics. Like the Italian humanists, Thomas a Kempis rejected scholastic endeavors:

Of what use is it to discourse learnedly on the Trinity, if you lack humility and therefore displease the Trinity? Lofty words do not make a man just or holy; but a good life makes him dear to God. If you knew the whole Bible by heart, and all the teachings of the philosophers, how would this help you without the grace and love of God?  

Similarly, Meister Eckhart rejected the role of dialectic and suggested that man's relationship with God was based on something far different from reason and intellect. Like Aquinas, Eckhart argued that man has very little in the way of positive knowledge about God. There was a fundamental problem in even speaking about God, since how could a visible likeness stand for the Infinite, the Immense, the Invisible, or the figure of an image for the Uncreatable? God cannot be represented by any likeness of a lower order, so that by its mediation the divine essence could be seen in it and through it.  

We cannot compare God to man, for every comparison implies that there are at least two things and that they are distinct, for nothing is


compared to itself or is like itself. Every created being taken or conceived apart as distinct in itself from God is not a being, but is nothing. What is separate and distinct from God is separate and distinct from existence.\textsuperscript{45}

For Eckhart, "nothing is as dissimilar as the creator and any creature."\textsuperscript{46} God in fact is beyond description; he is unnameable, inexpressible, indescribable, and incomprehensible. God can only be grasped through his works, but these, as mentioned above, cannot compare with Him in any way. From evidence in the world, we can draw only the conclusion that God is the cause of its existence.

Thomas Aquinas' five proofs of God's existence relied on sensory evidence and proceeded in an Aristotelian fashion back to the final cause. Eckhart accepted this way of arriving at knowledge of God, but argued that it does not involve any positive predications about God, nor does it involve knowledge of His essence. God is a radically different sort of being than we are; we are unacquainted with anything like God, and hence, can draw no conclusions about him from our ordinary experiences. Eckhart incorporated Aquinas' theories of knowledge by analogy, and drew the appropriate conclusion -- reason alone will never achieve true knowledge of God.

Eckhart's entire system questioned the use of reason and dialectic in theology. He consistently described God in

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., 55.

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., 81.
contradictory ways, saying that God possessed both characteristics. For example,

You should know that nothing is as dissimilar as the Creator and any creature. In the second place, nothing is as similar as the Creator and any creature. And in the third place, nothing is as equally dissimilar and similar to anything else as God and the creature are dissimilar and similar in the same degree.  

God is indistinct, he is total unity; creatures are distinct. God is infinite; creatures are finite. Hence, they are dissimilar. Yet nothing is more similar than God and his creations, since all things have their being through Him. God, however, is "distinguished by his indistinction, is assimilated by dissimilitude, the more dissimilar he is the more similar he becomes." That is, God is distinguished from all of creation by the very fact that he is, by nature, indistinct. His dissimilarity makes him a distinct being, that is, finite in the sense of being some kind of thing. These arguments play on dialectic, arguing both sides at once, and rather than resolve the contradictions, accept both as true.

There are many other examples of such arguments in Eckhart's works. For example, he described God as a word, a word unspoken . . . 'If one says that God is a word, he has been expressed, but if one says that God has not been spoken then he is ineffable.' And yet he

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47 Ibid., 81.
48 Ibid., 82.
is something, but who can speak this word? No one can do this, except Him who is this Word.⁴⁹

God is by nature a Word, yet no one can speak it or express it. Again, Eckhart argued that both sides of the dialectical argument are true of God.

As a final example of Eckhart's use of dialectic, let us look briefly at his description of man. On the one hand, there is something in the soul so closely akin to God that it is already one with Him and need never be united to Him . . . that Something is apart from and strange to all creation. If one were wholly this, he would be both uncreated and unlike any creature.⁵⁰

Eckhart often spoke of the birth of the Son in man. There are certain functions of the soul which are unmixed with carnal appetites. He argued that according to the Gospel of John,

to all He gave the power to become the sons of God . . . which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God . . . These agents of the soul . . . must be changed, transformed into God, reborn in him and of him, so that only God is the Father, and they, too, become his sons . . . For I am God's son when I have been born and formed in his image.⁵¹

Man is so close to God, then, that he is the son of God, of the same essence as God. On the other hand, Eckhart argued


⁵¹Ibid., 45.
that "all creatures are nothing in themselves." All creation depends on God for its being; without God it is pure nothingness. "There is nothing as dissimilar as the Creator and any creature." God is pure esse, creatures are nothing. Again, Eckhart wanted his audience to intuit the truth of both dialectical premises.

These arguments all depend on fluidity of meaning; if "dissimilar" and "distinct", for example, were used in the same sense throughout the arguments above, one could make no sense of the argument. Yet on a certain intuitive level the arguments do make sense, and without such an intuitive feeling for the meaning behind the literal meaning of the words, one would have to reject most of Eckhart's theology. Eckhart's theology pointed out the inadequacies of the dialectical approach to theology. What if, contrary to Abailard's suggestion in the prologue to Sic et Non, contradictory propositions cannot be resolved, but rather, are integral parts of theology and any true understanding of God?

For Eckhart, God existed on a level far removed from our ordinary existence. Language could only go so far in expressing his essence; the mind, or the divine scintilla, must intuit those truths which it cannot adequately express, and must bridge the gap which reason leaves open. In the

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53 Eckhart, Commentary on Exodus, 81.
prologue to the *Opus tripartitum*, Eckhart argued that the truth was often unheard of and shocking. His use and interpretation of language did indeed often cause him to say things which shocked the medieval authorities; his doctrine of the divine scintilla and the birth of the son in the soul, for example, resulted in a charge of heresy. Eckhart argued that those who accused him had not grasped the intent of his work. In many of his sermons and treatises, he argued that one must go beyond the obvious literal meanings in order to gain a more profound understanding of the scriptures. In the prologue to the *Book of the Parables of Genesis*, he stated that his intention was to "coax out (elicere) certain things under the shell of the letter (sub cortice litterae)."54 The truth within scripture could be likened to a golden apple covered by silver. Without the insight of intellect, only the silver is perceived; a closer look, however, will reveal the gold underneath. In the second prologue to the *Work of Commentaries*, Eckhart argued that scripture may be given several interpretations, so that the reader may choose which one is most useful for him. In other words, scripture has a didactic purpose, and our interpretations of it should not be confined to the literal,

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54 Tobin, 25.
or even to the standard figurative senses. Every true sense, for Eckhart, was a literal sense; every interpretation was imbedded by God within the scriptures for our edification.

Often, this flexibility in interpretation involved changing one word into another based on their similarity in sound. For example, in the Parisian Question number ten, Eckhart exploited the similarity between "minne" (love) and "inne" (within). "Through sounds all love becomes one love"\(^56\), and, therefore,

that love in which God loves himself, in that he loves me, and the soul loves God in that same love in which he loves himself; and if this love did not exist in which God loves the soul, the Holy Spirit would not exist.\(^57\)

As Frank Tobin remarks, "a logical understanding of these lines seems of secondary importance if not superfluous."\(^58\)

Eckhart's attempt to coax more than the literal or purely logical meaning from a text has much in common with the humanist interest in rhetoric. Petrarch, Valla, and Dante all emphasized the importance of language and of communicating ideas to an audience. For them, philosophical knowledge which was divorced from man not only lacked


\(^56\)Tobin, 175.

\(^57\)Eckhart, Parisian question number ten, in Tobin, 175.

\(^58\)Ibid., 175.
eloquence, but true wisdom as well. The function of philosophy was to instill moral qualities in man; mere wisdom alone often did not suffice. The Renaissance humanists emphasized a point of which Aristotle failed to take sufficient note; his demonstrative syllogisms were founded on premises which could not be demonstrated, and which were prior and more knowable. These premises, for Aristotle, were intuited after several common experiences; hence, his system, which extolled the demonstrative syllogism, was founded on intuition. As Ernesto Grassi points out in *Rhetoric as Philosophy*, rhetoric as a science has much in common with the acceptance of the Aristotelian premises, and philosophy, being based on these premises, is at heart rhetorical. For Grassi, the Renaissance humanists were actually reviving the true basis of philosophy when they emphasized the importance of rhetoric.

Eckhart's mysticism, with its play on dialectic and fluid interpretation of scripture, also emphasized the kind of knowledge involved in the Aristotelian premises. Eckhart, like the humanists of the Italian Renaissance, saw words, their use, and context as all important, and recognized that words mean varying things to different people. For Eckhart, one could never hope to achieve the scholastic's vision of rigorous rational theology -- dialectic did not resolve theological problems, but rather pointed to the inherently illogical nature of God. Eckhart attempted to suggest God's nature with his use of words as
best he could; since language must ultimately fail to reveal any positive knowledge about God, the function of the preacher as rhetorician becomes all important. Scripture, for Eckhart, pointed to the truth; it was up to the preacher to uncover the hidden meanings and to suggest them to his audience. Just as Leonardo Bruni argued that great care must be taken in translation to represent the meaning in its appropriate context, so Eckhart argued that words took on varying, often contradictory, meanings when talking about God. Eckhart’s emphasis on language as a fluid medium for relating to God is akin to the aims of the Italian rhetoricians. Both sought to sway the emotions rather than to cite scholastic proofs.

The fact that Eckhart was writing in thirteenth century Germany indicates that the Renaissance was not simply "a natural growth in Italy, but an importation everywhere else."

Eckhart’s theology broke with the rigid boundaries of medieval scholasticism. The Northern mystics were as concerned as the Italians with redefining the function and scope of philosophy. Like the Italians, they argued for an approach to religion and wisdom which took into account the individual. A Kempis advocated following the example of Christ rather than devoting oneself to the study of theology; Eckhart, even within the context of a basically Thomistic theology, argued that reason simply

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Monfasini, 172.
cannot go very far in understanding God — intuition and the divine scintilla can go much further. The Italian humanists were not the only thinkers to see language as a tool for moral instruction. These considerations suggest that Eckhart's position in the history of thought deserves to be reevaluated. His affinity to the humanists on the importance of rhetorical devices places him at the vanguard of the Renaissance, rather than at the end of the Middle Ages. Such an endeavor may well show that the Renaissance was a much more broadly based movement than previously thought, and the near universal acceptance of Burckhardt's thesis may at last be more critically examined.

III.

Abailard and the Renaissance

Renaissance humanism was, then, marked by a keen interest in rhetoric. This shift in focus from philosophy to rhetoric was present not only among the Italian humanists, but also among the northern mystics. The breakdown of medieval scholasticism, then, can be traced not only to Italian humanism, but also to northern theologians. The primary concern of the humanists, whether from the north or south, was the moral life of the individual. Eckhart was one of the earliest thinkers after Aquinas to break away from the rigid scholastic system and move towards a more fluid theology. As we have seen, this was one of the most predominant features of the Renaissance.
The Renaissance interest in rhetorical practices has led some commentators, such as Paul Oscar Kristeller, to claim that they were not philosophers at all. Kristeller points out that they produced no major works of philosophy or theology and no sophisticated metaphysical systems. "Their domains were the fields of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and the study of the Greek and Latin authors." Humanism was simply another tradition which existed side by side with that of scholasticism, whose primary expressions were in the fields of logic and natural philosophy. As we have seen, however, these characteristics of humanism were largely due to their overriding interest in the individual. They simply saw scholasticism as ineffective in this area.

The Renaissance has always been seen, at least to a certain degree, as a break with scholasticism and the medieval world view. For Burckhardt, this break was decisive, and he found modern man lurking in the guise of the Renaissance humanist. Charles Homer Haskins was one of the first to argue there was a Renaissance in the Middle Ages, and he pointed especially to the twelfth century. Haskins noted the growth of canon law, theology, and philosophy, the development of vernacular literatures, and a renewed interest in the works of classical antiquity. Colin Morris supplemented Haskins' thesis by arguing that the

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twelfth century was not only an age of renewal, but an age of the "discovery of the individual". Bernard of Clairvaux's twelve steps up the ladder of humility began with self awareness; Aelred of Rivalux modeled spirituality after the pattern of human friendships. Chretien de Troyes developed characters who were so unique in their personalities, that the identity of Percival, for example, could be discerned from a few telltale drops of blood. For Morris, the twelfth century found a place for human emotions and needs in theology, literature, and other areas from which they had been previously excluded. Haskins and Morris suggested, then, that Burckhardt was incorrect in asserting that the Italian Renaissance was a complete break with the Middle Ages, for they found many of the trends of Burckhardt's Renaissance already present in the twelfth century.

Yet both Haskins and Morris neglect the work of Abailard in their analyses. Haskins mentions him briefly in connection with the revival of dialectic, but makes little mention of his theological and ethical treatises; although Morris refers to the twelfth century as "the age of Abailard", he fails to differentiate Abailard from other theologians and secular figures of the age, choosing instead to emphasize his view of the atonement as an example of the renewed interest in human psychology. The two most important works in the reappraisal of the Middle Ages, then, fail to credit Abailard with any major achievements. Yet
had they taken greater note of the rhetorical concerns of the Renaissance, and less note of the controversial aspects of Abailard’s life, they might have found a clearer example of humanism in the Middle Ages than any of those they cite.

Abailard, like the humanists, is often accused of being a second or even a third rate theologian. As noted earlier, his lack of sophistication in the realm of metaphysics was largely due to a lack of interest in these issues, as he tacitly assumed that the tenets of the faith were true. Above all else, he was interested in communicating these truths, and he argued that effective communication took note of those whom one was addressing. Words, then, must be varied in different circumstances, and the scriptures were no different than any other text. Moreover, words were only a window on truth, which only provided a glimpse of revelation, rather than the entire vision at once. Those who looked through the window of words very often perceived different scenery. Just as Immanuel Kant would argue that there is no perception without interpretation, so too Abailard realized in the twelfth century that there was no revelation without the mediation of words, and words must be interpreted.

This theory of the nature of revelation and language led him to emphasize rhetoric in the form of dialectic rather than metaphysics. Abailard assumed that there was such a thing as eternal truth, yet human language would never be able to adequately represent it. Consequently, Sic
et non pointed out that many texts should be read with the liberty of judging, not the necessity of believing. The individual reader must decide for himself whether what he reads was accurately translated or was actually an opinion held by an authority; he must take the context of the language into account, and finally, must weigh the authoritative nature of the text against more less trusted authorities. Despite the fact that he repeatedly emphasized the integrity of all canonical texts as representations of eternal truth, nevertheless, many only contained a grain of truth or only one person’s perspective on truth. The individual reader must, then, rely on his own judgment rather than that of the church or the authoritative texts. The meaning of the texts became what the reader took it to be, not necessarily what the church said that it was.

Abailard’s theological and ethical treatises built on the approach of Sic et non. His theology developed a notion of belief that emphasized individual awareness and understanding of the concepts and propositions involved; his ethics developed a concept of sin as consent to evil, which necessarily involved individual awareness of the nature of one’s acts. His entire system, then, focused on an individual’s personal understanding of revelation. Mere recitation of creeds was not faith; one must truly believe what one is saying, and true belief involves understanding. As such, Abailard’s entire system focused on communicating
revelation in such a way that this sort of belief and understanding might be imparted.

Like Eckhart and the Renaissance humanists, Abailard’s focal point was the moral life of those whom he addressed. He saw reason as an integral part of that life, and properly used, it created faith infused with charity. Charitable faith is faith in which all acts are committed out of love for God. The humanists also emphasized inner spirituality over outward acts, as for example, when Petrarch urged his readers not to neglect their inner spirituality. The rhetorical approach is eminently suitable within this context, for its aim is to teach, please, and move an audience.

Abailard’s lack of interest in metaphysics, then, did not betray a second rate intellect as much as it betrayed a profound interest in the individual religious experience. Abailard anticipated the Renaissance rhetorical tradition, seeking to convert heretics and strengthen individual faith rather than to offer abstract speculations. Chretien de Troyes developed distinct characters; Aelred of Rivaulx brought spirituality down to the level of human relationships; Bernard recognized the need for self awareness on the path to true knowledge of God; Anselm’s famous proof in the Proslogion began by looking inward into the recesses of his mind. Yet none of these men explained the genesis, development, and fulfillment of faith in such personal terms as Abailard. Chretien de Troyes’ characters
were idealized, and hence, not necessarily reflective individuality, but rather were a description of idealized virtue. Bernard emphasized the transcendent majesty of God and the final goal of an individual’s spiritual quest was the unity of the will of God and man. Although Bernard’s twelve steps up the ladder of humility began with self awareness, the final stage of spirituality was the result of conquering one’s body and self will in favor of unification with God. Although Anselm explored the use of reason within an individual’s belief structure, he never provided the psychological justification for the use of dialectic within theology that Abailard set out in his logical treatises. Abailard, alone in the twelfth century, created a system in which human reason was truly necessary, for revelation was couched in human language, which must be deciphered. Each individual, depending on his own understanding of these texts, would decipher them differently. Abailard’s theology, then, truly recognized a role for the individual. Without reason, there was no faith or belief at all. No text or authority could present one with truth; truth was there, but it must be interpreted. Faith truly became a personal experience for Abailard. His dialectical vision of theology foreshadowed the breakdown of scholasticism in the Renaissance. For a man who contributed so much to the science of dialectic, this is ironic. We may agree with Grabmann and Fournier that Abailard did not initiate the methodology of *Sic et non*, nor did he originate the
techniques it presents for solving contradictions. Nevertheless, his work has far more importance than it is given credit for. In many ways, Abailard was the first Renaissance humanist. He developed philological techniques, encouraged the study of languages, and emphasized the fluid nature of words. If there was a "discovery of the individual" in the twelfth century, Abailard was one of the few to see the individual from the same perspective as did the later Renaissance humanists. *Sic et non* was far more than a mere collection of problematic issues; it was a microcosm of Renaissance humanism.
CHAPTER 8

THE DIALECTIC OF MORALITY: ABAILARD

AND JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Abailard's affinity to the Renaissance humanists is nowhere more clearly evident than in his ethical theories. His *Ethics* was one of his last treatises, and was the culmination of his earlier development of the power of reason. As such, the *Ethics* represents a well developed concept of the individual, one which goes far beyond the fictional characterizations of Chretien de Troyes or the self awareness advocated by Bernard of Clairvaux.

Abailard's originality is most clearly shown in his ethical theories, and it is primarily within the *Ethics* that his emphasis on reason transcended the boundaries of medieval theology. His other works, despite the fact that they generated controversy, attempted to strengthen orthodox views rather than to break with them. His ethical theories, however, asserted radically new ideas about the nature of sin and human responsibility, and the role of the church as mediator between man and God.

The methodology of *Sic et non* placed heavy responsibility on the reader to discern truth from falsehood, but the work itself went to great lengths to defend the authority of the scriptures and writings of the
fathers. The Ethics, however, went well beyond the limits of medieval theology, and although Abailard's Confessio fidei denied charges of unorthodoxy, the majority of the charges directed against him at Sens were valid. The Ethics was the culmination of his entire logical-theological framework, and defined a role for human responsibility unique in his age. His ethical theories, like the linguistic theories of Sic et non, anticipated the ethical outlook of the Renaissance. These considerations demand that Abailard's place in the history of thought be reappraised. He was not a second rate thinker who banished theology to the realm of grammar. He was a Lorenzo Valla of the twelfth century, whose advocation of the use of philological techniques heralded a new view of language as a flexible and fluid medium of expression; he was also an Erasmus of the twelfth century, whose ethical theories rejected the moral worth of outward signs and practices in favor of the development of inner spirituality. Unlike Erasmus, however, he drew the logical consequences of an intentional ethics, and in so doing, foreshadowed many aspects of the theology of Martin Luther. The Ethics puts to rest any notion that Abailard lacked the profound insight that characterizes great thinkers. In his ethical theories, his earlier justification of dialectic and the power of reason found full expression. Abailard, more than any other thinker of the twelfth century, exemplifies the theses of Charles Homer Haskins and Colin Morris. He, more than any
other figure of his age, truly made a "discovery of the individual."

The Ethics was primarily concerned with the nature of sin. For Abailard, the inner state of an individual was more relevant to sin than his outward actions. Abailard rejected actions as the source of moral valuation, since actions were neither good nor bad in and of themselves. The same action might be performed by different people, but

justly by one wickedly by another, as for example if two men hang a convict, that one out of zeal for justice, this one out of a hatred arising from an old enmity, and although it is the same act of hanging and although they certainly do what is good to do and what justice requires, yet, through the diversity of their intention, the same thing is done by diverse men, by one badly, by the other well.¹

Moreover, sometimes seemingly bad actions may in fact be meritorious, since God Himself occasionally commands us to do things which ought not to be done. For example, He commanded Abraham to kill his own son, a deed which is universally regarded as reprehensible:

You at any rate will reproach the Lord in the case of Abraham, whom he at first commanded to sacrifice his son and later checked from doing so. Surely God did not command well a deed which it was not good to do? For if it was Good, how was it later forbidden?

God, however, commanded that this action be performed in order to bring about a greater good, for the example of Abraham inspires greater obedience in us. It is the

intention behind God's command that exonerates God of having desired that an evil deed be committed:

If, moreover, the same thing was both good to be commanded and good to be prohibited -- for God allows nothing to be done without reasonable cause nor yet consents to do it -- you see that the intention of the command alone, not the execution of the deed, excuses God, since he did well to command what is not a good thing to be done. For God did not urge or command this to be done in order that Abraham should sacrifice his son but in order that out of this obedience . . . or love for him should be very greatly tested and remain to us as an example.²

The same actions, then, may be common to both good and bad people alike; even God commands that seemingly bad actions be carried out, but with intention of producing good results. For Abailard, then, actions are morally indifferent in and of themselves. They cannot bring about moral praise, for his examples have shown that good actions can be performed with evil intent, and bad actions with praiseworthy intent.

Abailard's evaluation of actions was consistent with the framework of logical nominalism developed in his logical treatise. Within such a framework, ontological reality is assigned only to individual entities, and each individual derives its character from what is peculiar to it and to it alone. Given such a view, Abailard's view of actions as acquiring significance only in a particular context is a logical extension of his modified nominalism.

²Ibid., 31.
Abailard's examples demonstrated that it is not actions per se which determine moral worth; given this argument, he was forced to find another source of morality. For Abailard, moral worth is to be found only within the mind of an individual. Abailard argued that although a man might sleep with another man's wife, he was guilty of nothing if he was unaware that she was married. The intention behind the action was more important for determining whether the person was good or bad than the action itself:

An action is good not because it acquires any kind of significance in itself, but because it comes from a good intention. It follows that the same thing may be done by the same man at different times and yet that the action may sometimes be called good, sometimes bad, because of a difference of intention.³

This was a departure from traditional ethics, which typically judged actions according to a set of rules. The Ten Commandments, for example, dictated that "thou shalt not commit adultery." If this law was transgressed, then punishment was to be levied in kind, according to the principle "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Here again, Abailard relied on the power of rational cognition, for he was not content to define sin in terms of outward action nor to equate an action done by one person in a certain set of circumstances with the same action performed by another person in different circumstances.

Abailard formulated a definition of sin which arose from his belief in the power of reason. For Abailard,

³Ibid., 53.
actions acquired their moral character from the intent of the agent. For this reason, he was not satisfied with defining sin as moral vice. "We consider morals to be the vices or virtues of the mind which make us prone to bad or good works."⁴ Some vices and virtues, however, are morally indifferent, such as ignorance or learning. "Since these befall the wicked and the good alike, they do not in fact belong to the composition of morality nor do they make life base or honorable."⁵ Vice is only that which "makes us prone to bad works, that is, inclines the will to something which is not at all fitting to be done or to be forsaken."⁶

Vice as so defined, however, is not the same as sin:

To be irascible, that is, prone or ready for the emotion of anger, is a vice and inclines the mind impetuously or unreasonably to do something which is not at all suitable. However, this vice is in the soul, so that in fact it is ready to be angry even when it is not moved to anger, just as the limpness for which a man is said to be lame is in him even when he is not walking limply, because the vice is present when the action is not.⁷

Abailard argued that man's natural inclinations, such as lust for a beautiful woman, were not sinful, since that which is a part of our natures and cannot be avoided is not sinful. Some theologians had argued that even in the context of marriage, experiencing pleasure in sexual

⁴Ibid., 3.
⁵Ibid., 3.
⁶Ibid., 3.
⁷Ibid., 3-5.
intercourse was sinful. The monastic tradition had advocated denial of bodily needs, and many theologians argued that it was sinful to enjoy the taste of delicious food. Abailard, however, argued that the law would not have prescribe[d] marriage so that everyone should leave his seed in Israel or the Apostle urge spouses to pay their debt to one another, if these cannot be done at all without sin? . . . It is clear, I think, that no natural pleasure of the flesh should be imputed to sin nor should it be considered a fault for us to have pleasure in something in which when it has happened the feeling of pleasure is unavoidable.\(^8\)

Since God has allowed pleasure in intercourse and in the consumption of certain foods, no one "should accuse us of sin in this [since] we do not exceed the limit of the concession."\(^9\)

Not only are natural vices morally indifferent, but our will to perform actions is also distinct from sin. Abailard cited the case of a man who is pursued by a cruel lord intent on killing him. The man attempts to escape so as to avoid his own death, but eventually is forced to kill the lord out of self defense. Abailard argued that the act of murder was sinful, but that the man’s will, which wanted only to escape his own death, was not evil. Sin is, then, distinct from will as well as action. In the case just mentioned, one cannot infer that the man simply wanted to kill his lord, but rather that he consented to an evil act so as to avoid his own death. "In short . . . the will

\(^8\)Ibid., 21.

\(^9\)Ibid., 19.
itself or the desire to do what is unlawful is by no means to be called sin, but rather, as we have stated, the consent itself." Consent, for Abailard, is contempt for the will of God:

This consent we properly call sin, that is, the fault of the soul by which it earns damnation or is made guilty before God. For what is that consent unless it is contempt of God and an offence against him? . . . our sin is contempt of the Creator and to sin is to hold the Creator in contempt, that is, to do by no means on his account what we believe we ought to do for him, or not to forsake on his account what we believe we ought to forsake.11

Lusting after pleasures of the flesh is natural and not sinful, but consenting to the vice is sinful. If a man goes through someone’s garden and desires the fruit he sees, he also wills to eat it. If he does not steal the fruit, he does not consent to the desire or the will. "He does not extinguish [his desire], but because he is not drawn to consent, he does not incur sin."12 Consent to an evil deed need not involve actually committing the offense, for the time when we consent to what is unlawful is in fact when we in no way draw back from its accomplishment and are inwardly ready, if given the chance, to do it.13

Consent to evil, then, or contempt for the will of God, is the origin of sin.

10Ibid., 15.
11Ibid., 5.
12Ibid., 15.
13Ibid., 15.
Vices make us prone to bad actions, but it is not the existence of such natural inclinations, but rather our consent to them which accounts for culpability. For Abailard, deeds added nothing to a person's merit or sinfulness. If the man gave his consent to stealing the fruit, even if he never actually stole it he was guilty of sin. This led Abailard to argue that actually committing theft would not have further increased his culpability. Common sense would seem to dictate that it is far worse to actually commit theft than to merely intend to do so. For Abailard, however, to argue in such a manner is to say that an exterior and corporeal act could contaminate the soul. The doing of deeds has no bearing upon the increase of sin and nothing pollutes the soul except what is of the soul, the consent which alone we have called sin, not the will which precedes it nor the doing of the deed which follows.\(^\text{14}\)

The same action may be performed by both good and bad men. For example, God the Father gave up Christ the Son for crucifixion, just as Judas betrayed him. "So the betrayer did what God also did, but surely he did not do it well? For God thinks not of what is done but in what mind it may be done, and the merit or glory of the doer lies in the intention, not in the deed."\(^\text{15}\) Conversely, one may do an action which seems evil, but for which the person does not merit punishment. "If a man who has been tricked in one way or another sleeps with a woman whom he thought to be his

\(^{14}\text{Ibid.}, 23.\)

\(^{15}\text{Ibid.}, 29.\)
wife," this action was done through ignorance and without sin.\(^\text{16}\) Deeds, then, are irrelevant to the moral quality of an act; one may not ever commit an evil act, yet have given his consent to sin. This consent, for Abailard, is the only legitimate source of morality; evil actions, as such, added nothing to one's sin.

Conversely, good actions do not increase one's merit. Again, common sense would seem to dictate that the doing of an action is more meritorious than the mere intent to do it. For example, I may intend to go to church more often, but because of circumstances, I never follow through with my intention. Surely it would be more praiseworthy if I in fact did go to church, rather than merely intending to.

Abailard's emphasis on internal states was so great, however, that he could not accept such an argument. To argue in this fashion would be to say that one good, the intention, joined to another good, the action, are worth more than a single good. Such a conclusion is nonsensical, as sometimes a person is prohibited or unable to carry out good deeds. For example, two men wish to build houses for the poor. One of them has his money stolen, and is never able to carry out his plans. This does not make him less praiseworthy than the person who performs the deed: "To think that wealth can contribute anything to true happiness or to worthiness of the soul or can take anything away from

\(^{16}\)Ibid., 25.
the merits of the poor, is the height of madness." If good works added to good intentions are better than mere intentions, then Christ's nature as God, which is good, and his nature as man, which is also good, would be something better than the divinity of Christ itself or his manhood itself:

Who will truly venture to put above God the whole that is said to be Christ, that is God and man together, or any aggregate of things what soever, as if something can be better than he who is the highest good and from whom all things receive the whatever good they have?¹⁸

There are many good things in the world which far outnumber God, but to argue that all of these good things added together surpass God is ludicrous. Hence, for Abailard, good works add nothing to what is already good; actions are morally indifferent and add nothing to or take away from the moral worth of an individual. Sin is found in contempt of God's will through consent to evil deeds.

Abailard's definition of sin as consent to acts which are against the will of God led him to some startling conclusions. If sin consists in conscious contempt for the will of God, then there is no original sin and one cannot be blamed for deeds which are committed in a state of ignorance. Abailard argued that to say we are born with original sin is to misuse the word "sin". This happens in many cases where we commonly ascribe sin to a person in

¹⁷Ibid., 49.

¹⁸Ibid., 51.
which there is technically no consent, since "the name "sin" is understood in various ways."\textsuperscript{19} Properly used, sin is contempt for God, but it can also mean "the sacrifice for sin in the sense in which the Apostle says the Lord Jesus Christ was made sin." The penalty for sin is also said to be sin, in the sense that we say a "sin is forgiven, that is, the penalty is pardoned, and that the Lord Jesus Christ bore our sins, that is, the penalties of our sins or those arising from them." To say that all men are tainted by the sin of Adam does not imply that all men have sinned according to the proper sense of the word "sin", but rather, that they suffer the punishment meted out to Adam and his descendants:

When we say that little ones have original sin or that all of us, as the Apostle says, have sinned in Adam, the effect is to say that by his sin we have incurred the beginning of our punishment or the sentence of damnation.\textsuperscript{20}

"Sins" which are committed out of ignorance are similarly not "sins" in the proper sense of the word. One cannot deny that the men who crucified the Lord committed an evil deed, but they were not believers, and "their ignorance excuses them from fault:"\textsuperscript{21}

And so we say that those who persecuted Christ or his disciples, who they thought should be persecuted, sinned in deed, yet they would have sinned more

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 63.
gravey in fault if they had spared them against their own conscience. 22

Acts such as the crucifixion of Christ are only sins in the sense that they are actions which it "is not at all fitting for us to do." 23 God often punishes sins which are sins in deed only, not in fault:

God often punishes people here physically although no fault of theirs requires this, but he does not do this without cause, as, for example, when he sends afflictions even upon the just as a trial or a test for them, or lets some be afflicted in order late to be freed and to glorify him for the benefit which he has granted. 24

God is truly just and orders the world according to his will. Many actions go against his will, and are, therefore punished, yet they are not sins in the proper sense of the word:

I do not see how, in the case of small children or of those to whom this was unannounced, not to believe in Christ, which is unbelief, should be ascribed to fault, or anything which is done through invincible ignorance or which we cannot foresee. 25

Abailard's distinction between sin in its proper sense and the punishment meted out to deeds which are against God's will was a refinement of the concept of sin, and his definition of sin as contempt for God was a departure from traditional ethical theories. Augustine defined sin as a privation of the good, and argued that sin was not a thing

22Ibid., 67.
23 Ibid., 67.
24 Ibid., 59.
25 Ibid., 67.
at all. For Augustine, the origin of sin was to be found in the divergence of desire from the will. In the paradise of the garden of Eden, Adam was posse non peccare, since his "body and mind worked in perfect accord; and there was an effortless observance of the law of God." It was possible for Adam to have continued in this state:

And if he had willed by his own free will to continue in this state of uprightness and freedom from sin, assuredly without any experience of death and of that unhappiness he would have received by merit of that continuance the fullness of blessing with which the holy angels are blessed; that is the impossibility of falling any more, and the knowledge of this with absolute certainty.

Adam, however, turned away from God, and this is the origin of sin. Man is endowed with free will, which would have enabled him to continue to be posse non peccare. God's commandments were easy for man to follow in paradise, and, hence, departing from the will of God was a grievous sin:

This command... was so easy to obey and so simple to remember for anyone still free from passion resisting the will that the sinfulness involved in breaking this precept was so very great precisely because the difficulty of submission was so very slight.

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28"God's precepts themselves would be of no use to a man unless he had free choice of will, so that by performing them he might obtain the promised rewards." Augustine, On Grace and Free Will, translated by Peter Holmes (Grand Rapids: W. B. Erdman's Publishing Co., 1971), 444.

29Augustine, City of God, 308.
All of man's needs were provided for in paradise; consequently, his fall was not the result of temptation by the Devil, but rather of a defect in his will:

The Devil would not have begun by an open and obvious sin to tempt man into doing something which God had forbidden, had not man already begun to seek satisfaction in himself and, consequently, to take pleasure in the words: 'You shall be as Gods.'

Augustine explained the fall of man in paradise by contrasting the mutable nature of man with the immutable nature of God. It was easy for man to continue to obey God in paradise, yet he did not do so. His will turned from the will of God toward his own desires. For Augustine, the fall from the perfection of paradise was the result of man's mutable nature, which distances him from God, who is immutable. God is a necessary being, while all other beings are created, and thus, are contingent. Created beings are made ex nihilo, and as such, by their very nature are mutable. "Every change causes that which was to cease to be. Therefore, he truly is who is unchangeable." All things derive their nature from God, who truly is, yet they do not have the same incorruptible nature as God:

there can be no unchangeable good except our one true, and blessed God. All things which he has made are good because made by Him, but they are subject to change

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30Ibid., 310.

because they are made, not out of Him, but out of nothing." In so far as [man turns] himself toward himself, he [becomes] less than he was when he was adhering to Him who is supreme Being. Thus no longer to be in God but to be in oneself ... is not to be wholly nothing but to be approaching nothingness.

Man’s nature, as mutable, is, therefore, less good. This mutability is the origin of evil, for "evil arises not from the fact that the man is a nature, but from the fact that the nature was made out of nothing." As such, evil is not a thing in the sense of a substantial being, but rather a privation of the good. Just as evil itself is not a thing, so too, there is no efficient cause for evil, but rather, only a deficient cause: "What makes the evil will is, in reality, an ‘unmaking’, a desertion from God. The very defection is deficient - in the sense of having no cause." Adam’s fall in paradise forever turned human nature away from the good, and made man non posse non peccarre. For Augustine, then, sin is not really a thing at all, but rather the result of our defective natures. After

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32 Ibid., 245.
33 Ibid., 309.
34 Ibid., 253.
35 Ibid., 256.
the Fall, man's will was no longer in accord with his
desires.\textsuperscript{36}

Abailard's notion of sin was a radical departure from
Augustinian ethics. Although he agreed that man's ability
to do good was corrupted by the fall, nonetheless he refused
to equate the defect in man's nature with sin. For
Augustine, the fall resulted in a continual conflict between
the will and desire; for Abailard, sin was independent of
the will, as he argued that we often sin against our will.
Abailard's notion of sin was the result of the conscious
operation of our reason, as it was consent to an act against
the will of God. Several of the capitulae haeresium
attached to Bernard's epistola 190 condemn Abailard's
conclusions in the Ethics:

\begin{itemize}
\item VIII. Quod non contraximus culpam ex Adam, sed poenam tantum.
\item XVIII. Quod neque opus neque voluntas neque concupiscientia neque delectatio quae movet eam peccatum sit, nec debemus eam velle exstinguui.
\item XIX. Quod non peccaverunt qui Christum ignorantes crucifixerunt, et quod non sit culpae ascibendum quidquid fit per ignorantiam.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{36}Anselm's \textit{De conceptu virgo} also accepted the existence of original sin, arguing that all men, from the time they quickened in the womb, owed God a debt. Man's original fall was a blow to God's honor, and we incur the punishment for Adam's sin in order to repay that honor. Like Augustine, he argued that man's will was fundamentally flawed as a result of the fall, so that we are born tainted by the sin of Adam, and cannot avoid incurring personal sin during our lives.

Abailard’s claim that sin was to be found in the intent of the agent led to conclusions which generated strong protest from Bernard, and were generally rejected even by those of his contemporaries who had begun to consider the role of intent in morality. His notion that intent was the source of morality was a startling one to make in the twelfth century. No theologian had ever carried emphasis on intention to this extreme. Augustine had emphasized the importance of one’s state of mind while doing an action:

Non quid faciat homo considerandum sed quo animo . . . Diversa intentio diversa facta fecit. Cum sit una res, ex diversis intentionibus eam si metiamur, unum amandum est, alterum damnandum.\(^{38}\)

Despite his recognition of the importance of intention, Augustine argued that some actions, such as blasphemy or theft, were always bad. The school of Saint Victor also argued that some actions were always morally reprehensible, such as adultery and perjury,\(^ {39}\) and Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* isolated actions which were *per se mala*. At the Council of Sens, Abailard was condemned for failing to give action a place in his moral hierarchy:

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Abailard's ethical theories, then, went far beyond those of his predecessors as well as his contemporaries. His strong emphasis on the power of reason is nowhere more clearly seen than in the Ethics. *Sic et non* established the often unclear nature of revelation, and laid the groundwork for a theology which focused on the role of reason within the faith. Revelation is not simply given to us, it must be interpreted. His logical theories had already established that all of our knowledge comes from experience, and it was in his ethical theories that all of these strands were merged together into a harmonious whole. Abailard's account of the meaning of universal terms placed heavy emphasis on the workings of the individual mind -- we interpret reality, we do not simply receive an impression of it as it is. Our knowledge of the world, then, comes about as a result of the workings of our understanding on sensory experience. Our knowledge of revelation is no different. Faith transcends experience, just as does the meaning and signification of universal terms. Only the understanding can grasp revelation, and in fact, the very nature of revelation demands individual input.

Abailard's entire logical and theological framework consistently emphasized the power of the human mind and

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40Bernard of Clairvaux, *Capitula haeresum Petri Abaelardi*, 1052D.
allowed it a role within the faith. His ethical theories simply pushed these assumptions to their logical conclusions. According to Abailard’s logical nominalism, universal terms do not name anything which exists in objective reality, but only signify concepts. So too, actions which appear to be the same actions are not good or bad in themselves, but rather acquire their moral value from the intent of the individual. There is no class of “good” actions, nor any class of “bad” actions. Each action acquires its meaning from the individual circumstances, which for Abailard, are primarily the result of one person’s understanding of the will of God and his conscious choice to either abide by it or depart from it. In the Ethics, Abailard’s theological system reached fruition, as it was here, more than anywhere else, where the place of reason in his theology was most clearly elucidated. Sin is a conscious deliberative action; it is not simply the result of a corrupted nature, but rather the result of the deliberation of human reason. Anselm had argued that faith which does not seek understanding is dead; Abailard gave this motto new life by arguing that understanding God’s commands is a prerequisite for all ethical behavior. Faith which does not seek understanding truly is dead for Abailard, as this sort of faith cannot possibly account for morality.

Abailard’s definition of sin as consent to evil led him to other conclusions concerning the nature of the priesthood
and repentance. Because consent and not action was the source of sin for Abailard, he was forced to rethink the traditional position on penance and repentance. Repentance must involve the desire to repent out of love for God, not just out of fear of the penalties involved. Abailard argued that those who lead a life of dissolution and repent at the last minute often do so out of fear of eternal punishment, not out of true love for God. This is not true repentance, for

> with this sigh and contrition of heart which we call true repentance sin does not remain, . . . because the charity of God which inspires this sigh does not put up with fault.  

True repentance arises out of love for God, and as a result, involves more than contrition for a single sin, for

> if God’s love, as is proper, leads me to this and brings my mind to be sorry for this consent purely because I have thereby offended God, I do not see how the same love does not for the same reason cause us to repent of the other contempt, that is, does not put me in that frame of mind that whatever excess of mine occurs to my memory I should similarly be sorry for it and be ready to make satisfaction.  

True repentance negates all contempt of God, and, therefore, no sin remains. God’s pardon is immediate, although "he does not forgive them every penalty but only the eternal one."  

Repentance and remission of sins does not negate temporal penalties which one might incur, as

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41 Peter Abailard, *Ethics*, 89.

42 Ibid., 91.

43 Ibid., 89.
many penitents who, prevented by death, have not performed the satisfaction of penance in this life are detained for purgatory, not damnatory, punishments in the future.  

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there was a renewed zeal for confession. The Crusades spurred on religious fervor, which was manifested in increased attention to the role of confession in penance. Since the age of Gregory the Great, confession had been seen as the means by which guilt is removed. Gregory based his account on the story of Lazarus, who was commanded to rise from the dead in order that he might confess his sins. The disciples unloosed him from his sins symbolizing their power to free men who are not ashamed to confess their sins. 

The councils at Chalons in 813 and at Paris in 829 proclaimed the benefits of confession and commanded bishops to instruct priests in the duties of the confessor. Anselm of Canterbury argued that all sinful stains were removed in true confession, and Bernard of Clairvaux saw confession and obedience as the two main aspects of monastic life.

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44Ibid., 89.


Abailard maintained that confession was a useful practice, although he could "not see what confession avails us with God who knows all, or what indulgence our tongue obtains for us." Confession is useful, however, since we "may be helped by the prayers of those to whom we confess." More importantly, the act of confession demonstrates humility before God and man, and in this humility, "a large part of satisfaction is performed and we obtain a greater indulgence in the relaxation of our penance." Sometimes men are ashamed to confess their deeds, fearing that by "becoming known through confession [they] who did not fear to be punished by God, [will] be punished by men." The humility shown in confession, then, is indicative of true repentance. Confession to a priest is also useful as "the priest in fact occupies the place of a doctor and he . . . must establish satisfaction." Despite the benefits of confession, Abailard pointed out that it may occasionally not be necessary, as when Peter avoided confessing his denial of Christ for fear that it would damage the newly founded church. Abailard's view of confession, then, departed from earlier views in that he saw confession as an

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(Paris: Migne, 1844-1882), 647C.

48 Abailard, 99.
49 Ibid., 99-101.
50 Ibid., 101.
51 Ibid., 103.
indication of one's internal state, and not as a necessary prerequisite for repentance.

Further, since repentance involves true contrition of heart, Abailard was led to question the function of priests and bishops in imposing penalties for sin. Sometimes, priests are in error when they impose penances, thinking that the sin is less grave than it is, or conversely, they impose too heavy a penance for a light sin. If so, "ecclesiastical power can do nothing in binding or loosing if it deviates from the fairness of justice and does not accord with divine judgement." In such a case, "God breaks these bonds of the anathema because he makes this decision of the pastor invalid." Abailard argued that the power of the keys was given only to the Apostles; the judgments of other prelates are valid only in so far as they conform to the will of God:

The Apostles were told "whatsoever you shall bind upon earth," etc., and in order to concede that this was granted generally to all the bishops, I think it must be understood in this way: those whom here the pastors of the church in one manner or another, as has been said, loose or absolve, heavenly power confirms thus their just or unjust decision, and commands subjects to keep it through humility.

While Abailard did not advise his readers to reject the power of the priesthood, his arguments clearly implied that

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52 Ibid., 119.
53 Ibid., 123.
54 Ibid., 125.
God alone could forgive and remit sins. This argument was attacked at the Council of Sens in proposition XI:

XI. Quod potestas ligandi atque solvendi apostolis tantum data sit, non etiam successoribus eorum.\(^{55}\)

Although Abailard was accused of heresy on the basis of this argument, it was fully in keeping with his claim that consent, and not action, formed the basis for moral judgments. If a person’s consent is the basis for determining sin, how can a priest or bishop truly determine culpability and punishment? Only God knows the state of one’s mind, and therefore, only God can correctly determine guilt or innocence.

God is said to be the prover and judge of the heart and reins, that is, of all intentions which come from an affection of the soul or from weakness or a pleasure of the flesh.\(^{56}\)

This argument, if accepted, might indeed have led to a reformation in the twelfth century; if God is the only true interpreter of the law, the loss of the power of the keys would have left very little room for the medieval church.

Abailard’s Ethics was his most original contribution to theology. Its originality is reflected in the number of propositions based on this work which were denounced at Sens. In many ways, however, these propositions do not adequately reflect Abailard’s theories. His Confessio Fidei denied having ever advocated the propositions denounced at

\(^{55}\)Bernard of Clairvaux, Capitula haeresum Petri Abaelardi, 1053C.

\(^{56}\)Abailard, 41.
the Council of Sens; Abailard consistently argued that
Bernard had not read his works or had grossly exaggerated
their contents. Although he had argued that works in
themselves were neither good nor evil, he never intended to
argue that man's actions make no difference in terms of his
salvation, only that the character of an action is
determined by intent. He did not explicitly deny that the
church was the custodian of the power of the keys, as he
insisted that the decisions of the priesthood ought to be
respected even if they were invalid, if only as an exercise
in humility. His ideas, however, clearly laid the
groundwork for the ideology of the Reformation, and just as
clearly, Bernard was correct in taking quick action against
Abailard.

Although Abailard claimed that he did not
"contentiously resist those who want to equal the Apostles
in the plenitude of power," and, therefore, merely wrote "to
expound [his] opinion rather than to put forward a
definition of truth," he clearly departed from the
framework of other theologians of the time. Hugh of Saint
Victor, for example, argued that repentance did not
automatically result in the remission of eternal sins; only
a priest could perform that function. Similarly, Hugh

\[57\] Ibid., 127.

\[58\] Hugh of Saint Victor, De Sacramentis, in Patrologia
cursus completus, series Graeca et Latina sive bibliotheca
universalis, vol. 176, ed. Jacques Paul Migne (Paris:
Migne, 1844-1882), 564-5.
insisted that Peter’s failure to confess his sins did not imply that confession might be unnecessary in certain circumstances.\textsuperscript{59} Abailard’s \textit{Ethics} is the clearest example of the coherence of his theological system as a whole, for he did not hesitate to apply the implications of his nominalism to his ethical theories. Although he stopped just short of a complete advocacy of nominalism by arguing that the will of God was an objective standard by which all else is measured, he demonstrated intellectual honesty in his ethics and theology.

Abailard has long been seen as dishonest, or at least intellectually timid. His important \textit{Sic et non} listed only a series of conflicting doctrines, never attempting the controversial and difficult project of reconciling them. Abailard has been seen, then, as a master of dialectic who could turn any situation to his advantage, which has often been interpreted as a lack of conviction on his part.

Abailard was a pioneer in the use of language; in freeing twelfth century Latin from its restrictive use of words, however, he often described the Trinity in heretical terms. He was a pioneer in his emphasis on individualism, as seen both in his biography, and in his ethical theories. His was indeed a fertile mind, and in many ways his claim to being the greatest mind of his age was justified. He was certainly one of the most skilled logicians of his age, and

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., 553A-554D.
he did not hesitate to draw the appropriate logical conclusions from within his nominalist framework. It is for these achievements, rather than for the exploits of his personal life or his condemnations that he should be remembered. With the work of Abailard, theology was forced to come to terms with the place of the individual in God's hierarchy, and it is due to Abailard that many of the ideas articulated in the Reformation, particularly by Martin Luther, came to the forefront. Abailard was far more than simply a skilled dialectician who responded to the exigencies of the time; he was truly a pioneer who pointed out a need for an account of individual merit. While Martin Grabmann and others insist that Abailard did not have a great impact on the scholastic movement, he did have an impact on the development of nominalism. His achievements were not to be fully realized until the Renaissance and Reformation, and it was in the work of Erasmus and Luther that Abailard's ideas reached fruition. Abailard's ethical theories, then, inaugurated a new age; he was a man who was far ahead of his time, and whose work made possible many achievements of the Italian Renaissance.
Abailard was in many ways the quintessential scholastic. Clearly, he venerated the power of human reason, and developed an entire theological system which allowed reason a far reaching role in faith. Nevertheless, Abailard's use of logic and dialectic never carried him away from the individual; he paid little attention to abstract metaphysical speculation, and focused his theology on the formation of faith and its practical applications within the life of the individual. *Sic et non* emphasized the necessity of philological techniques as an aid in interpreting the scriptures, yet this was not simply an exercise for the learned in probing the mysteries of the faith. Rather, it was intended to discover the teachings of Christ, so that one might enact them in his or her life. Abailard's scholasticism, then, was not incompatible with humanism.

The affinity of Abailard's theology with humanism is clearly evident in the work of Erasmus. Like Abailard, Erasmus focused on the moral life of the individual, and, consequently, was often critical of the excessive rituals of the Catholic church. Erasmus' religious views, like those
of Abailard, centered around Christ and his teachings. His "philosophy of Christ" advocated returning to apostolic practices, and focusing on the state of one's heart rather than on the "pomp and circumstance" of the church of his age. Erasmus, like most humanists, scorned scholasticism and its methodology. This would seem to put him at odds with Abailard; however, Erasmus, like Abailard, advocated the use of sophisticated philological and interpretive techniques in order to understand the scriptures. He criticized the scholastics of his day, but in many ways, his views harked back to those of one of the original scholastics, Peter Abailard. Abailard displayed many of the rhetorical concerns of the humanists; a comparison of his works with those of Erasmus demonstrates that although his ethical theories were a natural outgrowth of his emphasis on logic and nominalism, they were in no way incompatible with the views of an Erasmus. The techniques of a scholastic did not, then, necessarily place him at odds with the aims of the humanists. In Abailard's case, logic enabled him to develop the role of the individual in the religious experience, and in so doing, to enrich the meaning of faith and morality. The humanists of the Renaissance despised medieval scholasticism; yet, had they studied Abailard, they might have found that scholasticism, just as Renaissance humanism, was capable of addressing the needs of the individual.
Erasmus was particularly concerned about corruption in the church, and believed that the true spirit of Christianity had been largely lost. He wrote a number of works which satirized not only the rites and rituals of the church, but also its theologians, priests, bishops, and last but not least, its pope. Erasmus, like Abailard, believed that morality was to be found in inner spirituality, and argued that works performed without the proper attitude were useless. Consequently, he was naturally suspicious of philosophers and theologians, as they did not provide any useful guidelines by which to live but instead made endless distinctions in an attempt to penetrate mysteries of the faith which, for Erasmus, would always remain mysteries. Erasmus argued that Christianity should focus on Christ and his teachings, not on subtle refinements of theology. For him, the learned philosophers and theologians of his time had forgotten the meaning of Christianity. Erasmus' "theology" was not an organized system at all, but was rather the simple "philosophy of Christ" which all men might grasp and enact in their lives. The "philosophy of Christ" was not found in intricate arguments, but rather in Christ's life and teachings. For Erasmus, the man was truly a theologian who teaches not by skill with intricate syllogisms but by a disposition of mind, by the very expression and the eyes, by his very life that riches should be disdained, that the Christian should not put his trust in the supports of this world but must rely entirely on heaven, that a wrong should not be avenged, that a good should be wished for those wishing ill... And if
anyone under the inspiration of the spirit of Christ
preaches this kind of doctrine, inculcates it, exhorts,
incites, and encourages men to it, he is truly a
theologian, even if he should be a common laborer or
weaver. And if anyone exemplifies this doctrine in his
life itself, he is a good doctor.¹

To the learned men of his day these ideas were simple and
unlettered, yet Erasmus reminded his readers that:

Christ particularly taught these rude doctrines . . .
the Apostles inculcated them . . . however vulgar they
are . . . [they have] drawn the highest princes of the
world and so many kingdoms and peoples to its laws an
achievement which . . . the erudition of philosophers
cannot claim.²

The intricacies of theologians and philosophers were not
taught by the Apostles, and, therefore, they did not reflect
the original focus of Christianity. Paul wrote about faith,
yet he did not define it dogmatically:

The apostles consecrated the eucharist devoutly enough,
but suppose you had questioned them about the
'terminal a quo' and the 'terminal ad quem', or about
transubstantiation . . . I say they would not have
answered with the same accuracy as the pupils of
Scotus distinguish and define these matters. ³

For Erasmus, the endless distinctions of the learned largely
missed the point of Christianity, for they do not succeed in
inspiring men to Christian piety.

¹Desiderius Erasmus, The Paraclesis, in Christian
Humanism and the Reformation, ed. John C. Olin (New York:

²Ibid., 102.

³Erasmus, The Praise of Folly, in The Essential
Erasmus, translated by John P. Dolan (New York: Mentor
Books, 1964), 144.
The focus of Christ's teaching was the proper way of life, and wise men often appear useless in such matters:

Even Socrates, judged the wisest by the not so wise oracle, gave proof of this. When he tried to do something in public, he usually left amid the loud laughter of everyone present . . ., For while he philosophized about clouds and ideas, while he measured the feet of a flea and wondered at the voice of a gnat, he did not learn the common, ordinary things of life.

Plato was no different, "an illustrious advocate certainly, who, ruffled by the noise of the crowd, could barely speak out more than half a sentence." The disputations of the wise, then, serve no practical purpose, and

as a matter of fact, this whole type of men who devote themselves to the pursuit of wisdom are unlucky in most other things and especially in the propagation of children. I think nature providentially ordains it so that the evil of wisdom will not spread widely among men.5

Erasmus viewed theologians with equal suspicion, and argued that "perhaps it would be better to silently pass over [them]," since

they are hot tempered [and dealing with them] is like crossing Lake Camarina or eating poisonous beans. They may attack me with six hundred arguments . . . They are protected by a wall of scholastic definitions, arguments, corollaries and implicit and explicit propositions. They have so many hideouts that not even the net of Vulcan will be able to catch them; for they back down from their distinctions, by which they also cut through the knots of an argument . . . and they come forth with newly invented terms and monstrous sounding words.7

4Ibid., 115.
5Ibid., 116.
6Ibid., 143.
7Ibid., 143.
For Erasmus, the efforts of the theologians were wasted, as "these intricate subtleties are infinite . . . [and] no one can perceive [them] unless, like Lyceneus, he can see in the blackest darkness things that aren't there." One "notable fool" attempted to demonstrate the truth of the Holy Trinity by the use of grammar, and another diligent monk explained that the threefold nature of God could be deduced from the fact that the name of Jesus could be declined in three ways. Inventive and erudite though these arguments were, some of their listeners "were so amazed by this new approach that some of them came near to being overtaken by the same mysterious force that transformed Niobe to stone." Theologians of his era were guilty of "shaping and reshaping the Holy Scriptures, as if they were made of wax." In so doing, their true meaning was often lost.

Erasmus' critique of the philosophers and theologians of his day might be taken as a rejection of learning altogether, and in such a case, his concerns would seem to be much different than those of Abailard. Erasmus, however, rejected only empty learning which did not lead one to the practice of the philosophy of Christ. Just as Abailard's scholasticism was directed toward the realization of charitable faith, so too, Erasmus' humanism did not avoid

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8 Ibid., 144.
9 Ibid., 151.
10 Ibid., 147.
learning altogether, but rather directed that learning to
bringing the philosophy of Christ to the people. What
disturbed Erasmus was not theology or philosophy itself, but
the presumption that such endeavors represented the essence
of Christianity. The preoccupation of philosophers and
theologians with abstract metaphysical truths reflected a
concern for the outward manifestations of Christianity
rather than the inner life of the Christian man. This
emphasis on outer realities over inner truths was not
peculiar to philosophers and theologians; it was a disease
which infected the entire church structure. For Erasmus,
the monastic orders were a den of iniquity. The monasteries
had forgotten the true meaning of Christitumity, and defined
spirituality solely in terms of daily rituals:

It is amusing to find that they insist that everything
be done in fastidious detail, as if employing the
orderliness of mathematics, a small mistake in which
would be a great crime . . . Another will take glory in
the fact that he has parasitically lived in the same
spot for over fifty five years. Another will exhibit
his hoarse voice, which is the result of his diligent
chanting; another, a lethargy contracted from his
reclusive living; and still another, muteness as a
result of his vow of silence. But Christ, interrupting
their otherwise unending pleas will ask to himself,
‘Where does this new race of Jews come from?’

Erasmus taunted the monk with the rejoinder that although he
observe[s] the sabbath outwardly . . . in the secret
recesses of your mind you permit all kinds of vices to
run rampant. Your body does not commit adultery, but
you make your soul to be an adulterer by your
greediness. You sing psalms, but your thoughts do not
keep pace with your tongue. You bless with the mouth,
but curse with the heart. You hear the word of God

\[11\]Ibid., 148-9.
spoken to you, but you refuse it entrance into your heart.\textsuperscript{12}

Mere observance of outward rites could not guarantee of religiosity. Although monks professed to live a holy life based on the regular observance of mass and dietary restrictions, their hearts were often not as they should be:

Of what advantage to you is a body covered by a religious habit if that same body possess a mind that is worldly? If your habit is white, should not your mind be white too? What does it profit you when you kneel to venerate the Cross and forget the mystery of the Cross? You fast and abstain from those things which do not pollute men, yet you do not refrain from obscene conversations, which are a cause of pollution to yourself but also to those to whom you speak.\textsuperscript{13}

Monks were not alone in their lax practices. People commonly donated money to the church "thinking that it will be proper expiation for all [their] perjury, lust, drunkenness, fighting, murder, fraud, lying, and treachery." They did not, however, make their donations in the proper frame of mind, for they thought that they could then "start a new round of sinning with a clean slate."\textsuperscript{14} The cult of saints had proliferated so that every city had its own patron saint. Yet

many Christians will light a candle to the Blessed Virgin, even at noon when it is unnecessary. But how few have the ardent desire to imitate her in her chaste


\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 70.

\textsuperscript{14}Erasmus, \textit{The Praise of Folly}, 130.
life, in her temperance, and her love for spiritual things!\textsuperscript{15}

The prelates too were more concerned for wealth and riches than for the administration of their duties:

If our bishops would stop and consider what their white albs signify -- namely, sincerity and a pure life in every way untainted; what is signified by their two horned miter, the peaks of which are joined by a common knot -- a perfect knowledge of the Old and New Testaments; what is meant by their wearing of gloves -- the immaculate administration of the sacraments, untainted by any selfishness of self-concern . . . what is signified by the cross that is carried before them in processions -- the victory of spiritual charity over carnal affections. If they would but contemplate these and other virtues, I am sure that it would be safe to say that they would not lead such troubled and shameful lives.\textsuperscript{16}

For Erasmus, these ills could be cured by realizing that "the perfection of Christ is in the dispositions, not in the mode of life; in the soul, not in what a person wears or eats."\textsuperscript{17} This way of life was not meant to be obscured by tedious arguments which were only intelligible to a learned few, but to be accessible to all:

Who can carry around with him Aquinas' Secundae secunda? And yet it is important for all to live a good life, the path to which Christ intended to be accessible to all, not by way of a difficult labyrinth of argument but by a sincere faith and by an unfeigned charity which a confident hope accompanies. Finally, let the great masters, who of necessity are few in numbers, study these huge volumes . . . he has taught

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 136.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 156.

the chief part of Christian piety who has enkindled the love for it.\textsuperscript{18}

For Erasmus, devotion to the teachings of Christ was the essence of Christianity, and as such, he emphasized an inner spirituality which is very much like that of Abailard's \textit{Ethics}. "If we would be holy, we must go to the sole archetype of godliness, Christ Himself."\textsuperscript{19} Christ is much more than the mere representation of his figure on the cross. We should not look on Him as a "mere word, an empty expression, but rather as charity, simplicity, patience, and purity -- in short, in terms of everything he taught us."\textsuperscript{20} Christ's example can only be followed by "turning away from the visible things, which are for the most part either imperfect or of themselves indifferent, [and] seek[ing] the invisible."\textsuperscript{21} The visible world is a "mere shadow of reality;" true spirituality consists in gradually turn[ing] from those things whose appearance is deceptive to those things that are real . . . from the pleasures of the flesh, the honors of the world that are so transitory, to those things that are immutable and everlasting.\textsuperscript{22}

Since God is a spirit, he should be glorified by the spirit.\textsuperscript{23} Devotion to the cult of saints is devotion to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 112.
\item \textsuperscript{19}Erasmus, \textit{The Handbook of the Militant Christian}, 71.
\item \textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 58.
\item \textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 61.
\item \textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 63.
\item \textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 65.
\end{itemize}
the visible world; so too, devotion to the Cross is superfluous if the proper spiritual state is not present. There are those who venerate the cross and gaze in admiration at the tunic of Christ, "yet this is nothing compared with carrying the mystery of the Cross fixed in your mind." 24 If these "external things were the true source of holiness, then certainly there would never have been a people more religious than the Jews." 25 Many who witnessed the life of Christ, however, failed to believe. "If the very physical presence of Christ is useless to salvation, then how can you put your trust in corporeal things?" 26 Even the eucharist is useless in salvation if one "fails to let what takes place at Mass also take place within [his] heart." 27 "God is mind, the most pure and most simple mind of all; therefore, he must be worshipped with a pure mind." 28 All the good works in the world are useless unless they are accompanied by internal piety. 29 The philosophy of Christ is as simple as "keeping one's eyes constantly fixed on Christ," and in so doing, always acting

24 Ibid., 67.
25 Ibid., 67.
26 Ibid., 67.
27 Ibid., 65.
28 Ibid., 69.
29 Ibid., 69.
out of charity and love for one's fellow man rather than avarice, lust, or selfishness.

Although Erasmus denigrated the scholastic theologians and philosophers, his "philosophy of Christ" did not altogether neglect the role of learning in the growth of inner spirituality. Like Abailard, Erasmus argued that a thorough knowledge of the scriptures was necessary in order to fulfill God's commandments:

If we are truly and sincerely Christian we truly believe in Him who has been sent from Heaven to teach us that which the wisdom of the philosophers could not do, if we truly expect from Him, what no prince, however powerful, can give, why is anything more important to us than his literature?^{30}

There are two weapons that the Christian knight uses in order to attain true inner spirituality. One is prayer, which enables him to overcome our weaknesses of the flesh and rise to the level of the invisible. The other weapon is knowledge, which "fortifies the mind with salutary precepts and keeps virtue ever before us."^{31} Christ once asked the sons of Zebedee if they really knew what they were praying for, and Erasmus argued that one must probe the scriptures in search of their deepest meanings if one is to truly follow the example of Christ. In The Handbook of the Militant Christian, he argued that study of the classics was "wonderful preparation for an understanding of the

^{30}Erasmus, The Paraclesis, 103.

^{31}Erasmus, The Handbook of the Militant Christian, 35.
scriputures."\textsuperscript{32} Many of the ancients were excellent teachers of ethics, but Homer and Virgil are of no use if one reads them literally; whatever can be found in their works which supports Christian precepts should be "applied and referred to Christ."\textsuperscript{33}

The study of the ancients prepares one for the study of scripture, but here, too, words often must not be read literally. Some passages are obscure, and may be enlightened by reading the commentaries of the fathers. Others may be clarified by studying the original languages and translations of the passage, for often mistakes have occurred in copying. In 1516 Erasmus published his \textit{Novum instrumentum} and was heavily criticized for some of the changes he had made to the vulgate. In his "Letter to Martin Dorp", he defended his translation, arguing, as had Abailard, that errors in copying were frequent,\textsuperscript{34} and that the ancient Greek texts were often more reliable and closer to apostolic Christianity than the decrees of the councils and synods of his day. The scriptures often conceal invisible truths in the guise of the visible; good scholarship and diligent study can clarify the teachings of Christ and enable us to follow his model in life. Although

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid., 36.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., 36.

Erasmus was critical of scholasticism, he did not reject scholarship; what distinguished him from the theologians he so loved to make light of was that his form of religious learning was directed toward the goal of inspiring genuine piety and enabling one to move from the physical to the spiritual.

Erasmian humanism had much in common with Abailardian scholasticism. Both Abailard and Erasmus centered their theologies around the example of Christ. Erasmus downplayed the Cross as a physical symbol of Christ's life; Abailard downplayed the atonement as an act of redemption and emphasized the infusion of love for God inspired by Christ's example. Both saw Christ's role as teacher as more important than his role as redeemer, and this is due to the emphasis of both Erasmus and Abailard on inner spirituality. Abailard refused to assign moral value to actions, finding it instead in the intent of the agent; likewise, Erasmus refused to give moral sanction to monastic practices or the veneration of relics without an accompanying inner spirituality. Knowledge played an important role for both men. Erasmus denigrated scholastic techniques, yet urged his readers to study languages and the writings of the fathers; Abailard used the very scholastic techniques which Erasmus despised, but to achieve the same goal -- knowledge of the word of God in order that one might live by the example of Christ. Abailard's theology was not simply abstract speculation; rather, it was intended to enrich the
moral life of the individual. Like Erasmus, he encouraged the study of the pagan philosophers. Both were interested in morality, and if ethical principles could be found in the works of the pagans which resembled those of Christ, they ought to be used to edify the mind rather than simply rejected. For Erasmus the Renaissance humanist and Abailard the medieval scholastic, knowledge was at the service of Christ. Abailard's theology was much more systematic than Erasmus' ever was; nevertheless, his aims were no different than those of Erasmus.

II.

Abailard and Luther: The evolution of Abailardian humanism and Reformation ideology

Many of Abailard's statements in the Ethics were condemned at the council of Sens. His definition of sin was radically different than any others of the time, and had many implications which foreshadowed the Protestant Reformation. For Abailard, actions were irrelevant to morality, as moral worth was found only in the intent of the agent. Abailard's ethical theories, like those of Erasmus, internalized spirituality. Although Abailard, like Erasmus, did not advocate rejecting the power of the traditional church hierarchy, his theories certainly could have led to a "reformation" of the twelfth century. Since all morality was found in the inner life of an individual, the priesthood often erred in assessing sin and assigning punishment. For
Abailard, only God could know the state of one's heart, and if a priest or bishop made an incorrect judgement, then the sinner was not bound by it, but only by the judgement of God. These ideas might have led to a rejection of the role of the medieval church as mediator between man and God. According to Abailard's views, man's spirituality does not rest on his outward actions, but rather on his love for God and his desire to act in accordance with God's will. Only God can truly judge whether one is acting out of true love for God or from selfish motives. As such, his ethical theories emphasized faith, or inner spirituality, as the primary component of virtue and salvation, and man's spiritual relationship with God rather than his adherence to church decrees. Had Abailard been a little more daring, he might have drawn the logical conclusion that the medieval church played no role in the life of a Christian, and rejected the power of the priesthood altogether. His remarks skirted the edge of such a conclusion by encouraging his readers to obey the commands of prelates as a sign of humility and contrition rather than out of the conviction that the judgments of the priesthood were synonymous with the will of God.

Later theologians, however, would not be as eager to uphold the church as mediator between man and God. The Renaissance emphasized man's inner spirituality and individual progress in faith; the Reformation drew the logical conclusions of Renaissance individualism and
rejected the authoritative role of the Catholic church. In many ways, Martin Luther emerged from a humanist framework; like Erasmus, he employed philological techniques in his interpretation of the scriptures, and emphasized inner spirituality. His theology, however, was a departure in significant ways from humanism. Luther, like Abailard, was a nominalist, and his ethical theories reflect the logical connection of nominalist assumptions and Abailardian ethics. Abailard destroyed ultra-realism as a viable theory, and the impact of his nominalist logic can be seen in Luther's justification by faith. The impetus which Abailard gave to scholastic methodology can be seen in the subsequent history of nominalist ethics; Abailard's logical theories forced him to rely on the individual mind and led him to argue for a morality centered on intent rather than actions. In similar fashion, Luther, who was trained in nominalist theology, also developed ethical theories which relied on faith rather than observance of rites and rituals. Abailard began the nominalist tradition, which emphasized the doctrine of justification by faith. Consequently, his work made an important contribution to the history of thought and the emergence of the Protestant Reformation. It was Abailard more than any other thinker of the Middle Ages who developed a theology centered on the individual; although he remained a Catholic, his ideas would later erupt into the Reformation.
Luther's justification by faith is based on Abailardian ideas; however, Luther's debate with Erasmus revealed many aspects of his thought which departed from the framework of both Erasmus and Abailard. Erasmus and Abailard both spiritualized religiosity and allowed the individual a decisive role in his salvation. Luther, however, allowed the individual no role at all, denying free will and arguing that human nature was so corrupted by the Fall that man could will no good at all. Luther's theology emphasized the transcendent and fearful majesty of God; that of Erasmus and Abailard emphasized man's progress towards God. Luther, unlike Abailard, was no true humanist. His theology reflects the nominalistic ethics of Abailard, but not its spirit. Luther's theology and his debate with Erasmus demonstrates what Abailard might have been, but was not; the evolution of Abailardian nominalism ultimately distanced the nominalists from the humanists. Abailard's scholasticism was not incompatible with humanism; in fact, his entire theology was directed to strengthening the individual and his relationship with God. Late medieval nominalism, as clearly seen in the case of Luther, emphasized the omnipotence of God to the exclusion of a humanistic concept of the individual. The contrast between Abailard and Luther clarifies the humanism of Abailard, and clearly shows that Abailard was not simply a logician gone mad, but a man who used the power of logic solely for the uplifting of the soul. Abailard was not simply a second rate thinker who, as
Etienne Gilson argued, mistook logic for philosophy. His twelfth century humanism is an example of what scholasticism might have been and what the medieval church might have become had there been more men like Peter Abailard.

Despite his two condemnations for heresy, Abailard's writings were widely disseminated in Europe. The work of D. E. Luscombe has been enormously important in assessing the impact of Abailard in the intellectual history of Europe. According to Luscombe,

the number of Abailardian manuscripts found in Germanic regions, including the Baltic lands, is relatively very high and some of these were certainly produced in the scriptoria of German religious houses or by German scribes and were not merely imported from France.\(^{35}\)

Sic et non could be found in Einsiedeln and Tegernsee; Tegernsee also possessed a copy of the Ethics, as did the house at Prufenig. The Theologia "Scholarium", which contains many of the ideas found in the Ethics, was copied by a number of monastic houses, including Heiligenkreuz, Saint Matthias in Trier and the Dominican house of Vienna, the latter two being fifteenth century manuscripts. The Theologia "Summi Boni" was also present in a number of German houses such as Erlangen. Luscombe argues that

the good number of south German and Austrian manuscripts shows that something was stirring in the religious houses of this part of the world . . . it is particularly interesting to note the concentration of manuscripts in the circle of adjacent dioceses constituted by Salzburg, Passau, Freising, Regensburg,

Eichstatt and Constance. Many of these manuscripts were produced locally and not imported.\textsuperscript{36}

The presence of Abailardian manuscripts as late as the fifteenth century suggests that there was at least a minimum level of familiarity with his work in the major religious centers, and makes it at least possible that Luther was acquainted with some of Abailard's ideas and works. Luther was certainly acquainted with the \textit{Sentences} of Peter Lombard, having lectured on them on a number of occasions. If Luther never actually read any of Abailard's works, he clearly was exposed to many of his ideas in the Lombard's \textit{Sentences}. The \textit{Sentences} treat many of the propositions which were condemned at Sens. The Lombard did not always agree with Abailard's positions, but took a middle ground which often preserved the thrust of his theories without overstepping the boundaries of traditional theology. For example, he presents three views on the nature of sin, the Augustinian position that sin is a privation, the Abailardian position that sin is the intent to commit an evil deed, and a third position representing a compromise between the two, that sin is both will and action. He tends to affirm the latter point of view, arguing that actions and intentions are equally evil, but since actions proceed from an evil will, sin consists chiefly in an evil will.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., 87.

\textsuperscript{37}Peter Lombard, \textit{The Four Books of Sentences}, II, 35, 2.
Abailard argued that actions were neither good nor bad in themselves; the Lombard argued that some actions were always evil, such as the persecution of Christ, yet he claimed that all actions were judged by the intention from which they arose. This is essentially Abailard's position in the Ethica. Although he argued that the persecution of Christ was a "sin" in the sense that it was an evil deed which merited punishment, he did not accept the idea that fault could be ascribed to the perpetrators. Peter was also influenced by Abailard's definition of repentance and its implications for the validity of the power of the keys. In his discussion of the power of the keys, the Lombard distinguished between the forgiveness of God and that of the church. Like Abailard, he affirmed that the priesthood has the power of discretion, and when this power is not exercised rightly their decisions are not binding in heaven. Just as Abailard argued that only priests and bishops who lead moral lives can rightly apply the power given to the apostles, so too Peter claims that the power of binding and loosing is only rightly exercised by those whose lives are in conformity with the will of God. Although the Lombard attempted to soften many of Abailard's most problematic positions, the Sentences capture the essence of the Ethica.

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38 Ibid., IV, 18, 4-6.
Luther would not have had to search far, then, to
discover the lurking influence of Abailardian ideas.
Moreover, Luther was trained in nominalism, and clearly,
there was an intimate connection between nominalism as a
logical and ontological theory and an intentional ethics.
We have already seen the influence of Abailard's logical
nominalism on his theology as a whole, and specifically on
the development of his ethics. The importance and influence
of Abailard as a logician cannot be denied. In the same
breath as they condemned his theology, many of his
contemporaries praised his logical abilities. John of
Salisbury referred to Abailard as the "Peripateticus
Palatinus", who "won such distinction in logic over all his
contemporaries that it was thought that he alone really
understood Aristotle."\(^{39}\) Richard of Poitiers called
Abailard a lumen latinorum; for Peter the Venerable, he was
an Aristotle of the middle ages, the leader of all
logicians.\(^{40}\) Although he was widely criticized in the
years following his condemnation, by 1165 Wolfger of
Prufenig had included Abailard on his list of "modern

\(^{39}\)John of Salisbury, Metalogicon, translated by Daniel
D. McGarry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955),
1.5, 22.

\(^{40}\)"Gallorum Socrates, Plato maximus Hesperiarum, Noster
Aristoteles, logicos, quicunque fuerunt, aut par, aut
melior." Peter the Venerable, "Epitaphia Abaelardi," in
Patrologia cursus completus, series Graeca et Latina sive
bibliotheca universalis, vol. 178, ed. Jacques Paul Migne
(Paris: Migne, 1844-1882), 103.
If Abailard cannot be credited with the development of the scholastic methodology, he certainly can be credited with the development of modified nominalism. His ethical theories were an outgrowth of his nominalism, and all later nominalists would express similar ethical theories.

Luther was particularly influenced by William of Ockham, who, like Abailard, held a form of nominalism which allowed for the meaningfullness of concepts, but denied extrinsic reality to universals. For Ockham, reality was simply composed of the world of immediate experience. He rejected all forms of realism, and found universal terms meaningful only as terms in propositions. Ockham's nominalism had profound consequences for his theology. Since all knowledge derived from experience and concerned only particular things, rational knowledge of God and theology was impossible. Our apprehension of the truths of revelation differs from empirical knowledge. Revelation must be accepted on faith, and these truths often conflict with empirical facts. This is all the more evident when one considers that just as the human mind cannot directly apprehend immutable laws of nature, so God Himself is not bound by the laws of logic. He is utterly omnipotent, able to do whatever he will. He can save those who merit salvation, or he can condemn them. Good works, then, do not effect salvation; only the grace of God, freely given
without constraint on his part, can spare man from eternal damnation.

Luther was profoundly influenced by this terrifying picture of an all powerful God. During his first mass as an ordained priest, he trembled at the altar out of fear of God. For Luther, God's absolute omnipotence implied man's absolute impotence; no act could constrain God to save man, and hence, Luther was forced to rely on God's grace alone. Abailard's logical nominalism pushed to its limits became Ockhamism, which in turn generated Lutheranism. Abailard had argued that universals did not refer to any objective entity. Such a claim had important implications for all rational endeavors. If no general statements can be made, then there is no scientific knowledge at all, since this sort of knowledge for the most part consists of deductions of specific information from more general premises. Abailard argued that universals became meaningful within their logical context, and in this way, attempted to preserve meaningful discourse. Ockham, however, proceeding from Abailardian premises, concluded that the empirical world was contingent, as he could find no valid laws of nature through experience. The truths of faith could not be reached through empirical evidence; hence, none of our laws of reasoning applies to faith. God's nature, then, transcended the laws of logic, which led Ockham to skepticism about the role of meritorious action in salvation. Abailard's God was an immanently logical God,
constrained just as we are by the laws of logic. Abailard's
ethics applied this vision of logic to ethical behavior,
resulting in a positive role for rational behavior in the
faith. Although Luther and Ockham started from the same
premises as Abailard, they drew more radical conclusions,
and their view of the human predicament was a terrifying
picture of insipid man trembling before an unpredictable
God.

Luther's ethics, on the surface, are very similar to
Abailard's theories. Luther, like Erasmus, started with the
assumption that "man has a twofold nature, a spiritual and a
bodily one." These two natures were so radically different
that "these two men in the same man contradict each other."
This dichotomy was absolute for Luther, and like Abailard,
Luther argued that "it is evident that no external thing has
any influence in producing Christian righteousness or
freedom, or in producing unrighteousness or servitude." A
sick body does not create a sick soul; nor does a body
adorned with fancy vestments create a beautiful soul. For
Luther, "only one thing is necessary for Christian life . . .
that one thing is the most holy Word of God, the gospel of
Christ." Faith alone guarantees salvation, and faith is
independent of works. "The inner man cannot be justified,
freed, or saved by any outer work or action at all . . .
these works, whatever their character have nothing to do
with the inner man." \(^{41}\) Just as Abailard had argued that no corporeal act could contaminate the soul, so Luther argued that the inner man was entirely autonomous and untouched by the outward man. Faith alone saves man, and through faith, we become free from the bondage of the law and united to Christ. Similarly, Abailard had argued that mere obedience to law was not a sufficient guarantee of salvation; only faith infused with charity justifies man. For Abailard, as for Luther, faith which acts solely out of love for God far outweighs meritorious works. In Luther's words, the Christian is perfectly free lord of all and yet nevertheless the perfect dutiful servant of all -- he is free from the law, but his faith compels him to abide by God's wishes, constantly serving God by serving his fellow man.

Luther's dichotomy between the spirit and the flesh ultimately led him to reject the authoritative role of the priesthood and the medieval church as a whole. His claim that faith alone insures salvation forced him to conclude that "all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them except that of office . . . we all have one baptism, one, one faith, and are all Christians alike." \(^{42}\) The Roman Catholic church had

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elevated itself above the rest of Christendom, and had built up "three walls" by which it supported its authority. They declared that the spiritual power was above the temporal, that only the pope can interpret the scriptures, and that only the pope could summon a council. Since all Christians are equal, the church could not claim to have authority over the temporal realm, and could not claim to be the sole interpreter of doctrine. Faith was a bond which united the Christian to Christ in marriage; it was not a bond between man and man, or man and the church, but between man and almighty God. Like Erasmus, Luther protested abusive practices, such as Tetzel's sale of indulgences. For both Erasmus and Luther, such outward actions had nothing to do with man's spiritual life. Erasmus, however, was content with reform within the church; Luther eventually demanded total separation from the church. Luther, then, pushed Abailard's ideas to their extreme. Abailard's notions of sin and repentance clearly stated that God was the only prover and judge of hearts; nevertheless, like Erasmus, he argued that Christians who were truly contrite would and should abide by the judgments of prelates as a sign of their humility before God.

In many ways, then, Luther can be seen as an outgrowth of Abailardian ethics. Like Abailard, he began with a

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43Ibid., 10-1.

nominalist framework, and ultimately rejected the moral significance of actions. Luther's nominalism, however, was radically different than Abailard's. Luther emerged from the Ockhamist perspective, which emphasized the transcendence of God. For Abailard, God was the most immanently logical being, and hence, logic and dialectic were infinitely suitable in theology. For Luther and Ockham, God's actions and will were beyond the scope of human logic, which led Luther to stand in awe of God rather than to attempt to comprehend his nature.

Luther's vision of God led him to the brink of despair. God is not constrained by any laws of necessity; hence, good works could be no guarantee of salvation. Luther was obsessed by human weakness and continually visited Staupitz in order to confess the smallest sin. Ultimately, he came to the realization that God's commandments simply could not be fulfilled by man, for the Fall completely obliterated the image of God in him. Augustine argued that the Fall created the inclination to sin in all men; Luther argued that after the Fall man's nature was utterly depraved. As such, he was incapable of willing good acts at all:

Now then, Satan and man, being fallen and abandoned by God, cannot will good, i.e., things which please God or which God wills, but are ever turned in the direction of their own desires, so that they cannot but seek out their own.45

Man, in fact, has no free will at all; he is utterly at the mercy of God. Only when man has come to such utter despair can faith take over his life: "being truly humbled and reduced to nothing in his own eyes, he finds in himself nothing whereby he may be justified and saved." Even faith does not arise through free will; it is a gift of grace.

Luther's theology began with Abailardian and Erasmian assumptions about the relationship between the inner and outer man; yet it culminated in a theology that was decisively anti-humanistic in character. For Luther, man was utterly at the mercy of an unpredictable God; for Abailard and Erasmus, however, man's nature merely had been "clouded over" by the Fall, and he still possessed the faculty of free will by which to better himself. Man was still capable of willing good acts, and Christ's Incarnation and crucifixion enabled man's corrupted will to function again as it should. Erasmus and Abailard both rejected the role of the outer man in salvation, but they did so out of a humanist conviction in the basic goodness and integrity of man. Through the use of reason, man could understand the

"Luther, Freedom of a Christian, 283.

"Our power of judgment . . . has only been obscured by sin, and not extinguished." Erasmus, The Free Will, in Erasmus-Luther Discourse on Free Will, translated by Ernst F. Winter (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Company, 1961), 22. "What else is the philosophy of Christ, which He Himself calls a rebirth, than the restoration of human nature originally well formed?" Erasmus, The Paraclesis, 104. The emphasis is mine.
will of God; and by God's grace, he could lift himself up to a level where God could reach down and save him. The dichotomy between the inner and outer man in the works of Abailard and Erasmus resembled Luther's justification by faith; Luther, however, came to his conclusions for entirely different reasons than did Abailard and Erasmus. Abailardian nominalism, then, could logically be pushed into the Lutheran Reformation; a close comparison of Luther, Erasmus, and Abailard, however, points to Abailard the humanist, not Abailard the reformer. His theology began and ended with the individual life of faith; Luther's began and ended with a terrifying vision of an all powerful God. In many ways, the Lutheran Reformation was the end product of medieval scholasticism, but it is not necessarily what scholasticism had to become. The affinity of Abailard with Erasmus and the Renaissance humanists clearly indicates that there was no inherent contradiction between scholastic methodology and the humanist framework; scholasticism, as much as humanism, could work in the lives of those who followed it. Peter Abailard may not have had the profound metaphysical genius of an Anselm or an Aquinas; but he, more than any other thinker of his era, or of the scholastic movement as a whole, directed his logical skills toward the edification of the individual and the strengthening of his faith. Just as his personal life was a confused maze of secularity and religiosity, so too his theology simultaneously foreshadowed the humanism of the Renaissance,
but nonetheless also pointed to the Reformation. Perhaps it is the final irony of Abailard's career that the most profound implications of his theology were left for a later age, and that the man who most clearly articulated his theology of the inner man and its implications was a man who was utterly divorced from his humanist perspective. Martin Luther clearly demonstrated what Abailardian ethics meant for the Catholic church; yet in so doing, he also clearly transformed the Abailardian system. Abailard and Erasmus illustrate what the medieval church might have been; had not Luther "blown out the candle" of the humanism which began in the twelfth century, it might have found the flexibility inherent within its own theology to respond to humanist critiques.
CHAPTER 10

ABAILARD IN HIS OWN TIME: THE COUNCIL OF SENS
AND ITS AFTERMATH

Abailard was condemned for heresy in 1121 at Soissons, but had continued to advocate many of the positions he articulated in the *Theologia 'Summi Boni'.*¹ His later treatises on the Trinity, the *Theologia Christiana* and the *Introductio ad Theologiam*, were revisions of the arguments in the *Theologia 'Summi Boni'.* At Soissons, he was accused of tritheism, and of predicating omnipotence of the Father only,² and as an attempt to avoid these problems, his later trinitarian thought described the persons of the Trinity in a way that simultaneously resembled modal monarchism and Arianism. His most adamant opponent, Bernard of Clairvaux, was incensed by his writings on the Trinity, arguing that they were perversions of Christianity. His ethical theories also aroused a great deal of opposition. His old friend, William of Thierry, turned against him, and with Bernard, led the attack on his views. There are no records of the

¹His attempts in the *Theologia Christiana* to explain the diversity of the persons by referring to linguistic models follow the basic argument of the *Theologia 'Summi Boni'.*

actual proceedings at Sens, but William's *Disputatio*, Bernard's letters, the anonymous *Capitula Haeresium* and Abailard's *Apologia contra Bernardum* reveal the basic charges against him. As a result of Bernard's opposition, Abailard was formally condemned of heresy in 1140, and ended his life at Cluny in 1142. For centuries after the condemnation at Sens, Abailard was regarded as a rationalist whose veneration of human reason led him into heresy. A close examination of the charges at Sens, however, reveals that Abailard's work was not fully understood by his

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The date of the condemnation at Sens has been disputed in the literature. S. M. Deutsch argued that the council must have been held in 1141. Many of the letters associated with the convening of the council refer to an archbishop Samson, who according to Deustch, could not have been consecrated prior to August 1, 1140. Two documents from Rheims indicate that his reign as archbishop coincided with the tenth and eleventh years of the reign of Louis VII. The council, could not have been held, then, before 1141. Deutsch also argues that Alvius, bishop of Arras, was present at Sens. According to the *Acta Sanctorum*, Alvius was present at the monastery of Marchiennes during Whitsun week of 1140. Deutsch did not find it likely that Alvius could have traversed the distance from Marchiennes to Sens in time for the council to have been held in 1140. In addition, a letter by Hatto of Tours to Peter the Venerable refers to the present state of peace in France following the return of the king from his campaign, and added that the messenger sent by Bernard to Rome, Nicholas, was with him as he wrote. Deutsch argued that the campaign Hatto referred to was the siege of Toulouse, which occurred in the summer of 1141.

J. G. Sikes, however, finds these arguments unconvincing, for Alvius could well have traversed the roads between Marchiennes and Sens, and there is no evidence which convincingly proves that Hatto's letter was in fact written during the same year as the council, as Nicholas may have in fact been visiting for unrelated reasons at a later date. Sikes prefers to retain the conventional date of the council in 1140, following the chronicle of Robert of Auxerre. see J. G. Sikes, *Peter Abailard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 230-1.
opponents. Many passages were taken out of context, and their meaning distorted. Abailard's positions were not nearly as radical as they appeared, and in fact, some of the accusations are based on passages which cannot be found in any of his works. The council of Sens began a tendency found in almost all accounts of Abailard -- as at Sens, his work has been consistently misunderstood in the literature. Only recently have commentators begun to defend him against the charges of William and Bernard, but they still fail to divorce themselves from his career as a logician and to appreciate the humanism in his writings. Abailard's career was not a jumbled mosaic of logic, theology, and ethics; rather, it was a coherent whole which worked for the edification of the individual. He was not quite the radical heretic condemned at Sens, nor was he the quick-witted dialectician who never really understood theology described in modern commentaries. He was unique in his age, and he foreshadowed many aspects of modernity.

Many of Abailard's contemporaries who reflected on the condemnation of 1121 attributed his difficulties to an overzealous use of logic in theology. Abailard himself remarked in his Confession of Faith to Heloise that many of

his difficulties were due to his use of logic. The condemnation at Sens was also motivated to a large extent by the perception that Abailard had rashly applied logic to theological problems, with the result that many of his views were at best unorthodox and at worst heretical. It was William of Thierry who began the assault on Abailard. Sometime in 1138 or 1139, he wrote the *Disputatio adversus Petrum Abaelardum*, and forwarded it along with a list of thirteen offensive propositions to Bernard. William

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6William's thirteen propositions were:

1. Quod fidem definavit aestimationem rerum quae non videntur.
2. Quod impropria dicit esse in Deo nomina Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti, sed descriptionem bene esse plenitudinis summi boni.
3. Quod Pater sit plena potentia, Filius quaedam potentia, Spiritus Sanctus nulla potentia.
4. De Spiritu Sancto quod non sit ex substantia Patris et Filii, sicut est ex substantia Patris.
5. Quod Spiritus Sanctus sit anima mundi.
6. Quod libero arbitrio, sine adjuvante gratia, bene possimus et velle et agere.
7. Quod Christus non ideo assumpsit carnem et passus est, ut nos a jure diaboli liberaret.
8. Quod Christus Deus et homo non est tertia persona in Trinitate.
9. Quod in sacramento altaris in aere remaneat forma prioris substantiae.
10. Quod suggestiones diabolicas per physicam dicit fieri in hominibus.
11. Quod ab Adam non trahimus originalis peccati culpam, sed poenam.
12. Quod nullumm sit peccatum, nisi in concensu peccati et contemptu Dei.
13. Quod dicit concupiscentia, et dilectatione, et
claimed to have read the offensive doctrines in the

Theologia 'Scholarium' and the Liber Sententiarum, the
latter of which Abailard denied having written. He admitted
to not having read the Ethics or the Sic et non, but had
heard objectionable things about these works as well. An
anonymous author also compiled a list of heretical passages
from the Theologia 'Scholarium' and the Liber

Sententiarum.' Many passages, therefore, which William and

ignorantia nullum peccatum committi; et huiusmodi non
esse peccatum, sed naturam.

William of Saint Thierry, Epistola 326, in Patrologia cursus
Paul Migne (Paris: Migne, 1844-1882), 531.

'The Capitula Haeresium Petri Abaelardi listed fourteen
heretical propositions, together with passages purported to be
from Abailard's writings containing the heretical
statements. They are as follows:

1. Horrenda similitudo de sigillo aero, de specie et
genere ad Trinitatem.
2. Quod Spiritus Sanctus non sit de substantia Patris.
3. Quod ea solummodo Deus possit facere, vel
dimittere, vel eo modo tantum, vel eo tempore quo
facit, non alio.
4. Quod Christus non assumpsit carnem, ut nos a iugo
diaboli liberaret.
5. Quod neque 'Deus et homo' neque 'haec persona' quae
Christus est, sit tertia persona in Trinitate.
6. Quod Deus non plus faciat ei qui salvatur, antequam
cohaerat gratia, quam ei qui non salvatur.
7. Quod Deus nec debeat mala impedire nec possit.
8. Quod non contraximus ex Adam culpam, sed poenam
tantum.
9. Quod corpus Domini non cadit in terram.
10. Quod propter opera nec melior nec peior efficatur
homo.
11. Quod non peccaverunt qui Christum ignoranter
 crucifixerunt, et quod non sit culpae adscribendum
quidquid fit per ignorantiam.
12. De potestate ligandi et solvendi: (Which took
issue with Abailard's claim "quod hoc dictum est solis
the anonymous compiler objected to were not even drawn from Abailard's writings. These propositions were incorporated in Bernard's list of nineteen errors of Abailard, which was the list to which Abailard's Apologia responded and which was condemned by the pope in 1140.

Bernard and William were both Cistercian monks, and heavily steeped in mysticism. Bernard's writings spoke of the progress of the soul from self awareness to unification with God, and of a voluntaristic notion of faith as assertion of the will to believe. His theology downplayed the use of reason, and he found Abailard's dialectical methods noxious. Bernard wrote that Abailard lays bare to himself the deep things of God, he makes them so clear and easy to every one, and by his false teaching he so renders plain and evident the most lofty sacrament of grace, the mystery hidden from the ages, that any uncircumcised and unclean person can penetrate to the heart of it.8

For Bernard, faith did not "consist in the wisdom of words, but in the power of God."9 Abailard's dialectics were a


9 Ibid., 584.
presumptuous attempt to understand what cannot be understood:

What is more against reason than by reason to attempt to transcend reason? And what is more against faith than to be unwilling to believe what reason cannot attain?¹⁰

Over and above his distaste for Abailard's methodology, there was his suspicion of Abailard's character in general. Both Bernard and William were living the monastic life, and for them, Abailard was particularly dangerous, since he was "a monk, who lives without a rule; a prelate, who has no spiritual charge; an abbot without an abbey, who disputes with boys and converses with women."¹¹ Worse yet, his theological teachings were spreading quickly, and Peter's students were carrying on disputes on the Trinity and the nature of God based on his heretical ideas throughout the whole of France, in towns, villages, and castles, by scholars not only within the schools, but in the roads and public places . . . and not only among the learned or passably instructed persons, but among children even and simple and ignorant persons.¹²

Bernard was particularly incensed over Abailard's trinitarian theology, and his list of capitula, like the Capitula Haeresium, opened with an attack on several of

¹⁰Ibid., 566.


Abailard's doctrines concerning the persons of the Trinity. The first and second charged Abailard with writing "Quod Pater sit plena potentia, Filius quaedam potentia, Spiritus Sanctus nulla potentia" and "Quod Spiritus Sanctus non sit de substantia Patris aut Filii." The Capitula Haeresium cited the following passages in support of the second charge:

Cum itaque tam Filius quam Spiritus Sanctus ex Patre sit, hic quidem genitus, ille procedens, differt in eo generatio ipsa a processione quod is qui generatur ex ipsa Patris substantia est, cum ipsa, ut dictum est, sapientia hoc ipsum esse habeat ut sit quaedam potentia.

Etenim per amorem unusquisque a se ipso ad alterum procedit, cum proprie, ut dictum est, nemo ad se ipsum caritatem habere dicatur, aut sibi ipsi benignus esse, sed alteri.\textsuperscript{13}

In the Theologia Christiana, Abailard attempted to address the errors which led to his condemnation at Soissons by emphasizing the unity of the Trinity. He asserted that "there is one and the same substance of the three persons", but the diversity of the persons can be understood in terms of their proper functions:

all are one and the same throughout except in respect of those proper functions by which they remain diverse. The proper function of the Father is that he exists of Himself and eternally begets or has begotten the co-eternal son. The proper function of the Son is to be, or to have been, eternally begotten of the Father. The proper function of the Holy Spirit is that he proceeds from Father to Son.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13}Capitula Haeresium, 473-4.

Elsewhere Abailard distinguished the three persons by arguing that the Father was Power, the Son Wisdom, and the Holy Spirit Goodness. He argued that "Divine Wisdom is a kind of power, since it is the ability to discern and foresee and deliberate aright against anything that may deceive God."\textsuperscript{15} The Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son because the good disposition or the effects of it in His Creatures arise from power and wisdom, since what God wills to do, that He does . . . hence we have a conception of the Divine Mind going out into effect through activity.\textsuperscript{16}

Goodness, however, is not a power, but the effect of love, and to love something is not synonymous with having the power to achieve it. Although Augustine's \textit{De Trinitate} and even Bernard's eleventh sermon on the Song of Songs had also identified the persons with power, wisdom, and goodness, Abailard's discussion of the Trinity in terms of proper functions of God seemed to hark back to Sabellianism; on the other hand, his argument that the Father and Son were both examples of power, while the Spirit was Goodness seemed to imply that the Spirit was not of the same substance as the Father and the Son, while his statement that the Son was a "certain" power of God seemed to subordinate the Son to the Father. Abailard, then, alternately was interpreted as a Sabellian or as an Arian.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 86.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 89.
Abailard's arguments concerning the Trinity seem to reflect a lack of commitment. On the one hand, he implied that there was very little if any distinction between the three persons of the Trinity; on the other hand, he implied that they were radically different. Abailard's argument, while acknowledging the distinct persons of the Trinity, nevertheless emphasized, in true nominalist fashion, the essential unity of the Godhead, neglecting the distinction between persons. Just as one calls God many names, one can define God in three ways. Abailard's descriptions of the persons of the Trinity made them appear to become facets of God's power, and nothing more.

In his Apologia, Abailard denied having ever advocated such a view. As he had argued in the Theologia Christianity, Abailard pointed out that to argue that the divine Wisdom is a certain power of God is not equivalent to arguing that the Son is a certain power of God:

Scito itaque necisti et disce quae non didicisti, quod quamvis idem sit "sapientia Dei" quod "Filius Dei", aut "caritas Dei" quod "Spiritus Sanctus," non tamen idem est dicere vel intelligere "Filium Dei esse quamdam Dei potentiam" et "sapientiam Dei esse quamdam eius potentiam," vel "Spiritum Sanctum esse nullam Dei potentiam" et "caritatem sive amorem eius esse nullam potentiam." Saepe namque contingit, ut, cum voces aliquae per se acceptae sint eiusdem penitus significations, in constructionis ita sententiam variant, ut ille verus sit constructionis sensus, ille falsus.18

17Abailard, Apologia contra Bernardum, 360-66.

One can argue that God suffered on the cross, but this is not synonymous with the statement that divinity suffered on the cross. In the *Theologia Christiana* Abailard had explained the diverse ways in which one thing may be said to be identical to another thing. He had argued that the persons were not identical in definition, but nevertheless completely identical in number and essence. Abailard's linguistic subtleties were misread by his critics; in fact, he had never argued that the persons were anything but fully equal.

A. Victor Murray argues that the capitulum was taken from the *Introductio* and distorted Abailard's original wording, which read "cum igitur sapientia quaedam, ut dictum est, sit potentia." The capitula inserted "Dei", which indicated that God was the subject of discussion, not the special properties of the persons; the omission of "igitur" overlooked the fact that this argument was part of Abailard's larger argument to defend the unity and the diversity of the Trinity.

The third capitulum accused of Abailard of claiming "quod Spiritus Sanctus sit anima mundi." In the *Theologia Christiana*, Abailard had in fact written that the Greek philosophers had apprehended aspects of the Trinity, and had

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19 Ibid., 364.

likened Plato's world soul to the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{21} Bernard argued that "while [Abailard] exhausts himself to prove Plato a Christian, he proves himself a heathen."\textsuperscript{22} Yet, the capitulum took Abailard's arguments out of context, for Abailard had insisted that the philosophers wrote allegorically, and had never intimated that the world soul was identical to the Holy Spirit, merely that it indicated a rudimentary grasp of trinitarian principles.

The fourth capitulum charged Abailard with arguing "quod Christus non assumpsit carnem, ut nos a jugo diaboli liberaret." This was also a fair representation of Abailard's theory of the atonement. Abailard rejected Origen's ransom theory as well as Anselm's view that the Incarnation and atonement restored God's lost honor. For Abailard, Christ's primary mission was to teach fallen man the proper way to will.

The fifth capitulum read "quod neque Deus et homo, neque homo persona, quae Christus est, sit tertia persona in Trinitate." The \textit{Capitula Haeresium} cited several passages from Abailard's works in support of this charge:

\begin{quote}
Quando dico "Christus est tertia persona in Trinitate", hoc volo dicere quod Verbum quod ab aeterno tertia persona in Trinitate fuit, tertia persona sit in Trinitate; et ita patet quod locutio figurativa est. Si enim eam propriam diceremus esse, cum hoc nomen 'Christus' idem sonet quod 'Deus et homo', tunc talis
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{21}see chapter four.

\textsuperscript{22}Bernard of Clairvaux, \textit{Epistola CXC}, 576.
esse sensus: 'Deus et homo est tertia persona in
Trinitate'; quod penitus falsum est.\textsuperscript{23}

This passage cannot be found in any known works, and must have been taken from the Liber Sententiarum. Thomas of Morigny's Disputatio catholicorum Patrum contra dogmata Petri Abaelardi, however, refers to passages from Abailard's Apologia which assert the same view. Abailard argued that language is often problematic, and cannot be taken literally. If it were so interpreted, one would be forced to conclude that the mortal man who was Christ was immortal.\textsuperscript{24} This is part of his general argument that the persons of the Trinity may be described in diverse ways preserving their unique properties without implying numerical identity, and even William of Thierry agreed that Christ the man was not a divine being "secundum quod homo est." William argued, however, that Abailard was a Nestorian, since he omitted the assumptus homo from the Trinity.\textsuperscript{25} Here, the capitulum points to the fact that Abailard's concern for linguistic exactness often led him to assert heretical views.

\textsuperscript{23}Capitula Haeresium, 476.

\textsuperscript{24}"Et quia illae duae naturae non possunt aliquid aeternum esse, cum una earum careat aeternitate, 'Deus et homo' non est aliqua in Trinitate persona." Abailard, Apologia contra Bernardum, 368.

The seventh capitulum stated "quod ea Deus solummodo possit facere, vel dimittere, vel eo modo tantum, vel eo tempore quo facit, non alio." The Capitula Haeresium cited several passages in support of this allegation:

In tantum omnibus quae Deus facit, quod bonum est attendit, ut ipso boni pretio potius quam voluntas suae libitu ad singula facienda inclinari dicitur.

Ex his itaque tam de ratione quam de scripto collatis, constat id solum Deum facere posse quod aliquando facit.\textsuperscript{26}

Murray defends Abailard against this charge by arguing that Abailard only meant to imply that God can only will good things, not that he wills first and then sees if it is fitting.\textsuperscript{27} In the Theologia Christiana, Abailard had indeed argued that God's will was constrained by his goodness, but his point goes much further than Murray is willing to concede.\textsuperscript{28} That this capitulum did not capture the exact wording of the Introductio is no argument against the fact that it captured the essence of Abailard's views. God cannot do otherwise than he does, since he acts in the best possible manner. Abailard never reached the level of sophistication of Aquinas, who explained the necessity of God's actions without violating the possibility of other actions.\textsuperscript{29} Here, his accusers were simply correct in

\textsuperscript{26}Capitula Haeresium, 474.

\textsuperscript{27}Murray, 60.

\textsuperscript{28}see chapter four.

\textsuperscript{29}Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae I. 25.
taking issue with his application of the rules of logic to the will of God.

The seventeenth capitulum charged Abailard with the claim "quod Deus non debeat mala impedire." The Capitula Haeresium added the words "nec possit" at the end of the capitulum. In many of Abailard's works, he argued that God does everything out of goodness, and allows everything to happen for the sake of goodness. Things may appear evil to us, but this is simply because we do not understand God's plan. God allows evil things to happen, and if the world is truly ordered by God's goodness, then evil is part of that plan.

Several of the capitula concerned Abailard's ethical theories. The fifteenth capitulum read: "quod diabolus immiat suggestiones per appositionem lapidum sive herbarum." This was based on a remark in the Ethics suggesting that demons could use herbs, seeds, stones and trees to influence our minds. William produced fragments in his Disputatio which are not identical with Abailard's statements in the Ethics; nevertheless, Abailard had in fact argued such a point.30

The eighth capitulum condemned Abailard's notion "quod non contraximus culpam ex Adam, sed poenam." This is in fact an accurate representation of Abailard's doctrine of sin in the Ethics. Abailard had argued that sin is the

result of contempt for the will of God; God punishes certain actions, such as Adam's sin, but we cannot properly ascribe fault to mankind as a result of the Fall. Against Abailard, William's *Disputatio* argued that baptism remits the punishment for sin, but not the culpability of sin. Although the anonymous *Capitula Haeresium* cited two quotations which cannot be found in any of Abailard's surviving works, they reflect the essence of Abailard's views. His denial that mankind suffers from the stain of original sin was indeed a radical claim; here, the condemnation was based on fact.

The ninth capitulum also concerned Abailard's ethical theories, taking issue with his claim "quod non peccaverunt qui Christum ignorantes crucifixerunt, et quod non sit culpae adscribendum quidquid fit per ignorantiam." Again, this was an accurate portrayal of Abailard's views, although he had in fact argued that those who crucified Christ had perpetrated an evil deed, and so were punished. Abailard distinguished between sin in its proper sense as contempt for God and sin in the sense of committing an "evil" deed for which punishment was merited. Although he argued that no fault in the sense of *culpa* could be ascribed to the persecutors of Christ, since they sinned out of ignorance, he allowed for the fact that their deed was "sinful" and so merited punishment. In his *Confessio fidei*, Abailard attempted to address this accusation by arguing that sins committed in ignorance may in fact acquire *culpa*, but only
if one has been negligent, and does not know what he ought
to know.\textsuperscript{31}

The eleventh, twelfth and nineteenth capitula also
considered Abailard's ethical theories:

XI. Quod potestas ligandi atque solvendi apostolis
    tantum data sit, non etiam successoribus.
XII. Quod propter opera nec melior nec peior efficatur
    homo.
XIX. Quod neque voluntas neque concupiscentia neque
    delectatio quae movet eam peccatum sit, nec debemus eam
    velle exstingui.

The twelfth and nineteenth capitula reflect Abailard's
actual positions, although the texts which the anonymous
compiler of the Capitula Hearesium cited are not to be found
in any of Abailard's known works. In the Confessio fidei,
Abailard denied having advocated this position, but in fact
he had argued that natural pleasures and concupiscence are
not sinful.\textsuperscript{32} In this sense, he suggested that their
presence was acceptable; however, he had argued that to
consent to concupiscence was sinful. This capitulum, then,
did not present Abailard's complete views on the subject of
concupiscence.

The eleventh capitulum was somewhat inaccurate as well.
Abailard, in fact, had challenged the doctrine of the power

\textsuperscript{31}"Mala per ignorantiam facta, culpae sunt ascribenda,
    maxime cum per negligentiam nostram contingat nos ignorare
    quae nobis necessarium erat praenosse." Peter Abailard,
    Confessio Fidei, in Patrologia cursus completus series
    Graeca et Latina sive bibliotheca universalis, vol. 178,

\textsuperscript{32}Abailard wrote that this capitulum was "nec minus a
    meis tam dictis, quam scriptis alienum est." Ibid., 107.
of the keys in the Ethics, and had argued that only those decisions of prelates which are in accordance with the will of God are binding, not because they issue from a successor of Peter, but because they correspond with the will of God. Abailard suggested that the only power given to the church was the power of discernment, or the power of admitting sinners into the church or expelling them. Only God, however, can remit sins. In his Confessio fidei, Abailard conceded that the power of binding and loosing sins was given to Peter and to all his successors. He did not, however, specify what he believed this power consisted of, and hence, did not truly retract his original position that only God can remit or punish sin; the church can only levy temporal punishment.

The tenth capitulum read "quod in Christo non fuerit spiritus timoris Domini." Abailard had raised this question in Sic et non, article 78, but he himself never denied that Christ had fear of God. Abailard argued in his Confessio fidei that Christ's soul knew only perfect love of God, but that the "persona suorum membrorum" knew fear of God. Neither Bernard nor William addressed this issue.

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33 "Potestatem ligandi atque solvendi successoribus apostolorum omnibus, ut ipsis aequo apostolis concessam esse profiteor, et tam indignis quam dignis episcopis quandiu eos Ecclesia susceperit." Ibid., 107.

34 "Ergo timoris spiritum in anima Christi, qui perfectissimam habuit charitatem, nunquam fuisse credendum est, qui tamen in inferioribus membris non deest . . . Castum quippe timorem in saeculum saeculi permanentem." Ibid., 107.
specifically in their treatises, and it does not seem to have played a significant role in Abailard's condemnation.

The fourteenth capitulum also cannot be substantiated in Abailard's writings. It charged Abailard with arguing "quod etiam castus timor excludatur a futura vita." Again, neither Bernard nor William specifically treated this issue, and in the Confessio fidei, Abailard states that the "castus timor" was indeed present in the elect.35

The eighteenth capitulum read "quod anima Christi per se non descendit ad inferos, sed per potentiam tantum." Abailard had indeed taught that God could not be limited by location, nor could he move from place to place. He had further argued that Christ's descent into hell had a liberating effect on the souls of the elect, but nowhere does he deny that Christ's soul actually descended into hell.36 God, for Abailard, was omnipresent, but yet could not be located in a specific time or place. Anselm had argued in a similar manner in the Monologion. Anselm, like Aquinas, realized that the admission that God could be limited locally would have implied that his essence was not

35"Castum quippe timorem in saeculum saeculi permantem, qui proprie reverentia charitatis dicitur, tam ipsi animae Christi quam electis angelis et hominibus inesse semper recognesco." Ibid., 107.

simple. Here, Abailard was arguing along traditional lines, and the capitulum was simply a distortion of his teachings. Similarly, the sixteenth capitulum seems to have been an inaccurate charge. Abailard had never argued "quod adventus in fine saeculi possit attribui Patri." The thirteenth capitulum was also a distortion of Abailard's views. "Quod liberum arbitrium per se sufficat ad aliquod bonum." The Capitula Haeresium addressed this issue in the sixth capitulum: "quod Deus non plus faciat ei qui salvatur antequam cohaereat gratiae, quam ei qui non salvatur." This capitulum is based on the Expositio super Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos, in which Abailard compared the gift of grace to a doctor who must lift up his patient before he can receive medicine. Man must be helped by grace to receive grace. This analogy was inadequate for Abailard, as then evil might be imputed to God, for if he did not enable man to receive grace, man could not be accountable for his evil actions. Abailard's ethical theories refused to admit such a possibility, and he argued that God offers his grace to all irrespective of their merits; some accept it, others do not. The passage in the Expositio is ambiguous, and elsewhere Abailard seems to retreat from such a position. He consistently argued that the Holy Spirit must constantly carry us along; without grace, we could not will properly. He also argued that God predestined some for salvation, and others not; this was an example, too, of grace. Clearly, then, it cannot be maintained that all receive grace
equally, or that God does no more for the meritorious person than for the reprobate. Abailard argued that men cannot be held accountable for actions for which their free will was not responsible, and consequently asserted that "Culpandi reprobi non sunt, si recte non vivunt sicut electi, cum ad rectitudinem vitae illis sit illa negata gratia sine qua recte vivere nullatenus possunt." Abailard, however, never denied the need for grace, and had consistently emphasized the role of grace in the beginnings of faith, as well as the development of charitable love. He allowed for free will, but without grace, no man could ever will in such a way as to merit salvation:

Gratia igitur Dei est in electis suis quod eos ab aeterno praedestinaverit, quod et fidei eis inspiraverit, -- quae utique nostra praecedant merita et sine quibus eum diligere non valeamus, ut salvari mereamur.

This capitulum simply took Abailard's views on free will out of context.

The thirteenth capitulum read "quod ad Patrem, qui ab alio non est, proprie vel specialiter attineat omnipotentia, non etiam sapientia et benignitas." In several places Abailard argued that power was properly associated with the Father, as he alone had being from himself, whereas the other two persons derived their power and being from the

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37Abailard, Apologia contra Bernardum, 367.

38Ibid., 366.
Father. Both William and Bernard denounced this argument, as it detracted from the equality of the persons. Abailard's writings on the Trinity aroused the strongest criticism. His metaphor of the bronze image and the wax seal suggested that the son was subordinate to the Father; he simply had not been careful enough in his examples. Although many church fathers, such as Augustine, associated Power, Wisdom, and Goodness with the three persons, Abailard's descriptions of these qualities as proper functions consistently led him into heretical positions. Yet he had never maintained that his similes and metaphors were anything but similes and metaphors; he never claimed to be presenting a metaphysical portrayal of the Trinity, only to be expressing it in linguistic terms that everyone could understand. In theological terms, however, his examples were simply incorrect. Here the condemnation seems to have been on firm ground.

39. This is the position of both the Introductio and the Theologia Christian; see the discussion above on the first and second capitula.

40. "He illustrates by common examples, asserting that the Power of discernment which the Son is, is a particular kind of Power, just as a man is an animal and a brazen seal a particular form of brass, which means that the power of discernment is to the Power of rule and discernment, i.e., the Son is to the Father, as a man to an animal, or as a brazen seal to brass . . . your similitude demands that the Son to be the Son must first be the Father, i. e., that He who is the Son must first be the Father, i. e., that He who is the Son is the Father though not conversely?" Bernard of Clairvaux, Epistola CXC, in , 572.
Bernard was victorious at Sens; after the condemnation, Abailard retired to Cluny and devoted the rest of his life to study and prayer. Peter the Venerable described Abailard as a model member of the community, and as a prince among princes.\textsuperscript{41} Abailard remained convinced of his innocence, yet contritely wrote to Heloise that "I do not wish to be a philosopher if it means conflicting with Paul, nor to be an Aristotle if it means cutting me off from Christ."\textsuperscript{42}

Abailard's application of dialectic to theology in fact corrupted his trinitarian writings, but there can be doubt that Abailard never wished to reject the traditional authoritative structure of the church, nor to claim to be able to comprehend the mysteries of the faith through the use of reason.

His theological views were nowhere near as radical as they appeared in the writings of Bernard and William; moreover, his use of reason and dialectic was in keeping with that of Anselm, and in many ways, did not go as far. Anselm employed logic in search of deep metaphysical truth; Abailard employed logic as a tool to give deeper meaning to faith. Anselm demonstrated that logic need not always be in conflict with revelation; Abailard demonstrated that true


faith must necessarily make use of dialectic. S. M. Deutsch saw Abailard as the first rationalist, and a predecessor to Descartes. Abailard's use of reason, however, agrees with the framework of Anselm, and his most radical views were a logical extension of many of Anselm's assumptions.

Abailard, like Anselm, believed that revelation was the foundation on which all theology was built. "Unless God instructs the mind from within," all logical arguments and dialectical proofs amount to nothing. Abailard was quite clear in consistently affirming that "God far exceeds what can come under human discussion or the powers of human intelligence." Similarly, Anselm argued that God was "that than which no greater can be conceived." Although reason had great powers to penetrate the faith, many truths remained ineffable. Reason could only operate within the confines of faith, and as such, it was necessary to refer all rational speculation to the ultimate authority of the scriptures. Abailard did not depart from Anselm on this issue, and often remarked that

should any of the faithful; by reason or authority of the scripture show me to be in the wrong, I am ready to offer every satisfaction as regards what is in any way defective or needs correction."

In these respects, Abailard's methodology was that of a

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44Ibid., 69.
traditional theologian — revelation was supreme truth which could be fully understood only with the grace of God.

For Abailard, reason at best could only be a mirror of God, and not his likeness. Yet he consistently argued that the use of dialectic in theology was valid, and many of his most radical theses arise out of his justification of dialectic. Anselm was content to argue that man's reason was the clearest image of God; here, he did not depart from the framework of Augustine, whose De Trinitate also likened the Trinity to the human mind. Anselms' justification of the use of reason relied on a demonstration that reason, properly used, could never conflict with theology. Abailard, however, provided a logical explanation not only for the validity of the use of dialectic, but for the necessity of its use. Faith concerned truths which are not present to our senses; Abailard's logical treatises had established the understanding as the only faculty which could deal with such propositions. The use of reason, as exemplified in dialectic, was the most excellent use of the faculty of the understanding. Reason, was therefore, not simply a valid technique for understanding revelation, but rather the only one which could grasp these sorts of propositions.

Abailard, then, expanded on Anselm's approach by providing a logical and epistemological foundation on which to erect a metaphysical structure such as Anselm proposed. Had he been merely content with this sort of justification
of reason, his career probably would not have ended in
disgrace. So great was his belief in the power of reason
that he found examples of trinitarian thought in the
writings of pagans and the Hebrews, which suggested to him
that reason was able to grasp the eternal truths of
revelation without the example of Christ and without the aid
of the New Testament scriptures. Abailard argued this way
in part because he believed that an understanding of the
Trinity necessarily led to faith, and if the pagan could be
led to see that the tenets of Christianity resembled their
own philosophical systems, then they would be more inclined
to convert. Ironically, Abailard was concerned about the
spread of heresy, and eager to use dialectic as a means of
winning over converts to the church. His comparison of
Plato's world soul to the Holy Spirit, for example, was
based on a desire to persuade his audience more than on an
outright claim that the world soul was the Holy Spirit. For
Abailard, revelation was couched in the imagery of words,
which was often not exact. The Platonic writings were not
exact representations of the Trinity, but allegorical
realizations of the eternal truths of Christianity. In the
Dialectica, Abailard made this clear when he argued that the
Platonists and other pagans did not understand the full
implications of the Trinity.45 His arguments, then, were

45 Sed haec quidem fides Platonica ex eo erronea
convincitur quod illam quam mundi Animan vocat, non
coaeternum Deo, sed a Deo more creaturum originem habere
concedit . . . Unde nullo modo tenori catholicæ fidei
not quite as radical as they appeared, and other figures of the twelfth century, as for example, William of Conches and the Platonic school of Chartres, were arguing along similar grounds.

Moreover, his claim that the pagans apprehended aspects of the Trinity was in many ways an extension of the Anselmian framework. Anselm's *Proslogion* attempted to prove the existence of God solely through the use of reason. In order to show that reason could not conflict with scripture, as against the examples of Roscelin and Berengar of Tours, Anselm proceeded *sola ratione*. This methodology rested on the assumption that reason properly used could never err, and if so, then reason must be able to apprehend truths of the faith without the aid of scripture. Anselm consistently argued that reason must operate within the confines of faith, yet his methodology suggested more radical views. Abailard's argument that the pagans and Hebrews apprehended the Trinity simply pushed the Anselmian framework to its logical conclusion. Rather than representing an extreme view, Abailard's arguments here and Anselm's *sola ratione* approach were based on a deep belief in the eternal truth of the Christian faith; if only reason were rightly used, these truths could be grasped in any age and time.

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The methodology of *Sic et non* was also an extension of Anselm's *sola ratione* approach. *Sic et non* foreshadowed the rhetorical concerns of the humanist, for it was based on the assumption that words were only a veiled representation of revelation, not an exact image of it. Abailard suggested that prophets sometimes were mistaken in thinking that they were truly inspired, and in his sermons, he indicated that one person's understanding of revelation might be incomplete, and that later commentators or prophets might more fully understand revelation. Words, then, were not sacred; only the truth behind the words was worthy of our devotion. Words lead us to truth, but do not always accurately convey it; if so, then, the truths of revelation are independent of words. As such, Abailard's argument that the pagans and Hebrews grasped the Trinity is consistent with his entire framework. If words are only a cloudy image of revelation, then truth may be represented in more than one way. For Abailard, this meant that pagan philosophical writings, no less than the Christian scriptures, could contain kernels of truth. Here, as in so much of his work, he simply extended Anselm's *sola ratione* approach to its logical conclusions.

Although Abailard's use of reason evolved out of Anselmian assumptions, his conclusions went well beyond those of Anselm. Anselm never argued that pagans or other nonchristians could rationally probe the mysteries of the faith; rather, for him, reason was only valid within the
confines of Christianity. His methodology, however, laid the groundwork for Abailard's work, and Abailard, the consummate logician, did not hesitate to draw the appropriate conclusions. Anselm sought to extend our knowledge of revelation beyond the confines of scripture by arguing that in many instances, fitting reasons are sufficient grounds for drawing conclusions not found in the scriptures, as long as there is nothing in the scriptures which overtly contradicts those conclusions. Similarly, Abailard's views on the relation of language to revelation suggested that revelation transcended the scriptures, and in his Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew and a Christian he implied that Christianity was simply another representation of natural law, albeit the most perfect one to date. These remarks drew conclusions which Anselm never articulated; nevertheless, the foundation for Abailard's theories of revelation can be found in Anselm's work.

Although his contemporaries perceived him as a radical, his theories were in keeping with the presuppositions of Anselm. In the context of the twelfth century, however, his views often appeared radical, due on part to his excessive personality, in part to his often careless way of expressing ideas, and in large part, to the fact that mysticism permeated twelfth century theology. William of Thierry and Bernard of Clairvaux were both mystics, as was the school of Chartres, and to a great extent, the school of Saint Victor. The Victorines, for example, accepted Abailard's premise
that the world was inherently rational. For them the
visible world was the mirror of God.

The knowledge of invisible things [cannot be achieved]
without the assistance of corporeal similitudes . . .
reason would never rise up to the contemplation of
invisible things unless the imagination, by means of
representing the form of visible things, were to show
from what it should draw a similitude to those
things."

The world, then, provides a guiding hand in the ascent to
truth. That being so, Hugh of St. Victor urged his
students to "learn everything you can, you will see
afterwards that nothing is wasted." All knowledge for
Hugh was to prepare for the study of theology, the function
of which was to restore fallen man to his proper place.
These ideas are consonant with Abailard's program - nothing
which God creates can be irrational. The study of the
world, therefore, can only confirm the truths known to
theology.

The use of this principle by the Victorines, however,
fell far short of Abailard's dialectical vision of theology.
Whereas Abailard had expanded the Anselmian framework, the
Victorines retreated from it. Richard of St. Victor's proof
of God's existence began with the observation that objects
of experience are contingent, which eventually led him to
the conclusion that ultimately there must be some being

"Richard of St. Victor, The Mystical Ark (Random

"Hugh of St. Victor, Didascalicon (New York:
Doubleday, 1934), 154."
which exists only through itself: otherwise, no contingent object could exist, and we know that they do. In effect, this argument recast Anselm's argument in the Monologion, and is much more conservative than the arguments in the Proslogion. The ontological argument, in fact, would have had no place in Richard's overall scheme. Richard described six stages of contemplation, beginning with the contemplation of the visible world and proceeding through the various levels of reasoning based on experience. The last two stages, however, involve those things which cannot be proven by reason. Some of these truths can be understood but not proven, while others cannot even be understood. Rachel, who represents reason for Richard, must die before Benjamin, who represents the state of ecstatic contemplation, can live. The ultimate goal of contemplation for Richard was a mystical unification with God, which occurred behind a veil of darkness. This sort of program is at odds with the Proslogion. Anselm argued that an examination of our concept of God was sufficient to prove his existence; Richard, although he accepted the notion of the world as a mirror of God's rationality, argued that reason ultimately fails to achieve true knowledge of, and union with, God. Reason leads one along the proper path, but true union with God is achieved through a dark cloud. These views, then, are much more conservative than those of Anselm and Abailard. Within the context of the twelfth
century, then, Abailard's use of dialectic appeared that much more radical.

Abailard's two condemnations and his notorious affair with Heloise have created a modern view of Abailard as a maverick who stood out from other figures of his age. In fact, however, the twelfth century was age of wandering preachers and hermits, who, like Abailard, were searching for their own spiritual fulfillment. The church of the twelfth century suffered from many contradictions. Although the canonists such as Burchard of Worms and Gratian were attempting to codify cannon law, debate was still raging on the number and nature of the sacraments. These discussions tended to emphasize the holiness of the priest who administered the sacraments and abided by cannon law. At the same time, however, many priests displayed signs of worldliness. Clerical celibacy was still not universally accepted, and many priests openly lived with concubines and had children. The church had also become a very wealthy institution which was intimately involved in political affairs. Simony, the buying and selling of church offices, was common. Many people argued that simoniacs were not legitimate churchmen; since they had received their offices through corrupt practices, they owed their allegiance to the person from whom they received their benefice, rather than to God and the church.

These contradictions contributed to the rise of the Cluniac order in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Cluny
was founded in 910 with the purpose of freeing the monks there from any control but that of the pope, thereby eliminating conflicts which arose from being indebted to lay patrons. By the twelfth century, however, even Cluny had become corrupt. The main monastery at Cluny had become amazingly wealthy; Bernard described Cluny "as a school of Satan, a den of thieves." In Bernard's view, Cluny's wealth and grandeur distracted her monks from attention to their souls. The church of the twelfth century, then, suffered from problems with the regular clergy as well as the secular clergy.

In response to these problems, the twelfth century witnessed a resurgence in the popularity of asceticism. In 1098 Robert, abbot of Molesme, along with Stephen Harding and Alberic, founded a new monastery in Citeaux, France. Robert believed that Molesme, like other black monk monasteries, had become corrupt in its observance of the Benedictine rule. Robert had founded Molesme in great hardship. As a result of Robert's reputation as a holy man, however, Molesme had become quite wealthy. Its wealth inadvertently involved it in feudal relations -- it had been endowed with churches, villages, and serfs, and had accepted revenue from tithes. Such wealth and prosperity was unacceptable to Robert, who wanted to lead a life which strictly adhered to the Benedictine Rule. Citeaux was his answer.
Robert believed in a strict interpretation of Benedict's vows of charity, poverty, and chastity. The monks of Citeaux, like the original monks of Molesme, were expected to live entirely by their own labor. This enabled them not only to return to Benedict's threefold division of the day into work, prayer, and study, but to free themselves from feudal entanglements. The creation of a vast order was far from Robert's mind when he migrated to Citeaux. Robert had envisioned only the establishment of a new monastery where he could live the ultra-ascetic life he believed to be necessary for salvation. Robert was, in fact, basically unsuited to the cenobitic life. From the beginning of his career, he had a history of deserting the institutions where he lived in favor of the severe life of the hermit. He left the church of Saint Ayoul at Provins to lead a group of hermits in the forest of Collan; in 1090 he left Molesme to join a small group of hermits at Aux. Robert was a maverick whose respect for the Benedictine Rule did not prevent him from breaking it in order to follow its spirit -- the Rule forbade a monk from moving from one monastery to another, yet Robert disregarded this when he left Molesme and went to Citeaux. Although Citeaux grew into a huge order with 343 daughter houses, Robert had essentially wanted to lead an eremetical life.

Many of the other orders which appeared in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries were founded with similar aims. Romuald, who founded the order of the Camaldolese,
was a classic example of an ascetic who inspired the growth of an order but himself preferred the life of the hermit. Romuald was placed in charge of the Abbey of Saint Apollinare in Classe, Italy, by the Emperor Otto III. His discipline proved too severe for the monks there, and he resigned his post. In 1012 he moved to Camaldoli and founded a small hermitage, whose monks spent most of their time in separate cells and working off the land. Romuald later left Camaldoli and went to Sitria, where he attracted another group of followers. Though Romuald left Camaldoli, the small group he began became the head of an order of hermits in 1072. Romuald clearly, however, was more suited to the eremetical life. That an order grew out of his work was incidental; Camaldi began as an intense, individual religious experience.

Le Grande - Chartreuse received recognition as an order in 1176. Its founder was Bruno, a former cannon of Rheims. Bruno was dissatisfied with life at Rheims, believing that it was necessary to observe greater abstinence and poverty. Le Grande Chartreuse was founded in a deserted mountainous area which could only be reached through a cleft in the rocks. Bruno and his followers lived an isolated and extremely ascetic life. Like Citeaux, Camaldi, and Grandmont, Le Grande Chartreuse originated out of the desires of a small group of men to lead an isolated, ascetic life. The tremendous piety and charisma of these men inevitably attracted followers; eventually, orders arose.
Robert, Romuald, Stephen, and Bruno were essentially, however, mavericks who could not find a place for themselves in any order which existed at the time. To concentrate on the orders which grew out of their efforts is to obscure their origins -- the new orders were largely the result of a movement towards greater asceticism which was inspired by several pious hermits.

The founders of the new orders which arose in the twelfth century operated within the traditional confines of the church, but many of their actions departed from tradition. The twelfth century was also, however, an age in which heresy flourished. Some sects and individuals found no room for their ideas within the structure of the church, and many heretical preachers, such as Henry of Le Mans, rejected the church as a special instrument of God. Henry argued that priests had no power to grant absolution, perform marriage, or consecrate the host. Henry was troubled by the corruption of the clergy, which led him to claim that the true church consisted of those who led a life of poverty and simplicity. For Henry, one could pray anywhere as effectively as in a church.

Peter de Bruys, the leader of the Petrobrusians, preached similar doctrines. Peter believed that only the faith of an individual could save him. The rituals of the church were, therefore, useless. His followers rejected infant baptism, image worship, and the doctrine of real presence in the Eucharist. Tanchelm of Antwerp carried
these views even further. He argued not only that sacraments were invalid and useless if they were administered by polluted hands, but under such conditions, they were no better than pollutions themselves. Since the church was corrupt, Tanchelm urged his followers to withhold tithes from the church. All three men inspired large followings in France.

Peter Waldo, who founded the Poor Men of Lyon, was also anticlerical. Like Tanchelm and Henry, he did not believe in the efficacy of the sacraments. His followers heard each other's confessions and absolved their sins. The Poor Men had gone so far as to claim that laymen and women could preach, and rejected priests as special mediators between man and God. This led the Council of Verona to condemn the Poor Men in 1184. For Peter and his followers, the authority to perform priestly functions was not based on ordination, but merit.

Peter Waldo, Peter de Bruys, and Henry of Le Mans were united in their opposition to the orthodox church. Each, in his own way, was advocating a more individualized religion than the church could offer. Peter de Bruys believed that an individual's faith was sufficient for salvation; Henry of Le Mans argued that the true church consisted of those who led the apostolic life. The church had traditionally been closed to the lower classes, and the millenarian preachers showed the masses a way in which they could circumvent the power of the church and become their own priests. Many of
these wandering preachers attracted their largest following in the newly formed communes which were already affected by poverty. The church, while growing more and more wealthy, was paying less and less attention to the needs of the poor. It demanded tithes from them, but did not seem to provide anything in return. The monasteries were no better. Citeaux was known for razing villages when it could not find suitably remote places for new monasteries. The millennarian preachers were so successful largely because they enabled even the lowest members of society to participate in the religious life.

The origins of many of the new orders demonstrate that the twelfth century might best be thought of not simply as an age of new orders, but as an age of preachers and hermits. The hermits who founded the new orders had much in common with the heretical preachers who wandered the countryside during the same era. Both groups were concerned with the problems they saw in the church, and were interested in leading pious, ascetic lives; they simply approached the problem in different ways. Robert of Molesme withdrew from society to lead a purer life; Peter Waldo saw corruption and rejected the power of the church. By examining the sort of individuals who inspired both the new orders and the heretical movements, a deeper understanding of the problems and spirit of the age will be attained. The twelfth century was an age of unusual activity by heretical preachers and hermits who inspired huge followings. That
some of these movements were sanctioned by the church while others were condemned obscures the basic fact that both movements were a response to problems within the church. The preachers and hermits described above were the inspiration behind the reform movements of the twelfth century, and as such, they truly represent the spirit of the age.

Put in the context of his times, Abailard was not unique in proposing new ideas to old problems, nor was he unique in deviating from the traditional methodologies and procedures of the church. The rise of the Cathedral schools, like the growth of the new orders, signaled vast changes which were occurring in the church as a whole. Abailard's career, like those of Robert of Molesme, Romuald and other hermits, was simply an attempt to provide a framework in which the needs of the individual were recognized. The twelfth century was an age of mavericks, and Abailard's career was reflective of these overall trends.

Although Abailard exemplified many trends of the time, his theology did make unique contributions. Like so many men of his age, he attempted to address the needs of a new age, and found the confines of traditional medieval theology too limiting. More than any other figure of his age, he clarified the role of the individual in the church, and provided the logical foundations on which to base a theology which looked forward to the Renaissance. In many ways,
Abailard was a man of his century, but his theology revolutionized medieval thought, and in so doing, he leapt out of the framework of the twelfth century.
CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

The condemnation at Sens misconstrued many of Abailard's theological and ethical views; in fact, he was nowhere near as radical as he appeared in the capitula. His use of reason built on the framework of Anselm; yet he significantly expanded the role of reason within faith, and more than any other scholastic theologian, he validated the use of reason in theology. If his views were not as heretical as they appeared, his contributions to theology were nonetheless original, going beyond the work of Anselm, and indeed, beyond the work of any other theologian of the Middle Ages in the justification of reason. For these achievements, the modern world is indebted to Abailard, for he clearly established empiricism as a valid method by which knowledge could be obtained. His claim that all knowledge was derived from experience foreshadowed the British empiricists, and the justification of reason seen in Anselm, Abailard, and Aquinas, laid the groundwork for the scientific revolution. Without a conviction in the unity of the world order, science would simply be a series of unrelated observations. The Newtonian revolution was based on the belief that the world was a logical, predictable entity, and the scholastics pioneered the use of reason, and
paved the way for Newton and Descartes. Abailard made notable contributions to logic, and provided later ages with an empiricist model by which to study the world.

Abailard's scholasticism, however, differed from the scientific outlook of the modern world in several respects. Abailard was one of the last theologians and philosophers to see no great disparity between philosophy and theology, or between reason and faith. For him, true faith necessarily involved the use of reason, and reason could never conflict with the truths of revelation. Although Abailard argued that reason could not penetrate mysteries such as the Trinity, nevertheless, it could clarify these truths so as to enable man to strengthen his faith. The Middle Ages have been called the "Age of Faith", and Abailard's use of reason was entirely consonant with the character of his age. For him, reason and faith were in complete harmony, and consequently, there was never any doubt in his mind that the tools of the logician were at home in theology. Abailard's belief in the power of human reason was a reflection of his belief in the dignity of the human condition. Man and God were not separated by an unbridgeable gulf; the human mind could, to a great degree, penetrate the world of God.

This confidence in the unity of the human experience with the divine order was rarely to be seen again in the history of thought. Aquinas argued that theology was an entirely different kind of science than philosophy. Once knowledge was obtained, then one no longer had faith. One
cannot know what he believes; conversely, one cannot believe what he knows. Although Aquinas argued that faith and reason were consonant, nevertheless, he severed theology from philosophy. Ockham took Aquinas' distinctions between theology and philosophy more literally. Ockham, like Abailard, argued that all knowledge was based on experience. Unlike Abailard, however, he argued that there were no valid proofs for God's existence, and, therefore, the realm of faith was so utterly separated from that of philosophy that the truths of one discipline might conflict with those of the other. Ockham's nominalism led to skepticism about theological truths. Ockham saw this as an argument which strengthened faith, for according to his system one would have to believe what one knows to be false or at best unfounded empirically. His proof, however, that theology was in conflict with philosophy led others to suggest that perhaps the truths of theology were simply fables. Abailard, however, never departed from the conviction that the universe was unified through its logical structure, and that this logical structure was nowhere more clearly displayed than in God Himself and his works.

Later scholastics gravitated away from this position, and so would later rationalists. Immanuel Kant, for example, wrote a lengthy Critique of Pure Reason, in which he sought to bolster the reliability of human reason against the skepticism of David Hume. In so doing, however, he limited reason to the categories and their operation on the
world of experience; the transcendental ideas, such as the unity of the world order and the existence of God, simply could not be arrived at through the use of pure reason. Like Ockham, Kant rejected common proofs for the existence of God such as Anselm's ontological argument; they could not be validated by reason. For Kant, this approach freed metaphysics from the weak arguments which Hume had capitalized on; yet it also forever separated reason from the realm of theology.

Abailard was one of the last great thinkers to see no disparity between reason and theology. Rather than looking on him as an unsophisticated medieval, perhaps we ought rather to see him as one of the last to use reason in such a way that the divine order was not far removed from man. Bernard was concerned that Abailard's teachings might destroy Catholicism; he would have done better to have realized that Abailard preserved the medieval conviction in the unity of the divine with the secular and supported theology against the claims of a later skeptical age. That his views led him to assert ideas which were considered heretical in the twelfth century should not detract from an appreciation of his overall contribution to theology.

Abailard's scholasticism, like the eremetical wanderings of Romuald and Robert of Molesme, reflected many trends of the twelfth century. The twelfth century was an age in which society was straining the limits of the medieval social, political, and theological structures. The
traditional boundaries in politics and religion were simply no longer adequate to deal with the rejuvenated economy, the growth of city life, and last but not least, the introduction of new ideas into Europe. The age of Abailard was an age of rapid expansion in all areas, and in many ways, his career reflects these changes. Abailard, like the founders of the new orders and heretical preachers, found medieval theology too limited to deal with the spread of heresy. He did not seek to shatter medieval theology, but only to make it accommodate the needs of a new age. Abailard's emphasis on the power of the human mind and the role of the individual in his own salvation spoke to the needs of the twelfth century. More than any other thinker of the Middle Ages, he defined the concept of individuality. His logical theories eliminated Divine Illumination, forcing him to rely solely on the human mind, and his theology proceeded to demonstrate that there was a valid role for logic in theology. His vision of faith invigorated by reason penetrated the entire moral life of the individual, and led him to true love of God. Anselm's search in the Proslogion for one all encompassing metaphysical proof of the nature and existence of God was an abstract meditation; many have argued that his ontological proof played no role in apologetics, but was only intended to prove to believers what they already knew. Even if it was intended to convince the Fool, it was not a practical ethical and moral system which could be expected to play a decisive role in everyday
life. Anselm focused on the deep ontological and metaphysical truths of the faith; Abailard provided the rationale for the use of reason in theology, and applied it to ethical behavior. Just as Robert of Molesme and Romuald pursued their own inner spirituality, so too, Abailard's use of dialectic was directed to the spiritual life of the individual.

If Abailard was not the deepest metaphysical thinker of his age or of the scholastic movement in general, this should not negate his originality. He truly exemplified the ideals and concerns of the twelfth century Renaissance, and in so doing, demonstrates the inadequacy of Jacob Burckhardt's views. The "Renaissance" was neither exclusively Italian, nor were its characteristics unique to the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries. Humanism was not alien to the Middle Ages, and this is nowhere more evident than in the work of Peter Abailard. Abailard's entire theological system revolved around the rational life of the individual, and as did the Renaissance humanists, he focused on the spiritual growth of each human soul. His interest in the moral life of the individual led him, like the humanists, to reject outer actions in favor of inner spirituality, and to emphasize inner contrition rather than the mediating role of the church. Abailard truly brought God to man, and in so doing, he was the counterpart to the Renaissance humanists.
The work of Abailard decisively refutes the Burckhardtian separation of the Middle Ages from the Renaissance, and demonstrates that there is no essential contradiction between the aims and methods of the scholastic and those of the humanist. Many humanists of the Italian Renaissance were trained in scholastic methodology. Marsilio Ficino, for example, had studied to be a physician, and as such, was trained in Aristotelian dialectic. His Platonic Theology relied on Aristotelian principles, such as the natural end of man, in order to harmonize Platonism with Christianity. Lorenzo Valla, who developed philology to a new high point, was thoroughly Aristotelian in his methodology. Eckhart, who stood at the frontier of the medieval and modern worlds, also employed Aristotelian and Thomistic dialectic, yet his "theology" broke with Aquinas, and emphasized the unique nature of each individual religious experience. His use of dialectics was not intended to establish metaphysical proofs; like the humanists, he focused on inspiring an intuitive understanding of revelation in his listeners. For Eckhart, God was found in the soul, and it was the soul which must grasp revelation for itself. Eckhart's use of dialectics anticipated the rhetorical concerns of the humanists, and was symptomatic of the breakdown of medieval scholasticism and the shift toward Renaissance humanism. Aristotle and dialectic did not die with Aquinas; it simply took on new forms and concerns.
Just as the humanist employed scholastic methods, so too, the scholastic often reflected humanist concerns. Rationalism triumphed with scholasticism, but this rationality was not necessarily divorced from an awareness of the human predicament. This attention to human emotions and needs is evident even in the work of Anselm. Anselm venerated the Virgin Mary, and tended to describe her with intense emotion. There could be no deeper spiritual feeling than we see in one of his prayers to the Virgin: "Thee my heart wishes to love, thee my heart longs to praise . . . make an effort depth of my soul . . . to praise her merits, to love her blessedness, and to wonder at her loftiness."¹

Anselm's prayers and meditations were not separate endeavors from his theological treatises. Anselm sent a collection of his prayers to Matilda, the countess of Tuscany. In his preface, he claimed that "the reader ought not to be concerned to read the whole, but only so much as he feels sufficient to arouse in himself the impulse to pray."² The prayers, then, were not intended to be recited, but to create a state of religious piety within the reader.

Prayers were often added to Psalters; Anselm's prayers were no different, but their length far exceeds the length of the


Psalms, and with Anselm, they become much more than an appendix -- they are the focal point, rather than an afterthought.

Anselm's prayers and meditations were the first collection to be circulated under the name of their author, which reflects their intensely individual nature. The prayers often emphasize the agonizing individual quest for salvation:

my mouth does not have words with which to express my needs, nor does my heart have devotion to reach thy so great height from so great a depth . . . even when my strength is brought together, it cannot break through the shadows of its torpor, which the stains of its sins have brought upon it.

Anselm's meditations, then, focus on the individual's ascent to God. Many of the meditations rival the letters of Heloise in their emotional content. Anselm describes hell as

Horror! Horror! What do I see where no order, but everlasting horror dwells? Only a confusion of wailing, a tumult of gnashing teeth, a confused volume of groans. Woe! Woe! Again and again, woe woe! You torments of every kind, limited by justice, unlimited in suffering, will no limit, no remedy ever quench you?

The prayers and meditations, then, betray a man who felt emotions intensely. It would be a mistake to assume that the emphasis on reason in his theological works was a

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3Anselm, Prayer IX, in R. W. Southern, Saint Anselm and His Biographer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 44.

separate endeavor -- for Anselm, both the prayers and the treatises were an individual search for religious expression.

Although Anselm was the Father of scholasticism, it was the human and emotional elements of his writings that seemed to have most profoundly affected his pupils. This aspect of Anselm's work is reflected in the works of two of his favorite pupils, Osbern and Eadmer, and is an argument for the compatibility of scholasticism and humanistic concerns. Osbern was an Englishman who was sent by Lanfranc to study with Anselm at Bec. Eadmer tells us that he was especially stubborn in his studies, yet he became one of Anselm's favorite pupils. Osbern wrote a life of Dunstan, which reflects the influence of Anselm. The very fact that he wrote about Dunstan was significant, for Anselm's predecessor, Lanfranc, had allowed the observance of Dunstan to pass from the calendar; his constitution for Christ's Church makes no mention of a feast day for Dunstan. During Anselm's archbishopric, the altars of Dunstan and St. Elphege were given a place of prominence and moved to the high altar. In so doing, Anselm showed his affinity with the traditions of the English church. The English church had grown out of a fusion of Roman Catholicism with Celtic piety, which venerated local saints. Lanfranc found no reason to include the Feasts of Dunstan and Elphege in his liturgical rites; in this, he demonstrated the mind of a canonist. Anselm, logical though he was, was willing to
include altars for these saints in the layout of his church, which left a place for emotion as opposed to strict rationality.

Osbern's life of Dunstan reflects this bias — Osbern showed an appreciation for Dunstan as a human being with human emotions. He had seen Dunstan's cell and was touched by the smallness of it. He describes how "he remembered how Dunstan had often heard him when he had called on him in danger, and therefore, I neither wished to restrain my tears nor leave the spot." \(^5\)

Eadmer's *Vita Anselmi* also falls within this tradition. Eadmer could have painted an Anselm who was larger than life, but failed to do so. He was influenced by Anselm's scholastic methodology, and apparently never allowed the work to be circulated without revising it. Many of his revisions reflect an awareness of the implausibility of certain situations. The work was meant to be a tribute to the saintliness of Anselm, but Eadmer never allowed material to be inserted which did not stand up to logical scrutiny. Where, for example, did the story of the innkeeper who slept in Anselm's bed originate and could it be documented? This concern to depict events logically led him to be rather meager in the miracles he attributed to Anselm. Even fourteen years after Anselm's death, when he added a book of

miracles to the Vita, he still reported only a few visions and miracles. In this, he departed from earlier hagiographies, and it was certainly a measure of Anselm's lasting impact on him. Eadmer reported only those events which he could verify, and even then, sometimes reports that other companions saw the event as a miracle while he did not. Eadmer's Life of Anselm, then, is reflective of Anselm's sola ratione approach, and even if Anselm did not approve of the project, he would have applauded Eadmer's objectivity.

This approach created a picture of Anselm the man, rather than Anselm the saint. Eadmer's work was a product of his own reflection; he did not include material which he did not directly witness or could not directly corroborate. He viewed Anselm as a human, not a saint. The miracles which he attributed to Anselm were unlikely to make a strong case for canonization; Eadmer's failure to write a more convincing portrayal may have been one of the reasons for the lack of veneration of Anselm in England during the years after his death. In his preface to the work, Eadmer stated that his aim was to describe the private Anselm. He recorded Anselm's conversations, for which he was well known, making the Vita one of the first biographies to include actual dialogue. Eadmer was devoted to his teacher, but by the time of his death, had come to the realization that Anselm had not succeeded in establishing the claims of Canterbury as strongly as he might have. Eadmer appreciated
the fallibility of even an Anselm; the *Vita*, while in the hagiographical tradition, was one of the first modern biographies. Unlike Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*, Eadmer's Anselm is three dimensional -- he has his merits, but also his faults. In Eadmer, humanism found concrete expression in scholastic methodology.

Eadmer's manuscript became popular on the continent, making its way to several Cistercian houses, such as Anchin and Clairmarais, and finally to Clairvaux. The Cistercians were known for the emotional intensity of their devotional literature. Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* described religion in terms of human experience, arguing that self knowledge was the necessary basis of our knowledge of God. Aelred of Rivaulx argued that friendship was the foundation of spirituality. The personal quality of Anselm's religious experience and that of his English pupils is reflected in these works. Perhaps the essential humanity of so great a religious figure as Anselm, as depicted in Eadmer's *life*, did not escape the Cistercians. The humanism of the twelfth century was never entirely lost by the scholastics, and was indeed well under way at Bec in the eleventh century.

In the work of Eadmer and Osbern, scholastic methodology was not utterly at odds with humanism. It was Abailard, more than any other thinker, who managed to synthesize the two traditions. The work of Abailard, like that of Eckhart and the humanists, demonstrates that
scholasticism need not have come into conflict with humanism. Abailard's concerns were primarily those of a humanist. Unlike Anselm and Aquinas, he did not devote much effort to abstract metaphysical proofs. Consequently, he like the humanists, has been accused of being a second rate intellect. But in fact, his use of dialectic was well ahead of his time, for it pointed to the rhetorical concerns of the Renaissance, and paved the way for a deeper understanding of morality. He was not simply a logician gone mad, although clearly his use of logic stood out within the confines of the twelfth century. His theological system was certainly founded on his use of logic, yet he did not become like the late medieval scholastics who appear in the parodies of Erasmus and Petrarch; rather, in keeping with the trends of the twelfth century, he developed a theology which truly spoke to the individual. Abailard, like the humanists, was concerned with morality, and his scholasticism was never divorced from that perspective. Like the humanists, he encouraged the use of philological techniques and directed these efforts toward an individual understanding of the scriptures. Like Erasmus, he saw the written word as flexible, which led him to find hints of the Trinity in the writings of the Greeks. His veneration of the Greeks looked forward to the Italian Renaissance, and also to Erasmus' insistence on cosmopolitanism and toleration, rather than on rigid exclusiveness within the church. His work was an example of what medieval theology
might have become had Bernard not ruthlessly pursued him; it was an example of what the medieval church might have accomplished had not Luther extinguished the Erasmian reform movement.

That scholasticism later degenerated into the skepticism of Ockham and the anti-humanistic theology of Luther should not obscure the promise of early scholasticism. If scholasticism had been what Abailard wanted it to be, perhaps Burckhardt would not have had occasion to write about the uniqueness of the Italian Renaissance, and perhaps Erasmianism would have been called Abailardian reform. Abailard's work demonstrates that scholasticism was not necessarily in opposition to humanism, and for this reason, his contribution to theology and his place in the history of thought has been greatly undervalued. Abailard was much more than simply a "logician lately turned theologian", a notorious heretic, or the callous lover of Heloise. He was an example of what medieval theology might have been, and never quite became. In this sense, Burckhardt was right to point to the humanists as unique, yet had Abailard's work been more fully appreciated, he might have seen that the medieval world was not totally at odds with the world of the Renaissance humanist, and that medieval scholasticism was not necessarily the enemy of the humanists. Peter Abailard was clearly a part of the scholastic tradition, yet just as clearly, he stepped outside of it. He was a humanist of the
twelfth century, a man ahead of his time, whose work has never been fully appreciated.


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**Articles**


