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978-0-521-51911-3 - Paradoxes of Conscience in the High Middle Ages: Abelard, Heloise, and the Archpoet

Peter Godman

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## CHAPTER I

*Moral moments*

‘Now and then it is possible to observe the moral life in process of revising itself, perhaps by reducing the emphasis it formerly placed upon one or another of its elements, perhaps by inventing and adding to itself a new element, some mode of conduct or of feeling which hitherto it had not regarded as essential to virtue.’<sup>1</sup> Three such moments occurred between the second and the third quarters of the twelfth century. Each of them marked the emergence of a paradox of conscience unknown, or at least unrecorded, for more than half a millennium. Revived and refashioned in Latin, the ancient language of high culture, none of these paradoxes was tinged with the nostalgia of classicism. Expressions of a moral sensibility in the re-making, they served as barometers of change.

The change to which paradox pointed was both spiritual and intellectual. Accurately described as the reformation of the twelfth century,<sup>2</sup> its motive force was monastic. The attempt to re-establish, in its original strictness, the Rule of St Benedict; the efforts to restore the pristine purity of liturgical worship and prayer; the measurement of *authentica et proba* by the standards of an exemplary past;<sup>3</sup> these and other signs of concern with the genuine article were not accompanied by a decline in the production of forgeries.<sup>4</sup> Naturally enough. Compliments paid to others by admirers striving to surpass themselves, fakes represent the other side of authenticity’s coin.<sup>5</sup> That side has more than one facet. Viewed in less literal terms than the falsification of documents, it can also be seen to comprise the *factio* of faith.

<sup>1</sup> L. Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1971) 1.

<sup>2</sup> G. Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> See *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. R. Benson and G. Constable (Oxford, 1982) and M. -D. Chenu, *La théologie au xiiie siècle* (Paris, 1957).

<sup>4</sup> See *Fälschung im Mittelalter*, MGH Schriften 33, 1–6 (Hanover, 1988–1990).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. F. Troncarelli, ‘L’attribuzione, il testo, il falso’ in *Lo spazio letterario nel Medioevo: Il Medioevo Latino I: La produzione del testo* (Rome, 1993) 373–90, and A. Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship* (Princeton, 1990).

Cambridge University Press

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Peter Godman

Excerpt

[More information](#)

The *fictio* of faith is hardly mentioned in accounts of medieval theology, philosophy, and psychology.<sup>6</sup> Their portrayal of an age of belief, painted in the white of orthodoxy or the black of heresy, makes little room for subtler shades of grey. All seem to agree that the twelfth century made a cult of interiority, woke the conscience from its slumbers,<sup>7</sup> and redefined such sacraments as penance, in which authenticity is assumed as categorically as St Paul commands (I Timothy 1:5).<sup>8</sup> These broad brushstrokes leave few traces of ambiguity to linger within the frame. Next to no one appears to reckon with feigning on the part of those who confessed their sins.<sup>9</sup> One of the grounds for this omission is doctrinal. Sinners who accused themselves with the Biblical bitterness of remorse (Job 10:1) were thought to demonstrate spiritual sincerity, and still are.<sup>10</sup> Duplicity and deception are seldom admitted to the scene, despite the alertness of thinkers in the

<sup>6</sup> The exception is Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte*, III, 2, 86–181, who deals chiefly with baptism. His learned and exact study is ignored by later writers on the subject. (Cf. P. Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages c.200–c.1150* (Cambridge, 1993)). Legal aspects of this problem are considered in the valuable study by Y. Thomas, 'Fictio legis: L'empire de la fiction romaine et ses limites médiévales', *Droits: Revue française de théorie juridique* 21 (1995) 17–63.

<sup>7</sup> See M. -D. Chenu, *L'éveil de la conscience dans la civilisation médiévale*, Conférence Albert le Grand 1968 (Montreal, 1969) and L. Honnefelder, 'Conscientia sive ratio: Thomas von Aquin und die Entwicklung des Gewissensbegriffs' in *Mittelalterliche Komponenten des europäischen Bewusstseins*, ed. J. Szövérfy (Berlin, 1983) 8–19. Cf. P. Delhaye, *Le problème de la conscience morale chez S. Bernard*, *Analecta medievalia namurcensia* 9 (Louvain, 1957) and E. Bertola, *Il problema della coscienza nella teologia monastica del XII secolo* (Milan, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> See P. Anciaux, *La théologie du sacrement de pénitence au xii<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Louvain, 1949) and M. Colish, *Peter Lombard II* (Leiden, 1994) 583ff. Cf. R. Rusconi, *L'ordine dei peccati: La confessione tra Medioevo ed età moderna* (Bologna, 2002) and A. Carpin, *La confessione tra il xii e il xiii secolo: Teologia e prassi nella legislazione canonica medievale* (Bologna, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Nothing about this in *Faire croire: Modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du XII<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome 76 (Rome, 1981); *L'Aveu: Antiquité et Moyen Âge*, Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome 88 (Rome, 1988); K. -J. Klär, *Das kirchliche Bußinstitut von den Anfängen bis zum Konzil von Trient* (Frankfurt, 1990); A. Murray 'Confession before 1215', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 3 (1993) 51–81 and 'Confession as a Historical Source in the Thirteenth Century' in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to R. Southern*, ed. R. Davis and M. Wallace Hadrill (Oxford, 1981) 275–322; M. Ohst, *Pflichtbeichte: Untersuchungen zum Bußwesen im hohen und späten Mittelalter*, Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 89 (Tübingen, 1995); or P. Biller and A. Minnis (eds.), *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, York Studies in Medieval Theology (York, 1998). The brief discussion of 'fictive penance' by H. Lea, *A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church* II (Philadelphia, 1896) 422ff. is based on modern sources, polemically interpreted.

<sup>10</sup> For the ancient tradition, see F. Dingjan, OSB, *Discretio: Les origines patristiques et monastiques de la doctrine sur la prudence de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Assen, 1967). Typical of the reticence on the subject of *fictio* by recent moral and pastoral theology is B. Marliangeas, *Culpabilité, péché, pardon* (Paris, 2005). Related issues are, however, discussed by philosophical theologians. Cf. J. Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London, 2003) 107ff. and 147ff.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-51911-3 - Paradoxes of Conscience in the High Middle Ages: Abelard, Heloise, and the Archpoet

Peter Godman

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Moral moments*

3

Latin West to the (originally Greek) association of *hypocrisis* (ὑπόκρισις) with acting.<sup>11</sup> This has been ignored for another, less compelling, reason. Literalism, ingenuous or edifying, has relegated *factio* to the wings. Made to appear more marginal than the sleepwalkers whose antics have been brought to the fore,<sup>12</sup> the feigned penitents of the twelfth century in fact raised issues which, for their amused or appalled contemporaries, stood at centre-stage. The drama turned on ethical identity. Motivation played a leading role. Its uprightness was no longer accepted on the assurance of words or deeds. And in the glare of attention paid to guilt,<sup>13</sup> it was recognised that intentions could be crooked, even when sinners were meant to bare the secrets of their hearts.

The secrets of the heart, the *arcana* or *occulta cordis*, were considered unfathomable.<sup>14</sup> Ecclesiastical courts did not claim to judge them; only the penitential tribunal, in which the confessor acquired his knowledge like God, might do so, to the extent that they were admitted freely. As the patron-saint of the Holy Office, Pope Pius V, was later to note ruefully, confessors were not inquisitors.<sup>15</sup> The priest who received penitents' avowals did not, or was not supposed to, ferret out their *arcana cordis* by verbal

<sup>11</sup> See Chapters 2 and 7, below. No comprehensive account of this theme exists, but there are valuable studies by K. Hoheisel, U. Wilckens, and A. Kehl, 'Heuchelei' in *RLAC* XIV, 215ff.; F. Amory, 'Whited Sepulchres: The Semantic History of Hypocrisy to the High Middle Ages', *RTAM* 53 (1986) 5–39; R. Newhauser, 'Zur Zweideutigkeit in der Moralthologie: Als Tugenden verkleidete Laster' in *Der Fehltritt: Vergehen und Versehen in der Vormoderne*, ed. P. von Moos, Norm und Struktur (Cologne, 2001) 377–402 (with bibliography) and W. Speyer, 'Religiöse Betrüger: Falsche göttliche Menschen in Antike und Christentum' in *Fälschungen im Mittelalter* 5, 321–44.

<sup>12</sup> A. Boureau, 'La redécouverte de l'autonomie du corps: l' émergence du somnambulisme (XIIe–XIVe s.)', *Micrologus* 1 (1993) 27–42.

<sup>13</sup> Still classic is S. Kuttner, *Kanonistische Schuldlehre von Gratian bis auf die Dekretalen Gregors IX*, *Studi e testi* 64 (Vatican, 1935).

<sup>14</sup> See Kuttner, 'Ecclesia de occultis non iudicat. Problemata ex doctrina poenali canonistarum et decretalistarum a Gratiano usque ad Gregorium P. P. IX', *Acta congressus iuridici internationalis* III (Vatican, 1936) 225–46. Cf. P. von Moos, "'Herzenseheimnisse' (*occulta cordis*). Selbstverwahrung und Selbstentblößung im Mittelalter' in *Öffentliches und Privates, Gemeinsames und Eigenes: Gesammelte Studien zum Mittelalter* III, ed. G. Melville Geschichte: Forschung und Wissenschaft 16 (Berlin, 2007) 5–28 (= '*Occulta cordis*: Contrôle de soi et confession au Moyen Âge', *Entre histoire et littérature. Communication et culture au Moyen Âge* (Florence, 2005) 579–610); "'Öffentlich" und "Privat" im Mittelalter: Zum Problem der historischen Begriffsbestimmung', *Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Philosophisch – historische Klasse 33 (2004) 97–8; and S. Vecchio, 'Segreti e bugie: I peccata occulta', *Micrologus* 14 (2006) 41–58.

<sup>15</sup> See the letter of 8 September 1563 quoted by A. Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza: Inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (Turin, 1996) 10–11 and cf. (more generally and tendentiously) E. Brambilla, *Alle origini del Sant'Uffizio: Penitenza, confessione, e giustizia spirituale dal medioevo al XVI* (Bologna, 2000) 21–137.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-51911-3 - Paradoxes of Conscience in the High Middle Ages: Abelard, Heloise, and the Archpoet

Peter Godman

Excerpt

[More information](#)

coercion or physical force. It is obvious that this made him vulnerable to feigners. Less obvious is, why they wished to misrepresent and falsify their consciences. *Fictio* was practised by a particular type – mostly, but not exclusively, monastic. Fundamental to the religious identity of the majority of them were mourning for their sins and humility, which were related in theory and practice.

Humility, a virtue perhaps original to Christian ethics and certainly essential to monasticism,<sup>16</sup> was exemplified by penance. Monks are enjoined in the forty-ninth chapter of the Benedictine Rule to live every day as if it were Lent. St Benedict's recommendation was enforced by the habit of regular confession to superiors whom he describes as vicars of Christ. Small wonder that some quailed at this relentless soul-searching which they regarded as an ordeal, and attempted to bend its rules of self-accusation with *fictio*. More remarkable, in view of the many cultures in which confession figures,<sup>17</sup> is the rarity of the phenomenon (or the failure to note it). No account of feigned penance appears now to be taken by the moral and pastoral theology of Catholicism,<sup>18</sup> nor is it registered in all periods of Western Christianity.<sup>19</sup> Its identification as a problem with wide-ranging implications is distinctive of the ethical sensibility refashioned in the twelfth century.

Throughout this golden age of dialectic, rules of inversion prevailed. From a monk's *fictio* of penitential humility was concluded his guilt of pride. How the conclusion was drawn, St Bernard of Clairvaux explains in a work which that master-dialectician of the conscience wrote c.1125:

<sup>16</sup> See A. Dihle, 'Demut', in *RLAC* III, 735–78; P. Adnès, 'L'humilité vertu spécifiquement chrétienne d'après saint Augustin', *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 28 (1952) 208–23, and A. de Vogüé, *La règle de saint Benoît VII: Commentaire doctrinal et spirituel* (Paris, 1977) 168–83, 357, 367, 375, 384, 387, 399–400, 433.

<sup>17</sup> See H. Jaeger, 'L'examen de conscience dans les religions non-chrétiennes et avant le christianisme', *Numen* 6 (1959) 176–233; R. Pettazzoni, 'La confession des péchés dans l'histoire générale des religions' in *Mélanges F. Cumont*, Annuaire de l'Institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves 4 (Brussels, 1936) 893–901; and A. Hahn and V. Kapp (eds.), *Selbstthematization und Selbstzeugnis: Bekenntnis und Geständnis* (Frankfurt, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. L. Vereecke, *De Guillaume d'Ockham à saint Alphonse de Liguori: études de la théologie morale moderne 1300–1787* (Rome, 1986) and T. Fleming, *The Second Vatican Council's Teaching on the Sacrament of Penance and the Communal Nature of the Sacrament* (Rome, 1981). Thanks are due for advice on this point to His Eminence Georges Cardinal Cottier, OP.

<sup>19</sup> Relevant though it is to the later phenomenon of 'Nicodemism' (which is not an invention of the early modern period), no attention is paid to earlier *fictio* by C. Ginzburg, *Il nicodemismo: Simulazione e dissimulazione religiosa nell'Europa del '500* (Turin, 1970), or J. Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur* (Paris, 1983) and *L'aveu et le pardon* (Paris, 1990).

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Peter Godman

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Moral moments*

5

There are quite a few who, when they are accused of obvious faults, knowing that their self-defence will not be believed, make up a subtler argument to defend themselves and reply in the words of a crafty confession ... Their faces bowed, their bodies prostrate, they wring forth a few tearlets, if they can, interrupting their speech with sighs and their words with groans. Not only do such types not seek to excuse the reproaches levelled at them, but they themselves even exaggerate their fault, with the effect that, while you hear them adding some impossible or unbelievable detail about their guilt from their own lips, you are led to disbelieve even what you thought certain and, on account of your confidence about the falsehood of what is being confessed, you lapse into doubt about what you deemed almost secure. As they affirm what they do not want to be believed, by confessing they defend their fault, and hide it while revealing it; and when confession resounds laudably on their lips, wickedness continues to lurk in their hearts...<sup>20</sup>

Such a style, such a tone had not been heard since St Jerome, Bernard's only equal as a Christian satirist in Latin prose,<sup>21</sup> lashed the failings of all and sundry – each of them named. Anonymous but vivid, a type, not an individual, of feigned penance makes his début in European literature here. Bernard's *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, aptly characterised as an 'inverse commentary on the seventh chapter of the [Benedictine] Rule',<sup>22</sup> was composed by a seasoned confessor of monks who drew on his pastoral experience to show how the penitential obligation of sincerity might be turned on its head. Self-accusation as self-defence, revelation as concealment, multiplication and invention of faults in order to affirm a remorse that amounts to a composite of simulation and dissimulation: in

<sup>20</sup> 'Nonnulli enim, cum de apertioribus arguuntur, scientes, si se defenderent, quod sibi non crederetur, subtilius inveniunt argumentum defensionis, verba respondentes dolosae confessionis... Vultus demittitur, prosternitur corpus; aliquas sibi lacrimulas extorquent, si possunt; vocem suspiriis, verba gemitibus interrumpunt. Nec solum qui eius modi est obiecta non excusat, sed ipse quoque culpam exaggerat, ut dum impossibile aliquid aut incredibile culpa suae ore ipsius additum audis, etiam illud, quod ratum putabas, discredere possis, et ex eo quod falsum esse non dubitas, dum confitetur, in dubium veniat quod quasi certum tenebatur. Dumque affirmant quod credi nolunt, confitendo culpam defendunt et aperiendo tegunt, quando et confessio laudabiliter sonat in ore et adhuc iniquitas occultatur in corde ...' *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* xviii.46 in *Sancti Bernardi Opera III Tractatus et opuscula*, ed. J. Leclercq and H. Rochais (Rome, 1963) 51, 12–52. All translations, here and elsewhere in this book, are my own.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. D. Wiesen, *St Jerome as a Satirist* (Berkeley, 1964).

<sup>22</sup> C. Walker Bynum, *Docere verbo et exemplo: An Aspect of Twelfth-Century Spirituality*, Harvard Theological Studies 31 (Missoula, 1979) 102. Recent discussions of the work include M. Pranger, *Bernard of Clairvaux and the Shape of Monastic Thought: Broken Dreams* (Leiden, 1994) 84–121 and J. Kitchen, 'Bernard of Clairvaux's *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* and the Postmodern Revisioning of Moral Philosophy' in *Virtue and Ethics in the Twelfth Century*, ed. I. Bejczy and R. Newhauser (Leiden, 2005) 95–118.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

this *sic et non* of false assertions masking real denials, a paradox takes form. It is a paradox of *factio* constructed by a spiritual sophist who, through his pyrotechnics of auto-execration, aims at a pre-eminence of humility.

Humility aimed at exaltation inverts the teaching of Jesus, on which the seventh chapter of the Benedictine Rule is based: *Qui se humiliaverit, exaltabitur* (Matthew 23:12; cf. Luke 18:14). The inversion, as Bernard observes it, is theatrical. Performed in a pantomime of the sacramental stage, this 'crafty confession' requires a spectator. His suspicions are aroused by the overacting, which makes him aware that the monastic mummer is not just feigning but also showing off. Ostentation of piety, undertaken less out of love for God than from craving for men's praise, is condemned by Christ as pharisaical at Matthew 23:25ff. It is a mark of Bernard's restraint that he does not spell out what a long tradition of exegesis made plain.<sup>23</sup> To note that feigned penance could be ranked as a sub-species of hypocrisy might have seemed to him obvious or trivial or both. But Bernard is keenly interested in terminology, especially of the affective kind; and the care with which he employs it is unprecedented.

'Crafty' (*dolosa*), for example, has semi-legal connotations of malicious intent. Coupled with 'confession', the adjective mediates the tension between the penitent's motives for feigning and the effect he sought to produce on his confessor. That confessor, accustomed to browbeating popes,<sup>24</sup> admits to being unsure in his judgement. With a lack of confidence seldom paralleled in his other writings, Bernard of Clairvaux wavers in his opinion ('you are led to disbelieve', 'you lapse into doubt'). Subjectivity is one issue; verifiability, another. Their conjunction in this passage represents a turning-point in the development of the medieval conscience. Only a confessor who drew inferences unattested in the earlier tradition of penitential thought was capable of detecting the tension Bernard felt so acutely. It could not be felt until the sinner was recognised as potentially more sophisticated and less amenable to instructions from above than the stereotypes of passivity who recur in the handbooks of the early Middle Ages.<sup>25</sup> Their assumption of authority, unargued and peremptory, is shaken

<sup>23</sup> See K. Pollmann, 'The Splitting of Morality in *Matthew 23* and its Exegetical Consequences' in Pollmann (ed.), *Double Standards in the Ancient and Medieval World* (Göttingen, 2000) 263–86, and 'Hypocrisy and the History of Salvation: Medieval Interpretations of Matthew 23', *Wiener Studien* 114 (2001) 469–82. See further Chapter 2.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. P. Godman, *The Silent Masters: Latin Literature and its Censors in the High Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2000) 120ff.

<sup>25</sup> See Chapter 2.



Cambridge University Press

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Peter Godman

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Moral moments*

7

by this spiritual sophist. He is able both to misrepresent his inner state and to unnerve his judge.

On the judge-cum-prosecutor is placed the burden of proof. This reversal of roles was unknown to the prescriptive moralism long dominant in Latin Europe. It measured atonement, and therefore sincerity, by penitential 'tarifs' meant to be proportionate to sinners' transgressions.<sup>26</sup> Neither 'proportionality' nor the other clap-trap of pseudo-objectivity common in the manuals has any place in Bernard's work. He portrays a form of interiority that is evasive of measure and elusive of control. A moral maze, like a hall of mirrors where each reflection evokes its opposite, this labyrinthine conscience resists description in ordinary language. Hence the use of paradox. Combinations of contraries, such as 'proud humility' and 'simulating dissimulation',<sup>27</sup> highlight change. The change wrought in *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* is a new perception of ethical ambiguity.

Ambiguous because anxious, this monk does not experience the same fear inculcated into sinners by the penitential handbooks. It is not simply foreboding of punishment which leads him to feign, but an inverted (or perverted) sense of obligation. Obligated by the seventh chapter of the Benedictine Rule to reveal evil thoughts and deeds to his abbot 'in humble confession', he resorts to making a crafty one, which piles on the pathos. That pathos, affected to create the impression of a refined and rigorous conscience, cannot be assessed with the 'exteriority of the early medieval penitential codes which took deeds at face-value with no account of intention'.<sup>28</sup> Although intention and motivation are among Bernard's chief concerns, he had no means of probing them other than words, vehicles of duplicity, and gestures, signs of the soul.<sup>29</sup>

This soul is sick. Its spiritual physician makes his diagnosis delicately. So delicately does Bernard write that modern readers insensitive to the nuances of his Latinity may miss its critical and comic implications. The monk, for instance, does not weep. He 'wrings forth a few tearlets' (*lacrimulas*). The diminutive is derisory, the straining for effect dismissed in the sarcasm: 'if he can'. The dubitative tone leaves no room for doubt. *Fictio* is cast as

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* xviii.47, ed. Leclercq and Rochais, 52, 12 and 20.

<sup>28</sup> Constable, *Reformation*, 266 but see too R. Kottje, 'Intentions – oder Tathaftung? Zum Verständnis der frühmittelalterlichen Bußbücher', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 122, Kanonistische Abteilung 91 (2005) 738–41.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. C. Casagrande and S. Vecchio, *I peccati della lingua: Disciplina ed etica della parola nella cultura medievale* (Rome, 1987) and J. -C. Schmitt, *La Raison des gestes dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1990).

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Peter Godman

Excerpt

[More information](#)

a caricature of the theology of tears.<sup>30</sup> Meant to be in a state of lacrimose lamentation for his sins, this monastic impostor manages only to produce a trickle when he should gush in streams. And as pathos dwindles into bathos, his corporeal rhetoric of remorse – sighs and groans, crestfallenness and prostration – is exposed as sham.

There is nothing sham or sarcastic, however, about Bernard's twin theme of abbatial surveillance. Discipline and authority are treated by him with deadly seriousness. Neither discipline limited to following rules nor authority derived from rank concerns this grand inquisitor *avant la lettre*, so much as the inner qualities displayed in governance of one's self and of others. His work trespasses beyond the limits imposed on the confessor to write a chapter in the pre-history of the inquisitorial mentality. The cast of mind that led to the foundation of the Holy Office begins to take form in this tract; and if Pius V was likened to Bernard of Clairvaux,<sup>31</sup> that was for good reasons. The patron-saint of the Roman Inquisition had much to learn from *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*.

Consider the mentality that scrutinised those stoops and twitches which, on the part of Bernard's brethren, revealed a 'sickness of the soul' identified with curiosity;<sup>32</sup> or that eavesdropped on the cackle emitted by a monk who had pursed his lips and ground his teeth to suppress his laughter which escaped, like a snort or a snore, from his nostrils, even when he stuffed his fists into his mouth;<sup>33</sup> or that followed the gaze of a virtuoso of fasting as it travelled down the table, 'more concerned about forfeiting glory [for abstinence] than about feeling hungry', in order to see whether others were eating less...<sup>34</sup> An inquisitorial psychology of suspicion is adumbrated here. Voluntary or involuntary, conscious or unconscious, the slightest sign of deviance from Bernard's draconian standards of self-control is construed as self-betrayal.

The foundation on which his psychology of suspicion builds is less the traditional ideal of harmony between thought and action held to constitute sincerity,<sup>35</sup> than a novel sense of responsibility for detecting

<sup>30</sup> See P. Nagy, *Le don des larmes au Moyen Age: Un instrument spirituel en quête d'institution (Ve–XIIIe siècle)* (Paris, 2000) 267ff.

<sup>31</sup> G. Catena, *Vita del gloriosissimo papa Pio Quinto* (Rome, 1587) 4.

<sup>32</sup> *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* x.28, ed. Leclercq and Rochais, 38, 20ff.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. xii.40; 47, 17–19. <sup>34</sup> Ibid. xiv.42; 49, 5–10.

<sup>35</sup> Best discussed by G. Constable, 'The Concern for Sincerity and Understanding in Liturgical Prayer, especially in the Twelfth Century' in *Classica et Mediaevalia: Studies in Honor of J. Szövérfy*, ed. I. Vaslef and H. Buschhausen (Washington, 1986) 17–30. For a general survey of the problem, cf. J. Martin, 'Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence: The Discovery of the Individual in Renaissance Europe', *The American Historical Review* 102 (1997) 1309–42.



Cambridge University Press

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Peter Godman

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Moral moments*

9

the evasiveness (*tergiversatio*) of his charges.<sup>36</sup> Detection, needless to say, meant punishment. The Rule did not prescribe this degree of dragoon-ing: it is the invention of Bernard's obsessiveness. And if he tempered the punitive spirit of *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* in other works, declaring that the will should not be coerced into obedience and distinguishing between *confessio* and *defensio*,<sup>37</sup> he still appears to assume a vocation of martyrdom, or masochism, on the part of those who submitted themselves to his surveillance. The result is both hilarious and horrifying. Under the eagle-eye of their abbot, life cannot have been easy for feigned penitents at Clairvaux, that penitentiary of the spirit.



At the Paraclete, founded by Abelard and headed by Heloise after its donation by him to her in 1129,<sup>38</sup> she addressed similar issues from a different point of view. An inquisitrix not of others' consciences but of her own, Heloise was concerned to maintain the compatibility of her multiple roles as wife, abbess, and author. A precarious balancing-act, undertaken without the support of tradition or the reassurance of sympathy from the husband to whom she addressed her letters. Abelard now insisted on assuming the part of Heloise's spiritual director,<sup>39</sup> in the most recent of his several attempts to re-create himself. A master driven from the Parisian schools by the consequences of his scandalous affair and disastrous marriage with her, a monk who made Saint-Denis too hot to hold him, a precocious Petrarch whose enemies hounded him even from the solace of learned anchoritism, he had fetched up in the backwater of his native Brittany where, as abbot of Saint-Gildas, he was exposed to attempts by his brethren to murder him.<sup>40</sup> A lesser man might have despaired of playing Proteus. With a determination often misinterpreted as arrogance, Abelard again transformed

<sup>36</sup> *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae* XVIII.47; 52, 11.

<sup>37</sup> *De praecepto et dispensatione* IV.10; V.11; XI.28 in *S. Bernardi Opera* III, ed. J. Leclercq and H. Rochais (Rome, 1963) 260, 15ff.; 261, 8ff.; 273, 11. Cf. J. Leclercq, *Recueil d'études sur saint Bernard et ses écrits* V, *Storia e letteratura* 182 (Rome, 1992) 171–80.

<sup>38</sup> Abelard, *HC* 46, ed. I. Pagani, *Epistolario di Abelardo ed Eloisa* (Turin, 2004) 214. (All references are to this edition which, although not the most critical, is at present the most convenient, because it prints in one place texts that have been published separately.) For background, cf. T. Waldmann, 'Abbot Suger and the Nuns of Argenteuil', *Traditio* 41 (1985) 239–72 and M. McLaughlin, 'Heloise the Abbess: The Expansion of the Paraclete' in *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. B. Wheeler (London, 2000) 1–18.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapters 5–7 below.

<sup>40</sup> Abelard's role-playing is well studied by M. Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life* (Oxford, 1997).

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Excerpt

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himself from a failed reformer of male monasticism into a guide of the nuns at the Paraclete.<sup>41</sup>

Their abbess understood, not for the first time, that he had given little thought to the consequences of the scenario he was staging. Twice before – when he forced Heloise to commit matrimony and when he coerced her into taking the veil – Abelard had disregarded her will.<sup>42</sup> His imperiousness had been doubly dire, because it had condemned her to live what she regarded as a lie and because he declined to acknowledge the obligations she believed he had incurred. The wish of this determined man was no longer the command of this equally resolute woman. Once his pupil, she was now his peer in learning and letters. Through adversities hardly less painful than his, she had arrived at a firm, if anguished view of who she was and should be. Moral identity, present and future, is at issue in the correspondence of Abelard and Heloise; and the form in which she chose to present hers is confessional.

Confessional not in the literal sense of that term, restricted to verbal borrowings from St Augustine's masterpiece,<sup>43</sup> but in the spirit of ambivalence and self-division in which its first eight books were written,<sup>44</sup> Heloise's autobiographical letters are animated by the principle of self-knowledge with which Abelard entitled his ethical tract, *Scito te ipsum*. To read them as mere exercises in Ovidian imitation,<sup>45</sup> to strain from between their lines a manifesto of proto-feminism,<sup>46</sup> is to ignore the standards of the twelfth-century culture in which they were composed. Its prime value was truth; its hierarchy of knowledge stationed *grammatica* at the lowest rung.<sup>47</sup> This most modest of disciplines, not yet puffed by the hot air of

<sup>41</sup> Cf. P. De Santis (ed.), *I sermoni di Abelardo per le monache del Paraclete*, Mediaevalia Lovaniensia Series 1/Studia 31 (Louvain, 2002) and (with caution) J. Szövérfy (ed.), *Peter Abelard's Hymnarius Paraclitensis*, 2 vols. (Albany, N.Y.: 1975).

<sup>42</sup> See Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. P. Courcelle, *Les Confessions de saint Augustin dans la tradition littéraire* (Paris, 1963) II, 13.

<sup>44</sup> See Chapters 2 and 7 below.

<sup>45</sup> P. Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (†203) to Marguerite Porete (†1310)* (Cambridge, 1984) 107, 126–7; a similar line is followed by P. Brown and J. Pfeiffer III, 'Heloise, Dialectic, and the *Heroides*' in *Listening to Heloise*, ed. Wheeler, 143–60 with bibliography of more of the same.

<sup>46</sup> Proponents, conscious and unconscious, of this thesis are applauded by J. Marenbon in his bibliographical study 'Authenticity Revisited' in *Listening to Heloise*, ed. Wheeler, 27–31.

<sup>47</sup> See P. Delhaye, 'Grammatica et Ethica au xii<sup>e</sup> siècle', *RTAM* 25 (1958) 59–110; P. von Moos, 'Was galt im lateinischen Mittelalter als das Literarische an der Literatur? Eine theologisch-rhetorische Antwort Abelards' in *Abelard und Heloise*, 303ff., and F. Bezner, *Vela veritatis: Hermeneutik, Wissen und Sprache in der Intellectual History des 12. Jahrhunderts*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 85 (Leiden, 2005) 14ff., 99ff., 341ff., 631ff.