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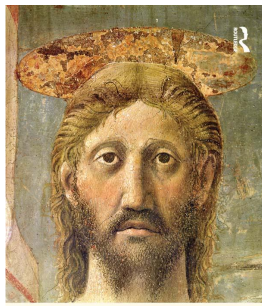

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8

PETER ABELARD

Constant J. Mews

Peter Abelard (1079–1142) introduces a new perspective into the philosophy of religion in the Latin West through his emphasis on the common source of pagan and religious philosophical insight. Although not the first person to argue that pagan philosophers shared some understanding of truths manifest through divine revelation to Jews and then to Christians, Abelard was one of the first teachers to create a coherent synthesis of *theologia* in which this insight was the driving principle. Boethius (*c.*476–*c.*525) had pursued philosophical enquiry into orthodox Christian doctrines relating to the Trinity, but never reflected explicitly on the relationship of pagan philosophy to Christian revelation. Rather than commenting on the *Opuscula sacra* (Sacred works) of Boethius, Abelard decided to create his own independent synthesis on the subject, a treatise about the Trinity, now known as the *Theologia 'summi boni'* (hereafter *TSum*). After the work was condemned as heretical at the Council of Soissons in 1121, he revised it in the early 1120s as his *Theologia Christiana* (Christian theology; hereafter *TChr*), transforming it yet again into his *Theologia* (the *Theologia 'scholarium'*; hereafter *TSch*) by the early 1130s. This final version was identified by the famous Cistercian abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux, at the Council of Sens, held on 25 May 1141, as containing many heresies (Mews 2002).

In responding to Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux created a powerful image of Abelard as a rebellious thinker who would continue both to horrify the Christian faithful and to fascinate those sympathetic to anyone persecuted for questioning ecclesiastical authority, down through the centuries:

> We have in France a former teacher turned new theologist, who from his earliest youth has dabbled in the art of dialectic and now raves about the Holy Scriptures. He tries to raise teachings, once condemned and silenced, both his own and others, and added new ones besides. He who deems to know everything in heaven above and on earth below apart from "I do not know," lifts his face to heaven and gazes on

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> the depths of God, bringing back to us words that cannot be spoken, which is not lawful for a man to speak. While he is ready to supply a reason for everything, even those which are beyond reason, yet he presumes against reason and against faith.
>
> (Bernard, *Omnia opera* 1953–80: 8:17–18)

Any attempt to present Abelard's philosophy of religion must question the influential stereotype evoked by Bernard. Was Abelard making audacious claims about the capacity of philosophical reason to understand the nature of religious truth? To appreciate the significance of his ideas, we must first consider how they evolved out of an awakened interest in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries in the philosophy and literature of the ancient world, as well as out of a desire among many scholars to draw connections between the insights of pagan antiquity and the truths of Christian faith.

THE GROWTH OF INTEREST IN PAGAN WISDOM: 1080–1120

Abelard, born in 1079 at Le Pallet, near the border between Brittany and Anjou, was inspired to study the Peripatetic tradition in logic, as far as it was then known in the Latin West, by Roscelin of Compiègne (*c.*1050–*c.*1125), under whom he studied during the 1090s at Loches, the ducal palace of the Counts of Anjou. Roscelin had come to Anjou after having been accused of expounding heresy by disciples of Anselm of Canterbury at a Council held at Soissons (*c.*1092). The charge laid against Roscelin was that in describing the three persons of the Trinity as three things, he opened himself to tritheist heresy. In fact, Roscelin insisted that he was simply pursuing the same broad agenda, as opened up by Anselm, of explaining Christian belief through the use of reason, in the same way that 'pagans' (i.e. Muslims) and Jews both defended their religious traditions. While Anselm had set a precedent for exploring faith through reason alone (*sola ratione*), Roscelin wished to go further in identifying the particular meaning or 'thing' (*res*) of each of the words, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, predicated of God. He was interested in the way theological categories were applied to God through human imposition, but retained a semantic theory influenced by Augustine, which identified words as signs of things.

Under Roscelin, the young Abelard absorbed a vocalist interpretation of dialectic that emphasized how categories were words (*voces*) rather than things in themselves. Even though he did not engage in the formal study of theology under Roscelin, Abelard would have known of his teacher's broader project of relating rational reflection to Christian faith in ways that went beyond the specific synthesis offered by Anselm. At the same time, Abelard became increasingly aware of limitations in his teacher's perspective, and thus sought to explore educational opportunities further afield.

Around 1100, Abelard went to Paris to study under William of Champeaux, famous for teaching both dialectic and rhetoric at the cathedral school of Notre-Dame as well as for his involvement in the ecclesiastical reform movement. Abelard, on the other hand, seems to have been supported by William's rival, Stephen of Garlande, also an archdeacon of Paris, but more closely aligned to royal control over the Church. In dialectic, William emphasized continuity with the teaching of Boethius, and took for granted that universals were indeed real things, in which individuals participated. Abelard challenged this perspective, most famously during a course of lectures on rhetoric that William was giving, perhaps soon after Easter 1111, when William resigned from the cathedral to create a community of Augustinian canons at Saint-Victor, just outside the city. While unable to inherit William's position at Notre-Dame, Abelard was able to establish himself as the pre-eminent dialectician at the schools of Sainte-Geneviève.

In 1113, following William's appointment as Bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne, Abelard spent a short time studying divinity under Anselm at Laon, before acquiring the position he coveted at Notre-Dame. He took particular exception to the way that records of Anselm's *sententie* or teachings were revered by disciples as authoritative when he found that they never addressed the questions that he wished to pose. Even though he reports that he did compose certain glosses on Ezekiel, Abelard was not particularly comfortable with biblical exegesis as a genre during these years, or with what he saw as an excessive reliance on arguments from patristic authority.

The episode for which Abelard is perhaps most well known is his love affair with the young Heloise, niece of Fulbert, one of the cathedral canons at Notre-Dame, where he taught at the cathedral school, from 1113 to 1117. While Abelard plays up the erotic nature of their early relationship in the *Historia calamitatum* (History of my troubles), there seems no doubt that his discussion with Heloise broadened his reading to embrace a wide range of pagan classics, in particular the poetry of Ovid and the writing of Cicero about friendship. A collection of over one hundred love letters (*Epistolae duorum amantium* [Letters of two lovers]), exchanged in the first half of the twelfth century between a controversial dialectician, excited by love as erotic passion, and a brilliant young woman, keen to reflect on the ethical demands of love, records voices very similar indeed to those of Abelard and Heloise (Mews 1999). Although these letters are not concerned with religious themes as such, they reveal a young woman convinced of the spiritual authenticity of her love and deep friendship for a teacher, who is awed by her capacity to reflect on ethics and friendship.

In the *Historia calamitatum*, Abelard presented his early relationship to Heloise as driven by lust rather than by love or philosophical concerns, so as to present what happened subsequently as ordained by providence, turning all things to the good. He contrasted what he presents as his false passion for Heloise with his gradual recognition of the consoling love of God, manifest through the Holy Spirit. He explained the development of the affair as the living out of a classic

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fable. After their relationship was discovered, Heloise gave birth to a child, and only reluctantly accepted Abelard's proposal that they marry. The secret marriage failed to placate her uncle, who had Abelard castrated in reprisal for the way he had treated Heloise. He became a monk at Saint-Denis, a wealthy abbey with close links to the Crown, while she took vows as a nun at Argenteuil, the abbey where she had been raised. The child was sent to be looked after by Abelard's sister, back in Brittany. Abelard was not happy, however, at Saint-Denis, and criticism about his teaching activity from fellow monks drove him to establish a school at a site some distance from the main abbey.

THE *THEOLOGIA 'SUMMI BONI'* AND ITS INSPIRATION

This was the context in which Abelard first started to draft his treatise on the Trinity. He would later explain that he was responding to the demand of his students for convincing reasons to accept Christian faith:

> It happened that I first applied myself to the foundation of our faith through analogies from human reasoning and composed a certain treatise of theology about the divine Unity and Trinity for our students, who were asking for human and philosophical reasons, and demanded more what could be understood than simply recited. They said indeed that proclaiming words that understanding did not follow was redundant, nor could anything be believed unless it was first understood, and that it was ridiculous for anyone to preach to others what neither he nor those he was teaching could grasp in the intellect, the Lord himself saying that such people were like the blind leading the blind.
> (1978: 82–3)

Abelard conceals here a more specific task by which he was preoccupied when writing the first version of his treatise on the Trinity, namely, to refute the theological error imputed to Roscelin of teaching that the three divine persons were as distinct as three things (*res*). His larger goal, however, was to provide a rational account of the foundations of Christian belief, but not necessarily in the way that Anselm had presented this.

Abelard's central theme in the *Theologia 'summi boni'* is that the names 'Father', 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit' are each applied to the supreme good, "which Christians call God" for a specific reason: to signify a particular attribute (*proprietas*) of the supreme good, namely divine power, wisdom and goodness (*TSum* 1.1). While he emulates Roscelin in analysing terms, he refuses to identify each name as signifying a particular thing (*res*). In the first of its three books he presents arguments from authority, identifying these attributes as discerned by both ancient philosophers and the prophets of the Old Testament. The second and third books are

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devoted to arguments from reason, showing how these concepts relate to each other in ways that parallel orthodox Christian doctrine about the three persons of the divine Trinity. Taking for granted the truth of the Christian religion, his concern is more hermeneutic in character: to explain the meaning of familiar terms in Jewish and Christian discourse by relating them to arguments evident through philosophical enquiry as well as from the testimony of Scripture.

The doctrine that Christ is the embodiment of divine wisdom, the Word of God, and that the Holy Spirit revealed itself both in the creation of the world and through the history of the Jewish people, is rooted in the New Testament itself. Early Christian writers, however, always tended to contrast the inadequacy of pagan philosophical insight compared to the truth of God's revelation in Christ. Abelard attached central importance to Paul's statement in Romans 1:20 that the invisible things of God (*Invisibilia Dei*) have always been evident to philosophers through the created world (*TSum* 1.30). Augustine had used this Pauline comment to acknowledge that Socrates and Plato had come closer than any other philosopher to understanding aspects of divine truth, but he did so only to contrast their understanding to the divine revelation offered to Moses and the Jewish people. By contrast, Abelard maintained that both philosophers and prophets were witnesses, each in their own way, to aspects of the supreme good, fully manifest only in the person of Christ.

Prior to 1120 there had been a few isolated attempts to argue that ancient philosophers had glimpsed the same truths as articulated by Christian doctrine. At Chartres, Bernard of Chartres (*d. c.*1126) was celebrated in the early decades of the twelfth century for his exposition of Plato's *Timaeus*, as translated by Chalcidius. While Bernard never himself explicitly identified Plato's World Soul with the Holy Spirit, Thierry of Chartres (*d. c.*1150) does briefly venture this claim in a commentary on the Hexaemeron (1971: 567), or six days of creation, that seeks to combine the authority of the first chapters of Genesis with Plato's account of the cosmos and its soul in the *Timaeus*. Because Abelard questions a literal identification of the Holy Spirit with the World Soul in his *Dialectica*, completed perhaps 1117/18, he may be referring directly to arguments made by Thierry (under whom he reportedly tried to study natural science, but unsuccessfully), as well as by the young William of Conches, also a disciple of Bernard of Chartres.

Rather than attempt any simplistic identification of Platonic and Christian doctrine, Abelard drew attention to the way different words could identify different attributes of the same truth. Thus he described the concept of the World Soul as a beautiful "covering" (*involucrum*) to explain that it could not be interpreted literally, but was rather a poetic image to describe the effect of God's goodness in the world. Much of the first book of the *Theologia 'summi boni'*, retained in all subsequent versions of the work, is an exposition of those passages in Plato's *Timaeus* and Macrobius' *Commentary on the "Dream of Scipio"* in which he explores how Plato's understanding of goodness infusing the entire world echoes what Christians believe about the effect of the Holy Spirit within creation. Eschewing

the traditional Augustinian understanding of the Holy Spirit as the mutual love of the Father and Son, Abelard prefers to focus on divine benignity towards creation as a whole. By comparison, he gives much less attention in the earliest version of his treatise to justifying from philosophical authority his claim that 'Father' was the name given to divine power, and that the Son was divine wisdom (cf. *TSum* 1.35–6).

Abelard's identification of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the attributes of power, wisdom and benignity was not controversial in itself. In one of his earliest writings, Hugh of Saint-Victor (*d.* 1141) invoked the triad of divine attributes in his *De tribus diebus* (On the three days), as part of a larger argument that the physical world (*mundus sensilis*, a term used by Chalcidius in his translation of Plato's *Timaeus*) is like a book, through which we can learn about divine power, wisdom and benignity of good. His treatise is not about the Trinity as such, but rather about how God reveals himself as a trinity of attributes, revealed in three allegorical 'days' or phases of creation. Abelard develops this triad very differently from Hugh in being much more concerned to explore the meaning of the words, 'Father', 'Son' and 'Holy Spirit'. Whether Abelard is here drawing on Hugh's version of the triad as has been argued (Poirel 2002) is not certain. Much depends on the precise dating of particular works. Both Abelard and Hugh of Saint-Victor may be responding to the use of the triad by Thierry of Chartres as part of his desire to connect Platonist teaching to Christian doctrine (Mews 2008). The triad of divine power, wisdom and goodness was a Middle Platonist theme invoked by Basil in his commentary on the Hexaemeron and thus by Ambrose. Augustine had himself preferred more psychological analogies to the Trinity, notably in comparing the three divine persons to memory, understanding and will in the human soul. Abelard never questions the Platonic notion that there is a supreme order to the cosmos, and was sympathetic to the broader project of linking the *Timaeus* and Scripture, but was critical of assuming that Platonic Forms had an independent reality of the subjects that they informed.

Unlike Thierry of Chartres, Abelard focused on the meaning of the words used to define Christian doctrine. He devoted the second and third books of his *Theologia 'summi boni'* to the issue that had so troubled Roscelin: how could one speak of three distinct persons, all sharing one essence? By suggesting that Father, Son and Holy Spirit were names given to signify divine attributes (*proprieties*) rather than specific things, he hoped to escape the implication, raised by Roscelin's argument, that they were ontologically separate entities. Abelard defended the role of reason to explore Christian doctrine, but rejected the narrowness of "false dialecticians" like his own teacher. While Abelard turned to the central argument of Augustine's *De Trinitate* (On the Trinity) that there was a trinity of relations within God, identified in Latin as *personae* (or invented characters), he transformed the Augustinian argument by applying this notion to the relationship between three attributes, namely power, wisdom and benignity. In his discussion of possible objections that can be made to orthodox Christian doctrine, he

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considers possible ways of considering identity and difference to conclude that there is no real distinction between the three persons, other than of signifying distinct attributes in the divine nature, the supreme good. In the core section of the third book in the *Theologia 'summi boni'* (3.52–87), Abelard presents his idea that wisdom, or the power of discernment, is related to power in the same way as species is to genus, or a wax image and wax itself. Central to his analysis is a conviction that words in particular phrases often operate metaphorically (as when we say 'the fields smile', to mean that they bloom), and not according to the literal meaning of individual words. This was a notion that Abelard may have picked up from the theological writing of William of Champeaux, who had also attempted to provide a philosophical account of Trinitarian doctrine. Yet whereas William gives only a brief suggestion about how the three persons may signify distinct attributes, Abelard explores at length the philosophical relationship between species and genus. In a short subsequent section (3.88–93), Abelard considers how the Holy Spirit or divine benignity proceeds from both power and wisdom through operating in the world.

There were clearly many inadequacies in Abelard's account, notably in the imbalance in identification of authorities (more philosophical than patristic) and in the limited attention given to God the Father as divine power. These weaknesses were exploited by his critics at the Council of Soissons, where former disciples of Anselm of Laon (Alberic of Reims and Lotulph of Novara) accused him of expounding heresy. The official charge that Abelard mentions as raised against him was that he attributed power to God the Father alone, but not to the Son or the Holy Spirit. Abelard understood God's power to be manifested in his potentiality as source for all that could come to be, not in his capacity to act. His understanding of religion, at least when he initially drafted his treatise on the Trinity, was based on the perception of a divine order to creation rather than on revelation over and beyond the created world.

Soon after the burning of his treatise at Soissons and (after a brief incarceration at Saint-Medard) his return to Saint-Denis, troubles with other monks of that abbey led Abelard to escape to the territory of Champagne, where he found a place to live not far from the city of Provins, on an estuary of the Seine. Here he built an oratory that he dedicated initially to the Holy Trinity, but then rededicated to the Paraclete or Holy Spirit, reflecting the particular emphasis of his theology. Abelard continued to modify his treatise on the Trinity, giving it the title *Theologia Christiana*. Although *theologia* would become common currency within scholastic discourse during Abelard's generation, the term was not used by traditionally minded writers such as Bernard of Clairvaux, except to refer to that work, which he labelled *Stultilogia* or 'Stupidology'. The title *Theologia Christiana* was itself a controversial one, presenting his arguments as a Christian version of a pagan philosophical practice. Abelard seems to have understood *theologia* in a traditional sense of purely abstract reflection about God rather than about Christ or the Church.

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In this much enlarged version, Abelard supplied more written authority for his argument, both from pagan and patristic authors. He found many of these texts while compiling the *Sic et non* (Yes and no), an evolving anthology of patristic texts collected over a long period. He organized them around a range of subjects, not just the Trinity, but also the person of Christ, the sacraments and charity as the foundation of all ethical behaviour. This anthology, which he may have begun while still at Saint-Denis, was introduced by a Prologue laying out his conviction that the foundation of all critical enquiry, and thus the first key to wisdom, lay in the questioning of texts. Abelard recognized that often doctrinal statements were shaped by rhetorical technique and thus prone to human error. Rather than simply accepting authority, one had to subject all written claims to the scrutiny of reason. In the *Theologia Christiana* he responded to the questions that he had raised at the outset of the *Sic et non* about the nature of faith in God. Public criticism forced him to find greater written authority to defend his arguments.

In addition to doctrinal comment, he added a great deal of polemical material deriving from Jerome about the ethical example set by the ancient philosophers (perhaps drawn from a lost *Exhortation* to his fellow monks), incorporated into a completely new second book. He also improved core aspects of his central philosophical argument comparing the interrelationship of three attributes to that between three persons of the Trinity. These attributes were not things in themselves, he argued, but only abstractions predicated of God, who was beyond all form. Whereas Roscelin had been very literal in his understanding of terms predicated of God, Abelard drew on Aristotle's *On Interpretation* to reflect on how the same word could generate different meanings (*TChr* 3.162; cf. *TSum* 2.103). In the case of the Trinity, this meant that statements about God the Son being generated from God the Father needed to be understood as analogous to the relationship between wisdom and power (or potentiality) in general, and statements about the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son need to be understood to be about God's goodness proceeding from his power and wisdom to the world. In a final fifth book, Abelard started to develop ideas about the nature of divine power itself. In particular, he started to expand the notion, implicit in his original thought, that God's power did not refer to God's ability to act in any way that he wished, but only in the way that he did act, namely, through wisdom and goodness.

Abelard's philosophy of religion, as he articulated it during the 1120s, when he was teaching at the Paraclete, was based very much around an ideal of imitating ancient philosophers in their commitment to an ideal of reflection on the supreme good. A remark that he makes in his *Soliloquium* (Soliloquy), probably from the early 1120s, about another treatise that has not survived, crystallizes his conviction during these early years:

> Whoever reads this exhortation will see that the philosophers are greatly in fellowship with Christians not so much in name as in actual

> fact. For Greece, equipped with so many philosophical arguments, would not have submitted to the yoke of the Gospel so quickly had she not been prepared for this in advance by the writings of the philosophers, just as Judaea had been prepared by those of the prophets.
> (1984: 893)

Although this short interior monologue, between Petrus and Abaelardus, does not get very far in reflecting on the fundamental identity of the philosophical pursuit of wisdom and the preaching of Christ, it does articulate his fascination with exploring the common ground shared by philosophy and the Gospel.

There is greater depth of analysis in Abelard's *Collationes* (Conferences), written perhaps in the early 1130s (although its date has been much disputed). In the first of its two dialogues, between a philosopher and a Jew, Abelard debates the positive role of Jewish law in establishing a moral code with a degree of sympathy not often found in Christian literature, which usually asserts the superiority of Christian over Jewish revelation. The philosopher articulates his regret that too often there is no progress in matters of faith, because people do not investigate faith rationally (2001: 11). While the Jew defends the regulatory function of the Law in restraining acts of wickedness, the philosopher argues that there were many who lived before Moses simply in accordance with natural law, without any rituals such as circumcision. By implication, the precepts of the Law are not in themselves essential to a virtuous life. Abelard presents the philosopher as one who worships one God, has been circumcised as a descendant of Ishmael, but relies simply on natural law. Abelard may not have had a specific Muslim in mind in presenting this philosopher, but he uses this figure to debate a broader issue: the intention behind acts of religious duty. The Jew puts forward eloquent testimony that "the law extends the feeling of love both to people and to God, and you will realize that your law too, which you call 'natural', is included within ours, then for us just as for you those which concern perfect love would be enough for salvation" (*ibid*.: 55). Although Abelard does not formally resolve this part of the debate, he leaves the reader to conclude that even if the philosopher respects the purpose of the Law, he is not bound by its obligations.

In the second dialogue, between a philosopher and a Christian, Abelard explores the theme that their common goal is identified as ethics by the philosopher, but as divinity by the Christian. One focuses on the journey, the other on the goal (*ibid*.: 83). The debate enables him to develop ethical concerns based on philosophical teaching (mediated in particular through Cicero; *see* Vol. 1, Ch. 8), and to consider how they may relate to Christian theological reflection. It begins with the philosopher and the Christian setting the ground rules for such a debate, in particular with both accepting that reason has to precede authority (*ibid*.: 93), an inversion of the argument that Anselm had put forward, that one had to believe in order to understand. They then present their respective teachings about the supreme good for man and how it can be reached. The philosopher sees virtue

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(distinguished by Cicero as prudence, justice, courage and temperance) as the only way of leading to happiness, while the Christian identifies *caritas* (love) as the foundation of the virtues, which may not be equal in all people. The Christian argues that although justice, courage and temperance (in all of which prudence is present) are central to human perfection, positive laws, such as the commandments in Scripture, encourage growth in virtue. Specific actions, however, are not good or bad in themselves. They conclude by debating the highest good, by which a person is made better. Abelard's driving argument is that the vision of God, the supreme good, should not be interpreted in physical terms, but rather as a spiritual awareness, in the same way as the suffering of hell should not be interpreted as a physical fire (*ibid*.: 195). Although he never gives the Christian the opportunity to explain how the supreme good should be acquired, Abelard does have him reflect on what might seem a supreme evil, Christ's death, could yet be something good. Everything that happens is done for a good reason: exactly the same theme as underpins the *Historia calamitatum*.

While Abelard's arguments in the *Collationes* are strongly philosophical in character, he seems to have devoted more of his attention in the 1130s to his theological writing as well as to Scripture, a shift that may be linked to a change in his personal situation. In 1129, after having spent two years in relative exile at Saint-Gildas, in Brittany, he decided to transfer control of the Paraclete to Heloise (presumably at her request), as she and her nuns had been expelled from the abbey of Argenteuil. This was the context in which Abelard wrote the *Historia calamitatum*, in theory for a fictional friend, but quite possibly for Heloise and her nuns as a way of outlining the origins of their oratory. In response to the subsequent demand of Heloise that he attend to the spiritual needs of the community, Abelard was obliged to create homiletic and liturgical writings that responded to the needs of the women. He was obliged to draw much more on Scripture than on the philosophical writings familiar to his students in the early years of the Paraclete.

Soon after 1131, Abelard also resumed teaching at the schools of Sainte-Geneviève, Paris, where his friend Stephen of Garlande was still dean. Abelard organized his theological teaching into a tripartite structure, based around faith, the sacraments and charity, already laid out in the *Sic et non*. Although he never wrote a complete synthesis of his teaching on all these subjects, collections of *sententiae* taken down by students reveal that Abelard did develop a mature body of theological teaching during these years. He transformed the *Theologia Christiana* into a much more tightly argued work, the *Theologia 'scholarium'*. Here he simplified a complex philosophical discussion about identity and difference into a presentation of his core image of the Trinity as like a bronze seal, in which the seal issued from the bronze (like the Son from the Father) but became sealed on wax in the same way as the Holy Spirit imprinted the divine image in man (*TSch* 2.112–16). While the core of his argument about the divine persons as names for divine attributes had not changed, he now defended much more clearly the need for rational discussion of all religious doctrine. As he argued at the outset

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of his treatise, faith was "the estimation (*aestimatio*) of things unseen", and therefore could never be defined in any particular form of words. In the third book of the *Theologia 'scholarium'* Abelard also took much further his thinking about the nature of divine power, wisdom and goodness. God could only act in the way that he did, always shaped by wisdom and goodness in ways that sometimes went above human understanding.

In his commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, also written during the 1130s, Abelard developed his thinking about the act of Christ's redemption of humanity. Refuting the argument that humanity had fallen through original sin to a legitimate yoke to the devil, Abelard insisted that humanity needed to be shown the example of divine love, manifested by Christ through his life, death and resurrection. Inevitably such ideas moved him far away from the thinking of Augustine about original sin and our need for grace. Abelard did not deny grace, but insisted that only through a free act of the will could humanity turn towards God.

One of Abelard's last major writings was his *Ethics*, always called in manuscripts *Scito teipsum* (Know thyself). Only the first book, on vice, survives complete, as he may never have finished the second, about virtue. Here he picks up his emphasis on intention, initially raised in the *Collationes*, but takes it to a new degree of sophistication, with awareness that a wrong will or thought may not be sinful in itself. Sin, he now argues, consists in consent to that wrong will in contempt of God. Such thinking may well have been in response to Heloise's insistence that her intentions to Abelard had always been pure, and that simply having a lustful thought was not in itself a sign of sinning against God.

Abelard's outspoken way of presenting what he considered to be the values of true religion, as distinct from false superstition, generated hostility from his critics. William of Saint-Thierry and Bernard of Clairvaux were alarmed, not just at Abelard's questioning of traditional notions of original sin, but at his apparent rejection of traditional notions of divine omnipotence. They accused Abelard of minimizing the omnipotence of God the Son and rejecting it completely in the case of the Holy Spirit. They did not appreciate that Abelard's theological system was based on a desire to reformulate the standard definitions of Christian belief in ways that were more fully in accord with the precepts of philosophical reason.

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On DIVINITY see also Ch. 6; Vol. 1, Chs 8, 18, 19, 20. On ETHICS see also Ch. 4; Vol. 1, Ch. 11; Vol. 3, Ch. 9; Vol. 4, Chs 13, 19; Vol. 5, Chs 12, 15, 21. On JUDAISM see also Vol. 1, Chs 9, 10; Vol. 3, Ch. 15; Vol. 5, Chs 8, 15. On LAW see also Ch. 10; Vol. 3, Ch. 12. On PAGANISM see also Vol. 3, Ch. 2. On THE TRINITY see also Chs 2, 15; Vol. 1, Chs 14, 17, 20; Vol. 3, Chs 3, 9, 17; Vol. 4, Ch. 4; Vol. 5, Chs 12, 23.

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