And Yet I Have Loved Him: The Judgement of William of Saint Thierry on Peter Abelard

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AND YET I HAVE LOVED HIM;
THIS JUDGEMENT OF WILLIAM OF STAIINT THEIERRY 
ON PETER ABELARD

by

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"And yet I have loved him and would desire to love him still — as God is my witness! But in this matter no one shall ever be my neighbor or my friend."

William of St. Thierry
Letter to Bernard, Prologue.
On the second of June in the year 1140, a Council of the Church in Sens formally condemned as heretical nineteen propositions from the works of Peter Abelard, philosopher, theologian, and teacher of unparalleled popularity.\(^1\) Denying emphatically that his teaching varied in any way from that of the Church, Abelard appealed to Rome, only to have Innocent II uphold the decision of the Council. He upheld the condemnation of Abelard's works, ordered his writings to be burned, forbade him ever again to teach, and, finally, ordered him to perpetual penance.\(^2\) The condemnation of Abelard can be laid to the vehement opposition of one man, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, for it was Bernard who had first publicly denounced Abelard, Bernard who had presented the offensive articles to the Council, and Bernard who had instructed the pope in the errors of Abelard's theology. Saint Bernard had in turn been aroused against the theological teachings of Abelard and urged to defend the Church against his errors by an obscure Cistercian monk of the hidden abbey of Signy, William of St. Thierry.

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2. Ibid.
One year previous to the Council, William of St. Thierry had sent to Bernard a letter which first alerted him to the teachings of Abelard; it was this letter which precipitated the subsequent bitter and tragic dispute between that Cistercian saint and the "enfant terrible of the schools."3 The first outcry against the teachings and publications of Abelard since his condemnation at Soissons in 1121, the letter minced no words in exhorting Bernard to action in what William considered a defense of the faith long overdue:

...Peter Abelard is writing again and teaching new doctrines. His books cross the seas and pass over the Alps; his new speculations concerning dogma are spread openly everywhere and are freely proclaimed. It is even said that they have partisans in the Curia at Rome. I warn you that you are endangering both your own souls and the interests of the Church by keeping silence under such circumstances. Can we regard with indifference this man's attempts to corrupt the faith for which we have renounced ourselves? Does the fear of offending him make us fearless of offending God?

4. One copy of the letter was dispatched to Saint Bernard, another to the papal legate, Geoffrey, bishop of Chartres. Hence the plural.
The evil, I assure you, is still only in embryo, but unless it is dealt with in time, it will develop into a form for which I doubt an enchanter shall be found. 5

Hailed as "one of the most profound and original thinkers [of the twelfth century]...perhaps its most outstanding theologian...and undoubtedly the most talented spirit that Citeaux ever attracted," William was by no means new to the business of writing in defense of the faith and in the instruction of souls. Born probably in 1085 in Liege of Flemish, possibly noble, parents, he is shown by public annals to have attended the school of Laon at the time when Master Anselm was teaching there. In the year 1113, having reached the age of twenty-eight, he forsought the school to enter the monastery of Saint Nicasius (near Rhiems), a Benedictine house in which observance of the Rule is credited with being considerably more strict

5. "Petrus enim Abaelardus iterum nova docet, nova scribit; et libri ejus transunt maris, transiliunt Alpes; et novae ejus sententiae de fide, et nova dogmata per provincias et regra deferuntur, celebriter praediscantur, et libere defenduntur: in tantum ut in curia Romana dicantur habere auctoritatem. Dico vobis, periculose silentis, tam vobis, quam Ecclesia Dei. Pro nihil dicimus corrupti fidem, pro qua nosmetipsos nobis abnegavimus: non timemus Deum offendere, ne offendamus. Dico vobis, adhuc parturiens parturit malum hoc: sed nisi praeventum fuerit, erumpet in regulam, cui vix inventatur incantor." Epistola ad Gaudfridum carnotensem et Bernardum abbatem clarae-vallensis... (Inter s. Bernardi, 328), Migne, Patrologia Latina 182, col. 531C. N.B. Hereafter the Patrologia will be cited as P.L.

than that of many contemporary monastic houses. Some five years later, in 1118, he met Saint Bernard of Clairvaux for the first time, an encounter which William has recorded for us himself in his life of the Cistercian saint. Bernard had, at the time, been temporarily relieved of his abbatial duties because of the alarm which the deterioration of his health (and his complete disregard for that health) had occasioned in his bishop.

Neither the first nor the last to have been, quite simply, overwhelmed by the force of Bernard's personality and sanctity, William could compare the sensation which he felt at entering the tiny hut where Bernard was lodged only with that which he experienced when he approached the altar to celebrate Mass. The enforced lassitude of Saint Bernard left him ample time to converse with his visitor and the young Benedictine (actually Bernard's elder by five years) was so impressed that he was "filled with desire to share his life amid much poverty and simplicity." Dissatisfaction

7. Most sources agree that although Saint Nicasius was noteworthy in the strictness of its monastic observance and had greatly been influenced in this by the example of Cluny, it had never been affiliated with the Cluniac federation. See Bouyer, op. cit., p. 70; Walter Shrewing, The Golden Epistle of Abbot William of St. Thierry to the Carthusians of Mont-Dieu (London, 1930), Introduction, xv; and A Religious C.S.M.V., The Meditations of William of Saint Thierry, (London, 1958), Introduction.

8. "Tantaque affectus sum...tantoque desiderio in paupertate illa et simplicitate cohabitandi ei...." Sancti Bernardi abbatis clarae-vallensis vita et res gestae, VII, P.L.185, col. 246. N.B. This biography will hereafter be cited as Vita prima.
with his own religious life may have set in immediately, for William in later years wrote:

Had the chance been given me, I would have asked nothing more than to be allowed to remain with him always. . . .

In a short time William was to leave his own abbey but for quite different reasons: In that very year he was elected abbot of the more prosperous if not so strict Benedictine monastery of St. Thierry and set diligently about raising the standards of the religious under his rule. After six years in office William became convinced that his earlier impulse had been correct and that his was a Cistercian vocation. Accordingly, in 1124, in one of his several letters to the abbot of Clairvaux, he petitioned for permission to enter that austere abbey. Rather unexpectedly Bernard refused his request; not, as he explained, because he did not desire to have William in Clairvaux as much as William desired to be there but

9. "...ut si, optio illa die mihi data fuisse, nil tam optassem quam ibi cum eo semper manere ad serviendum ei." Vita prima, VII.
...putting aside what both of us want (as it is right that we should), it is safer for me and more advantageous for you if I advise you to do as I believe God wishes. Therefore I counsel you: hold on to what you have, remain where you are and try to benefit those over whom you rule.\(^{10}\)

It may be that Bernard saw in William a means of raising the standard of the Benedictine observance, which he had publically declared on several occasions badly to need improvement. It might also be that, the Benedictines being already more than a little piqued at the numbers of their brethren whom Bernard had received, he felt so distinguished an abbot might be the final blow!

In any event William abided faithfully by his friend's decision for eleven years, meanwhile taking an active role in a movement designed to return the black monks to a more primitive observance of the Rule,\(^{11}\) and composing at least three treatises on the spiritual life which we shall later have occasion to examine.

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11. This is remarked upon without reference to source by Pere Bouyer, op.cit.,p.81ff, and by Odo Brooke O.S.B. "William of St. Thierry," The Month, XXVIII,6 (Dec.,1962) p.344.
By 1135 the solitude and simplicity of Citeaux had become irresistible to the abbot of St. Thierry. Still lacking Bernard's permission to enter Clairvaux, William resigned his abbacy to transfer his vows to the smaller Cistercian abbey at Signy. Despite his expectations the life there proved too rigorous for someone of his age and in his state of health. After one near fatal bout with illness, he was, much to his own chagrin, relieved of the obligation of manual labor and set to study in its stead. The library at Signy reflected William's care and the breadth of his tastes. Besides the writings of those Fathers of the Church usually found in monastic libraries, St. Augustine, Jerome and the Venerable Bede, William's shelves quietly boasted his own favorite authors, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius, St. John Chrysostom, and secular writers, Aristotle, Boethius and Seneca. The development of so extensive a library under William's direction demonstrates perhaps most tangibly the amazing and, in his day, almost unique appreciation which he had for the great eastern Fathers. During his thirteen years at Signy, William found time to compose several more treatises on the spiritual life and on doctrine. He died on the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, 8 September, 1148.

Although William throughout his life modestly disclaimed any outstanding talents and invariably cloaked himself beneath the lustre Saint Bernard, so eminent an authority as Pere Bouyer has ventured to state that "when considered as thinkers, [one] may even be tempted to say that Bernard did not exist in comparison with William."\(^{13}\)

The esteem which William felt for Bernard is illustrated by the very fact that he should write to him of his personal anxieties concerning Abelard. Although William had himself on previous occasions privately reprimanded authors whom he felt to have erred from Catholic truth,\(^{14}\) he viewed Abelard's errors as far too wide-spread to be efficiently dealt with by quiet personal intervention and likely to spread alarmingly further if not immediately nipped. Bernard held a position of both office and honor which would enable him to act with authority and gain the attention of the leaders of Christendom while William himself, a simple monk at an obscure abbey, could only study and deplore.

Having no one near to whom I could open my mind, I determined [after reading the Theology of Peter Abelard] to turn to you and to call upon you to defend the cause of God and of the entire Latin Church. You are the only one of whom Abelard has any fear. If you close your eyes, there will be nothing to hold him in check.... It would be useless to attempt to remedy this evil by private counsel or

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14. See below (notes 72 to 96).
admonition because it has already been published.¹⁵

What were the motives that impelled William to attack Abelard so adamantly? Could it perhaps be that William, like Abelard's critics at the Council of Soissons, might with some justification be accused of being jealous of Master Peter? The latter's popularity and brilliance, not to mention his devastatingly sharp tongue, had, by his own admission, gained him many enemies.¹⁶ Was it, as has variously been suggested, the latter's application of the dialectical method to the substance of theology? Did William object categorically to a rational examination of the articles of faith and thereby deserve the frequently applied and often damning epithet, "antidialectician?"¹⁷

Certainly excerpts from William's letter might lead one to accept this hypothesis:

15. "...cum non haberem in quem refunderem, vos in omnibus eligi, ad quos me converterem, et quos in causam Dei et totius latinæ Ecclesiae citarem. Vox etiam (53A) timet homo ille, et reformidat. Claudite oculos: quem timebit? et qui jam dicit quod dicit, quid non dicet, cum nullum timebat?... Nec secreta commotius sua correctione malum hoc attentandum est, quod, ipso se prodente, tam publicum factum est." Epistola 326, P.L.182, col.531D and 532D.

16. The sensitivity to persecution by his enemies manifested by Abelard in his Historia Calamitatum sometimes makes one wonder if he did not consider anyone opposing him a raging "enemy." That he had alienated many people cannot, however, be denied.

17. For an example of this see Martin Grabmann, Geschichte der scholastischen Methode II (Graz,1957), IV,118. "Wir haben in Bernhard von Clairvaux und Wilhelm von St. Thierry französische Vertreter (der) Antidialektiker kennengelernt."
Abelard follows the same method in expounding Holy Scriptures as in teaching dialectics, constantly putting forward his own devices, his novelties....

Another theory often advanced to explain William's opposition to Abelard is that William, and for that matter the Cistercians in general, took outspoken and violent exception to the "climate of curiosity"19 which characterized the explorations of Abelard, feeling that submission to authority better fulfilled one's Christian duty than did theological speculation. By his own admission, William had found himself:

...bewildered and alarmed at the new terms employed by this author in discussing articles of faith and at the new meanings which he attaches to terms long in use...a critic of the faith rather than an humble believer, liking better to reform than to obey its teachings.20

To accuse William of obscurantism, as some have done, is to assert that he found fault with Abelard because Abelard had dared attempt to think out, to decipher logically the data of the Christian faith. It is to claim that he, unlike Abelard, denied the efficacy of reason in matters of faith and knowledge of God. Even a cursory reading of his treatise against Abelard's Theology makes

18. "...agens in Scriptura divina quod agere solebat in dialectica, proprias adinventiones, annuas novitates." Epistola 326.
20. "Cum enim graviter turbarer ad insolitas in fide vocem novitates, et novas inauditorum sensuum adinventiones... censor fidei, non discipulus, emendator, non imitator." Epistola 326.
it clear that this was not William's primary preoccupation. Nor, on more careful study, does it appear that anti-rationalism loomed as a motive at all. William's first and overriding concern was with the doctrine which Abelard had been disseminating, his exception to the thesis which Abelard advanced and in which William felt the schoolman had erred from Catholic truth. The original protest to Bernard enumerated six different areas of, in William's opinion, questionable theology: the Holy Trinity, the person of Christ, the Eucharist, grace, sin, and a definition of faith. 21 His own faith firmly grounded in the orthodox tradition of the Fathers, William could not but cast a jaundiced eye at some of the propositions advanced by Abelard. The later Disputatio followed an outline almost identical with that of the letter but in it William examined each error with infinitely closer scrutiny and sought logically to explain and repudiate the heretical inclinations of each.

William had need to read no further than the first paragraph of Abelard's Christian Theology before feeling uncomfortable.

In the first line of his Theology he has defined "faith" as the estimation of things not apparent, not subject to the senses of the body; thinking perhaps that it is commonplace to appraise our faith or that

it is permitted that one think whatever he please on the matter. 22

By this definition Abelard had, in William's opinion, reduced faith from an intellectual affective assent to God's gift of revelation down to a mental appraisal of the data of that revelation. Implicit in this position William clearly saw the freedom to accept or reject parts of that revelation as one wished.

22. "In primo limine theologiae suae fidei diffinivit aestimationem rerum non apparentium nec sensibus corporum subjacentium, aestimans fortasse, vel communem fidei nostram aestimationem esse, vel licitum esse, in ea quodlibet euilibet ad libitum aestimare." Disputatio adversus Petrum Abaelardum ad Gaudfridum carnotensam et bernardem...T, P.L. 180, col. 249. Actually what Abelard had said was "Est quippe fides existimatio rerum non apparentium."

(Epitome theologiae christianae Petri Abaelardi, P.L. 178, col. 1595.) This is a rewording of the Vulgate, Hebrews XI, 2: "Fides est sperandum rerum substantia, argumentum non apparentium." Why William should have substituted existimatio for existimatio is not at all clear. Bruno S. James argues that the substitution does not affect the validity of William's objection since in such a case the two words would have been synonomous. (St. Bernard of Clairvaux, London, 1957, p. 140, n. 1). Webb and Walker, the translator of many of William's works into English, argue on the contrary that Abelard had used existimatio to imply the knowledge of Christian mysteries beyond human comprehension but not utterly beyond human grasp in some degree. William, they contend, had unjustly or carelessly equated the two words and had substituted existimatio, which he then read to mean mere opinion. (The Mirror of Faith, London, 1960, Introduction, p. 6) Harper's Classical Dictionary, in support of James' contention, defines existimatio as "judgment, opinion, supposition," whereas aestimatio is an "estimation of a thing according to its intrinsic value, appraisement, evaluation." Not only would these definitions make the substitution immaterial, they would seem to indicate that William had made Abelard less offensive by his "misreading."
The second and one of the most glaring of his divergencies from the Catholic faith reared itself when Master Peter approached the mystery of the Trinity and attempted honestly if over-confidently to clear up the unfathomable mystery of the divine relationship:

Right away at the beginning of his descriptions he dissects the One into three, into greater and into greatest and into lesser, as if he thinks the mystery shall become more apparent in sequence.23

In the first book of his Christian Theology, the work found so offensive by William, Abelard had sought to explain the relationship of the Father to the Son and the generation of the Son from the Father by the analogy of a brazen seal.24 A brazen seal, such as that used to affix an heralic device to documents, is bronze cast in a specific image. Now the seal, insisted Abelard, is made of bronze; the bronze is not made of the seal. The seal is in essence25 bronze and the bronze and the brazen seal are therefore essentially the same but they are variant in their respective properties. In other words, the material of the seal is bronze, the material of the bronze is not the brazen seal.26 The brazen seal is generated from the bronze. In an analogous way, the Son is generated and has His substance from the Father.

25. "In essentia..." Disputatio III, P.L. 180, col.255B.
"Just as the brazen seal is of bronze, and is generated in some way from it, so the Son has His Being from the substance of the Father, and accordingly is said to be begotten from him."27

The divine attribute imputed specifically to God the Father by Abelard was power. And since the Son takes His being from the Father, the distinctive attribute of the Son, wisdom, must take its being from divine power just as the Son takes His being from the Father. By the analogy of the brazen seal, one thing proceeding from another must share the substance of the thing from which it proceeds. Divine wisdom, therefore, must be a kind of power, a certain power (quaedam potentia).28

"Now as we have shown above, divine power rests especially in the name of the Father, just as does divine wisdom in the name of the Son. As I have said, however, divine wisdom is a certain power of God Himself.... Surely it is apparent that divine wisdom has its being from divine power, just as the brazen image of said to be of bronze."29

27. "'Sicut ex aere est (255) aereum sigillum, et ex ipso quodammodo generatur, ita ex ipsa Patris substantia Filius habet esse, et secundum hoc ex ipso genitus dicitur." Disputatio III, P.L. 180, col.254D - 255A.
29. "Ut enim supra ostendimus, specialiter nomine Patris divina potentia dec laratur, sicut nomine Filii divina sapientia. Est autem divina sapientia, quaedam, ut ita dicam, ipsius Dei potentia, quia videlicet ab omni fallavia vel errore sibi providere potest. Cum igitur sapientia quaedam ut dictum est, sit potentia, sicut aereum sigillum est quoddam aes...." Disputatio III, P.L.180, col.255A.
By speaking of divine wisdom as a certain power, Abelard seemed to William to be making the Son inferior to the Father and to be destroying the coequality of the divine persons. Such tendencies William did not hesitate to label Arianism.

Drawing out his analogy, Abelard had spoken of the Godhead in terms of genus and species. Just as the brazen seal was species of bronze and biologically man is a species of the genus animal, so wisdom is a species of divine power and the Son a species of the Father.

Then as it were, [Abelard] concludes, except from inadmissible [premises], saying "And that is that the Son is of the substance of the Father, whether he is begotten, species born of genus as the philosophers say, or he is created." 30

What Abelard had attempted to do was to find some rational and logical explanation for the Trinity and to this end had sought to discuss each Person separately. In the process, however, one division and simplification had led to another until the accumulation had brought him at last into apparent misconception regarding the relationship of the Divine Persons. What had begun as a means of understanding better the mystery of Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity had devolved into a discussion of three seemingly

30. "Deinde quasi concludit, sed ex inconcessis, et dicit: 'Et hoc est Filium de substantia Patris esse, sive genitum esse, sicut dicunt philosophi, species ex genere gigni, sive creari.'" Disputatio III, P.L. 180, col. 257A.
separate and distinct beings, whose personality had implicitly been obliterated by Abelard’s preoccupation with wisdom and power, and whose unity had been divided into degrees of being. William found the analogy wanting on three counts. His thesis had first of all carried Abelard into two ancient heresies:

The analogy of bronze and brazen seal beclouds the issue while the simile seems to reach toward this conclusion: that a difference of equality appears between the Father and the Son....It seems to us that this rests upon diminishing co-similiar and consubstantial beings into a power and a sub-power. To the extent that it destroys the persons, it is Sabellianism. To the degree of disparity and inequality it is to tread in the steps of Arius. 31

As if it were not enough that William could detect two long ago reproved heresies in Abelard’s one simile, he found yet a third flaw by his probings. Abelard had spoken of the bronze as the materia and the brazen seal as the materiato. The bronze was the matter whilst the seal was the material, the thing formed. Apparently unable to abandon his metaphor when it had served his purpose, he continued on to discuss the Father as the divine materia and the Son as the divine materiato. This, at least, was original with him:

31. "...qui sibi velit haec aeris et aerei sigilli similitudo, quae per omnia ad hoc videtur niti, ut inter Patrem et Filium inaequalitatis appareat dissimilitudo....sed nobis vedetur...et consimiles et consubstantiales, in potentiam et semipotiam extenuare nittur, quantum ad destructionem personarum Sabellianum est; quantum ad dissimilitudinem et imparillitatem, hoc in sententiam Arrii pedibus ire est." Disputatio III, F.L. 180, col. 256A and 257B.
(Arianism and Sabellianism) are very ancient and well tried heresies. This dialectician, however, plays with the Father and the Son as if with material things and matter, since everything in this way would be of that same substance. And, he says, that the Son proceeds from the Father as species proceeds from genus. This is a new heresy, wholly and peculiarly his and in this he, "the announcer of a new God" — as the Athenianis said of Paul (that we may speak more gently) — appears in the world. Where is now the Triune God? Where the persons of Begetter and Begotten? Where the One proceeding from the Other? Where the Unity of which Truth says, "I and the Father are One?" The destruction of Persons destroys the Trinity of God; dissimilarity reduces the unity into greater and into lesser. 32

William undoubtedly considered his teaching on the Trinity Abelard's greatest single failing for he devoted four entire chapters of the Disputatio to a painstaking examination of Abelard's handling of this vital dogma; three chapters on the analogy of the brazen seal and its ramifications and a fourth on Abelard's vague abandonment of the Holy Ghost, on which no little part of the Trinity dispute centred. Among his proclamations which would specifically earn Abelard the condemnation of the Council

of Sens once William had aroused Bernard and Bernard the
whole of Latin Christendom, his teaching on the third
Person of the Trinity looms large.

In the *Disputatio* William took care to quote the
objectionable passage in its entirety. Abelard had
argued that since the Son is begotten and the Spirit pro­
cceeds, there must be a difference in the way in which Each
shares the substance of the Father. Furthermore, although
the Son's distinctive attribute, wisdom, shares in the
Power of the Father and is therefore a "certain power,"
the attribute of the Holy Ghost was conceived to be
benignity or charity. No one, Abelard's protestation ran,
can be kind or benign toward himself but only in relation
to others. William took this to mean that Abelard was
preaching that the Holy Spirit did not share the substance
of the Godhead. His original letter to Bernard expressed
William's objection tersely and pointedly:

"He says" that the Holy Ghost is not of the
same substance of the Father and the Son in
the same sense as if the Son of the substance
of the Father.34

34. *(Dicit)* "de Spiritu sancto, quod non sit ex substantia
Patris et Filii, sicut Filius est ex substantia
Furthermore Abelard had attempted, again honestly but none too carefully, to reconcile the concept of the Platonic world soul, the "cosmis soul by which our souls are animated,"35 with the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. If one keeps in mind that Abelard was always primarily a philosopher, it should not appear too surprising that he would have attempted to bring about a synthesis of the two.

He says, moreover, that the mind is God as did Cato and that the Holy Ghost is the soul of the world, as did Plato.36

William's most direct criticism of what he viewed as this haphazard attempt at platonizing the Trinity lay in his contention that it was not becoming a man who purported to explicate theology to use Plato as his chief authority for any argument. St. Augustine had already dismissed the philosophical question involved.37

The seriousness and care with which Abelard philosophized only served to point up to William his rather casual lack of precision in theological discussions. And to make things worse in William's eyes, Peter Abelard had toyed with dogma to make it fit the current proposition, denying or

36. "Dicit enim animum esse Deum, secundum Catonem; Spiritus sanctum animam esse mundi, secundum Platonem." Disputatio V, P.L. 180, col.265A.
37. Disputatio V, P.L. 180, col.265CD.
affirming teachings central to the Christian faith as it suited his intellectual fancy. This is illustrated in Abelard's further dissection of the Trinity, in which he refuses and then conversely asserts the divinity of Christ for the sake of argument. Near the end of chapter VIII William points out:

"Master Peter says, "We do not concede that Christ is that Person, that is, God and man, the third person of the Trinity.""

While at the beginning of that same chapter, Abelard had already grandly conceded that Christ is that Person. Thus his ensuing exasperation is somehow not too unexpected:

"This," he says, "we concede! That we do not! As if there is nothing or could be nothing in Christ or of Christ unless he had conceded it!"

Annoying as was this seemingly disinterested arguing to a person of William's sensitive orthodoxy, it was not his primary objection to Abelard's teaching on the person of Christ. The epistle to Bernard had accused Abelard and the Disputatio quoted him as stating:

"As it seems to us, the devil never had any authority over man except by permission of God, as a jailor, and [it follows] that

38. "'Non concedimus quod Christus haec persona, hoc est, Deus et homo, tertia sit persona in Trinitate.'" Disputatio VIII, P.L. 180, col. 279.
40. "'Hoc,' inquit, 'concedimus, illud non concedimus,' tanquam de Christo, sive in Christo nil sit, vel esse possit, nisi quod ille concesserit." Disputatio VIII, P.L. 180, col. 277A."
the Son of God did not take flesh in order to free man."

'It seems to us?', William exclaimed immediately, as if Abelard thought perhaps he enjoyed a more direct revelation of the Godhead than St. Paul or the Doctors of the Church. Here Abelard seemed to be questioning the very purpose of the Incarnation. In an attempt to cast rational light upon the terminology common to Christian theology and to make clear these definitions in a manner compatible with classical philosophy, the scholar had used as his measure human, man-to-man relationships, qualities, emotions, and attributes. His objection to the traditional interpretation of the death of Christ as the atonement for the sins of man and the means of reunion with a loving God best exemplifies this:

"How," Abelard says, "does the apostle say that man is reconciled through the death of the Son with God (Rom.V), when He should be angered so much the more against man because men crucified His Son than because they transgressed His precepts!"

41. "'Sed ut nobis videtur, nec diabolus unquam in homine habuit jus aliquod, nisi forte Deo permittente, sicut carcerarius, nec Filiius Dei, ut hominem liberaret, carnom assumpsit.' Ut nobis, inquit, videtur." Disputatio VII, P.L. 180, col.269D.

42. "'Quomodo,' inquit, 'Apostolus reconciliari hominem Deo per mortem dicit Filii Dei (Rom.V), qui tanto plus adversus hominem irasce debut, quanto amplius homines in crucifigendo Filium ejus delquerunt quam in transagrediendo ejus praeceptum gustu unius pomer?" Disputatio VII, P.L. 180, col.270B.
Clearly here, as elsewhere, Abelard had understood "God" as a Being of powerful emotion and the emotion most prevalent is anger. He is angry because men do not do what He wants and He is the more angry that the simple creatures whom He has created should have had the temerity to deny, reject, and finally to crucify His Own Son. Omnipotence to Master Peter implied power and power inferred anger.

Even this, however, William did not feel to be the extent of Abelard’s misguided Christology. He had plunged deeper into heresy by questioning the truth of the hypostatic union of true God and true man in Christ Jesus.

He says also that in the person of the Mediator, God is severed from man — as did Nestorius. No mere intellectual game, this was a conclusion to which Abelard’s rather careless dialectic had brought him. In seeking to make mystery manifest, he had, in William’s opinion, fallen into a trap which was not even original.

But then, neither the solution nor the difficulty into which Abelard had so enthusiastically cast himself were unique to him. Throughout the centuries, Christian men had exercised their intelligence in attempting better to fathom the mystery of the Triune God. William himself, as he records in an earlier work, had started down the treacherous path which Abelard so diligently pursued:

43. "Iterum dicit de persona Mediatoris, Deum ab homine severnens, sicut Nestorius." Disputatio VIII, P. L. 180, col. 276D.
I am confronted with the fact of God as Trinity: which mystery the Catholic faith, rehearsed by my forebearers, impressed me by long use and commended to me. But my soul's foolish way of picturing things sees and regards the Trinity in such a fashion that she fondly thinks that there is number in the simple Being of the Godhead. 44

To divide God into three and thereby to lose sight of His Unity, or to concentrate upon Unity by obliterating Trinity has always been a tempting alternative to the mind of man, who having no experience of a being who is not one substance — one person cannot truly comprehend the meaning of Trinity. In trying to explicate to oneself or to others this mystery, more than one good theologian had slipped into the very trap which ensnared Abelard. Those who doggedly pursued one bent or another to the furthest extent they could had added several heresies to the history of the Church. William made one final point upon this very consideration before he moved on to consider other of Abelard's teachings:

We have seen...how divinity has been preached in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost by the Catholic Fathers: this is a profession of faith, not a description of divinity.45

"Now let us pass to other things," commented William as he moved from the questionable Christology of his wayward adversary to express horror and amazement at what he considered Peter Abelard’s quaintly perverse interpretation of the Holy Eucharist.

For as you have before you in your hands and are able to read, he attacks the sacrament of common salvation, of the passion and death of Christ: and how monstrous it is in him — destroying and exaggerating, as he dissipates and tears it to pieces and scatters it to the winds....46

A monk long trained in the Benedictine tradition, as William had been for some twenty-six years, would by the nature of his vocation be so imbued with a love of the liturgy, emphasized monastic round of community prayer and praise, that he would find it impossible to sit back while Abelard began peering inquisitively at the Eucharist. William could not simply bite his (literary) tongue while Abelard picked

45. "Propter quod dicimus, quoniam cum in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti a Catholicis Patribus divinitas praedicatur; fidei est haec professio, non divinitatis descriptio." Disputatio VII, P.L. 180, col. 251C. Italics mine.

46. "Sicut enim prae manibus habetis, et legere potestis, invadit sacramentum communia salutis, de passione et morte Christi, et quantum in ipso est, destruens et exagitans illus, quasi dissipat et discerpit, et mittens illus in ventum...." Disputatio VII, P.L. 180, col. 269C.
the Eucharist apart until he could apparently find an explanation which might satisfy his literal train of thought and which could be reconciled with what Abelard understood philosophically. In this attempt he arrived at a theory which was considerably more puzzling in its implications than traditional teaching.

Master Peter says of the Sacrament of the Altar that when the substance of the bread and wine are changed into the substance of the Body and Blood of the Lord... that the accidents of the prior substance remain in the air. I beseech you, as what in air? One might suspect that William's objection to this particular article was not so much prompted by the heterodoxy as by the singularity of it. Why Abelard should feel obliged to come to the conclusion that the substance of the bread and wine hover in air while that of the Body and Blood of Christ is present is not at all clear. Opinions on the Sacramental Elements voiced by some of the early scholastics were apt to range from the obscure to the ridiculous. William's exasperated rhetoric question: "I beseech you, as what in air?" makes one conclude that he placed Abelard's explanation in the latter category. His own theology, as

revealed in the Disputatio, demanded less the precision of the scholastic discussions than the loving faith of the patristic writers:

This said blessed Augustine: "That which you see on the altar is bread and chalice because your eyes report this to you. Faith, however, demands this — that the bread so elevated is the Body, the Chalice the very blood of Christ."48

Two final considerations in Abelard's Theologia singled out as objectionable by William may be considered together since both men thought them inextricable; the burden of sin and the operation of grace. Considerably less of William's excoriating energy was expended upon Abelard's treatment of the nature of sin than upon his pronouncements on grace and the Trinity. Perhaps he felt that Abelard's quaint notions spoke for themselves. One modern intellectual historian, while he goes far in attempting to vindicate Abelard, equates his theories on grace and original sin with those on the Trinity as Abelard's "main theological offenses."49

Abelard's instruction on original sin was more easily dismissed by William than was that of actual sin which follows necessarily upon it. Abelard, unlike Catholic

48. "Hinc etenim dicit B. Augustinus: 'Quod videtis in alteri, panis est et calix, quod vobis renuntiant oculi vestri: quod autem fides postulat instruenda panis, corpus, calix vero sanguis est Christi.'" Disputatio IX, P.L. 180, col.280D.
49. Gordon Leff, Medieval Thought from Augustine to Occam, (Saint Albans, 1958) p.113.
tradition stretching back to Augustine and beyond, refused to consider original as a flaw or a fault in the individual but held it to be a punishment brought down by Adam upon himself and subsequently upon all mankind. Such a theory as that, according to William, ignored Christ's exhortation to universal baptism:

He says that we bear the penalty of the original sin of Adam and not the guilt. Why then are infants baptised? For in baptism, as the Fathers have said... the guilt is dismissed; the punishment remains to the practice of life....

 Apparently, as he refused to discuss it further, William considered this proposition so manifestly heterodox as not to need careful consideration or elaborate refutation. Through baptism, he reaffirmed in the tradition of Augustine, the guilt of sin is cleansed. If there were no guilt in the individual, there would be no need for baptism. Yet baptism is a prerequisite for eternal life.

Abelard's theories concerning actual sin, which follow directly and are dependent upon his concept of original sin, posed a more difficult problem for William. To Abelard intention was ever the watchword. The most important facet

50. "Dicit etiam ab Adam originalis peccati trahere nos poenam, non culpam. Ut quid ergo parvuli baptizantur? Sed in baptismo, sicut dicunt Patres...culpa dimittitur; poena ad exercitium vitae hujus manet, quae est moris corporis et caeterae tribulationes vitae hujus." Disputatio XI, P.L. 180, col.281D.
of a sinful act was the intention of the individual acting and that intention alone determined whether or not the person did indeed sin. An act, considered in itself was neither sinful nor sinless. By sin, Abelard did not mean evil act plus evil intention, as traditional ethical thought speaks of it. To him an "evil" action could be blameless if the intention of the person commitment the action were pure. By the same token, an outwardly blameless action could very well be sinful, if the intention of the person acting were sinful. The only determinant whether or not sin had been committed lay in the active consent of one individual to evil, and in the accompanying contempt for God which such an intention presupposed.

He says that nothing is sin except only in consent to evil and in the contempt of God which man has in consent to evil.51

The absoluteness of Abelard's theorem was demonstrated by several examples which William considered significant enough that he listed them but not so irrefutable that he felt called upon to answer them at any length, perhaps feeling that the irregularity of each manifested its own shortcomings. The first concerned the mind. If a person knows no better, no matter what his act, the intention could not possibly be held to be sinful. The act therefore is not

a sin. Overt contempt of God would not be sin if the person did not fully realize the implications of his action.

He says that nothing done through ignorance is sin. He says that whereas a Gentile or a Jew scorns the faith of Christ, he does not sin because he believed the contrary of God (to that faith.)

Similarly physical drives and acts the result of natural drives could not be considered sin since in the desire and sometimes even the illicit fulfilment of these drives, encompassing the act of will which would have had to be made, man was merely following the dictates of nature. The sin was really neither magnified or diminished by whether one did indeed perform the forbidden act but lay in the consent he had given to temptation or withheld once he had recognized temptation apart from nature.

Neither concupiscence, nor evil delights, nor evil will is sin according to him, but nature. "To desire another woman," he states, "or to desire to sleep with another's wife is not a sin. The only sin herein is in consent and contempt of God." He also says that, just as by concupiscience and evil pleasures no sin is committed, so the consent to sin is not magnified by the performance of sins.


53. "Etiam nullam concupiscientiam, nullam delectationem malam, nullam voluntatem malam dicit esse peccatum, sed naturam. 'Concupiscere,' inquit, 'alienam uxorem, sive concumbere cum alterius uxore, non est peccatum sed solus in hoc consensus et contemptus Dei peccatum est.' Et sicut in concupiscencia et delectatione nullum peccatum committi, sic peccatum consensusullo actu peccati dicit augmentari." Disputatio XII, P.L. 180, col.282.
Finally Abelard entertained some unique hypotheses on the tempter himself. Satan, he believed, used physical matter to lead men into sin. Certain objects in the natural order incited certain responses in other things and in men. Satan, of course, was only too aware of this and, in a sort of "conditioned-reflex" theology of sin, thoughtfully provided the proper piece of matter to produce the desired vice.

Then he moves to another question, saying, "At the suggestion of the devil, it is often asked how he is able to tempt men when he does it neither by word nor by a sign. To which we say," he continues, "because he does it by means of physical things: stones and herbs. Just as in nature there is a certain stone which attracts iron or suppresses the sensual, so there are certain other stones and herbs by which desire, wrath and other vices are excited. When the devil wants to furnish desire or wrath or any other vice to someone, he gives him that stone or that herb which he knows possesses that power."54

"This is ridiculous," commented William tersely.

In spite of the fact that his denial of the importance of action in sin aroused the ire of William, it must in all

54. "D i en d e a li a m m o v e t q u a e s t i o n e m s i c e n s : ' D e s u g g e s t i o n e d i a b o l u s o l e t q u a e r i q u o m o d o p o s s i t s u g g e r e r e h o m i n i b u s , c u m n e c v e r b i s , n e c s i g n i s h o c f a c i a t . A d q u e m d i c i m u s , ' i n q u i t , ' q u i a f a c i t h a e c p e r p h y s i c a m r e r u m , l a p i d u m , v e l h e r b a r u m , q u i a s i c u t i n e r a t u r a q u o r u m d a m l a p i d u m e s t f e r r u m t r a h e r e , v e l l a p i d i n e m e x t i n g u e r e , i t a q u i d a m l a p i d e s s u n t , v e l h e r b a e , q u i b u s l i b i d i , i r a , e t c a e t e r a v i t i a e x c i t a n t u r . Q u a n d o e r g o d i a b o l u s v u l t s u g g e r e a l i c u i l i b i d e m , v e l i r a m , v e l a l i a v i t i a , a p p o n i t e i l a p i d e m i l l u m , s i v e h e r b a m , q u a m s c i t t a l e m h a b e r e v i r t u t e m . ' H o c r i d i c u l u m e s t . . . . ' D i s p u t a t i o X , P.L. 180, col.281.
fairness be admitted that Abelard's ethical considerations, for all their shortcomings, did serve to draw the attention of later scholastics to the psychological aspects of ethics and thereby gave foundation to the development of systematic moral theology.

But if one were to accept Abelard's theory that intention alone constituted sin, one would almost of necessity have to follow him into his next step, his teaching on grace. According to traditional theology, man, in order to achieve good, must actively will the good. For this reason was he given free will. Abelard would emphatically agree that far. The doctrine continues, however; in order to accomplish good, God must give the person His Grace — a gift from God of the ability to do the good. If a man cooperates with this gift from God, good will be accomplished. Abelard by his emphasis upon the subjective in sin, repudiated the necessity for grace in every good action. To his mind, again with its emphasis upon intention, the will to good was all that was really important.

He says that we can will and accomplish good through our own free will without the aid of divine grace.55

Upon investigating Abelard's writings on the nature of sin and grace, William discovered he had reasoned himself into an inevitable corner tainted ever so slightly of Pelagianism.

55. "Dicit...quod libere arbitrio, sine adjuvante gratia, bene possumus et velle et agere." Epistola 326, P.L. 182, col. 532.
In his sometimes excessive regard for man's fallen nature (which bears the punishment not the guilt of original sin) Abelard attacked the doctrine that man, whom God has, after all, endowed with a reasonable mind to discern between good and evil, should need any additional supernatural aid to choose and to implement that choice. The traditional doctrine suffered a gaping hole in Abelard's opinion:

If it is so that a man by himself is able to do no good work and that in some way he is not able to raise himself up to receive divine grace (as has been stated) by means of his free will without the help of grace, does it seem that his reason, whereby he shall have committed the sin, should be punished? Isn't he immune from sin if he is not of himself able to do anything good and even more prone to evil than to good?56

Not only would Abelard exempt man from responsibility for his sin if forced to acquiesce to traditional teachings, he would even lay that culpability with the God who made such a creature, a being endowed with a mind by which to distinguish good from evil but devoid of the ability of implementing that choice. "Is not God Who has made man thus, if He

56. "'Quod si ita est, scilicet ut homo nihil ex se boni operari possit, ut aliquo modo ad divinam gratiam suscipiendum per liberum arbitrium sine auxilio gratiae, prout dictum est, se erigere non possit, (267A) non videtur ratiom quare si peccaverit, puniatur. Si enim non potest ex se aliquid facere boni, et talis factus est, ut pronitor sit ad malum quam ad bonum: nonne si peccat, immunis est a peccato?" Disputatio VI, P.L. 180, col.266D.
is to be praised by such a creation, the One more culpable?" inquired Abelard, still theorizing upon the false premise that sin was a state of the mind and confidentially assured of his own position that the truth was not so, but "greatly otherwise."

Without any doubt Abelard's theory of grace seemed both to him and to William a more arduous way of attaining good and hence salvation than the traditional offered. The grace which William and theologians throughout the centuries had preached implied a help, a comfort in the performance of good. To William this comfort carried with it an implication of enveloping, God-given joy which would by its very nature make the act of willing, although in itself difficult and even perhaps unpleasant, a joyful act. Abelard had scant use for anything which carried with it the slightest hint of accompanying happiness, for he viewed joy as an ultimate reward from God to those who had persevered and he considered a way to God that was not difficult and self-determined largely invalid.

"For," he says, "whatever is done with labour and struggle is well done and is deserving of the crown and prize: indeed, what is done with peace and delight deserves nothing." He teaches that. He, as master of morality, writes that:

57. "Nunquid Deus qui talem eum fecit, laudandum est de tali creatione, et non potius culpanus?" Disputatio VI, P.L. 180, col.267A.

As should be obvious from his commentary, William found this aspect of Abelard's theology no less incredible than some of the items already dismissed. In earlier, and especially in later, works William had declared himself inalterably opposed to the idea of such an individualistic road of salvation. "Those who come to God," he later reaffirmed, "must believe that He is and that He rewards all those who seek Him."59 Whereas Abelard's teachings demanded that man can and must distinguish, will and perform good alone and unaided by divine help, William, with Catholic tradition, firmly believed that the human soul can accomplish the good to which it is called only by the help of God and that this help (grace) is unfailingly accompanied by the joy of an obedient child.

It is interesting to note that of the thirteen propositions to which William directed Bernard's attention, nine were condemned by the Council of Sens; four, the definition of faith, the artical dealing with the substance of the Sacrament Abelard's definition of sin, and one misstatement on the nature of the Trinity, were not mentioned by the Council, ten additional statements not attacked by William at all were specifically condemned.60

59. "Primus siquidem accessus ad Deum est fides, dicente Apostolo: Accedentes ad Deum credere oportet, quia est, et inquirentibus se remunerator fit. (Heb.xi,6)" Speculum fidei IX, P.L. 180, col.376D.
60. Mansi, op.cit., v21, col.568-70.
William's chief objection to Abelard's *Theology* must be sought in these articles of doctrine. It was Abelard's either unwitting or deliberate distortion of the doctrines of the Church which enraged the writer of the outspoken *Disputatio*. Yet there was a second criticism of the *Theologia* manifest in William's letter and it is the protest seized upon and magnified out of proportion by those who have maintained William suffered from obscurantist intolerance.

Unapologetically and undisguisedly, William took exception to Abelard's pride, to his thinking that his was the chief and ultimate authority in matters of faith. William complained that Abelard believed his own mind, his powers of reason, to be so acute as to allow him to disregard or to dismiss with no more than a disdainful passing glimpse the data of revelation and the centuries of doctrine and edification of the Fathers, and to twist excruciatingly the minutiae of faith until faith was distorted and even heretical.

At his own licence, (Abelard) forms an image of the Greatest Being. Of that faith formed by the Holy Spirit, handed down by the Apostles, and commended to all the faithful, he discards whatever he wants, he adds whatever he desires making everything new: new words and new dogma of which no one but he himself is the author.61

61. "Ad libitum suum summæ sibi essentiae format effigiem; a forma vero fidei ab apostolis tradita, a Spiritu sancto per ipsos formata et omnibus commendata fidelibus, auptert quae vult, apponit quae vult, nova faciens omnia, nova verba, nova dogmata, quorum nonnisi ipse auctor est." *Disputatio* IV, P.L. 180, col.258.
But can it defensibly be argued that his criticism of Abelard's colossal self-esteem makes William categorically an obscurantist? One important aspect of the so-called antidialectical bias of William toward Abelard was the latter's reckless disregard for the items of faith laboriously hammered out and forged through the centuries. Abelard's penchant for choosing to recognize only those propositions which advanced his own argument and then constructing whole new structures upon incomplete premises elicited from William the following exhortation to Saint Bernard:

When you shall have read all that he bewails, all that he writes, all that he adds on, all he exaggerates, all that he dashes to pieces, all that he teaches, all that he emends you be the judge whether you discern...the pitfalls he digs out.62

As has previously been noted, Abelard seldom allowed himself to become discouraged at whatever gaps might appear in his knowledge of theology but went blithely forward, positing conclusion after doctrinal conclusion on only his own authority. William ventured to remark that, mindful of man's relationship to an infinite God, one might be better advised to accept and admit his own ignorance than to create doctrine out of intellectual nothingness.

63. See page 19.
Master Peter should be reminded that as it is more prudent to be ignorant in certain things, so it is dangerous and exceedingly vain to wish to go beyond these same things by one’s own imagination.64

One must not make the mistaken assumption that Abelard was a clever semi-atheist who took great delight in acting as an irritant to the theologians of his day. On the contrary, he lived in the Church, although twice condemned by the Church, and died professing his faith and sustained by the Sacrament. He was a faithful Catholic and, by the time of the Disputatio, a devout religious who varied from his equally faithful Catholic adversary chiefly in making the crux of his theology his insistence that only by doubting does one come to inquiry and by inquiring does one perceive the truth.65 In many ways he was in advance of his times. Had he been writing even a hundred years later perhaps many of the bitterly condemned passages would never have been contested. Already in 1142 William and the Council Fathers did not agree upon his specific errors. The Council turned their attention to minute definitions and heretical assertions while William pierced more often to the core, to the fundamental theology with which Abelard worked.

64. "Dicendum ergo est magistro Petro, quia sicut cum talibus aliqua ignorare valde tum est; sic in ejusmodi inveniendis tales velle praecedere vanum nimiis et periculosum est." Disputatio IV, P.L. 180, col. 264. Italics mine.

65. Abaelardi Sic et Non, Prologus, P.L. 178, col. 1349B. "Dubitanto enim ad inquisitionem venimus; inquirendo veritatem percipimus."
Part of Abelard's difficulty with both the Council and William came from the fact that in his honest striving to elucidate those things which he considered unnecessarily obscure, he was often breaking new trails and in this he allowed himself as much by uniqueness of his theses as by his own boundless self-confidence to exceed his own carefully defined limits. Disdainful of many of the philosophers and theologians of his day who too often and too bombastically insisted that a text from the Fathers glibly cited definitively proved or disproved a point and eliminated further discussion and who saw no inconsistency in their citations even when one Father might directly contradict another, Abelard refused to wait for heretics and infidels to point up the fallibility of the method. To profess a belief in something of which one had not the slightest grasp was to him an offense greater than admitting one's disbelief.

These professors rush forward in such insanity that while they confess they do not understand something, they do not blush to profess that they believe it: as if faith consisted more in enlarging on words than in the comprehension of the soul, and as if the things of the mouth were greater than those of the heart. They glory so greatly in that they seem to believe such things as they are not capable of discerning with their
mounds or of conceiving with their minds.66

On the other hand, Abelard had no patience with those whom he accused of haughtily refusing to assent to anything which they had not personally been able to demonstrate.

The arrogance of certain [professors] was such that they held that nothing could exist which could not be comprehended or expressed by their small reason....67

Abelard, as his writing demonstrates, could be objective in the extreme about the place of reason in theology. His one over-riding fault throughout his life, and the one upon which William seized, however, was the colossal esteem with which he regarded his own mentality. It was a regard proportionately accentuated as he applied it from the finite to infinity. Furthermore, according to William, Abelard did not serve his own avowed purpose by these mental treks into divine mystery. Far from making doctrine clearer, he only beclouded the more the matter under discussion by his unique hypotheses and similes: His treatment of the Trinity exemplified this:

This is the new theology of a new theologian concerning the Father and the Son: one which vests the holy simplicity of the Christian faith foreign clothing and makes it more obscure while it clamors to be made more clear.\(^{68}\)

Apparently Abelard in his enthusiasm had been wont to dazzle his students with the rhetorical flourishes which dialectics and his brilliant wit afforded. In a moment of impatience William complained to Bernard that in the theology of Abelard the "divine materia is dishonored and subjected to a common trick."\(^{69}\) The pervasive tenor of awe and respect before divine mystery characteristic of William's own theology (which shall later be remarked upon) seemed to him utterly lacking in Abelard. So careful to keep his own investigations from impinging upon what he considered the ineffable and unsearchable majesty of God, William railed against Abelard's readiness to examine any and all facets of divine revelation and, moreover, to call into question the faith of the ages to satisfy a passing, or even trivial argument. The possibility that Abelard had sometimes treated theological questions lightly out of exasperation

\(^{68}\) "Haec est nova novi theologi theologia de Patre et Filio, sanctam Christianae fidei simplicitatem alienis vestiens exuviis reluctatem, et obscuriorem efficiens, dum nititur facere clariorem." Disputatio III, P.L. 180, col.255c.

\(^{69}\) "...et communi artificio subjici designatur divina materia." Disputatio III, P.L. 180, col.255.
the unquestioning pertenacity with slower and duller minds and that he did so only occasionally must be disregarded if one takes seriously William's ensuing observation.

In all this outrage, his madness is not averse but his hand is outstretched toward it.  70

The sympathy which William had been known to have extended to a monk who had innocently let himself be led into overreaching his authority had been withheld from Abelard, who was not only "too clever for his own good"  71 at times but who unrepentantly and repeatedly thrashed deeper into what William considered grave theological misconception.

The difference in William's approach toward a writer who had, he felt, unintentionally slipped into heresy and toward Abelard who seemed to revel in it is staggering and may serve to point up the true motives which impelled William to denounce Abelard so vigorously.

Sometime around 1128, while still abbot of the Benedictine house at St. Thierry, William had come into the possession of a treatise on the Eucharist written by a monk named Rupert. The article was one which the abbot

70. "Et in his omnibus a contumeliis Spiritus sancti non est furor ejus adversus; sed adhuc manus ejus ententa." Disputatio V, P.L. 180, col.265A.
found quite pleasing except that it contained one slight "blemish" which he evidently felt the young monk should correct with all great diligence and haste.

Rupert, apparently well-educated in the secular sciences, (it is entirely possible that he had left one of the schools to enter the religious life) had reasoned that:

The God-Man Christ is living and perceptible to the senses and mobile in his body. The body of the Eucharist, sacrifice, however, has no life, it has no sensibility, it is not mobile. Therefore it is not the body of the Lord.

Just what Rupert had said before or after this which reduced such blatant heresy to the state of a "blemish" is not at all apparent from William's lengthy reprimand. Contrary to his later practice of forwarding offensive tracts to Saint Bernard, William addressed himself directly to the young author, whose speculations were, after all, confined to himself and perhaps a few brethren and not being heralded to one and all from a university. Then, too, it makes a difference whether one is abbot of a prosperous monastery or a simple monk obedient to his superiors.

73. "Vivens et sensibilis in corpore suo, mobilisque est Deus et homo Christus. Corpusuauctem sacrificii vitam non habet; sensuum non habet, mobile non est; corporus ergo Domini non est." De sacramento altaris, P.L. 180, col.345. The order in the English translation is mine to indicate the syllogistic reasoning.
William understood Rupert's prevailing error to be that he had studied and emended the teachings of the Church and the very promises of Christ to fit an Aristotelian syllogism commensurate with data perceptible to the senses. Such gross limitations upon the powers and intellectual correction of the words of God were not viewed by William with limitless sympathy. Evidently feeling, however, that Rupert's zeal had momentarily run away with his good judgement, William was careful to instruct him affectionately and logically, in the spirit in which Rupert had himself written.

Upon beginning and from time to time throughout the work on the sacrament of the altar, William gently reminded Rupert that one must invariably and constantly ponder upon spiritual matters in a spiritual manner (spiritualia spiritualiter pensare).74 One must not allow oneself to lose sight of the Object and End of all such discursive investigation. With the respect for mystery which characterises all his writings and upon which we shall have reason to comment more fully later, William launched upon a discussion of the Eucharist which, typically, was not intended as a vehicle for "debating abstract problems. [He] spoke of the Sacrament as a living reality which the Church daily proposed for [his] adoration."75

74. "Cum ergo sic se habeat res sacramenti, res sicut sunt debemus aestimare, spiritualia spiritualiter pensare." De sacramento altaris X, P.L.180, col.258A.
The entire work is aimed at reminding the other religious of the total self-offering which they had both made and continued to make.

Most of this treatise does not touch upon the problem here being considered and, for that reason, it will not be examined more closely. The point is that William allowed and even implicitly encouraged Rupert to apply what he had learned in the secular schools to his monastic theology — so long as he did so in respect, in reverence, and in faith.

On the other hand, one senses that the crux of Master Peter's offensiveness was not his application of reason but the unbounded pride of the schoolman who leapt with confident deedlessness into any discussion which suited his current fancy with scant trace of any awe. Once he began a debate, invented an explanatory metaphor, or set out to prove his point, Abelard seemed unable to be swerved to the slightest disloyalty to his own inventiveness. "He seems to want to defend utterly everything he says," complained William after Abelard's dogged devotion to his analogy of the brazen seal had produced a triple heresy.

Abelard was not the only philosopher against whose writings William felt obliged to speak. We have seen how he entreated Rupert, who had backed himself into a heterodox corner, to stop to think and by reflection return to

76. "...ut omnino etiam defendere velle videatur quod cicit." Disputatio IV, P.L. 180, col. 257D.
orthodoxy. There were others, however, who, like Abelard, had neither desire nor intention, apparently, of remaining within the Catholic fold. How he dealt with another of the "worldly philosophers" may illustrate still further William's insistence upon adherence to the faith of the Church and the limitation of reason, to its proper sphere not its abandon­ment.

Among the books of "a new brother fleeing from the world and seeking God,"77 William, as librarian of Signy, had found a work by a certain Guillaume78 of Conches intriguingly entitled Summa philosophicae. Upon closer scrutiny the article proved less an objective philosophical compendium than a vehicle for propagating Guillaume's own highly irregular theories — theories alarmingly reminiscent to William of the careless sortees of Peter Abelard into theological mystery. While he considered this new philosopher less significant than Abelard, William evidently did think his doctrine and his method important enough to warrant an answer. Moreover he thought them dangerous enough that they should be forced into the open where they could be clearly viewed by theologians instead of being allowed to remain

77. "Venit enim nuper ad nos frater quidam fugiens de saeculo, et Deum quaerens...." De erroribus Guillelmi de Conchis, P.L. 180, col. 333B.

78. I have used the French form of William of Conches' name to avoid the confusion of two Williams.
hidden in academic recesses to be quietly and persistently taught to eager young students.

After composing a brief resume of his major criticisms against the new Summa, William forwarded the offensive book together with his critique to Saint Bernard. Like Abelard, from whom William was convinced Guillaume had drawn his example, William contended that Guillaume of Conches not only advanced false and heretical doctrine but he also habitually regarded the things of sacred mystery with a supercilious impudence which William not unexpectedly found extremely irritating. While Guillaume had not a particle of the impact upon society academic and clerical that Abelard had, he was using the teachings of Abelard to form a base for his own theories. In so doing he posited conclusions none too cautiously upon the sometimes already shaky premises of Abelard, adding and deducing things which Abelard himself would never have admitted. He was perhaps one of the students who had begun the slow penetration of Abelardian heresy through society.

Although less important than the theology of Peter Abelard, Guillaume of Conches produces a new philosophy, confirming and multiplying whatever the former said and shamelessly adding to it many things of his own which [Abelard] never said. Among those who re-present [Abelard's teachings], this one allows for the falseness of his novelties and besides, a note of glibness in the man makes them cheap and despicable....
This, his doctrine, must be made public. 79

In view of his bitter dispute with Abelard, it is not surprising that William was alert to catch traces of his influence in this new writer and quick to sense great similarities between the two. They were two men with identical shortcomings in William's opinion, except that of the two he considered Peter Abelard by far the superior. Abelard had initiated and Guillaume merely took what he pleased from Abelard's writings and used them to further his own hypotheses. When Guillaume puzzled over something, he turned to Abelard for his authority.

This man whose writings have been sent off and Peter Abelard are of one spirit in their similar ways of talking and of erring. They walk in that same spirit, in the same tracks - to what degree [You] may observe from their writings. They affront the grace of the Spirit when they scrutinise... God in the spirit of this world. They profess the same knowledge, except the one sets the example for the other of what the latter does not know. When one says something, the other carries forward whatever the first feels. 80


Just read the enclosed Summa, William requested Bernard, and Bernard would be the judge whether he agreed with the observations which William had made or whether he could perceive an orthodoxy hidden from William and misread and misinterpreted by him.

May you who read all this works of this man concerning faith and his philosophy about God, which he asserts himself through his own lips, see if [you think] it is utterly sound or rather if it is not utterly unsound and even heretical.  

After he had studied the offensive book more minutely, William altered his verdict: "I shall not say heretical but pagan." Abelard himself, for all his offensiveness, had never deserved such an epithet.

The doctrinal issue which William found most wanting was Guillaume's interpretation of the Holy Trinity.

Abelard, it will be remembered, had left fertile ground for new Trinitarian pronouncements. In the wake of Abelard, Guillaume had assigned to God three attributes: "Therefore there is in the divinity power, wisdom, and will." Each of these attributes he designated as a different Person of the Trinity. The Father he considered to be power, as had

81. "Videant enim qui legunt totum contextum fidei hominis istius, et philosophem de (335) Deo, quam assumpsit per os suum." De err. Guil., P.L. 180, col.335A.
82. "non dicam haereticum, sed ethnicum...." De err. Guil., P.L. 180, col.335A
Abelard; the Son wisdom generated from power; the Holy Ghost, proceeding from power and wisdom, was will, not benignity as Abelard had envisioned Him. In so doing, Guillaume had fallen into the same trap which had ensnared Abelard; he had wittingly or unwittingly divided the Trinity into three distinct attributes, into three instead of One. William had himself earlier spoken of the human memory, reason and will as analogues of the Trinity but he had not meant thereby to divide the Godhead into three separate philosophical entities utterly divorced one from another.84 He had been cautious to remind his readers that the analogy could not and must not be drawn that far. Reading Guillaume's work now he did not need search far for a suitable label for this particular aspect of Guillaume's doctrine, although he really needed no label at all to specify the familiar error:

Here I omit the offensive mark of the Sabellian heresy, meanwhile, which Guillaume has constructed for himself in his mind when he has spoken of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost as God constituted for His power, His wisdom, and His will.85

84. De natura et dignitate amoris, P.L. 184, col. 382CD.
85. "Ubi omittio interim gravem et Sabellianae haeresis notam, quam ipse sibi in caput suum contrahit, cum de Deo dicturus Patre et Filio et Spiritu sancto Deum pro eis potentem, sapientem, volentamque constituit." De err. Guil., P.L. 130, col. 335B.
As his conclusive point in arguing the fallacy of Guillaume's theory on the Trinity, William cited Saint Augustine in his own favour: "'Whatever is in God,' he says, 'is God.'"86 Lest Bernard or anyone else encountering the new philosopher should think he could lightly dismiss him, William was careful to elaborate upon the gulf between orthodox trinitarianism and this philosophical perversion of it. Power, he argued, could not be imputed to one Person of the Trinity and not to Another, or to One unequally or in different measure than to Another. Nor could wisdom, nor will, nor benignity, nor any other of the divine attributes. God is utterly completely and in every way One.

[There are] not three gods but one God.
A potent or powerful Father, potent Son, and potent Holy Ghost; but not three potent beings or powers but one power and one potent Being. The very same must be understood of wisdom, goodness, truth, and charity.87

Guillaume also entertained quaint theories concerning man's creation. Chortling with philosophic condescension over the biblical account of man's creation "out of the dust of the ground" and woman's from the side of man, Guillaume

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86. "'Quidquid,' inquit (Augustinus), 'in Deo est Deus est.'" (Lib.V, De Trinitate, c.7) De err. Guil., P.L. 180, col.335D.
advanced what he considered a vastly more credible and philosophically more plausible hypothesis: God had fashioned man from *Urstoff*, from stellar matter and from "spirits" already existing in the universe, and had implanted a soul once the body had been naturally "created".

Then, describing the creation of the first man philosophically (or rather according to natural philosophy), he says that [man's] body was not made by God but made from nature and that the soul [was] given to it by God as soon as the body had been made from spirits whom he calls demons and from the stars.88

William was not too favorably impressed with either the philosophical possibilities of the new theory or of its author's offhand dismissal of biblical authority. First of all, Guillaume had disregarded the magnificent mystery of human life; he had thought to explain with no hesitation what he considered obvious and "natural." In disregarding the wonder of the creation of humanity, he had ridiculed the simple account in Genesis by interpreting it literally and then rejecting it. A spiritual meaning behind the story, an allegorical manifestation of God's purpose, such as William saw in it did not enter Guillaume's mind. Without trying to understand divine purpose within

88. "Deinde creationem primi hominis philosophice seu magis physice describens, primo dicit corpus (340) ejus non a Deo factum, sed a natura, et animan ei datam a Deo, post modum vero ipsum corpus factum a spiritibus, quos daemones appellat et a stellis." *De err. Guil.*, P.L. 180, col.339D-340A.
the Genesis account, he had rejected it as implausible according to his conception of the natural order.

In [his teachings] on the creation of woman it may clearly be read... how stulte and how proud he is. He ridicules the history of divine authority... and interpreting this in a physical sense, he presents an invention of his own, exceedingly arrogant... lightly esteeming that great mystery.89

Doctrinal novelties aside, Guillaume offended the Cistercian for a second and still Abelardian reason — his boundless and over-meaning self-confidence coupled with his blatant disregard for mystery. His writing evidently conveyed to William his fascination for his own intellect for, after reading the work, William snorted that he was "chattering like Abelard"90 and acting "as if a mystery hidden through the ages were revealed to him."91 Guillaume's intellectual narcissism surpassed Abelard's, leading him to overstep the bounds merely of contradicting the teachings of the Church. He went so far, if we are to credit William's commentary, as to scorn boldfaced the Bible, tradition and contemporary theology.

89. "In creatione vero mulieris palam omnibus legentibus est, quam stulte, quam superbe; irridet historiam divinae auctoritatis; ...Et physico illus sensu interpretans, nimirum arroganter veritati historiae suum praefert inventum, parvipendens magnum illud sacramentum...." De err. Guil., P.L. 180, Col.340A.
For the man falsely given the title "philosopher" and "natural philosopher" philosophises in the manner of natural philosophy about God and... he jests about the Father... and the Holy Ghost. 92

For all his distressing novelties, Abelard’s sincerity and genuine piety had never come into question. With Guillaume it was otherwise. He was not carried away in his quest for truth; he contemned holy doctrine not because he wanted rationally better to understand it but because it simply did not appeal to him personally. There was little doubt in William’s mind regarding the faith of Abelard’s imitator. "If he believed it," William averred, "he would not ridicule it." 93

To compound his odiousness, Guillaume justified his novelties, cautiously mindful perhaps of the unhappy fate of his idol, Abelard, by insisting that "because a thing is not elsewhere written, it is not heresy but, on the contrary, faith." 94 William was not about to concede that just because an article has not been disproved, discredited or disavowed in Holy Writ or Holy Tradition one performed a virtuous action in assenting to that article. Curtly he reminded

94. "Nam enim,' inquit, 'quia alibi scriptum non est, ideo haeresis est, sed si contra fidem est.'" De err. Guil., P.L. 180, col. 335A.
Bernard says:

Paul indeed says, "But though I or an Angel from heaven preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema." [Gal.I,vii]95

Here, as in his letter against Abelard, William constantly reiterated the primacy of faith, the dominance of love, and the demand for awe which one must possess before even contemplating any investigation of theological mystery. The humility which he set as an absolute prerequisite for scholarship stood out in sharp contrast to the arrogance of this scholar. One examined doctrine from within the faith not by darting in and out of traditional teaching as one fancied. When one purported to follow the teachings of a Father of the Church or a prominent theologian, even Abelard himself, one obligated oneself to remain true to these teachings, to reflect and clarify what the master had written and not to go off on some personal tangent.

When we speak about God, let us keep a plan not only of sound faith but also of sound words in faith — just as our philosopher here loves to say about his philosophies. Let us say what we shall of the Fathers and Doctors, and of our own teachers, conveying the sense of their words in our hearts, following in their

steps, presuming nothing of ourselves.96

In treating of Guillaume, William echoes and intensifies his criticism of the method of Peter Abelard: not the use but the misuse of reason; not Abelard or Guillaume's desire to understand his faith but his attempt to reduce his faith merely to what he could understand.

Since its beginnings, William countered, the glory of the Christian faith had been acknowledged to be that an omnipotent, omniscient God had in his mercy revealed to finite man truths concerning Himself. No one by his imagination could have conceived the mysteries of Christianity and no finite mind could really comprehend in every detail even that revelation which it has pleased Almighty God to give.

The apostles and their successors had invariably attributed the gift of knowledge and understanding to God. If then, they freely acknowledged and more, insisted that the source of their wisdom was the charismatic authority bestowed by the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, how could Abelard presume to place himself alone against their teachings in the catholic tradition and hope to escape the scathing rebuke of a profound, sincere and devoutly orthodox Cistercian?

96. "Ut autem cum de Deo loquimur, formam non solum sanae fidei, sed et sanorum in fide verborum teneamur, sicut philosophus hic noster loqui amat ex philosophis suis; sic et nos loquamus quidquid loquemur ex Patribus, et doctoribus, et dotoribus nostris, ipsis corum verbis sensus eorum afferentes, vestigiis eorum inhaerentes, nil de nobis praeumentes." De err. Guil., P.L. 180, col.334BC.
Is it therefore better that he assert anything to us than that which all the Doctors since the Apostles have agreed and consented upon? Isn't it better that it be revealed to him or that he come to find it out through himself than that they, who learned of the Lord, should teach us? Is his wisdom deeper? Is his sense more acute? Is his life holier? Is his authority greater? 97

Reason was to Abelard perhaps the supreme gift of God to man. "All the gifts of the Spirit come from God Who is the Father of lights. For in Him alone is the abundance of things known whose gift is all wisdom." 98 If reason is a gift of God penetrating the mind of man, giving to man a personal, interior revelation as it were, then the ability and the desire to exercise reason in the quest for truth would be inspired of God.

And if inspired by God and receptive to the revelation of God, this ability would be able to be used to investigate divinity. The mind, the residence of reason and the mirror of wisdom, would be able to comprehend the self-revelation of Wisdom Himself. While William would not contradict Abelard in much of this assumption, he did suspect that the determination and the boldness with which Abelard pursued the topic


manifested not so much a personal revelation but a pride which would not admit of shortcomings. Instead of reflecting divine activity, Abelard's methods reflected his growing separation from God.

For whose is it to give reason, to illuminate data for him? This attack is the supreme vanity of a mind excessively distant from God. This presumption in the mind is the pride of his heart. From his cloistered life in imitation of the humility of Christ, William could only rumble in scandle at the arrogance of Peter Abelard.

Before turning to a more detailed investigation of William's opinion of reason, there remains one more aspect of Abelard's thought to be considered in seeking to discern William's motives in attempting to silence him. It was not only the doctrine and the excesses of inquisitiveness with which William found unmitigated fault: there is yet one additional and vital aspect which should not be overlooked in delving into the reasons of William's assault upon Abelard. The "peripetic of Paris" was not merely speculating rather recklessly on theological mysteries and deducing dangerously unorthodox implications regarding them: he was

99. "Cujus enim est rationem dare, ipsius est datam illuminare. Vanissimae mentis est, et nimium elongatae a Deo tentatio ista; superborum mente cordis sui est ista praesumptio." Disputatio VI, P.L. 180, col. 267D.
also propagating these questionable novelties to the impressionable students who flocked eagerly to his popular lecture, to his abbeys and even to his hermitage. The students in turn would instruct others in an ever increasing chain until at length the untutored faithful would have the tenets of their credulous beliefs challenged. And these simple-minded folk were singularly ill-equipped to defend doctrine to themselves let alone to anyone else.

It is one thing, however, to hold a false belief and another to present the truth in such terms as will both enable man of understanding to receive it and also allow those, who lack the power of thought and cannot grasp things as they really are, to hold their opinions less offensively, because of the terms employed. 100

That the dissemination had already begun William noted in his treatise to Bernard. Abelard's stand on the propitiatory death of Christ was already gaining advocates. His students, "as if from his sentences, murmer about, saying...that the advent of Christ in the world was not necessary," 101 Abelard never took this stand but it was one which could be inferred from some of his propositions.

100. "Sed alia est sententia, quod falsum est, opinantium; alia, quod verum est proferentium talibus rerum nominibus, ut et ab intelligentibus veritae possit intelligi, et opinantes, quia res sicut sunt, cogitare vel intelligere non possunt, ex rerum nominibus aliquanto tolerabilius permittantur opinair." Med. orat. VI, P.L. 180, col. 223D.

101. "Quod et scholares ejus quasi ex sententia ejus submurmurant ex propositis quaestionum calumniis dicentes, si auderet, non fuisse necessarium in mundo Christi adventum." Disputatio VII, P.L. 180, col. 269C.
Offensive as his novelties were, Abelard would not have posed the dilemma to William (and hence to Bernard) which he did, had his outrageous investigations been confined to his own scholarly person. As brilliant a scholar as he could pick at mystery, err in logic, and then hold back aloof from total and in some personal commitment to the nuance of his own teachings. The more simple-minded could not and herein lay one of the most decidedly dangerous aspects of his careless speculation - a decidedly anti-social influence which might lead people from the way of salvation. It was a peril which William, concerned as he was with the spiritual life of his and other monks, must surely have had in mind when he took up his pen against Abelard.

For a man that hinders another hastening from earth to heaven, though he keep him not back, yet does great harm to him. 102

These then are the three counts on which William of Saint Thierry felt Peter Abelard to have erred: doctrine, the conclusions to which his non too precise investigations sometimes brought him; pride, the self-confidence with which Abelard appeared to approach God and to attempt solely through his own powers of thought to prove or to disprove the data of divine revelation; and popularity, the adverse

102. "A terris enim ad caelos festinantem qui moratur, et se non detinet, plurimum tamen nocet." Epistola aurea ad fratres de Monte Dei I,1, P.L. 184, col. 311B.
influence which the popular lecturer had and could conceivably increase by his teachings upon the faith of many.  

William of St. Thierry cannot be considered a pious but untutored monk meddling in affairs beyond his ken. He was no stranger to the academic world. For eight years (1105-1113) he had studied at a most important theological centre of the day, the school at Laon, to which scholars from Germany, Italy, and England as well as from all over France flocked. At the time when William was there the most illustrious lecturer at the school was Master Anselm (of Laon), who had himself studied under Anselm of Canterbury during the years when that saint had resided at Bec. Since Saint Anselm, by expanding the use of dialectics in theological studies, was a major contributor to the growth of the scholastic method, it is not at all surprising to find one of his students leading a school whose writing "were already scholastic at the beginning of the twelfth century...if one understands scholastic as characterized not by the use of Aristotle but by the teaching procedures, principally the quaestio applied to the sacra pagina...."  

It is important for our purposes to

103. Leclercq, op.cit.,p.12.
keep this definition of "scholastic" in mind, for it is precisely in the application of the quaestio to the Sacred Scriptures that some claim William found the greatest fault with Abelard.

It would be difficult to believe that William could have studied at such a hotbed of incipient scholastics as Laon for eight years and still have emerged untouched by their methods to the extent that he could assail Peter Abelard vehemently for the same practices which his fellow students and professor had been using for years. Dom Leclercq unequivocally asserts that William had received at the feet of Master Anselm instructions in exegetical methods which "he will surpass, even while using." And Dom Dechanet, noting the consistency with which William throughout his lifetime employed techniques closely akin to those made reknown by Abelard, suggests the possibility that William could very well have found the germ of his own method in the writings of the man he later attacked. "The prodigious science of Abelard facinated him: the method interested him: he is to use it later wisely and with discretion." In several works, including the devastating Disputatio in which he attacked Abelard's teachings, William

ordered his propositions in a careful and methodical fashion strikingly reminiscent of Abelard's own arguments. Noting the similarity of the style used by William not only in the Disputatio but also in other of his theological treatises and that of the "scholastics", could one not conclude that William had been well trained in the Laon dialectical method and had utilized this valuable tool without hesitation to its greatest advantage? If William did, he would not be unique in the monastic tradition. As Dom Jean Leclercq has noted:

All theology necessarily involved some reflection on the content transmitted by tradition.... It is clear that [the monks] did not refuse to use dialectics. This they could not refuse since the use of dialectics in theology is a necessity and had become traditional [by the late eleventh century]. Consequently dialectics in monastic education was the usual complement to grammar.

If dialectics were common in the cloister by the end of the eleventh century (and Leclercq had substantiated the claim amply), it would be folly to suppose that a theologian trained in the "secular" schools would have found it necessary to renounce the method upon entering the novitiate. One must accept William's utilization of this tool and, as becomes obvious from reading his treatises, his mastery of the method.
The charge against William, like that against Bernard, that he denied reason any validity at all in man's search for God has been levelled insistently and is significant enough to merit a more detailed investigation. In doing so, one discovers a division must be made in William's work. Those treatises which he composed while at Saint Thierry and at Signy before the disputation with Abelard are of a different tone than those composed after Abelard's condemnation. 107 The whole character of his spirituality in fact has altered somewhat. While it is conceivable, since William had consistently turned more and more from the Augustinian tradition to that of Origen, 108 that the shift might have occurred even had William never heard of Abelard, the sudden searing attention which he directed toward the rational faculties of the human mind at Signy seems without doubt to stem from Abelard's apparent obdurate contention that by reason alone man could discern God. One can almost believe, with very little imagination, that William was trying to justify Abelard's theses so far as he could in these later works. Writing to the monks of the Charterhouse at

107. Those works written while at St. Thierry and before the confrontation with Abelard are: De contemplando Deo, P.L. 184, col. 265-380; De natura et dignitate amoris, P.L. 184, col. 379-408; De sacramento altaris, P.L. 180, col. 341-365; and Meditativae orationes, P.L. 180, col. 205-248. All other works considered were written at Signy.

Mont-Dieu, after Sens, he reminded himself and his readers that because one is not in complete agreement with another, one must not categorically deny that the other may reflect divine truth in some degree. "Take heed also, servant of God," he admonished the Carthusians, "take heed lest those whom you would not imitate, you seem to condemn." 109

At Saint Thierry William did not concern himself with the role reason might play in man's search for God. He never even defined what the term "reason" conveyed to him. He did not pause in his meditations to assign reason a detailed role. Only in passing did he mention that faculty. In order to understand what his opinion on reason was, one is forced to extract single sentences from whole works. The sense of the assembled citations is identical with his total theology; his consistency before and after Abelard's condemnation is complete. The change in his emphasis is staggering.

William, as has been noted, had divided religious, and analogously all Christians, into three states; animal, rational, and spiritual. 110 Rational man, using his mind, that is his intelligence, to seek God searches on a higher plane than does the person who places his reliance upon his sensual perceptions. Both animal and rational man are

109. "Cave etiam, serve Dei, cave ne quosconque imitari now vis, damnare videaris." Epistola aurea I,11,6, P.L. 184, col.312A

overtaken by the spiritual man who has discovered in himself in God a faculty deeper than either the senses or the "inferior reason."\textsuperscript{111}

If one has been endowed with a keen mind, one would be foolish to deny oneself the exercise thereof. One does not generally leap from animal to spiritual man without passing through the state of rational man. The cause for this, of course, is simple. One must strive to understand what he is to believe. He must try to grasp what it is he professes. Otherwise he assents blindly to something of which he has not the slightest comprehension and which he could not possibly defend to himself or to anyone else. He prides himself upon his piety when actually he is turning deliberately away from God into self-deception and false piety.

\textit{...as Saint Paul says (Rom.\ I, 20), we are inexcusable if we decline to go on from our natural knowledge to the true theology when God has equipped us with the ability to do so. If we refuse to seek the knowledge of God, we are like those who, knowing God, refuse to glorify Him and to render Him thanks. We should}

\textsuperscript{111} "\textit{quae de inferioribus ex ratione consistit...}"

\textsuperscript{Med. orat. \textbf{iii}, P.L. 180, col. 214B.}
be calling ourselves wise when in fact we were fools.112

Reason may indeed lift one toward God. Rightly exercised it carries one from the periphery of sense perceptions inward to greater understanding. But it cannot take one the whole way to the core, to God. The deeper understanding which results from right reason is not a personal apprehension of God; it is knowledge about God. Rational understanding clears away confusion. It clarifies but it does not reveal. Reason's sphere is the revelation of God to man in the natural order, in the world of sense and pattern and logic. God, it must not be forgotten, is greater than His self revelation in nature. One does not attain to God, in time or in eternity, through the natural order alone.

Can reason or rational understanding effect anything? For although reason may send us to You, O our God, it cannot of itself attain to You. Neither does that understanding which, as a product of reason, has lower matters for its field of exercise go any further than does

112. "...sicut dicit Apostolus, quod notum est Dei, id est quantum de Deo, ration potest comprehendere, notum sit illis, ita ut in illis, id est intra seipsis, unde naturaliter Deum cognoscant.... videlicet quia nolunt ulterius procedere vel proficere cum possint, in veram scilicet theologiam; 'quia cum cognoverint Deum, non sicut Deum glorificant, aut gratias agunt; sed evanescunt in cogitationibus suis, et obscurator insipiens cor eorum. Dicentes esse se nem sapientes, stulti facti sunt.'" (Rom. I, xxi-xxii). De natura et dignitate amoris xiv, P.L. 184, col.404D.
Man has been created in the image of God. His Creator has endowed him with certain powers which imperfectly reflect divine perfection. Insofar as human reason shares in divine reason, it may comprehend Divinity; but human reason shares imperfectly in Perfection, finitely in Infinity. "Reason may," therefore, "know only as much about God as it contains of God in itself."\textsuperscript{114}

Above the natural revelation of God there is the supernatural. God has made known to mankind things about Himself which no one, however acute his mentality, could ever have reasoned out from the natural world of sense data. That God is triune, that God is love, do not enter into a philosophical concept of God arrived at without God's supernatural revelation. For understanding of these supernatural truths, one must look not to his own ability logically to compile tactile facts but to the authority of those vehicles chosen by God to reveal His truth: the Scriptures, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, the Church herself. That Christian

\textsuperscript{113} "Quid ratio potest? quid intelligentia rationalis? Nam etsi ratio, Deus, nos ad te mittit, per se tamen te non attingit; nec intelligentia ea quidem, quae de inferioribus ex ratione consistit, rationis terminos excedit, nec mensuram habet pertingendi usque ad te." Meditativae orationes iii, P.L. 180, col. 214BC.

\textsuperscript{114} "Ratio potest comprehendere, notum sit illis, ita ut in illis, id est intra semetipsos." De natura et dignitate amoris xiv, P.L. 184, col. 404C.
doctrine which one cannot excogitate for himself and then accept, he must accept on authority and then examine. "Knowledge is gathered by reason and understanding. Faith truly is disclosed only by authority."\(^{115}\)

In moving from one sphere to another, one does not cast out the helpmate of the former, lower level. One does not actually move steadily upward but fluctuates incessantly between these levels of understanding. What one studies, one seeks to comprehend. What one seeks to understand one accepts and studies. Reason judges upon what has been accepted in faith. Authority informs the reason whether or not it has overstepped its bounds. Confidently and with no inconsistency, William could assert "faith and reason and authority alike all teach me."\(^{116}\)

Man has not the initiative in his search for God. True, he must desire to know God better but that very desire is enkindled in man by God Himself. To this call, if he will, man responds, doing simultaneously his will and God's because his own will strives to conform to the divine will. Similarly if one desires to go on from rational understanding to a more complete understanding, one must look for God to provide the means. And he does so with His love.

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116. "Nam cum et fides et ratio et auctoritas cogitare me docent..." *Meditativae orationes ii*, P.L. 180, col.210C.
[Love] is the brightness of the everlasting light and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty and the image of His goodness. And unless she first come to us and His favor prevent us, the effort of our understanding, whatever it be, avails us little or nothing.\textsuperscript{117}

Without love, reason puts its trust solely in itself. The unloving rational man claims and believes that the human mind alone can know all things; that of all the wisdom of the ages, it unaided can partake, understand, and communicate. Every age has had its share of rationalists the twelfth century unexcepted. Pride, the danger to the Christian of this spirit, is so well known as to be almost a platitude. Without love, man's fallen nature refuses to admit its own less than perfect state.

Whereas knowledge puffs us up, love builds us up. So it is necessary to have more than mere knowledge which leads to curiosity, vanity and self-ostentation. Reason, unaided by love, can lead us only to pride.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{117} "Candor est enim lucis aeternae, et speculum sine macula Dei majestatis, et imago bonitatis illius; et nisi ipse prior ad nos veniat, et nisi gratia ejus nos praeventiat, parum aut nihil nos promovet conatus quilibet nostri intellectus." Meditativae orationes xii, P.L. 180, col.245D.

\textsuperscript{118} "Scientia vero inflat, caritas edificat. Aut ergo in hujusmodi exquirendis elaborant, ut tantum sciant; quod tantummodo servit curiositati, aut, ut videantur, sive sciantur scire; quod servit vanitati. Et hoc eorum studium tantum potest proficere, et in alta se extollere, quantum potest ratio sine amore. De natura et dignitate amoris xiii, P.L. 184, col.404B.
In the healthy Christian faith and reason are each one spiritual eye directed toward God.\textsuperscript{119} The eye of reason has a certain logical pattern by which it sees; faith leaps from its failures and ignorances to understanding. Reason goes from what God is not to what He is; faith and love do not bother with what God is not but penetrate straight to what He is. Reason is cautious while love is enveloping. Although reason is a part of the Mind of God, it is but a tiny part. Love is a share of the Love of God, but an imperfect share. The two eyes must focus together if spiritual sight is to be gained.

And when I say that these two help each other, I mean that reason instructs love and love enlightens reason. Reason merges into the affectivity of love and love consents to be limited by reason. Then it is they can achieve great things.\textsuperscript{120}

By the same analogy, the eye cannot really perceive an object until it has been in some way transformed into that object. When the two eyes of the spirit have begun to discern God, the spirit begins to be transformed into the image of God. It begins to do and to will only that which God wills. It learns what it is to attain to the vision of God.\textsuperscript{121}

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\textsuperscript{119.} \textit{De natura et dignitate amoris} viii, P.L. 184, col.393.
\textsuperscript{120.} "Cum tamen, ut dixi, invicem se adjuvant, et ratio docet amorem, et amor illuminat rationem; et ratio cedit in affectum amoris, et amor acquiescit cohiberi terminis rationis; magnum quid possunt." \textit{De natura et dignitate amoris} viii, P.L. 184, col.393CD.
\textsuperscript{121.} \textit{De natura et dignitate amoris} viii, P.L. 184, col.394.
\end{flushleft}
One knows God insofar as one is like God and one is like God insofar as one knows Him.

That for the abbot of Saint Thierry resolved any problem. Beyond reason lay the exclusive domain of faith. Together faith and reason could accomplish wonderful things but reason without faith and without love doomed itself to vain frustration. That not everyone seriously interested in finding Truth shared his viewpoint may have come as quite a shock to William. Surely he realized that there were many who through lack of love, lack of discipline or lack of instruction were not the slightest bit interested in learning better to know God. But that anyone who sincerely wanted to know God and understand the things of God should not feel called to and respond to this love may have been a bit of a jolt. William was personally so deeply in love with God that he suffered the short-sightedness of those completely in love who fail to understand that not everyone shares this love nor find the Lover as irresistible as does he.

When William encountered in Abelard a man the emphasis of whose theology was not loving immersion in God but intellectual comprehension about God, he was forced to the realization that not every earnest theologian did share his total self-oblatory devotion. This is not to say that Abelard did not love God — he did. In his letters to Heloise he constantly but vainly exhorted her to abandon her infatuation for him in favour of the perfect and unfailing
love of Christ. As becomes obvious from William's post-Abelardian writings, however, he believed that Abelard regarded the powers of human mentality and most especially his own so highly that his pride would not allow him to make that submission to the enveloping love of God which Love demands. With patient and minute attention, William in his later writings turned to what he had discovered to be a dilemma for some like Abelard — the proper place of reason in the spiritual order.

Suddenly one is inundated with passages on faith and reason and far from having to pluck observations hidden in paragraphs on other topics, the reader must sort the most pertinent from amid the manifold pronouncements on the subject. For the first time William felt obliged to define reason. The interpretation which he gave assigned a high place indeed to a faculty which many accuse him of having categorically rejected. Reason is nothing less than that unique blessing of mankind "which by making a mortal creature rational, makes it a man." Reason encompasses truth, desire, obedience, contemplation. It is

...an upward gazing of the mind wherein by itself and not by the body it contemplates truth;

123. "quid ipsa ratio, quae animal mortale faciendo rationale, hominem perficit." Epistolae II, ii, P. L. 184, col. 340B.
or it is that very contemplation of truth, or the very truth that it contemplates, or it is life according to reason, whereby it is conformed to the truth contemplated. 124

The progression from discernment through the senses to understanding through reason and finally to apprehension by the "heart" carries through all William's writings.

Although God surpasses all time, all place, and all knowledge, He may in some measure be comprehended by reason "which is a far more true and surpassing thing than may be felt in any manner of feeling." 125

Reason is that divinely implanted faculty which differentiates man from the beasts. It is that faculty which allows him to have mastery over all other creatures and, unlike any other creature, over himself. Since reason has been given man by God, the use of reason is a virtuous action which may expect results.

124. "Ratio vero sic definitur a deficientibus, vel describuntur a descriptentibus: Aspectus animi est, quo per se ipsum, non per corpus, verum intuetur: aut ipsa veri contemplatio aut ipsum verum quod contemplatur, aut vita rationalis aut rationale obsequium, in quo conformatur veritati contemplatur." Epistolae aurea II, ii, P.L. 184, col.341B.

125. "(Deus) excedens omnen locum virtute naturae illocalis, aeternitate vero omne tempus quod vel ratione vel opinione comprehendit potest: quae longe verius est et excellentius, quam quo libet sentiendi genere sentiatur: Certius tamen sensu humilis et illuminati amoris, quam quodlibet cogitatu rationis attingitur, et semper melius est quam cogitatur; melius tamen cogitatur quam dicitur." Epistolae aurea II, iii, 24 P.L. 148, col.353.
Now no exercise is more worthy and profitable to the man who has reason than exercise in that best part of him and that whereby he has pre-eminence over other creatures and over other parts of himself and this is the mind or spirit.  

Insofar as the sensible world is concerned, reason is man's truest and best tool. Not to exercise reason would be not only foolish but a rejection of God's distinctive gift to man. God has ordained that things of the natural order should be investigated by the reason. Ratiocination is a praiseworthy, utterly natural and necessary function of man. "All," not some, "discerning of rational things comes of the inquiry of reasonings." The keener his mind, the greater the obligation of the individual to utilise that gift in seeking to understand God's world. The greater the gift, the greater the responsibility to the Giver.

God's purpose in bestowing rational faculties on man was to enable man to search for truth. God did not grant a gift whereby man may investigate what he sees, may search for truth, and then deny him the right to use it. God does ask that the gift be offered up but He does not ask that it be ignored or suppressed. Likewise God does not give man

126. "Nullam vero dignius et utilius exercitium est homini eam habenti, quam in eo quod melius habet, et in quo caeteris animalibus, et caeteris partibus suis praeminet, qua est ipsa mens vel animus." Epistolae aurea, II, ii, P.L. 184, col. 341C.

127. "Deinde per inquisitionem ratiocinationum quaelibet discretio rationabilium." Epistolae aurea, II, iii, 21, P.L. 184, col. 352A.
this faculty for investigating and the concomitant desire to attain to truth and then capriciously withhold truth from it. "Reason seeks; reason finds."¹²⁸ Reason is God's gift of the means to know.

The mind of man is, by its very nature, always seeking after truth and reason is its natural means of attaining the truth.¹²⁹

The monk, as every Christian who seeks God, must "dare also sometimes to be wise."¹³⁰ To disavow reason would be to refuse to investigate the truths which God has revealed, to turn one's back on the natural, i.e. The God Given, means of attaining the wisdom God has intended man to have. Not to look unto what one professes is not, as some would have it, a piously virtuous exercise but self-deception and presumption of the highest order. There are those, of course, whom God has not given the means of probing their faith. For these simple folk who through lack of intelligence or lack of opportunity or lack of guidance have never grown and never shall grow higher than the state of animal man, the simple profession of faith, illustrated generously with homely moral tales told by the parish priest not only is


¹²⁹. "Menti siquidem ad inquisitionem veritatis naturaliter semper tendenti, sicut finis solet esse querendi, inventio ipsa veritatis, ad quam tenitur; sic via ad inveniendum solet esse ratiocinatio, qua veritas inventur." Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 375D.

sufficient but most praiseworthy. For those who, perhaps well educated or totally uneducated, possess a "simple childlike faith" in spite of questions or inquiries, this is beside the point. These are those whom William addresses. 131

Those who could go on to greater understanding, the greater bulk of Christian men, and who did not, William bATED for deluding themselves that they knew or accepted the faith when actually they wallowed in lethargy and professed a lightly held creed which would never withstand temptation and one which, because contrary to the natural means of understanding with which God has endowed them, would never carry them into His nearer presence.

As for those who are too lazy to look more deeply into the faith...they do not know what faith is. If they did, they would certainly take care to understand what they believe. 132

Those of "simple faith" receive their understanding directly from God. It is "an instruction which often makes nonsense of the human reasoning." 133 These are they who spring from animal to spiritual man without needing to pass through the state of rationality. Theirs is a unique vocation,

132. "Neglegenti enim et hebati sufficit interim fides a caene...necienti utique quid sit fides; quod si sciret, daret certe operam intelligere quod credit." Spec. fid. P.L. 184, col. 378C.
133. "ad quod docendum, si non adsit ipse Spiritus et docenti et discendi; deficient perstrepentes rationum ratiocinationes." Spec. fid. P.L. 184, col. 378D.
not granted to many but one which carries its own rewards and its own shortcomings. Contemplatives, be they monastic or involved in the busiest of secular tasks, bask in the glory of God, adore and worship Him. But, in all fairness William had to admit that they were not socially "useful" in combating heresy or propagating the faith.\textsuperscript{134} Of course, by the nature of their calling they were not supposed to be. In the Church there is a "diversity of gifts." The fact that William chose in his later works to stress the gift of godly learning when previously he had emphasised the contemplative almost exclusively only indicates the sudden concern which Abelard's heterodox apologetics had probably caused him.

It is one thing to have simple faith and with it the savor of its sweetness in the heart, but quite another to understand what one believes and to be prepared to give an account of one's faith and explain it to others. Simple faith is far removed from temptations and has a sweet savor but it does not give light to others.\textsuperscript{135}

It may be for the simple reason that William was one of those souls who felt more called to savor than to illuminate that he had so long almost ignored the role of reason. He

\textsuperscript{134} Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 379C.
\textsuperscript{135} "Aliud enim est habere simplicem fidem, et fructus ejus simpliciter in corde capere suavitatem: aliud intelligere quod creditur, et paratum esse semper ad reddendum de fide rationem. Simplex fides sapit, sed non lucet et est a temptationibus remotior." Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 379C.
did possess the acumen to appreciate, however, that there were those who shifted all the emphasis to the other side of the balance and he was graced with the solicitude to correct the overbalance in either direction. One must not forget that William was one of the leading if not most prominent theologians of his day. He had studied long and successfully the methods of investigating the faith and had arrived at the state of "savoring" God as the climax of a long intellectual as well as affective struggle. His logical progressions reflect the schoolman. His delicate interweaving of thought which defies systematization manifests the contemplative so caught up in the glory of God he cannot wait to drive home his point through logical sequence.

Human reason has two forms, argued William the philosopher: Natural reason, or simple rationality, possessed by every man and utilized every day in all manner of common problems; and a perceptive rational mind directed wholly and only to questing for God and His truth.\footnote{Epistola aurea II, 11, 12, P.L. 184, col. 346C.} The goal to which reason is meant to direct itself is truth — to know, to recognize, to contemplate that which really is. Reason is not its own justification; it has been given man not that he may entertain himself manipulating it or indulge in toying with trivial mental gymnastics, but to lift man to something worthy of his grandeur and like himself. To the
free will of rational man belongs the choice whether he will use this God-given reason to its intended use or waste it away.

There is one understanding that comes of the force of natural reason and another from the virtue of a rational mind. The one denies not itself to the things of the world, be they vain or sober; the other fastens itself only to worthy things and those that are like to itself.137

Any exercise of this gift of reason which leads its possessor toward truth, toward an apprehension of God's world and therefore onward to God would, one gathers, fit William's category of the "virtue of a rational mind." It is more the ultimate than the immediate objective that concerns him. And while he manifestly held the religious life to be the most perfect expression of man's loving search for his Creator, he never criticized the secular life in se. If he had, for example, been convinced that Abelard's writings represented a sincere search for God and not more a deliberate self-aggrandizement, William would not, I believe, have attacked him as he did.

To the will of the individual belongs the choice whether he will offer this gift to God back to God to receive it

137. "Sed alius est intellectus ex vi naturalis rationis, alius ex virtute mentis rationalis....Ille saeculi rebus et seriis et nugatoriis se non negat: hic autem non nisi dignis se rebus, et similibus sibi se ipsum accommodat." Epistola aurea II, i1, 12, P.l. 184, col. 346C.
renewed and enriched or keep it for his own limited and selfish ends. Those who choose to serve God and search for God submit their questioning to Him and to the authority of His revealed agencies. Those who do not, refuse any but their own authority and, in the course of their petty investigations, may come even to doubt and to attack the faith which God has called them to understand.

Reason would then seem to be two-fold, either attacking faith or defending it.... It can hesitate to believe anything which does not belong to its own authority or it can submit all doubts to authority.138

The same authority on which William had insisted at Saint Thierry appears again with an imperativeness even more forceful than that which he had earlier had. Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition cannot be disregarded even to the slightest degree. One's own personal opinion, his own philosophical or prejudicial bias cannot be chosen in preference to doctrine hallowed by God's Church throughout all ages. Employing a simple metaphor, William likened the obstinate to travellers who pursue their own private path to heaven by turning away from the road along which God has directed them to come.139 They have gone off on a disastrous byway from

139. Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col.374,375CD.
which they may escape only in returning to the beginning and setting out again — to accepting on faith the word of authority.

In its investigation of the data of faith, the reason may doubt, in fact inevitably will doubt, some of the facts offered to it. The human mind by its very nature "prefers to investigate the truths of faith through its natural means" and some of the faith will not conform to natural understanding. No soul will be damned because it has doubted. No soul will be denied the ultimate vision of God because of that momentary incredulity which is simply part of its nature. The Mother of God, even while accepting and assenting to the word of the angel, paused to inquire "how shall this be accomplished?" but she did not deny the truth of the message. Even so must man not presume to deny what he may doubt or may not understand of the truths of faith. By the help of a well disposed will and the grace which God will always give him, the mind of man may still, in doubt, incline toward God and slowly learn the understanding which is not native to himself.

A person honestly seeking understanding and completely surrendered to God's will and already far advanced in the devoted service of God may at any time err from the divine

140. "Menti siquidem ad inquisitionem veritatis naturaliter semper tendenti...." Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 375D.
path by encountering questions apparently incomprehensible and unanswerable. It is not only the careless and the superficial whom doubt assails. Whether the inevitable doubt accosts one at the outset or after he has begun the journey to understanding — to God — the best remedy is "to commit oneself to divine authority" and believe.

Mindful perhaps of Abelard's unhappy and oft frustrated intellectual search for God and reflecting perhaps upon personal experience, William conceded that the surrender to faith without hesitation even in the midst of doubt was no simple task. Dependent upon his own strength, man could never do it. Seen from the natural plane, total renunciation to faith is completely unnatural. But on the supernatural level, from God's viewpoint, self surrender becomes if not easy then possible through the help of His grace.

It is greatly difficult and never without the great help of God's grace that one is able to succeed in believing without hesitation and without motives which satisfy natural reasoning: to believe and to love, believing to love and to love to believe.

The two uses of reason — defending or attacking the faith — divide on this very issue. The attacker refuses to

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142. Spec. fdi., P.L. 184, col. 373D.
143. "Nili melius animus regendum se credit et committit, quam divinae auctoritatis:" Spec. fdi., P.L. 184, col. 373D.
144. "Magni quippe exercitii est, nec sine magno auxilio gratiae Dei efficaci potest, non accepta ratione, absque hesitatione, quod credendum indicitur, credere et amare, et amore crediti ipsum credere amare." Spec. fdi., P.L. 184, col. 376B.
assent to anything which does not belong to his own author-
ity and shrivels into a mockery of itself; the defender
submits his doubts to authority and grows.145 Those who
will not believe require tactile signs, tangible proofs,
before they will assent to anything at all. Even those who
do believe hesitate to make the leap from what they can prove
to what they must accept unproved and undemonstrable. To the
human will, to that free choice of man, belongs the decision
whether or not the gift of reason will be surrendered to God
and received back or snatched up to be consummed selfishly;
to be used to comprehend God or to be flaunted to glorify
oneself.146

The will chooses and leads the mind. The mind seldom
preceeds and draws the will after it. Rational inquiry may
lead from disbelief to faith but only if the will has made
that choice, freely and without impediment. No amount of
scholarly learning, although it may dispose the mind to faith,
will take a person one step nearer God unless he wants to go.
"It does not seem that reason draws the will to faith but
that the will draws reason."147

God will not strike down those who deny his sovereignty
and pervert His gifts to self-centred or heterodox ends.

145. Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col.374G.
147. "Quia non tam ratio voluntatem, quam voluntas trahere
videtur rationem ad fidem." Spec. fid., P.L. 184,
col.376A.
Similarly will He not coerce a person into surrender. Many who have hesitated to offer themselves and their gifts back to the Giver have demanded that He manifest to them some tangible proof of the need for absolute faith. They will acquiesce when God has demonstrated to them the logic of surrender. The soul who does will to follow God, to offer self to God, finds this no less an awesome step. When the mind recognizes that it has reached a zenith beyond which it cannot pass, it may turn upon faith, attacking it as irrational, as some have done, or, making the leap to faith, may submit all its doubts to authority and continue upward — not by the natural means given to reason but by the supernatural given by faith. William never claimed that, although an imperative, this was an easy transition.

"Unbelievers ask for signs and those who do seek wisdom hesitate to make an act of faith."\(^{148}\) Returning to the analogy of paths and deviations, William compared the exchange of faith for reason to a wanderer leaving the obvious path to take a shortcut. The road of reason looks straight and seems to lead directly to God. When that path has been abandoned for the short cut pointed out by God, that is, when faith has superceded reason, the person may regret having left the straight path. What a lot could have been learned that must now remain unknown or viewed from the

\(^{148}\) "Infideles signa petunt; hesitantes sapientiam requirunt." Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 381A.
other end, as it were. Better than man, however, God knows the dangers and limitations, the pitfalls and boundaries of the seemingly straight rational path and insists that only the short-cut is the one true, unfailing route.

The mind inevitably feels discomforted when it is brought to assent by a road unfamiliar to reason. But faith insists that reason shall leave its natural way and come by a short-cut, with the help of grace.\(^{149}\)

The basis for this fear to take the short-cut or for refusing to leave the straight path are myriad. The reasons behind which men hide are even more plentiful. Basically, when all rationalization, all self-justification, and all self-deception stand exposed for what they are, the refusal comes down to a flawed conception of God predicated by man's aversion to conceding that anything or anyone is greater or could be greater than the human being. Anyone who implicitly accepts this hypothesis, however vehemently he deny or disdain it, cannot surrender because he shuts his eyes to the Person Who demands surrender.

The weak and the clever, who perceive the things of God with difficulty, are likely to find faith repulsive to their reason and habits of thinking. Sometimes it is their

\(^{149}\) "Cumque mens abducta a via naturae in viam gratiae per aliam viam miratur se reduci in regionem suam, aptans tamen se ad credendum, hoc est de rebus fidei cum simplici assensu cogitandum, vim illico patitur recurrentis naturae...." Spec. fide., P.L. 185, col. 375D.
faith which is weak, sometimes their intelligence. 150

There can be little doubt that William was thinking of Abelard as he continued:

Often without wishing to, they measure the infinity of divine power by the yardstick of a weak human understanding. They feel that God cannot be and cannot do otherwise than as the human mind conceives of His Being and His actions. They take the mysteries of faith contained in Holy Scriptures to be figments of the human imagination. 151

Mindful of those very dangers to which he believed Abelard had succumbed and into which Guillaume of Conches had impelled himself, William never seemed to tire of warning that overemphasis upon the rational faculties of man may present serious if not insurmountable obstacles to the growth of the soul toward its destined end. As he had exhorted his monks at St. Thierry and pointed out to Saint Bernard about Abelard, William continued to insist upon the limitations of the divine gift of reason.

As we have seen, rationality, itself disquieting, is often a hindrance to faith even while not actually contradicting it. It tries to strike out toward attaining a knowledge of

150. "Infirmi quippe ingenii, sed infirmioris fidei homines animales, non percipientes, aut vix percipientes ea quae Dei sunt, licet repugnante ratione fidei rationi et consuetudini humanae;" Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 372B.

151. "...seepre etiam nolentes, quasi infinitatem divinae potentiae metiuntur de infirmitate sensus humani, seu fidei suae, quasi suggerente natura humana et sensu ejus." Spec. fid., P.L. 183, col. 372C.
divine things when actually it is powerless to being...152

With characteristic urgency William, the monk at Signy, echoes his earlier contention that before one can attain to a closer knowledge of God to which he, by the mercy of God, is called, before he can pass through the door which separates him from God and hides the sight of God from him, he must stoop beneath the low gateway of authority.153

Anyone truly seeking God does not hesitate to abase himself by bowing under the low lintel of faith and authority because he is so taken up with the glory of what he senses awaits him that he gladly and willfully submits. The proud man, the person who must know in advance every detail of what he does, who must ponder all the advantages and disadvantages, who thinks that divine justice must conform to his sense of justness, may well dally his admittance in beatitude away.

When a proud man is called to faith and invited in at the narrow door, he will stop to question the doorkeeper as to why he should be allowed in and another refused admittance. He spends so much time arguing on the threshold

152. "Rationalitas enim, sicut dictum est, in seipsa inquieta et improba, ubi ratiocinandi habet facultatem, fidem saepius aggreditur, etse non studio contradicendi sed natura ratiocinandi;" Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col.378B.
that he is eventually left outside altogether. 154

The picture of the dialectician comes through all too clearly to allow one to think William had not Abelard in mind.

Reason is a valid tool for gaining knowledge about God but it cannot take one to the knowledge of God. "Faith is our first step toward God." 155 Without faith under authority, one can never, try though he may, approach the divine Godhead. The necessity for this is obvious: man has a glorious mind, formed in the image of God, but man's mind is only finite, only an imperfect image of Perfection itself. Reason may know only as much about God as it contains of God. Man had turned away from God deliberately and incurred the penalty of a sinful nature. Sin has created a blot on the human mind whereby it is not in a position truly to grasp the truth and is not, therefore, of itself able to undertake its own salvation. 156 By means of his mental powers, man may begin but not until he lifts himself above himself through faith may he begin to see the infinite, invisible things of God.

154. "Venit enim ad ostium fidei superbus et elatus, et dum vocatur ad credendum et invitatur ad ingrediendum, stat et disputat contra ostiarium cur, alio admisso, alius excludatur; donec justo judicio ostiarii clauditur ei ostium." Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 370B.
156. Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 386B.
Faith to William, far from being the "estimation of things not apparent,"157 is to recognize the ineffable majesty of God and the smallness of oneself. It is to receive a proper appreciation of one's own worth by being able to appraise oneself from a detached point of view, by viewing oneself, as it were, from God's vantage point and not from one's own. To know oneself is truly to inculcate humility within oneself — not the false humbleness that simpers about unworthiness and shortcomings and secretly prides itself of its virtue, but the deep interior humility of accepting oneself in the scheme of God's world for holding the place which one does in fact hold.

While Saint Bernard often spoke of knowing oneself as a recognition of the miserable plight of humanity, William to the contrary evaluated self-knowledge as an appreciation of the grandeur of humanity, the glory of being a man, above the beasts, the image of God, endowed with a mind and a soul which may elevate him to his Creator. "O image of God," he wrote before his dispute with Abelard, "recognize your dignity and may the image of your Creator shine in you. You see yourself vile, while you are precious."158 One dare not minimize the esteem with which William regarded the place of mankind in the creation. On the other hand one dare not exaggerate this esteem and in doing so ignore the limitation

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157. See Abelard's definition of faith, page 12.
which he places on man's fallen nature. It is precisely in accepting oneself for what one is — the image of God and a miserable sinner — that one can gain the purity of heart, the humility which is the rock basis of the assent to God. First and foremost the profession of faith produces this humility. We have God's own "promise that the pure of heart shall see Him. And it is faith alone which purifies the heart."159

The man who will not stoop under the gateway of authority to the fast profession of faith cannot advance spiritually to God. And if there is no advance in the spiritual life there must needs be retrogression. Living organisms, physical or spiritual, cannot stand still. If one refuses to respond to the call to come up higher, one puts his will in opposition to God's and steps backward. To refuse to make the act of faith is to reject God's proffered grace and to return to the severely limited means of man's fallen nature without divine help. The rational man who encounters the call to become spiritual man and turns away is more likely to sink back to the state of animal man than he is to remain in the stage of rational.

159. "Species namque summi boni ad amorem sui et cognitio-
nem naturaliter semper suscitat et trahit omnem ration-
alem intellectum, quo mundiorem, eo jam sibi propin-
quorem, eo ardentiorum ad videndum, quod videndum
beatis mundi cordibus promittitur: quod nonnisi
mundis cordibus videtur." Spec. fid., P.L. 184,
col.368D.
He who refuses to accept the discipline of faith falls from the way of grace and is reduced to the way of corrupt nature and is made an animal man, who cannot perceive those things which are of God. 160

Although it is altogether salutary that a man should examine his beliefs by means of reason, the man of faith will realize that the rational is not the final, ultimate judgment.

Faith must both precede and follow reason. Faith teaches reason what its proper subject is and reason teaches faith to order its credence. By accepting the authority of God's own revelation, one accepts the limitations of his own nature in the humility of objective understanding.

But the man of real faith, if... tempted to subject the truths of faith to merely rational inquiry, will straight way meet the temptation by refusing to give his assent to the thought. Being a faithful servant of divine authority, he contents himself first with the faith as it is taught by men...that flesh and blood reveals. 161

160. "In quo qui non recipit disciplinam, perit cito de via gratiae, et reducitur in viam corruptae naturae et efficitur animalis, qui non percipit ea quae Dei sunt." Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 376BC.
Reason does not, however, teach faith to the point of bringing faith to understanding because that understanding does not come from the human side. Through faith, reason looks for understanding to come down from God, the Father of Lights. Understanding even apparently arrived at by rational inquiry is a gift from the throne of God and a reward of faith not a merely natural conclusion to which one would have succeeded if he had had no faith.

Every generation, every individual must make the discovery that the first father of man, Adam, had to learn. The judgment of reason is not strong enough to free him or his descendants from the "spirits of blasphemy and fornication." The more Adam struggled, the stronger became their hold on him. So it is with every man. So long as he places all reliance upon himself and rejects the help of God, man fights a losing battle.

Possibly bending backward to credit Abelard's thesis as much as possible, William divided faith into two categories, too. Faith is the same, imperative to salvation and absolute in its surrender, but in its effects it varies. The first faith consists of natural faith revealed by men. The second is the supernatural revealed by God alone. The one without the other is incomplete. This echo of William's

162. Meditativae orationes ii, P.L. 180, col. 210B.
163. "Fornicatio vero et blasphemia inter omnia temptatonum pestes...." Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 377C.
earlier analysis of reason. Natural man may know God within
the natural order but he will never know God above nature,
God as God is, without the gifts of grace and accompanying
faith. Natural faith is a shadow of perfect faith, a mirror
which reflects but does not allow the viewer to see clearly
the glory of God's presence. Natural man sees through a
glass darkly while God prepares him for the clarity of the
eternal beatific vision.

...There is a faith which flesh and blood
reveal and a faith which our heavenly Father
Himself reveals. The one is not the other.
But it is only in their effects that they
differ. By means of the first we are taught
what to believe, the second enables us to
understand what we believe. The first is
our tutor in religion and a teacher to our
weakness. The second gives us the perfect
liberty [of being God's children].

At Signy, William broadened and deepened his concept of
the souls advance to God. Before encountering the hesita-
tions of Abelard, before entering the Cistercian order, he
professed his belief in the love of God and his personal
response to that love. At Signy he reflected more and more
upon the mystery of that divine love and the incomprehensi-
bility of man's vocation to return love to Love. "He lives

164. "Altera siquidem est fides, quam revelat caro et
sanguis; altera quam revelat Pater qui est in caelis.
altera non est altera. Hædem fides, sed alterus
affectus. Illa docet quid sit credendum; ista fidei
suum suggerit intellectum et plenam intellectus
etymologiam, cum qui credit intus in affectu cordis
legit quod credit. Illa pedagogus est, tutor vel
auctor humanæ infirmitatis; ista vero ipsa est
hereditas et perfectio libertatis." Spec. fid.,
P.L. 184, col.378CD.
he sings its joys. The means to God become two and yet inextricably one — faith and love.

There is a knowledge about God which comes from faith, and another which comes from love or charity. The first belongs to this life, the second to eternal life.

The difference is not kind but degree. Faith is brief understanding through love in this life; charity is understanding through love in eternity. Without intense love and intense faith, man is stymied in his ascent to God and must either attack what he cannot comprehend — as Guillaume of Conches — or assert to know what he cannot and become frustrated — as Abelard. The human mind is a marvellous thing but man's capacity for responsive love far surpasses even the mind. Intelligence may indeed be man's greatest tool in understanding the world about him but "in respect to the things of God, the soul's highest sense is love.

"The mind is the soul's interior sense faculty and it is also the highest and best faculty that the soul has, being surpassed only by love, when love is pure." When the child of God truly loves and accepts that he is loved both

165. Leclercq, Vandenbrouche, and Bouyer, op. cit., p. 250.
166. "Cognitio autem haec Dei alia fidei est, alia amoris vel caritatis. quae fidei est, hujus vitæ est; quae vero caritatis, vitæ eternæ." Spec. fid., P.L. 184 col. 392D.
167. "In eis vero quæ sunt ad Deum, sensus mentis amor est." Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 391A.
his own reason and the authority of others pale into insignificance. Helpful on the way up, they fall away forgotten in the overwhelming brilliance of God's love. Unenveloped within divine love, the man of faith is counted one of "God's simple children." His is not the simplicity of the slow-witted but the uncomplicatedness of one who recognizes his goal and can abandon everything that is not that goal. No longer must one piece together isolated facts into some sensible pattern, no longer must one force sensible facts to fit his opinion or alter his opinion to accommodate facts, because one has caught sight of the entirety.

When the reason can go no further, God's simple children continue on their way with the help of love. In their simplicity, they walk with complete security, depending neither upon their own wits nor on the wisdom of others, but trusting entirely in the Name of the Lord. They make no personal judgments in matters of faith, no fine distinctions. 169

While faith is the concommitant to reason, love appears in William's writings as the limit of reason. This is not to say that reason disappears. Rather reason in faith and in total surrender experiences a transformation and becomes love. The rational man does not die that the spiritual man

may be born. He grows, as if from childhood into adulthood, almost unrecognizable except for a few retained characteristics.

The necessity for this change from reason to love is obvious. Love is the single prerequisite to salvation. The simpleminded who cannot rationally understand his faith, the monk who devotes his life to savoring God, and the scholar whose endeavor it is to comprehend God must share in common the complete and utter love of God. When at the final judgment one stands stripped of pretense and excuse, self-justification and shallow credence, "leaving aside all judgments of good works and trust in merits, we may be justified by this alone: that we loved much." 170

God surpasses all understanding, except within the revelation of Himself given by Him in His mercy to man. No matter what he does, finite man can neither truly comprehend nor less apprehend God. He can succeed in understanding better or less well by virtue of the means he chooses. One must order the various epistomological tools in their proper sequence, subordinating the lower to the higher, the circumscribed to the more inclusive. Although veiled, William's progression from animal to rational to spiritual man presents itself again and again in his

analysis of the climb of the soul to beatitude. Emotions and the senses, the tools by which animal man knows, succeed less well in comprehending than does reason, the tool of rational man. Above both stands love, the raison d'être of spiritual man.

[God passes] beyond all places by virtue of His nature which knows no place; and all time that may be comprehended by His eternity; by reason or imagination; which is a far more true and surpassing thing than may be felt in any manner of feeling. Yet He is more surely attained by the feeling of humble enlightened love than by any conceiving of the reason and is ever better than may be conceived. 171

Rational man, even rational man with the deepest, truest and most steadfast faith, may doubt the truths of his faith; to doubt but not to presume to deny is the part of rational man. Love, by its very fervor, drives every suspicion of doubt from the life of the Christian. "The vehemence of love removes the scruple of suspicion." 172

Love does not strain to know God, it reposes in God.

The only alternative to love is pride. The person who, having gone part of the way, refuses — as in free will he may and so many so manifestly have done — to accept what

171. "(Deus) excedens omnem locum virtute naturae illocalis, aeternitate vero omne tempus quod vel ratione, vel opinione comprehendi potest: quae long verius est et excellentius quam quolibet tamen sensu humilis et illuminati amoris, quam quodlibet cogitatu rationis attingitur, et semper melius tamen cogitatur quam dicitur." Epistola aurea II, 11, 24, P.L. 184, col. 353 C.

172. "In tantum ut magnitudo amoris tollat scrupulum suspicionis..." Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 376 B.
he cannot glean for himself, says in effect that his understanding is greater than that of any of the Doctors of the Church, greater than revelation, greater in the final analysis than God Himself. Reason leads either to bloated pride or to sincere humility in the denial or comprehension of how limited, how finite, how puny is that great power of the human mind in the face of Knowledge.

Whereas knowledge puffs us up, charity builds us up. So it is necessary to have more than mere knowledge which leads to curiosity, vanity and self-ostentation. Reason, unaided by love, can lead us only to pride.173

In his rather detailed descriptions of the proud man who refuses to pass beneath that low lintel of authority into the love which liberates one to live for God alone, William too often mirrored Abelard's own picture of himself to allow the reader to escape the conclusion that Abelard was constantly on William's mind as he composed his final treatises. Exhorting all Christian men to question their own motives when tempted to contradict holy tradition, William echoed his censure of Abelard in the Disputatio:

173. "Scientia vero inflat, caritas edificat. Aut ergo in hujusmodi exquirendis elaborant, ut tantum sciant; quod tantummodo servit curiositati, aut, ut videantur, sive sciantur scire; quod servit vanitati. De natura et dignitate amoris xii, P.L. 184, col.404B."
In order that his faith may be strengthened and his heart established blameless in holiness, a wise man will turn to the great lights of the Church for aid, to those holy men of proven sanctity, unmatched wisdom and outstanding knowledge of the life of the spirit. He will study their writings and teachings, and he will strive to imitate the example of their steadfastness. He will scorn the temptation which arises in his soul by thinking to himself, "Am I better and wiser than these great men? Am I holier? Am I more gifted than they?"

The object of pure love is God. The object of discursive reasoning, in love, is God. To exercise one's intelligence, especially in theological questions, for any other purpose than to find and to glorify God is to misuse God's gifts, to pervert a great good into a lesser good or even into a negation of good. Searching for fame, wanting to surpass and contradict everyone else just to be able to pride oneself on one's own accomplishments, wanting to investigate the things of God for no other reason than to increase one's mental accumulation of facts, manifests a subordination of the higher to the lower, a diverting of sublime talents to narrow channels. Animal man is in fact in control although rational or even spiritual man may appear to be.

174. "Adsciscat sibi prudens animus ad munimentum fidei; ad confermandum cor, ad illuminandum fidei conscientiam, magna Ecclesiae luminaria; summos viros spiritualis scientiae, summae sapientiae, sanctitatis probate, doctrinas et scripta eorum...." Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col.388D.
...Importunate animality seizes on the affection and understanding.... Hence it is that the vices of curiosity burst forth.... Hence a loathing of that which is wont to be done and the presumption of new things.... Hence proceed daily new occupations, new inventions of doing and laboring, and divers readings, not to the edification of the soul but to the beguiling of the weariness of the day.175

Before beginning any study, any investigation, any reading at all, the Christian must formulate his intention. And, if his work is to be spiritually profitable, he must firmly purpose that by his study, he shall come better to understand God and, understanding Him, more ardently to love Him. Any other goal would be a perversion and corruption and lead the student into vanity and estrangement from God. The deplorable estate of man divorced from God, vainly reliant upon himself cannot but worsen so long as man refuses to love and to submit. To pursue any other course is to fall from the path to which God calls into another, that inevitably leads further and further from

175. "...animali vero improbitate sibi affectum praeripente et intellectum.... Hinc solitudinis et silentii quaeruntur inordinatae, et proposito inimicæ consolationes, in via regia commendum institutionum furtiva propriae voluntatis diverticula, solitorum fastidium, praesumptio novitatum: ...Hinc quotidie fiunt novae occupationes, novae actionum et laborum adinventiones, lectiones diversae, non ad aedificandum animum, sed ad fallendum tardantis diei taedium...." Epistola aurea, I, vi, 16, P.L. 184, col. 319C.
illumination. From one spot of vanity proceeds a host of vices.

A will that is wont to be proud often makes the soul puffed up in great poverty of heart. Whence proceeds vain glory, faith in oneself, neglect of God, boastfulness, disobedience, contempt, presumption, and other plagues of the soul, which are wont to flow from the swelling of pride. 176

Each of these outgrowths of pride barricades man from the God he seeks. Except through the utter self-surrender insistently demanded by William, man cannot approach the nearer to God. Still less can he possibly hope to understand to the slightest degree the mysteries of Divinity if his heart is filled with worldly concerns and centred upon himself. Sin and diversions, self and ambition must be swept away if one is to direct his whole and total attention to God. More than that, the attention must be diverted from the finite to God. Instead of making oneself and one's own interests, or anyone else, or any system the centre of his world, each man must learn to make God the core and very heart of his love. Only in this way may he enable God to sweep away pride and to implant the heartfelt humility of spirit so essential to the apprehension of Love.

The mysteries of God, the meaning that lies behind them, the sacraments that Christ instituted for us — none of these things can ever be examined by a soul that has not been cleansed from impurity or by a conscience that is still stained by evil thoughts and desires. Neither can they be subjected to a mind that is full of its own importance. 177

Reason clarifies the picture of faith, it brings into focus an understanding of things believed. Faith draws reason upward toward God and love prepares it to await understanding to come down from God, the Father of Lights. Since in regard to God, love is the highest sense of the soul, the infidel, presented with the facts of faith, may accept them intellectually but he will not believe because he will not love. 178 So, too, the Christian cannot truly hold the faith until he knows personally and vitally the love which is that faith.

In William’s implicit opinion, Abelard had never really advanced past the state of animal man. True, he had a keen mind which he exercised in the functions of rational man, but he had never bent low but in pride had contradicted revelation, Scripture and the authority of the Church. Worse still he had never learned or would never admit those

177. "Porro immunda anima, impura, conscientia, superbus animus, curiosa jactantia, merito ab inquisitione divinorum sacramentorum vel mysteriorum arcetur quia spiritus disciplinae effugiet fictum, nec habitabit in corpore subdito peccatis et in malivolam animam non introibit sapientia." Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 384A.

178. Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col. 391A.
limits beyond which his reason could not take him. Tragi-
cally he lacked that holy simplicity of faith which is
"true humility in conversation, seeking a righteous con-
science rather than fame."\textsuperscript{179} It would have been better
for him if he had been one of those simple souls who
accepted without question not because he had great faith
but because he knew no better. Abelard's self-assurance,
like his opinion of human reason, knew no bounds.

I do not want to extol \textit{[the dull]}, at
the expense of those who seek to understand
what they believe, provided only the latter
do not attempt to investigate the ineffable
majesty of God.\textsuperscript{180}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{179.} "\textit{Vel est simplicitas, in conversatione vera humilitas,
silicet virtutis magis conscientiam amplectens....}"
\textit{Epistola aurea I, v, 13, P.L. 184, col.317A.}
\textsuperscript{180.} "\textit{Quaquam vero simplicem simpliciter credentem
extollimus, quasi ad depressionem spiritualis exami-
natoris: qui si non sit scrutator majestatis....}"
\textit{Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col.379BD.}"
Certain pointed doctrinal references reiterated again and again in his later works illustrate William's inability to forget the tragedy of Peter Abelard. The theses condemned to Saint Bernard reappear repeatedly, thinly disguised as affirmations of faith and ejaculations. Perhaps William feared that his readers' faith had been troubled by Abelard's teachings. Perhaps he wanted to assure them of the orthodox position on disputed questions. It may be that he was simply so concerned that a man of Abelard's considerable talents would fall into error so persistently that he could not dismiss the spectre from his mind.

Abelard, it will be remembered, preached that a person's intention constituted sin or virtue. A man who made an act of will to do good, did good by that exercise of his free will. It was not necessary that God's grace should first come to him. In willing good man was not so much concurring with the divine will as recognizing and embracing "the good" through his innate perception. William's refutation of the teachings of the "homo ingratus" have already been examined. It is repeated after Abelard's condemnation in the Mirror of Faith together with a greater concession to Abelard's emphasis upon will:

If you do not will to believe, you shall not believe. You believe because you will it. But you do not will it unless grace comes to your aid.182

Another of Abelard's greatest offenses in William's eyes was his denial of the redemptive purpose of the Incarnation. The idea of omnipotent God lowering Himself to the state of man was repugnant to Abelard's concept of omnipotence. Had his emphasis, like William's, been less on the power and more on the love of God, he might have resolved his dilemma.

We must believe without any shadow of doubt that God became man for us, for our salvation and the redemption of our sins. If you know what omnipotence is, then you can believe that almighty God could come down for us.183

Abelard's pronouncements on the Holy Trinity, the very core of Christianity, were so involved and so significant that William felt obliged not only to refute it again and again in short affirmations of faith but to devote an entire book to the subject. This work, tellingly entitled the "Enigma of Faith," demonstrates William's skillful use of...
dialects and his profound regard for the mystery of unfathomable deity. In examining rationally the doctrine of the Trinity from every angle, he returns in each case to the enigma of the Triune God. Understanding of the Trinity cannot be gained through the power of the mind because man has no basis of understanding. Understanding may come in some measure through an experiential, personal encounter with the Triune Unity, but that is not the understanding which Abelard sought or one which would satisfy him. Without this experience one is driven back to the necessity for faith. One believes because God has revealed it.

One must believe without any doubt that the Holy Trinity, the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, share a divine unity equally and inseparably and that they are not three gods but One God.185

The question of whether or not the love of God brought happiness has already been examined in the discussion on Abelard's doctrine.186 While William never attacked Abelard directly on this point, or even on the definition of love with which Abelard worked, his own doctrine of love and the importance which he attached to love lead one to suspect that William found Abelard's theories of love sadly wanting.

185. "Crede ergo indubitanter sanctam Trinitatem, Patrem, et Filium et Spiritum sanctam, unius substantiae, inseparabili aequalitate divinam habere unitatem; ideo, non tres esse does, sed unum Deum." Spec. fid., P.L. 184, col.385A.
186. See above, page 40.
Abelard theorized brilliantly and exaltedly on the abstractions of love but troubled himself with neither human practicalities nor theological implications. It was he who claimed that one should love God as one would a friend and that the relationship could best be understood as one between men. *Amor amicitiae* was the term he employed to describe an emotion which passed directly from the one friend to the other, from the one loving to the Beloved, an affection motivated not by hope of reward nor by the redeeming love of Christ, nor in response to the love of God, but simply a love of God because He is.

Gilson\(^{187}\) has demonstrated Abelard's practical application of his philosophy of love. The love which man has for God should be not the love which Abelard had for Heloise: a love which demanded, which took and did not give, a love rooted in selfishness and desire. Rather man's love for God should reflect the love which Heloise had for Abelard; selfless, generous, seeking the glory of the one loved, a love which in no way sought to possess.

In the realm of theology this was interpreted to mean that man should love God with a pure love, seeking no reward not even the happiness, which Abelard considered very definitely a reward. Because happiness was considered a

reward, it was held to be ulterior motivation. One loved to gain happiness. Intention was ever the watchword with Abelard and he was apt to question intentions human and divine. Truly to love God with a pure love, he argued, one must renounce happiness and sacrifice any thought for self.

William certainly agreed that God must be loved for Himself alone and for no other reason than that He is. But he never took the position that man would be bound to love God even if himself not loved. The whole tenor of his spiritual teaching opposes such an idea. Indispensable to William's theology is the belief that God is Love and it is only by His love that man is able to love Him or anyone else in returning love to Love. Natural affections have natural objects, one is drawn to those who share one's own interests and friendship arises. To love God with the same love one feels toward a friend, however, is to wrench God from the sublime to the mundane. It would be to subordinate the supernatural to the natural. "The love of God is to our own natural love what our soul is to our body."188

So long as man is bound to this world and the sight of Perfect Love is hid from him, he must accept on faith the love of God and accepting that love, love in return. When that devotion has been purified, intensified, and

188. "Amori vero nostro, affectui nostro illi naturali, sic est amor Dei, sicut corpori nostro anima sua est." Spec. Fid., P.L. 134, col. 391C.
supernaturalized, the person loving may catch a glimpse of Him Who is Love. During one's lifetime, this glimpse at most is momentary and transitory but in eternity, in the presence of God Himself, man may comprehend that which he has known in fragments through faith. In heaven man may come to know God as God is and as He knows Himself. To want to know God as one would a friend palls into a shallow distortion in comparison to this.

Our knowledge of God is brought about on earth by faith. In eternity it comes about through love or charity. Now it is one thing to know God as one knows his friend and quite another to know Him as He knows Himself.189

Within William's lifetime almost, the world had rediscovered the instructive writings of Ovid on love. Students revelled in the Ars amatoria: postulants arrived at the gates of the monastery with it tucked under their arm. It was inevitable that Ovid's influence would begin to be felt in philosophic circles. The tendency to seek the meaning of divine love through human love became increasingly pronounced. The connotation commonly attached to love, insisted William, failed woefully to express the warmth, the depth, the grandeur, or the inclusiveness of love in God. To try to understand the nature of love in

189. "Cognitio autem haec Dei alia fidei est, alia amoris vel caritatis... quae vero caritatis, vitae aeterae.... Aliud quippe est cognoscere Deum sicut cognoscit vir amicum suum, aliud cognoscere eum sicut ipse cognoscit semetipsum." Spec. f id., P. L. 184, col. 392D
and for God by making it analogous to observable human love is to go about the business backward. One begins with God, who is love. One ends with God, to Whom alone love is due. In the process of learning to love from God one becomes so filled with the essence of loving that it overflows to those more "natural" objects about one.

William had found some of his novices at Saint Thierry so imbued with Ovid's Art that he had expressly sought to combat his influence in composing his own treatise on love. Against the ancient author William asserted, "The art of all arts is the art of loving and the teaching belongs exclusively to God."\(^1\) The difficulty with Ovid, of course, was that his preoccupation with love was hardly on a spiritual level.

Love comes from God, is due to God, and is learned from God. Neither the friendship of men, the selfless love of an Heloise, or the idealistic hypothesising of a philosopher could add one whit to the instruction which God has already so manifestly given to man in Christ.

...No one else can teach us to love Him, for His first great lesson in love was to love us first, even to the death of the Cross for us, loving, and embracing us....\(^2\)

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190. "Ars est artium ars amoris, cujus magisterium ipsa sibi retinuit natura, et Deus auctur naturae." De natura et dignitate amoris I, P.L. 184, col. 379C.

191. "Et non est alius in quo sit salus, qui docuit nos amare se, cum usque ad mortem crucis prior dilexit nos, amando et diligendo...." De contemplando Deo VI, P.L. 184, col. 373D.
Just as, so far as William is concerned, there is no unselfish love, as Abelard would label it, so there is no such thing as a love devoid of joy. The completion of human nature in the divine nature is the ultimate goal of every man who will choose it. It is a state which, no matter what the degree of spiritual advancement, cannot but be accompanied by happiness, for complete happiness is desiring that which is completely natural to oneself. And to William to desire what is natural is to desire that which God desires, that for which He created man — fulfilment in Himself in eternity.

What does it mean to be happy unless it be the state of desiring nothing but good and having all that one has wished for? To want You and to want You very much — that is to love You and to love You intensely. 192

If utter happiness is wanting the greatest good and ultimately attaining to it, unhappiness conversely is the result either of setting one's desire upon a less worthy object which cannot give satisfaction totally or of seeking vainly for something which does not, or cannot, exist. Since union with God is the natural end of man, the end for which he was created, it is completely attainable and must by definition bring happiness with it. There can be no frustration in being with God.

192. "Quid enim est beatum esse, nisi non velle nisi bonum, et omnia habere quaecumque vult? Te igitur velle, et vehementer velle, quod est amare, et singulariter amare..." De contemplando Deo VIII, P.L. 184, col. 376A.
But one who desires something unattainable is unhappy and dissatisfied. In the blessed kingdom in the vision of You unhappiness has no place.193

Long before he attacked Abelard's theology, William had punctured the other's altruistically unrealistic theories of love. "It would be impossible to be united to God in love without being also united to Him in happiness, for they alone are really and truly happy who are utterly in love."194 Those, and one suspects that William had Abelard in mind, who ignore God or who search for some ultimate "good" or "truth", some philosophical abstraction beyond God to which to dedicate themselves are bound to encounter an abyss of frustration which can lead inevitably only to the dismal unhappiness of unfulfilment.195

It is only in the light of William's own personal spiritual life that one may hope to understand his grounds for having attacked Peter Abelard. We have already argued that William, far from denying the validity of reason, allowed it an active and important role in the struggle to know God and, furthermore, encouraged its use. Beyond the sphere of reason, however, he saw the exclusive realm of faith. In the former, the impetus came from man's side,

194. "Quid autem est absurdius uniri Deo amore, et non beatitudine?" De Contemplando Deo VII, P.L. 184, col. 375D.
in the latter, from God's Faith entailed love and love intensified faith. Together and in the proper sequence, reason, faith, and love could mount the summits of human understanding. Alone and out of perspective, each was paralysed and apt to stray. Reason, because it does come, immediately, from the human side of the "dialogue" is the most limited and fallible of the three.

The question ceases to be, did William permit reason as well as love. More pertinent to understanding his attack on Abelard is the query, how far did he believe man, by reason, by faith, by love, could go toward God. William was a contemplative and moreover a mystic who had given himself without reservation to the love of God. Knowing firsthand the joy of the vision of God, it was not at all unnatural, but rather greatly to be expected, that he should desire to share this happiness with others. So long as he felt that the philosophizing of an Abelard was holding anyone, the philosopher or the listener, back from this blissful and attainable union with perfect Love, he would attempt to oppose and to correct him.

The motivation for William's attack upon Abelard must be sought within the total personal theology of the Cistercian mystic, a man who claimed to have had somehow an interior, personal, totally unexpected and yet thereafter intensely desirable revelation of God within his own soul. And his
mysticism, in turn, must be fitted within his monastic vocation. For to consider William's spirituality independent of the monastic life would be to divorce him from his true element. It would be to isolate one single facet of the man (and hence our problem) from the entirety which formed the facet and in doing so, to distort it. William had decided ideas on his own state.

In abandoning Laon for St. Neasius, William felt he had only left one school for another. For to his mind the monastery was nothing other than

...charity's own school. Here the study of love is pursued, here love's disputationes held, love's questions answered.196

The role of Master, held previously by the professor, had been assumed by the superiors — the abbot, the prior, and the novice master — who trained the new novice in observing the Rule, taught him to give himself to God absolutely, and at the last rendered account for his soul to the God Who had given him into their care. No easy task. The superior must deny himself for the sake of his charge. He must sacrifice his own solitude, the joy of his personal contemplation, his longing after perfection to serve the new brother. To be

196. "Haec est specialis caritatis scola: his ejus studia exercentur disputationes agitantur, solutiones non ratiocinationibus tantum, quantum ratione et ipsa rerum veritate et experientia terminantur." De natura et dignitate amoris IX, P.L. 184, col.396D.
the guardian of another's salvation is no light task nor to be lightly taken.

For his part the novice, accepting the regularity of the life, the coarse clothing, the plain food, the discipline and the silence, gives to his superiors his utter and unquestioning obedience. Every detail of his life, his time, his energies, his body, his inclinations, his very will belong no longer to him but must be at the disposal of those over him. Such obedience is imperative if the novice is to fit without uproar into the religious house and to allow God, through His agents, to bring his soul to its perfect end. In many ways this is an "obedience of necessity."\(^\text{197}\)

William divided religious into three states: the animal, the rational, and the spiritual.\(^\text{198}\) The "animal" is the beginner. He progresses toward salvation chiefly through the prodding of others. He obeys his superiors, he watches his more advanced brethren, desirous of being like them, and imitates their example. To help the monk pass from this beginning to higher things, William

\(^{197}\) The "\textit{oboeidentia necessitatis}" is that spirit of holy obedience by which the young monk obeys his superiors to facilitate life within the monastery. By this outward, "enforced" obedience, he gradually is to learn the interior obedience at which William aims in his \textit{Epistola aurea}.

\(^{198}\) \textit{Epistola aurea}, P.L. 184, col.315ff.
recommended reading and meditation. By reading the simpler passages of the Scriptures (so as not to confuse untutored minds), most especially the Gospels, the Fathers of the Church, and the lives of the saints, the novice learns to lift up his heart to the Lord, to pray spiritually without depending upon the aids of images and analogies when he meditates on God.

When the novice has advanced to a clearer knowledge of God, he is said to be a "rational man." Now he knows intellectually what his goal is. He recognizes the goodness and grandeur of God and he blindly desires to know God more intimately. But he lacks the complete selfless love and humility prerequisite to the closer love of God. At this point in his spiritual growth the danger of retrogressing through spiritual pride is at its peak. As a beginner the monk could easily recognize his shortcomings by looking about him at his brethren. Now he is on the way but as yet he has not seen God so completely that he can recognize himself for what he truly is. Humility and real self-knowledge are the virtues which William emphasises again and again to his monks.

When through prayer, meditation, humility, unceasing self-examination, interior as well as exterior silence, and

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199. "De animali vero statu transuenter ad rationalem... sicut in proficiendo, sic et in meditando et transtando." Epistola aurea, P.L. 184, col. 339D-340A.
obedience, the monk surrenders himself without reservation to God not only intellectually but affectively, he is spoken of as "spiritual" or "perfect" — not that he has attained a plateau of existence in which he may securely relax — but because he has been so trained and has so trained himself to pray unceasingly and to reach toward God with his mind, his love and his whole being, that he may enjoy the ineffable experience of a personal knowledge of his God. This is the essence of monasticism as William experienced and as best he could express it.

Monastic piety is the perpetual mindfulness of God, the continual striving of the will to understand Him, the unwearied affection of loving Him so that no hour (I do not even say no day) may ever find the servant of God save in the labor of exercising and zeal of advancing or else in the sweetness of feeling or bliss of enjoying.

In the "spiritual state," obedience is transformed from obedience prerequisite to the ordering of the house to obedience joyfully given; from the obedience by which one allows one's superiors to command by Rule to the obedience by which one subjects oneself freely not only to the seniors but to the juniors, to inferiors even, not because of their

200. "Fietas enim haec est jugis Dei memoria, continua intentionis actio ad intelligentiam ejus, indessa affectio in amorem ejus: et nulla unquam inveniat servum Dei, non dicam dies, sed hora, nisi vel in exercitii labore et projiciendi studio, vel in experientiae dulcedine et fruendi gudio." Epistola aurea IV, P.L. 184, col.313C.
worthingness or their example but because they are God's and therefore worthy of one's love, from the obedience of necessity to the obedience of love.

Almost at the end of life in Christ, William wrote on the state of the monk who had allowed the love of God to permeate his being gradually through prayer, penance, and perseverance as a participation in the Perfect Sacrifice of Christ. By offering himself unconditionally to God, the monk embraces the passion and crucifixion with Christ. In the Sacrifice of the Altar he is reminded of his total self-oblation and can renew consciously and concretely this offering in a continuous act of sacrificial worship. Even when the Eucharist is not available, it would be inexcusable if the monk did not direct his attention to the presence of his Savior for at least a part of each day's meditation. This, as well as the reception of Holy Communion, fills the soul with the presence of God and empties it of self's own interests. The celebration of the Mass is reserved to a few men and to a certain appointed hour of the liturgical day, but each monk can, in the solitude of his own cell, meditate upon the Passion and Sacrifice of Christ at all times. This, too, should fill him with the presence of Christ and help him toward that union of the soul with his Redeemer for which he is striving.
To receive the thing signified though it be without the Sacrament is life eternal. And if you want and truly desire it, this is in you at all times both of the day and of the night. For as often as in remembrance of Him who suffered for you you are moved in piety and faith by this deed of His, so often you eat His Body and drink His Blood. As long as you abide in Him through love, and He in you through the working of holiness and righteousness, you are accounted to be of His Body and His Members.

William never claimed that the religious life was the only life which prepared man for the enjoyment of God. He went to great lengths, in fact, to dispel the idea and to warn others about harboring it. To those to whom the vocation was given, however, it was the most direct way to Christ. William spent more than half his life in the cloister and had found his joy within its silence. One cannot be surprised that he waxed most eloquent when he spoke of something so dear to himself. In writing to the Carthusians of Mont Dieu, he described the complete personal surrender to the love of God demanded and the intense joy of the contemplative life which he and his readers had chosen:

201. "Sacramentum enim sine re sacramenta sumenti mors est; res vero Sacramenti, etiam, praeter sacramentum, sumenti vita aeterna est. Si autem, vis, et vere vis, omnibus horis, tam diei quam noctis, hoc tibi in cella tua praesto est. Quoties in commemorationem ejus qui pro te passus est, hoc factus ejus ple ac fideliter fueris affectus, corpus ejus manducas, et sanguinem bibes. Quandiu in eo manes per amorem, et ipse in te per sanctitatis et justitiae operationem, in ejus corpore et membris ejus computaris." Epistola aurea X, P.L. 184, col.3270.
To others it belongs to serve God, to you to cleave to Him. To others to believe in God, to know, to love, and to fear Him; to you to savor of Him, to understand Him, to apprehend Him. This is a great thing — this is an arduous thing. 202

William had abandoned the School for the cloister and had found himself in his true element. And while he frequently and severely contrasted the education of a monk with that of a student, he did not condemn the schoolman. He recognized that not everyone was called as he had been. With more sophistication than we may credit to William, embroiled as he was in the twelfth century turmoil, Dom Leclercq has stated the position that William implicitly held:

The difference between the monks and the scholastic lie less in the doctrinal than in the psychological domain. They are the result of two different states of life, both of which are lawful in the Church. 203

One must search still deeper if he wants to find the basis for William's condemnation of Peter Abelard. One must also fit Abelard into the pattern. As a Master at Saint Genevieve Abelard had philosophized with a flourish unique to himself but he had not remained a Master in Paris. He, too, had deserted the school for the monastery. The profound

sense of monastic conversio insisted upon by William had not noticeably marked Abelard's entrance into the cloister. We need not here consider the role of Heloise in Abelard's life save in its effect upon the subsequent course of that life. After his mutilation by her outraged uncle, Abelard could not face returning to public lecturing. He who had so often devastated others by his often cruelly brilliant wit would not expose himself to the barba of others. His carefully constructed world had, in bitter truth, come crashing into splinters around him. Not knowing quite what to do but, much to his everlasting credit, accepting "at once and completely the cruel form of expiation which God had imposed on him,"204 he put his scholastic triumphs behind him and sought the shelter of the cloister.

Filled as I was with such remorse, it was, I confess, confusion springing from shame rather than devotion the result of conversion which drove me to the refuge of the monastic cloister.205

Once a religious he embraced the life with sincerity and fervor. The genuineness of his devotion is reflected in his letters to Heloise, now his "sister in Christ."206

204. Gilson, Heloise and Abelard, p.66.
205. "In tam misera me contritione positum confusio, fatoer, pudoris potius quam decotoio conversionis ad monasticorum latibula claustrorum compulit." Historia Calimitatum, P.L. 178, col.136A.
She candidly admitted she had become a nun for love of Abelard and not for love of God. Repeatedly but vainly he pleaded with her to recognize and embrace the love of Christ as the only unfailing, pure and perfect love, as the Love of which theirs had been but a crude imitation. For all his pleadings she lived and apparently died in love with Peter Abelard long after his affection had passed from her to God.

Abelard's initial monastic fervor was so zealous that his brethren at St. Denis soon found him an exceedingly uncomfortable thorn in their sumptuous side and cast about for a means of ridding themselves of his noisome criticism. The disorder created by the eager students who thronged after him even into the monastery provided good reason to release him from his vow of stability to the abbey and send him off to a priory to resume teaching.

From the moment of his conversion, Abelard turned deliberately from expounding only philosophy to devoting himself especially to theology, "in keeping with my state," and promptly ran afoul. Two brief years after he entered St. Denis, he was forced to burn with his own

208. Abelard, Epistole V, P.L. 178, col.265AB. One cannot categorically state that Heloise never, until the end of her life, managed to replace Abelard in her affection with God. In the extant letters she never did.
209. Historia Calimitatum VIII, P.L. 178, col.137A.
hand his writings on the Trinity. A long literary silence ensued which was first broken in 1136 by the publication of his *Theologia Christianae*, the book almost immediately attacked by William.

Might it be that William, so firm in his opinion of what monastic study should be, might have excused Abelard had Abelard remained a cleric but could not forgive him for bringing flashes of the old Abelard into the monastery? I think not. St. Bernard might attack Abelard as a "monk without a Rule," a "second Herod" seeking Christ only to destroy him, but William never made the slightest mention of Abelard's personal life. If his insistence on affection and humility within the religious life increased in the works written after Abelard's condemnation, as it did, may we not rather infer that William was only too unhappily conscious of and deeply lamented Abelard's failure to comprehend this need. No matter how he may have felt about Abelard's wandering from abbey to abbey and gathering secular students to himself at each, William never lowered his criticism to a diatribe on his opponent's personal fulfilment of his vocation.

William of Saint Thierry traces his ascent to God in four intertwining, intermending steps which are actually rather artificial since the ascent is really nothing less than the single dynamic progression of the soul toward its natural end. In many ways these four steps parallel the growth of the monk from animal through rational to spiritual man. But understood in another, deeper sense, and the sense in which William meant them to be placed, they can be perceived as four steps taken by man once he has attained to the state of "spiritual" man. The beginnings of mystical growth, in other words, appear after one has already attained to the highest religious state; the soul of the person called to the mystical experience has attuned itself to the voice of God. William gives the degrees of the ascent four names and compares them with the developing ages of man:

Just as with the passing of time, a child grows into a youth, and the youth becomes a man and grows old, his changing characteristics providing him with three changes of name, so it is, too, with the growth of virtue. The will develops into love, love becomes charity, and charity develops into wisdom.211

211. "Sicut enim secundum aetatum incrementum vel detrimentum puer mutatur in juvenem, juvenis in virum, vir in senem; secundum qualitatum mutationes, etiam aetatum nomina mutantes; sic secundum virtutum profectum voluntas crescit in amorem, amorem in caritatem, caritas in sapientiam." De natura et dignitate amoris II, P.L. 134, col.382A.
Each of the four stages, the will, love, charity, and wisdom, makes its distinctive contribution to the growth of the human soul Godward. Each builds upon and deepens the previous. From the first awareness, however slight, in the soul of God's presence and His love to the mystic experience and beyond, to the eternal beatific vision, spiritual "maturation" progresses "up" these steps. Each step has its peculiar characteristic but each step also melds imperceptibly into the next.

It is the will which first moves the soul toward God, and love carries it onward. Charity contemplates Him and wisdom enjoys Him.²¹²

The very earliest stirring of the soul's long journey finds being in an act of the human will. Of all the steps this is the most dependent upon frail man for, although God implants the impulse to love in the soul, man must himself make the decision to return himself and his love to its Source. In His mercy God enkindles a sense of returning love in the soul of man created to love Him.

This is your love, by which You love those who love you, Lord. It is to implant in them the desire for loving and desiring to love you.²¹³

²¹². "Primum enim ad Deum voluntas animam movet, amor promovet, caritas contemplatur, sapientia frutitur." De natura et dignitate amoris IX, P.L. 184, col.397C.
The presence of this call to love is felt as a quiet persistent nudge which, when a man recognize it, may be embraced and followed or rejected and denied. In this, as in all vocations, the freedom with which God has endowed man is scrupulously safeguarded. In the sense that he is absolutely free to make this first act of will positively or negatively, man sets off toward his final destiny.

You seek to draw us to You because You know that love cannot be forced into men's souls: You know that it must be kindled from within. If there is force involved, there is no liberty and if liberty is absent then so is righteousness. You desire to save us, O Lord, yet since You are completely just, You can only save or damn a man according to his deserts and not as You would like to do.214

Once the creature called to a higher life has made the initial act of will and desires to reach out toward his Creator, God assumes the initiative actively and envelops man with His love and His Being, depending only upon the continuing consent and co-operation of the human will. Because each soul is unique, God calls each differently and each must search out the way best suited for him to respond and thus to pass into the next, deeper step toward the God who calls him. He must single-mindedly fix his attention

214. "Sciebas enim, Creator animarum Deus, in animalibus filiorum hominum cogi non poddr, sed provocari oportere affectum istum. Simul etiam quia ubi coactio, jam nec libertas; ubi non libertas, nec justitia. Tu autem, Domine, juste, salvare nos volebas juste, qui nullum salvas vel damnas sinc juste...." De contemplando Deo VI, P.L. 184, col. 374B.
upon his Goal, find the way best suited to attain to that Goal, and seek to understand as best it lies within his ability to do so that Person who is the Goal.

Everyone who mounts up to You needs first this great will — great as he can make it. He also needs a will enlightened as far as You have made it worthy to receive light and moved according to the form that You have given it.215

By the simple, and yet for self-centred and sin-ridden man, incredibly difficult first act of will, the soul has opened itself to be permeated with the sweetness of divine love and the overpowering interior beauty of God's presence, which create in the soul an even more intense responsive affection and a desperate spiritual longing. As Love diffuses Himself in the heart of man, He deepens man's love and the two components of the responding love, the affection and longing, turn back to God who is alike the Source and the End of each. Overawed with the wonder and the fathomless mystery of love, the soul yearns to repose in this sweet state but simultaneously reaches out to grasp more fully Perfect Love. Without realizing it, because of course his attention is not fixed on himself, man has grown from the stage of willing to loving.

215. “Primum necessaria videtur voluntas magna, deinde illuminata, deinde affecta. Hae in omni ascendente primum est magna, secundum posse suum; illuminata, secundum donum tuum; affecta, secundum modum tuum; magna, quantum eam creasti; illuminata, quantum dignam fecisti; affecta, sicut eam formasti.”

Meditativae orationes XII, P.L. 180, col. 245C.
At its birth love is nothing other than the will...under the help of grace.... Its birthplace is God. There it is born, and there it comes to rest. 216

The man who has learned to love realizes that while his new relationship to God is more wonderful than anything he had anticipated, it is not the end toward which he feels himself drawn. Rather than a love in which one can repose it is a love which presses toward what it senses to be yet greater. Far from being left behind, the will is caught up in this love and, too, strains for the fulfilment of the intense desire which has been awakened in the soul.

Those who make definition define love as a single intense will; but those who define it can form no judgment on the limits of Your love. If it be called desire, I do not deny it, for in truth, my Lord, I do desire You. 217

While the person whom God has called to this more intimate knowledge of Himself learns slowly to mount up to Him, daily life continues. The mystical experience is not a sudden bolt from nowhere, hurtling one from spiritual darkness into the intense light of divine presence. It

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216. "Vihil enim est aliud amor quam vehemens in bono voluntas...cum adjuvantur a gratia.... Primumque nativitatis ejus locus, Deus est. Ibi natus, ibi alitus, ibi proventus." De natura et dignitate amoris II, P.L. 184, col. 383A and 382B.

217. "Sola quidem vehemens voluntas a diffinientibus amor diffinire solet; sed qui hoc diffinunt, de finibus amoris tui judicare non moverunt. Si desiderium vocetur, non renuo. Nam revera desidero te." Meditativae orationes XII, P.L. 180, col. 246B.
comes as the culmination of extended spiritual growth perhaps chronologically brief, perhaps coming after decades of faith. At some time in that growth, when the person has learned to love and to desire God, he realizes that God acts upon him not only spiritually but also through the created world. Either as a sudden revelation or as a slowly dawning perception, the Christian recognizes God in the events and persons who have constantly surrounded him.

He who yearns for You has no doubt that You can be loved. I can see You in everything, in heaven, on earth, in all Your creatures. I can see that You can be loved without being seen because everything speaks to me of the love of God. The more I see this, the more I love and desire to live in You. 218

No one can love God and honestly search for God and desire union with God, who does not love every one of God’s creatures. The love of God is inexorably bound up with the love of fellow. When one senses divine love, he can not but see that love extended to all creatures and manifested in all. What God can love, man must also love.

Perhaps it seems incongruous that a man who preached love so fervently could at the same time engage in an acrid

218. "Itaque, ut dixi, ex dono gratiae tuae contemplans omnes conscientiae meae angulos vel terminos, unice et singulariter desidero videre te, ut omnes fines terrae meae videant salutare Domini Dei sui, ut amen, sum videro, quem amare hoc est vere vivere." De contemplando Deo, P.L. 184, col. 369A.
dispute and vehemently demand the condemnation of another theologian. If so, still another puzzle presents itself.

The possibility exists that William had learned the value of the dialectical method not from Master Anselm or from the writings of the philosophers but from Peter Abelard himself. By carefully sifting dates and data, Dom Dechanet has posited that both Abelard and William could have been students of Anselm of Laon during the same year, 1112-1113. From this he has constructed the appealing hypothesis that the two not only were acquainted but good friends and influenced one another greatly. Abelard himself is the authority that he had betaken himself to Laon at about this time. While he does mention having known "two students there who appeared to excel,"219 he makes no mention of any William. But then, the two whom he did single out were those who had made themselves unpleasant at Laon and who were later instrumental in Abelard's condemnation at Soisson, so his purpose in mentioning them by name was not exactly to praise their erudition.

The magnetism of Abelard's personality and the excitement which his lectures occasioned for students has often been attested to. He was William's senior by six years and

already a terror by the time he arrived at Laon. William had really only to be there to come under his spell. If he was there he certainly knew of Abelard: everyone did once the young scholar had had the unheard of audacity to begin public lecturing in opposition to the Master of the School. it is altogether possible that William, whom so eminent an authority as Pere Bouyer can name "perhaps the century's most outstanding theologian," had already demonstrated to the limited world of Laon some of the originality and depth which would mark the writings of his maturity. If so it would not be difficult to imagine him seeking Abelard out or Abelard arranging to meet him to discuss the lectures of Anselm, particular questions or theology generally. William made no secret of the admiration which he felt for Abelard the philosopher:

In reading Plato, when he understands a thing, he preaches on it and extolls the sense of it magnificently; where he does not understand exactly, he strives to explain it always in the best way.

One might infer from this either that William had heard Abelard lecture on philosophy or that he had made a point of reading his philosophical works. Since William was most

certainly in the monastery by the time Abelard returned from his stay at Laon to systematic lecturing and since he would have scant call within the cloister to concern himself with strictly philosophical commentaries, the likeliest supposition is that the two had spent some time discussing philosophy together or that William had been a part of a group basking in Abelard's discourses. The phrase "in reading Plato" (cum legit Platonem) might also be translated "when lecturing on Plato," which adds credence to the belief that William had indeed heard Abelard personally.

After presenting to Saint Bernard the theological propositions which he felt Abelard had misinterpreted, William paused before answering them to make a comment odd in one who has just spent a great deal of time examining and refuting heretical doctrine: "This is the theology of Peter Abelard. Would God I were not opposed to him."222 The best substantiation for the theory that the two were close friends comes from William's pen even as he was exhorting Bernard to attack Abelard's theology.

God knows that I have loved this man and would desire to love him still, but in a matter of this sort, no one is my friend, no one my kinsman.223

222. "Haec est theologia magistri Petri...et utinam non contra eum." Disputatio IV, P.L. 180, col.258.
It is unfortunate that Abelard did not wait to write his autobiography while in his final retirement at Cluny. He must surely have been aware of the part William had had in his condemnation and might have commented upon their relationship with at least a particle of the candor with which he could treat of his affair with Heloise. Equally regrettable is the fact that William did not live to write the explicit judgment of Abelard and his teachings contained in the chapter in the *Vita prima Bernardi* dealing with the Council of Sens. At the very least, Peter the Venerable might have hinted, while writing to Heloise to break the news of Abelard's death, that Abelard had felt betrayed by friends! But no, the only references are oblique and the conclusions must remain mere hypotheses.

William remained at Laon until he took the Benedictine habit in 1113. Abelard had left slightly earlier in his fit of "precocious undergraduate" disagreement with his teacher. William had been there some eight years and few people would deliberately study under one man that long without regarding him highly and forming some sort of attachment for him. Dom Dechanet has advanced, on this premise, the further theory that William's monastic conversion might have signalled the resolution of the strong inner conflict in which he was embroiled when trapped between loyalty to his old master and to Abelard when his hot-headed

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friend set up his own chair and publically humiliated Anselm by his opposition.

One need not accept this very attractive hypothesis to realize the influence which the method, if not the man, had exerted upon our writer. That William should some twenty years later attack the man whom he had, at the very least, highly regarded as a philosopher demonstrates not so much his denial of Abelard's method as a criticism of the ends to which Abelard had used the method. As will later be demonstrated, William used dialectics skillfully and without hesitation as a means of deepening his own faith. Abelard, on the other hand, manipulated this tool in order to defend the faith. Trained primarily as a philosopher, Abelard did not take up theology as a major preoccupation until after his own entrance into the religious life and his theology always bore the imprint of the philosopher. He dealt in abstractions; he analysed revelation as he had philosophical concepts. When he was in doubt as to an article of faith, he never allowed that doubt to interfere with his speculations but went, sometimes all too confidently, ahead in an attempt to explain the source of his hesitation. An apparent non sequitur here and there did not disturb his quick mind unduly, so it is not too difficult to understand why he sometimes led himself into theological blind alleys nor, on this basis, to perceive the grounds for William's outspoken disapproval.
With no inconsistency whatever, William could love Abelard and still incite abbots and bishops to condemn him. Whether or not he knew Abelard personally, he did in fact love him. But in loving the man, William was not obliged to love the heresy the man taught. He knew that he must "hate the sin but love the sinner," and he did not confuse the two.

It was indeed because he was so committed to love Abelard, the man and his immortal soul, and the souls of all men, that William raised such a hue and cry. To teach a proud man humility one must sometimes humiliate him. To demonstrate the fallibility of the human mind, one must demonstrate the errors consequent upon the function of the mind. How could Abelard stoop beneath that low lintel into heaven when he had refused to bend a little on earth.

There were more souls involved than just Abelard's and William's, however. Those countless students who sat enthralled at Abelard's feet had to be considered. Those unknown and perhaps unborn scholars who read his writings also had immortal souls. If they drank deeply of Abelard's theses, how could they find their ultimate happiness with God. William loved them too much to let Abelard go unchallenged.

Make no mistake; William's first concern was with the love and honor of God. That was his primary love, the essential, the uncompromising, the inalterable love of which
his love for men was but a reflexion. He loved Abelard and all men deeply and earnestly but he loved them in God and he loved them because he loved God.

As soon as he had felt the touch of God's love and had consented to love and to be loved, William desired so intensely to fill his own being with that of his Beloved that he burned to be united more completely with His Being, impatient with himself and his limitations and anxious to live only and always for God. The confines of his own finiteness and the failures incurred through his own fallen nature vexing and restraining him from the immersion he sought was brought home to him in the bittersweet pattern of the joy of recognizing God's love and the utter desolation of being returned to himself seemingly without God. And although intellectually William could never despair of God, when the warmth of his Presence was snatched away, he descended into the trials of an arid assertion of faith and even horrified himself with his presumption in having dared and yet daring to seek a love which so far transcended him and his ability to respond. Struggle though he might to return to the former warmth which had rewarded and sustained him, William sank only more deeply into himself and into desolation. His will continued steadfast but his affection senses no returning, supporting love.

The trouble is that the more I strive after You and the more I long for You, the harder I seem to be pushed back to earth, back into
myself so that once again I am completely subject to my whims and fancies.... My one comfort is that Your grace makes me sure that I really do desire to desire You. It makes me certain that I really do love to love You with all my heart and soul.225

Gradually, if a man persevere, he realizes that this period of anguished groping has been but another step in the ascent to God, a gift of divine love which enables man to recognize what it is that stands between him and God: himself, his own pride, his self-centeredness, his vanity. Once he has known the frustration of attempting to fight his way into the presence of God, the truly humble man, cauterized of haughty self-confidence, may place himself, his trust and his entire being, completely and unreservedly in the hands of God and continue his spiritual growth.

What am I to do? I am so completely taken up with sin that I cannot die to myself let alone life to You. Then obedient to your command and aided by your grace, I stand on the rock of my faith, in the Christian faith. Here I find that I am really close to You.226

225. "Sed quanto tendo fortius, tanto retrudor durius infra, in memetipsum, sub me ipso. Sic ergo rescipiens et discernens et dijudicans me ipsum, factus sum mihi ipsi de me ipso laboriosa et tediosa quaestio. Tamen, tamen, Domine, certe certus sum per gratiam tuam, desiderium desiderii tui, et amorem amoris tui havere me in toto corde et in tota anima mea." De contemplando Deo II, P.L. 184, col.369C.

226. "Ego enim vere in peccatis totus usque adhuc necdum potui mori mihi, ut vivam tibi. Sed tamen, ex praecepto tuo, et dono tuo, sto in petra fidei tuae, fidei Christianae, in loco qui vere est penes te...." De contemplando Deo I, P.L. 184, col.368B.
As the recognition of what he is and what his true place in the universe is dawns however dimly upon man, there accompanies it the unswerving conviction that there is absolutely nothing which he can do to come into the nearer presence of his Beloved unless he first and unceasingly make oblation of himself. Recitation of the Divine Office, long hours of meditation, the performance of works of mercy cannot advance man from the steps of will and love to that of blessed charity except he first freely return himself completely to his Creator. When and only when man has offered himself, his soul and body, without reservation and without hesitation, can he approach the nearer the union which he desires:

My prayer and sacrifice cannot be perfectly pleasing in Your sight unless I offer myself with them. 227

Standing "securely on the rock of my faith," William grew and learned of God to enter into the deeper love which is charity, "love from God, in God, and for God." 228 Love, the love experienced in desiring more intimately to know God, is transformed by the offering of self into charity, the love of enjoying and possessing that knowledge.

227. "Sicut enim mea non tibi perfecte placens oblata nisi mecum." De contemplando Deo I, P.L. 184, col. 369B.
228. "Amor quippe illuminatus caritas est: amor a Deo in Deo, ad Deum, caritas est." De contemplando Deo V, P.L. 184, col. 387D.
There are, I think, two types of love: the love of desiring a thing and the love of enjoying the object of desire. The first sometimes is deserving of sight of its object. The vision of the object in its turn is given the favor of enjoying and delighting in the thing, while the delight brings with it the fullness of joy.229

The differentiation between love and charity in William's catalogue of ascent may perhaps best be comprehended if one understands by "charity" a love deepened, love synthesised, love intensified; a love encompassing the complete oblation of and candid recognition of self and self's delights. Charity differs from love as does contemplation from meditation.

Love begins with an effort, with but little feeling in the soul. Charity is love's realization.230

Charity reinforces the ever-present will and together will, love, and charity carry the soul forward. When his love has evolved into sweet charity, William has opened his being to the overwhelming impulse of God. The agony of doubt and the blindness of struggle disappear since man has learned to direct his attention single-mindedly to God and to forget himself.


The unfaltering trust which characterizes charity brings with it a return of joy, but a happiness which is infinitely deeper and more abiding than that of the first faltering steps of the upward struggle. One has learned to make God and not oneself the center of the universe and in so doing has learned that to fasten one's complete attention on God is to encompass the whole universe.

The soul which God has taken for His own is truly happy. Through the grace and power of the Holy spirit...it loves only God. It no longer cares about itself. Indeed it still loves itself, but in God and only in Him. 231

After charity comes wisdom, the final step of the arduous and blessed ascent to God — the ultimate grade in this life which precedes and anticipates the everlasting beatitude of the perfect vision of God. Will, love, and charity are all contained and intensified in wisdom but wisdom is also the perfection of the others. Wisdom looks forward to the mystical union of the soul with God which can best be analogised with the union of the bride and bridegroom in marriage, for neither may hope for complete union in this mortal life. The Love of God and man can never in this life be perfect, that is William's insistent

231. "Et, o felicem et felicissimam animam que Deo sic a Deo meretur affici, ut per unitatem Spiritus in Deo colum amet Deum non suum aliquid privatum, nec nisi in Deo amst se ipsum." De contemplando Deo IV, K.L. 184, col. 372C.
point, but wisdom approached the perfection of heaven as nearly as could any finite-infinite relationship. Escape from the frustrating limitations of the little self is in wisdom possible to a degree unknown in the previous steps of the ascent, for now the existence of the whole man is utterly dependent upon the continuing presence of Love.

This is the intent of the strife of the solitary, this the end, this the prize, this the rest from labors and consolation of pains. This is man's true perfection and very wisdom, embracing and containing in itself all virtues not gathered in form without, but, as it were, naturally grafted in itself, unto that likeness of God whereby it is that which it is...even as God is That Which Is...232

The soul, having advanced past the blind struggle to answer the call to love, having been granted the joy of the veiled vision of God and having despaired alternately of His presence, now is permitted a glimpse of the Godhead. Philosophers who tried to apprehend God from examination of what He is not, have not even begun the ascent to a mystical union with the Personality of God, for it is only

232. "Et haec est destinatio solitarii certaminis, hic finis, hoc praemium, haec requires laborum, consolatio dolorum. Et ipsa est perfectio et vera hominis sapientia; omnes in se amplectens et continens virtutes, non aliunde collectas sed velut naturaliter insitas sibi, ad similitudinem illam Dei, qua est ipsae quidquid est: cum sicut Deus est id quod est." Epistola aurea II, iii, 19, P.L. 184, col. 350D.
"those who in their prayer and contemplation have got past all that You are not, [who] may see You as You are." 233
And in discerning, however transitorily or imperfectly, the wonder of Perfect Being, Perfect Wisdom, Perfect Love, man is overwhelmed with the realization that his own perfection, the fulfillment of his personality, lies in union with this Perfection and that without this completion of his marred being, he remains only a shell, an empty substitute for the personality which God had intended and made possible.

This is the completion of human nature: Love, so rooted within the soul of man that he wills that which God wills and loves that which God loves and is in charity with the Charity of God. This is the wisdom to which God has brought it. This is the natural end for which man was created because it is that end which God intended.

The total surrender, this slow trudging up toward God is not simply the making of a mystic; it is the prerequisite of the Christian life. All men, insisted William, have been endowed with the natural desire and the means of mounting up to the ultimate vision of God and it is the duty of every man to reach out to his Creator. Not every Christian is called to the mystical encounter with God. Although he may pray, meditate, fast and live a life of great sanctity,

man does not choose whether or not he will enjoy the closest experience of God. The initiative is always with God, who reveals Himself to whom He will.

To a certain few, for reasons incomprehensible to themselves or to anyone else, God sometimes chooses to give a foretaste of the eternal, total bliss of heaven. Whether to encourage them or others through them, or to reward them or to enable them to testify to the reality of promised joy, no one may know. Those to whom it is granted do not bother to question it. The moment may be brief, the taste engendered remains permanent and inquenchable.

As long as we are alive, the heart can enjoy only very occasionally the blissful silence of peace of heaven. This blessing comes quite rarely to the godly man’s soul, which is wisdom’s dwelling place. And when it does come, it lasts for only about half or a quarter hour. But the joy remains for the soul remembers still as it strives for the perpetual festal day with You. 234

The mystic experience foreshadows in this life the unending enjoyment of God in eternity. And although it is but momentary, the encounter with the Person of God affects the soul of the individual so profoundly that thereafter the whole being of that person, his very nature, is raised to a likeness of divinity which exalts him above the human.

234. "quamdiu quippe in hac sumus vita, hoc felicissime pacis silentio in coelo, id est in anima justi quae sedes est sapientiae, aliando fruuntur affectus: sed hora est dimidia vel quasi dimidia intentio vero de reliquis cogitationis diem festum perpetuum agit tibi." De contemplando, Deo IV, P.L. 184, Col.372D.
Having "met" God and seen, or better, having "felt" the bliss of heaven which awaits him, he is not likely to cast the opportunity of the eternal enjoyment of supernatural felicity lightly away. To exchange what he knows empirically will be his if he perseveres for a fleeting, temporal, very real but lower pleasure would be folly of the highest order and contempt of God's love.

[The Holy Ghost] so draws the will of man to Himself that the soul, in its love for God, is completely transformed into God. It is not changed into the divine nature but into that form of beatitude which, although less than divine, is more than human. 235

All the investigations of theologians, the speculations of philosophers, the examples of saints may aid one in his ascent toward God but none of them can conduct him into the presence of enveloping Love. God is the absolute master of His universe. Through revelation and the "natural" gifts with which he has endowed the human race, the noblest of His creations, He enables one to learn, to approach, even to love. But His ineffable Presence is hidden to all but those to whom He Himself reveals Himself. 236


Although men may teach how to seek God and angels how to adore Him, He alone it is who teaches how to find, to possess and to enjoy. 237

The only testimony of that moment left by William may be applied alike to the transitory mystic vision or to the eternal beatific vision. With a bare and simple sentence he conveyed in the only way possible what that encounter with Omnipotence is. In simplicity and imagery he expressed the inexpressible.

This is the end, this the consummation; this is perfection, this is peace, the joy of the Lord. This is the joy of the Holy Ghost. This is silence in heaven. 238

This personal profound apprehension of God which comes from God and envelops the person in God cannot be learned except in faith. The spiritual anticipation, the predisposition of the will and the affections which precede it cannot except through faith be effected. Only as faith is transformed through self-oblatory love into charity can the soul mount from the natural to the supernatural and from the fleeting to the changeless, from time into eternity.

237. "Hominces doceant Deum quaerere; angeli adorare: solus ipse est qui docet invenire, habere, et frui." Epistola Aurea II, iii, 17, P.L. 184, col.349C.

238. "Hic est finis, haec est consummatio, haec est perfectio; haec est pax, hoc gaudium Domini, hoc gaudium in Spiritu sancto, hoc est silentium in coelo." De contemplando Deo IV, P.L. 184, col.372D.
There are two kinds of knowledge of God: the one which comes from faith, the other which comes from charity. The first belongs to this life; the second to life eternal, or rather, it is life eternal. 239

Those, who like Abelard, placed so great a reliance upon the ability of the human reason to disclose the mysteries of heaven that they hesitated or refused to commit themselves in faith hovered at the very bottom of William's spiritual ascent. They concerned themselves with the non-essentials while they ignored the call of God and the means given by Him to come up higher. Helpful though rational investigation might be, imperative though rational understanding might be, to treat it as the nucleus of God's relationship with man would always be to mistake the servant for the king. Contrary to their apparent opinion, theologians such as Peter Abelard did not have the duty of improving upon the faith by their endeavors. Theirs was the duty to let faith correct them.

Faith ought not to be corrected by rational examination but the reason should be corrected by the examination of faith. 240

It has been pointed out that Abelard, too, denounced

239. "Cognitio autem haec Dei alia fidei est, alia amoris vel caritatis. Quae fidei est, hujus vitae est; quae vero caritatis, vitae eternae: vel potius, sicut Dominus dicit, haec vita asterna est." Spec. f. id. P.L. 180, col.392D.

240. "Non jam ad examen rationum fides, sed ad examen fidei corrigenae rationes sunt." De sacramento altaris XI, P.L. 180, col.361D.
those who held their reason to be the sole authority in matters of faith and censured those who substituted "noise of the lips" for "movement of the heart." In a letter to the abbess Heloise, Abelard earnestly protested that he did not wish to be a philosopher if it meant resisting Saint Paul nor an Aristotle if it must separate him from Christ. He recognized that intellectualism alone would not carry him to God but at the same time from his passionate devotion to the power of the human reason arose complications which plagued him and led him into overstepping the bounds he had himself so carefully set and into conflict first with William and then with Bernard and the Church. William, in his own writings and in the writings of Abelard, recognized the inherent shortcomings of the epistemological tool of reason. In all fairness it must be pointed out that he similarly admitted the inadequacy of faith. His task, his vocation was not, he believed, to teach men to live in this world in the expectation of heaven, but to lead them into the perpetual enjoyment of heaven. In the presence of God's majesty, the fragmentary comprehension of the mind and the restricted apprehension of faith pale into the finite implements they are, or rather each will encompass the completeness in which it has so slightly shared. Reason will be transformed into

perfect understanding. Faith will be absorbed into the perfect charity of Love.

When at last we arrive at that place for which we have been aiming, there will be no further need for faith. We shall not be asked in heaven 'Do you believe?' for we shall see God face to face and contemplate Him. There shall be no need for hope when that which we have hoped for all our lives is revealed in our sight. And yet faith and hope will not exactly disappear. Rather they will turn into the things which they have foreshadowed.242

William of Saint Thierry loved God, desired God, adored God and sought with all his strength to bring all men to the perfect and undying love of God. The motivation behind his writings against Abelard was by no means as simple as some have claimed. His vehement opposition to the philosophies of Peter Abelard sprang from his own deep personal theology and his concern for others, from his love of God and his love of all things in God. By his supernatural vocation and by his monastic dedication he believed he could do no other.

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