

LETTER 1

ABELARD'S LETTER OF CONSOLATION TO A FRIEND: A STORY OF CALAMITIES

In arousing or calming human emotions, I have found, the experiences of others are often more effective than mere words. So, after offering you some comfort when we talked together, I have decided, now that we are apart, to write you a letter of consolation about the calamities I have suffered. This should make you realize that your troubles amount to little or nothing compared with mine, and you may find them easier to bear.

[His Birthplace]

I was born on a manor called Le Pallet, which is near the border of Brittany and, I believe, about eight miles east of the city of Nantes. Quick-witted, which is natural in a child of my land and people, I was also outstanding in my talent and facility for learning. I had, besides, a father who had acquired some little education before he was given the sword-belt of a knight.¹ He later became so intensely fond of learning that he was determined to have his sons instructed in letters before they were trained for the knightly life. And this he did. Because I was the first-born son and, for that reason, dearer to him than the others, he provided more carefully for my education.

As I made greater progress in my studies and they became easier for me, I embraced them more ardently. Indeed, I fell so completely in love with them that I gave up to my brothers the pomp of military glory, together with the inheritance and rights of the first-born, and I finally abandoned the court of Mars to be educated in the lap of Minerva. Preferring the armor of dialectical reasoning to all other branches of philosophy, I exchanged other weapons for this, and I valued the conflicts of disputation more highly than the trophies of war. As an imitator of the peripatetics, I wandered, debating as I went, through various provinces, wherever I had heard that the art of dialectic was actively cultivated.²

¹ See: Explanatory Notes, "Abelard."

² *Peripatetics*: Term generally used for the school of Aristotle, who founded a formal institution, the Lyceum, but liked to walk around (Greek, *peripapeun*) the Athenian countryside with his

[His Persecution by Master William]

At last I arrived in Paris, where the study of logic was already most flourishing, and I sought out as a teacher William of Champeaux, who was at that time as distinguished in reality as in reputation for his mastery of this subject.³ I stayed with him for a while and at first he liked me. But he later became greatly annoyed with me because I tried to refute some of his opinions and often attempted to argue with him, and sometimes seemed to vanquish him in disputation. My behavior also aroused the hostility of those of my fellow-students who were considered more outstanding than the rest, the more so because they regarded me as younger and less advanced in my studies than they were. This was the beginning of my calamities, which have continued to this day, and as my fame spread more widely, the envy of others was aroused against me.

Then, with greater confidence in my ability than my age warranted, as a mere youth I aspired to become the master of a school and I found a place where I could do this, at Melun, which was at that time a well-known town and a royal seat.⁴ My master suspected my plan and in his efforts to remove my school as far as possible from his own, he plotted secretly against me, using every means in his power to prevent the establishment of my school before I left his classes, and to deprive me of the place I had in mind. But certain influential men in this region were hostile to him and with their help I succeeded in doing as I wished. In fact, his display of jealousy won a great deal of support for me.

From the time when I established my school, my fame as a dialectician began to increase so much that the reputation not only of my fellow-students, but of our teacher himself gradually diminished and was finally eclipsed. So I became more self-confident and moved my school as soon as possible to Corbeil,⁵ which is closer to Paris, in order to have an opportunity to engage more often in our battles of disputation.⁶ Not long afterward, I fell ill as a result of excessive study and was obliged to return home. Even though I was away from France for several years, students who were eager for instruction in logic kept trying as hard as they could to seek me out.

A few years later, after I had recovered from my illness, that teacher of mine, William, then archdeacon of Paris, renounced his former status as a secular cleric to join the order of regular canons, hoping, it was said, to gain a higher reputation for piety so that he might be given a major church office. His hopes

students teaching as they walked. In later, medieval, centuries, the term came to imply something like a quest: here Abelard is comparing himself to knights errant as well as to ancient Greek philosophers. *Dialectics*: The art of dialectic (or logic) is the art of arriving at the truth by disclosing the contradictions in an opponent's argument, or overcoming them.

³ See: Explanatory Notes, "William of Champeaux."

⁴ *Melun*: a royal residence up the Seine favored by Philip I, some 40 km./25 mi. southeast of Paris as the crow flies—and not far (14 km./9 mi.) from the Champeaux which was William's birthplace and probable family seat.

⁵ *Corbeil*: another royal residence on the Seine, downriver from Melun, some 14 km./9 mi. closer to Paris.

⁶ *Battles of disputation*: increasingly important in teaching, these refer to debates involving two or more participants, students or their teachers.

were later realized when he was made bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne. But at this time his entrance into the religious life did not remove him either from Paris or from his accustomed study of philosophy, since he immediately began to teach publicly, as usual, in the very monastery [Saint-Victor] that he had entered for the sake of religion.⁷

Returning at that time to hear his lectures on rhetoric, I forced him, among other ventures in disputation, to change—or rather, to renounce—his former opinion concerning universals.⁸ Regarding the common existence of universals, he had maintained that the same thing exists wholly and essentially in all of the individuals of its class, that among these there is no difference in essence, but only diversity in the multitude of their accidents. Now, however, he so altered his opinion that he afterward stated that the same thing exists in its individuals not essentially, but indifferently.⁹ This question of universals has always been the greatest problem for dialecticians, so baffling, indeed, that Porphyry himself, in his *Isagoge*, does not presume to answer it definitively when he writes about universals, saying: "This is a most difficult problem."¹⁰ So after William had changed his opinion, indeed was forced to abandon it, his lectures became so careless that they could hardly be considered lectures on logic at all, as if this whole subject consisted only of the problem of universals.¹¹

From this time on, my teaching acquired so much force and authority that those who had earlier been most ardently devoted to that teacher of mine, and had attacked my teaching most violently, now flocked to my lectures.¹² Indeed, the person who had succeeded to our master's chair in the school of Paris offered me his own position, in order to become my pupil along with the rest, in the very place where his master and mine had formerly been so eminent. I can hardly describe how consumed with envy Master William was, how he seethed with rage when, after a few days, he saw me in full sway there as a teacher of dialectic. Nor did he endure for long the misery of the injury he had suffered, but stealthily tried once more to get rid of me. Because there was no charge he could make against me openly, he attempted, by accusing

⁷ *St. Victor*: the abbey just outside the walls of Paris where William of Champeaux founded a community of canons and a school (ca. 1105).

⁸ *Universals*: Abelard described a "universal" word (he accepted no universal "things") as a "common or confused image of a large number of beings." How are "universals" related to "particulars"? Are "universals" real or merely collective names for real particulars? Answers to these question have especially vexed theological implications in respect to any definition of the Trinity. For discussions of Abelard's formulation of this issue in his *Logica "Ingredientibus"*, see: Luscombe, "Peter Abelard" in *Twelfth Century Western Philosophy*, pp. 279–327; Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, ch. 3; and especially, Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Abelard*, ch. 8.

⁹ *Individuals*: For twelfth-century perspectives, consult John of Salisbury as well as Abelard's *Logica "Ingredientibus"*.

¹⁰ *Isagoge* 4.1, p. 1. 13, p. 25, 13; it is through Boethius's Latin translation of the introduction of the third-century Neoplatonic philosopher Porphyry's *Introduction to Categories* that this text on dialectic was known; see *In Porphyrium* 11: PL 64, 826: CSEL 48, 159.

¹¹ See: HC above, note 8, on "Universals."

¹² *Lectures*: the continuing survey of a subject or theme; see Marenbon, *Philosophy*, pp. 48–52, 63–68.

this man of the worst crimes, to get the school away from the person who had given up his mastership to me, and to substitute for him another man who was a rival of mine. Then I returned to Melun and established my school there, and the more openly his jealousy pursued me, the greater my prestige became. For, as the poet says: "Envy seeks out what is highest, the winds blow on the mountaintops."¹³

Not long afterward, Master William discovered that nearly everyone who was at all discerning was dubious about his piety and, because he had obviously not withdrawn from the city, there was much noisy whispering about the sincerity of his conversion to the monastic life. For this reason he transferred himself and his group of monks to a certain village at a distance from the city. I returned immediately from Melun to Paris, hoping from now on to be at peace with him. But, as I have said, through his efforts my place there had been taken by my rival, so I set up the camp of my school outside the city on Mont-Sainte-Geneviève, as if to besiege the man who had taken my place.¹⁴

When my master heard this, he brazenly came back at once to the city, bringing with him whatever students he then had and re-establishing his community of monks in their former monastery, as if to deliver his deserted vassal from my siege. Although he intended to help this man he harmed him greatly. Until then, this substitute had a certain number of pupils, especially for his lectures on Priscian, about whom he was considered a great expert. But after our master came back, he lost them all and was forced to stop teaching. Not long afterward, as if he had given up hope of achieving further worldly fame, he, too, entered the monastic life.

You have, I am sure, long known the facts about those conflicts of disputation which, after my master's return to the city, my students carried on with him and with his pupils. You are aware, too, of the success that fortune granted to my students in these battles, indeed, to me myself through them. As I speak modestly, I may quote more boldly the saying of Ajax: "If you want to know the outcome of this battle, I was not vanquished by my enemy."¹⁵ If I were silent about this, the facts themselves speak loudly and they proclaim the result of this affair. But while all this was going on, my beloved mother, Lucia, urged me to return home, because my father, Berengar, had entered a monastery and she was planning to do the same. When she had done so, I returned to France chiefly in order to take up the study of Scriptures, since my master, William, had now obtained the bishopric of Châlons. In this field, his own teacher, Anselm of Laon, then enjoyed very great and long-established authority.¹⁶

¹³ Ovid, *Remedia Amoris* 1.369.

¹⁴ Mont-Sainte-Geneviève: a school established at the church of St. Geneviève on the steep hill on the left bank of the Seine, near the site of the old Roman forum. That school, annoyingly independent of the cathedral's school down on the riverbank at Notre-Dame, would contribute later to the evolution of the University of Paris.

¹⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13.89–90.

¹⁶ See: Explanatory Notes, "Anselm of Laon."

[When He Went to Master Anselm at Laon]

So I became a student of this old man, who owed his reputation to long experience rather than to his intelligence or his memory. If anyone came knocking on his door in uncertainty about any question, he left more uncertain than ever. He seemed most admirable to those who listened to his lectures, but worthless to those who asked him questions. He had a marvelous mastery of words, but they were almost meaningless and devoid of reason. When he started a fire, it filled his house with smoke, rather than making it glow with light. To those who saw it from a distance, his tree seemed remarkably leafy, but those who came closer and examined it more carefully found it barren. So after I had come to gather fruit from this tree, I realized it was the fig-tree that the Lord had cursed, or that old oak to which Lucan compares Pompey, saying: "There he stood, the mere shadow of a great man, like a lofty oak in a fruitful field."¹⁷

When I had discovered this, I did not lie idle in his shade for very long. When I began to attend his lectures less and less often, however, some of his better students were offended, as if I were being scornful of such a distinguished master. They secretly turned him against me, too, and made him my enemy by their evil insinuations. Then one day, after some discussion of *sententiae* we students were joking among ourselves.¹⁸ One of them, challenging me, asked what I thought about the teaching of the sacred books, since until then I had studied only philosophy. I replied that I considered the study of this kind of exposition very beneficial, because it teaches the way to salvation. But, I said, I was greatly surprised that educated men should not be able to understand the commentaries of the Holy Fathers through their writings and glosses alone, without the need for any further instruction.

Most of those who were present laughed at me, and asked whether I could and would presume to demonstrate this to them. I replied that I was ready to try it if they wished. Then, louder than ever in their scorn, they said: "Certainly, by all means, go ahead. Let someone bring us the commentary on some little-known part of Scripture, so we can put your claim to the proof." They all agreed on the exceedingly obscure prophecy of Ezekiel. Taking the commentary, I immediately invited them to attend my lecture the next day. Then they began to give me unwelcome advice, declaring that there was no need for haste in such an important matter; in view of my inexperience, I ought to spend more time in study and in developing my interpretation. But I replied indignantly that I was accustomed to relying on my intelligence rather than on practice, and I added that I would give up altogether unless they would come to my lecture without delay, as I wished.

¹⁷ Lucan, *Pharsalia* 1.135–36.

¹⁸ *Sententiae/Sentences*: Robert of Melun, a distinguished student of Abelard's, emphasized the importance of grasping the *sententia*, the thought or opinion behind a text, or raised by a text, e.g., the issues raised by Scripture, which he regarded as more valuable than simple glosses of scriptural texts. See: Explanatory Notes, "Anselm of Laon" for more on this subject. Also consult Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, chs. 2 and 3.

To tell the truth, only a few of them attended my first lecture, for everyone thought it ridiculous that I, who had until then been almost entirely unfamiliar with the teaching of Sacred Scripture, should take it up so hastily. Yet all those who did come liked what I said so much that they praised it enthusiastically, and urged me to continue my interpretation after the manner of this first lecture. When those who had not been there heard about it, they flocked to my second and third lectures, and everyone was very careful to copy the glosses I had begun on the first day.¹⁹

[Anselm's Persecution of Him]

As a result, the old man was consumed with jealousy, and since he had already been turned against me by the influence of certain persons, as I have said before, he began to persecute me for my teaching of Holy Scripture with as much hostility as Master William had shown earlier toward my teaching in philosophy. At that time, there were in the old man's school two men who seemed more outstanding than the rest, Alberic of Reims and Lotulf the Lombard, and as their opinion of themselves became more exalted, they grew angrier at me.²⁰

Largely because he was disturbed by their sly hints, as I later found out, the old master arrogantly forbade me to carry on, in the place where he exercised magisterial control over teaching, the work of interpretation that I had begun there.²¹ He claimed that if I, a novice still untrained in this study, should happen to make some error in my work, he would be blamed for it. When the students heard about this, they were most indignant at such an open display of envy, the like of which no one had ever experienced before. The more evident his jealousy became, the more it redounded to my honor, and his persecution only made me more famous.

[When He Finally Became Famous in Paris]

So after a few days I returned to Paris, and for some years I peacefully conducted the school that had long before been intended for me and, indeed, was offered to me, but from which I had at first been driven away. There, at the beginning of my course, I tried to finish the glosses on Ezekiel that I had begun at Laon. My lectures were, indeed, so popular with those who had heard them that they considered me no less gifted in the teaching of Holy Scripture than I was in philosophy. Because of the interest in both fields, my classes grew by leaps and bounds, and you cannot have failed to hear how much money and fame they brought me.

¹⁹ *Glosses*: a brief explanatory note or translation of a difficult or technical expression, usually inserted in the margin or between the lines of a text or manuscript. As in Abelard's case, these often became more extended or developed explanations. He refers to his (now lost) gloss on Ezekiel.

²⁰ See: Explanatory Notes, "Alberic of Reims."

²¹ See: Explanatory Notes, "Anselm of Laon." For an extensive, at times debatable, discussion of magisterial control of teaching, an important role, see Clanchy, *Abelard*, pp. 65–94.

But success always inflates the foolish, and worldly tranquility weakens the spirit's vigor and easily destroys it through the lures of the flesh. By this time I regarded myself as the only philosopher who remained in all the world and I no longer feared any competition. The outcome was that, although I had been altogether continent until then, I began to give myself up to lust. Now the more successful I had become in philosophy and sacred learning, the more I cut myself off by the impurity of my life from the philosophers and divines. It is well known that philosophers, not to mention divines—I mean those who are dedicated to the teaching of Holy Scripture—have been adorned especially by the virtue of continence.

When I had become an utter slave to pride and sensuality, the divine grace granted me the remedy for both diseases, though I was unwilling: first for lust and then for pride. For lust, by robbing me of those parts of my body by which I had served it, and for the pride that surged up in me chiefly because of my learning—since, as the Apostle says (1 Cor. 8.1), "knowledge puffs a man up"—by humbling me through the burning of that book which was my greatest glory. Now I want you to know the story of both remedies, in the order in which they occurred, and more truly from the events themselves than from hearsay.

I had always loathed the impurity of harlots, and I was prevented by my scholar's zeal for study from meeting and coming to know ladies of noble birth. Nor did I have much contact with the ordinary sort of women. But evil fortune caressed me, as they say, and found an easier opportunity to cast me down from the heights, so that, in my excessive pride and my neglect of the grace I had received, the divine pity might restore me humbled to itself.

[How He Fell in Love with Heloise, and Was Wounded in Mind and Body]

There lived in the city of Paris a girl named Heloise, the niece of a canon called Fulbert, who loved her so much that he had made every effort to give her the best possible education. She was by no means the least handsome of women, but in the extent of her learning she surpassed them all.²² Since this gift is so rare in women, it won the highest praise for her, and made her the most famous woman in the whole kingdom. Seeing in her all of the qualities that commonly attract admirers, I decided that she was the right person to unite with myself in love, and I felt this would be easy to do. For I was then so renowned, and so outstanding in my youth and charm, that I was not afraid of being rejected by any woman whom I should deign to love. I was the more convinced that this girl would yield to me readily because I was so well aware of her knowledge and her love of literary studies. This would mean that, even when we were parted, the exchange of letters could bring us together, and since it is often possible to write more boldly than one can speak, we could always converse delightfully with one another.

²² See: Explanatory Notes, "Heloise" for her education in Argenteuil and Paris; see also "Argenteuil."

Utterly on fire with love for her, I looked for an opportunity to bring her closer to me through intimate and daily association, and thus to win her more easily. To do this, I arranged with her uncle, through some friends of his, to take me into his house, which was near my school, at any price he might ask. As an excuse, I claimed that the care of my household was a great hindrance to my studies, and too heavy a burden for me.

To tell the truth, he was extremely avaricious and also most eager that his niece should continue to advance in her studies. For both reasons, I easily obtained his consent and got what I wanted, since he was consumed with greed for the money and at the same time convinced that his niece would profit from my teaching. Pressing me eagerly about this, beyond what I had dared to hope, he fell in with my plan and helped our love along by giving me complete charge of her as her teacher. In this way, as soon as I returned from my classes, I might devote myself both day and night to teaching her, and if I thought her negligent, I might discipline her sternly. I marveled at his simple-mindedness in this affair; indeed, I could not have been more astounded if he had turned over a tender lamb to a ravenous wolf. By entrusting her to me not only to teach but to punish, what was he doing but giving almost complete license to my desire and providing me with an opportunity, even though I did not want it, to overcome her with threats and blows if I could not do so with caresses?

But there were two things, above all, that kept him from base suspicions; these were his love for his niece and my past reputation for continence. What more shall I say? First we came together in the same house, and then in the same spirit. Under the pretext of study, we abandoned ourselves entirely to love, and our lessons gave us the privacy our love required. Although our books were open, we spoke more of love than of learning. There were more kisses than conferences. Our hands went more often to one another's breasts than to our texts. If, to avoid suspicion, I sometimes struck her, my blows were the marks not of anger but of the tender affection that is sweeter than any perfume.

Need I say more? In our passion we neglected no stage of love and if love could invent anything new, we added it. The less we had experienced these raptures, the more ardently we pursued them and the less our desire was quenched by them. As this delight captured me more completely, I gave less time to philosophy and less attention to my classes. I found it extremely tiresome to meet them and equally difficult to remain there, since I was keeping vigils of love by night and of study by day. I became so careless and lazy in my lectures that I offered my students nothing freshly thought out, but only what I knew from memory. I simply recited what I had learned earlier, and if I felt like composing songs, they dealt with love and not with the secrets of philosophy. As you yourself know, a great many of these songs are still popular, and they are sung in many places, especially by those who are attracted to the same way of life.²³

You can hardly imagine how sad my students were, how loudly they groaned and complained when they learned of the obsession—or rather, the upheaval—of

²³ Regarding Abelard's "love songs" for Heloise, see esp. Constant Mews, *Lost Love Letters and Abelard and Heloise*.

my spirit. Few could be deceived about anything so obvious and, in truth, no one was, I believe, except the person who was most dishonored by it—I mean, the girl's uncle. Indeed, when people sometimes hinted about this to him, he could not believe it, both because of his immoderate love for his niece, as I have said before, and because of the well-known continence of my former life. We do not readily suspect evil in those whom we love most, and the taint of shameful suspicion cannot infect a devoted love. As St. Jerome says in his letter to Sabinian, "We are always the last to know about the evils of our own house, and we are ignorant of the vices of our wives and children when the neighbors are gossiping about them."²⁴ But what one is the last to know does eventually become known; it is not easy to conceal from one person something of which everyone else is aware.

This is what happened to us after some months had passed. You can imagine how great was her uncle's sorrow when he found us out, how grievous was the pain of the lovers in their parting, how bitter was my shame and confusion, how deeply contrite I was to see the girl's affliction! What a storm of grief she suffered for my shame! Neither of us complained of his own fate, but only of the other's. Each of us lamented not his own, but the other's misfortunes. But this separation of our bodies meant the closest union of our spirits, and the denial of its fulfillment made our love burn more brightly. The shame we had experienced made us more shameless, and as our feelings of shame diminished, our actions seemed to us more virtuous. We ourselves felt the emotions described by the poets in the tales of Mars and Venus when they were surprised in love.²⁵

Not long afterward, the girl found that she was pregnant, and she wrote to me about this with the utmost joy, asking me what I wished to do. So one night when her uncle was not there, I secretly took her away from his house, as we had planned together, and sent her without delay to my own land. There she stayed with my sister until she had given birth to a son, whom she called Astralabe.²⁶ But after her flight, her uncle almost went mad, and no one who had not seen it himself could imagine the torments of grief he suffered and the shame that overwhelmed him. He did not know what to do to me, or what traps to set for me. He was very much afraid that if he killed me or injured me in any way, his beloved niece might suffer for it in my country. To seize me and force me to go somewhere against my will would do no good, especially since I was always on my guard against this. I had no doubt that he would attack me at once, if he could or if he dared.

At last, feeling some pity for his terrible anxiety and bitterly reproaching myself for the deceit that love had caused, as if it were the basest treason, I went to him as a supplicant and promised to make whatever amends he might ask. I protested that this affair should not seem astonishing to anyone who had ever experienced the power of love and who knew how much disaster, from the very

²⁴ Jerome, actually to Castrician, *Ep.* 147.10: PL 22, 1203; CSEL 56, 327.25.

²⁵ Vulcan discovered his wife, Venus, in bed with Mars. Ovid, *Ars Amatoria* 2.561ff and *Metamorphoses* 4.169ff.

²⁶ See: Explanatory Notes, "Astralabe."

beginning of the human race, women had brought on even the greatest of men. Giving him more satisfaction than he could have hoped for, I offered to marry the girl whom I had seduced, if this could be done secretly so that my reputation would not be damaged in any way. He agreed and, in order to betray me more easily, he sealed the bargain I had made with him by his own word and kiss, and those of the members of his household.

[Heloise's Arguments against Marriage]

I returned at once to my own land to bring back my mistress and make her my wife. But she did not approve of this plan at all. Indeed, she absolutely opposed this marriage for two reasons: because it was dangerous as well as disgraceful for me. She swore that no satisfaction could ever appease her uncle, and so we afterward found out. She wished to know how she could glory in me after she had made me inglorious, and had humiliated both herself and me. What penalties, she asked, would this world demand of her if she deprived it of so bright a light? What curses, what a loss to the Church, what tears from the philosophers, would be the consequences of such a marriage! How disgraceful, she cried, how deplorable it would be if I, whom nature had created for all mankind, should tie myself to one woman and lower myself in this fashion! Hardly able to bear the thought of a marriage that would be in every way shameful and burdensome to me, she insisted not only on the disgrace but also on the hardships of marriage, against which the apostle Paul warns us when he says (1 Cor. 7:27–28): “Are you free of wedlock? Then do not go about to find a wife. Not that you commit sin if you marry, nor if she marries, has the virgin committed sin. It is only that those who do so will meet with outward distress. But I leave you your freedom.” And he also says (1 Cor. 7:32): “I would have you free from concern.”

But if I would accept neither the advice of the Apostle nor the teachings of the Fathers concerning the heavy yoke of matrimony, at least, she said, I should listen to the philosophers and consider what had been written on this question by them or about them. In the first book of *Against Jovinian*, for example, St. Jerome recalls that Theophrastus, having carefully set forth in great detail the intolerable trials of marriage, demonstrated by the clearest reasoning that the wise man should never take a wife. Jerome himself summed up these philosophical arguments in these words: “When he argues thus, what Christian does Theophrastus not put to shame?” In the same book Jerome also says: “After Cicero had divorced Terentia and was asked by Hirtius to marry his sister, he absolutely refused to do so, saying that he could not give his attention at one and the same time to a wife and to philosophy. He does not say merely ‘give his attention,’ but adds that he ‘does not want to do anything that can be regarded as competing with the study of philosophy.’”²⁷

But, Heloise continued, say no more for the moment about this obstacle to philosophical inquiry, simply look at the conditions that surround this honorable way of life. What harmony can there be between scholars and servants, between

desks and cradles, between books or tablets and distaffs, between pens or styluses and spindles? Who, if he is trying to meditate on sacred or philosophical questions, can stand the bawling of children, the lullabies of the nurses trying to sooth them, and the noisy crowd of a household, both men and women? Who is strong enough to endure the everlasting messiness of babies? The rich are, you may say, because they have ample room in their palaces or houses and, being wealthy, are not obliged to count the cost or bother with daily cares. But in reply, she insisted that the philosopher's situation is not that of a rich man, nor do those who are involved in making money and in other worldly affairs have to trouble themselves with sacred or philosophical responsibilities.

For these reasons, she said, the distinguished philosophers of earlier days scorned the world entirely, not so much rejecting their own time as fleeing from it, and they denied themselves every pleasure in order to rest only in the embrace of philosophy. One of these philosophers, and one of the greatest of them, Seneca, says in a letter to Lucilius:

The time to study philosophy is not simply when you have a leisure moment; we must neglect everything else in order to devote ourselves assiduously to that study for which there is never time enough.... It makes no difference in the case of philosophy whether you drop it altogether, or study it only intermittently; for if it is interrupted, it does not remain with you. Distractions must be resisted, in fact, completely eliminated rather than extended.²⁸

What those who, among us, are truly called “monks” now endure for the love of God, the noble philosophers who were so highly esteemed by the pagans likewise endured for love of philosophy. For among every people, pagan as well as Jewish and Christian, there have always been some men who were more eminent than the rest because of their faith and their integrity of character, and these men were distinguished from ordinary people by some exceptional virtue of abstinence or continence. Among the Jews, there were in ancient times the Nazirites who consecrated themselves to God according to the Law, or the Sons of the Prophets, the followers of Elias or Elisha, who, as St. Jerome says, were monks according to the Old Testament.²⁹

More recently, there were those three sects of philosophy described by Josephus in his *Book of Antiquities*: some called Pharisees, others, Sadducees, and still others, Essenes.³⁰ Among us Christians, there are the monks who imitate either the common life of the apostles or that earlier and solitary life of St. John; among the pagans there were, as I have said, the philosophers. For they gave the name of wisdom or philosophy not so much to the acquisition of knowledge as to holiness of life, as we deduce from the origin of this name itself, and also from the testimony of the Fathers.

²⁸ Seneca, *Ad Lucilium* 72.3. Cf. Heloise, *Letter* 2.

²⁹ Jerome, *Ep.* 125, *Ad Rusticum* 7: PL 22, 1706; CSEL 56, 125 and *Ep.* 58, *ad Paulinum* 5: PL 22, 583; CSEL 54, 534.

³⁰ Josephus, *De libro antiquitatum*, 18.1, 11; cf. Pauly-Wissowa, 19, 2, 1825 and 1A, 2, 1691.

²⁷ Jerome, *Contra Jovinianum* 1.48: PL 23, 291ab.

There is, for example, the statement of St. Augustine in the eighth book of *The City of God*, describing the various kinds of philosophers:

The Italian school of philosophy had as its founder Pythagoras of Samos, from whom the very name of philosophy is said to have come. For before him those men were called wise who seemed to excel others by some praiseworthy manner of life. But when Pythagoras himself was asked what his profession was, he replied that he was a philosopher, that is, a student and lover of wisdom, since it seemed to him the height of arrogance to call oneself 'wise.'³¹

From the words, "who seemed to excel others in some praiseworthy manner of life," it is evident that the wise men among the Gentiles, that is, the philosophers, were so called in praise of their lives rather than their learning.

But, Heloise went on to say, I do not intend to give examples now of the sobriety and continence of their lives, for fear that I should seem to be teaching Minerva herself. Yet if lay people and Gentiles, who were not bound by any religious vows, lived in this way, how should you, a cleric and a canon, behave, in order to avoid putting base pleasures before your sacred duties, to prevent yourself from being quickly swallowed up by this Charybdis, and from being submerged in these impurities shamelessly and beyond recall?³²

If you care nothing for the privilege of the cleric, you should at least defend the dignity of the philosopher. If you scorn the reverence due to God, at least you should temper your shamelessness with the love of honor. Remember that Socrates had a wife, and think of the sordid way in which he was forced to wipe out that blot on philosophy, so that his example might make those who came after him more cautious. Jerome himself does not fail to mention this when he writes about Socrates in the first book of his *Against Jovinian*: "Once, when he had endured for a long time the storm of invective which Xanthippe poured upon him from an upper window, and after she had drenched him with dirty water, he simply said as he wiped his head, 'I knew that there would be a shower after all that thunder.'"³³

At last, Heloise pointed out how dangerous it would be for me to bring her back, and how much sweeter it would be to her, and more honorable for me, if she were called my mistress rather than my wife. In this way I might be held by love alone, not tied by the power of the marriage bond. If we were separated for a while, she said, the joys of meeting would be the more delightful, the rarer they were. When, after trying to persuade or dissuade me with these and similar arguments, she still could not overcome my obstinacy or bear to offend me, she sighed deeply and wept, concluding her appeal with these words: "In the end, one thing will happen. We shall both be ruined, and in our ruin, we shall experience suffering as great as the love we now know." In saying this, as

³¹ Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 8.2: PL 41, 25; CSEL 40, 355.

³² Heloise's reference to Abelard as "cleric and canon," indicates that as a teacher, he was then, like Fulbert, a secular canon of Notre-Dame. *Charybdis*: Charybdis is the sinister whirlpool that Odysseus famously eluded.

³³ Jerome, *Contra Jovinianum* 1.48: PL 23, 291bc.

everyone knows, she was not untouched by the spirit of prophecy. Then we left our infant son with my sister, and returned secretly to Paris where, in a few days, after we had kept secret vigils of prayer by night in a certain church, we were joined together at dawn by the nuptial blessing, in the presence of her uncle and some of our own friends and his. We left there at once, secretly and separately, and saw each other only very rarely and in private, concealing as much as possible what we had done.

But her uncle and members of his household, seeking some consolation for their disgrace, began to talk publicly about the marriage that had taken place, thus breaking the promise they had given me about this. Heloise then called down anathemas on them, swearing that what they said was utterly false. Her uncle was furious and often abused her unmercifully. When I found out about this, I moved her to an abbey of nuns near Paris, called Argenteuil, where she herself had been reared and educated.³⁴ There I had the religious habit, proper to the monastic calling, made for her, all except the veil, and I put it on her.

When her uncle and his kinsmen and friends heard this, they thought that I had now tricked them completely, and had made her a nun because I was looking for an easy way to be rid of her. Wild with rage, they plotted together against me and bribed my servant. One night when I was lying asleep in an inner room of my lodgings, they revenged themselves with a most cruel and shameful punishment, of which the world learned with utter consternation. They cut off those parts of my body with which I had committed the act they deplored. They fled at once, but two of them were caught and deprived of their eyes and genitals. One of these was that servant of mine who, while still in my service, had been led by greed to betray me.

[Concerning the Wound to His Body]

When morning came, the whole city thronged around me, and I can hardly tell you how stunned they were, how loudly they mourned, how they tormented me with their clamor, and upset me with their laments! It was chiefly the students, and particularly my own pupils, who tortured me with unbearable moaning and wailing, so that I suffered more from their pity than from the aching of my wound. I felt the embarrassment more than the injury, and my shame made me more wretched than my pain. I thought of the great fame in which I had once gloried, and how swiftly and sordidly my pride had been humbled, or rather, destroyed. How just, I reflected, was the judgment of God that had struck me in those parts of my body with which I had sinned, and how righteous was the betrayal by which that man had avenged my earlier betrayal of him.

I knew very well how loudly my rivals would praise what was so clearly an act of justice. I knew also what a perpetual grief this wound would be to

³⁴ See: Explanatory Notes, "Argenteuil." In moving to Argenteuil, Heloise did not thereby become a nun: both male and female abbeys frequently housed long-term lay residents. It is true, however, that the departure to the cloister of one or both spouses often indicated a forthcoming dissolution of marriage, hence Fulbert's reaction.

my parents and friends, and how widely this unparalleled disgrace would be broadcast for all the world to know. What course would be open to me in the future, how could I show my face in public, to be pointed at by everyone, to have my name on every tongue, to be a monstrous spectacle to every eye? I was no less confounded by the fact that, according to the letter of the Law, which kills, eunuchs are such an abomination before God that men who have been made eunuchs by the amputation or bruising of their testicles are forbidden, as stinking and unclean, to enter the church, and that for sacrifice even animals of this sort were utterly rejected. For so it is written in Leviticus (22:24): "No beast that has suffered crushing or bruising or gelding may be offered to the Lord," and Deuteronomy (23:1): "The emasculated, the mutilated, are not to be admitted into the Lord's assembly."

Sunk as I was in such wretched grief, it was, I admit, the confusion of shame, and not truly devout conversion to the religious life, that drove me to seek a hiding place in the privacy of the monastic cloisters. Moreover, Heloise had already willingly taken the veil at my command, and had entered the monastic life. So both of us put on the sacred habit at the same time, I in the abbey of Saint-Denis and she in the abbey of Argenteuil, which I mentioned before. I recall that a great many people, pitying her because she was still so young, tried to dissuade her from taking up the yoke of the monastic rule, as if it were an intolerable burden. But she burst out, as well as she could amid her sobs and tears, into the famous lament of Cornelia, crying: "O greatest husband, too worthy for my bed: What right had fortune to bow this noble head? Why, guilty woman, did I marry you, To make you wretched. Now accept the penalty that willingly I pay."³⁵ With these words she hurried to the altar, seized from it the veil blessed by the bishop, and in the presence of everyone bound herself to the monastic life.

I had scarcely recovered from my wound when my students rushed to me and began to importune both my abbot and me incessantly, demanding that what I had done until this time from a desire for profit and praise, I should now try to do for the love of God.³⁶ They declared that God would exact heavy interest from me on the talent he had entrusted to me and that, since I had previously exerted myself especially for the rich, I should now devote my efforts to teaching the poor. I should realize, they claimed, that the hand of the Lord had touched me chiefly in order to free me from the desires of the flesh and the tumultuous life of the world, so that I might dedicate myself to the life of learning and become a philosopher not of the world, but of God.

Life in the abbey³⁷ to which I had withdrawn was, however, altogether worldly and scandalous, and the abbot who surpassed the other monks in the dignity of his office, outdid them even more by the notorious wickedness of his conduct.³⁸ Because, both in public and in private, I often criticized their intolerably filthy habits, I made myself offensive and odious to all of them. So they were delighted

by the insistent demands of my students because they saw in them an opportunity to get me out of the way.

Finally, the constant and embarrassing pressure of my disciples, together with the intervention of my abbot and fellow-monks, made it possible for me to withdraw to a certain cell where I conducted classes, as I had done before.³⁹ But such a horde of students flocked to my lectures that there was not enough room to house them or enough land to provide food for them. While I was teaching there, I gave my attention chiefly to the sacred learning that was appropriate to my monastic calling, but I did not completely abandon teaching the liberal arts, in which I had more experience and in which my students particularly wanted my instruction. I used it as a kind of hook by which to draw those students who were enticed by the savor of philosophy to the study of the true philosophy; this, according to the *Ecclesiastical History*, is what Origen, who was the greatest of Christian philosophers, used to do.⁴⁰

Since the Lord seemed to have endowed me with no less talent in sacred than in secular studies, my classes in both fields began to grow larger, while those of all the other masters became smaller. This made them envy and hate me and two of them, in particular, were always attacking me as hard as they could behind my back, objecting that it was clearly contrary to the vows of a monk to engage in the teaching of worldly texts. They asserted also that I had been so presumptuous as to assume the role of a master of sacred studies without having been instructed by a master myself. Therefore, they claimed that I should be forbidden to teach in a school. To accomplish this purpose, they were constantly hounding bishops, archbishops, abbots, and anyone else within reach who had any reputation for piety.

[On His Book of Theology and His Persecution by His Fellow-Students]

As it happened, I applied myself first to discussing the fundamentals of our faith by analogies drawn from reason, and I composed for my students a treatise on theology, *Concerning the Divine Unity and Trinity*.⁴¹ They had been asking for rational and philosophical arguments, and urgently seeking what could be understood rather than simply stated. The repetition of words is useless, they said, if the mind does not follow them and, since nothing can be believed unless it has first been understood, it is ridiculous for anyone to preach to others what neither he nor his students can grasp intellectually. The Lord himself, they declared, had called such men "the blind leading the blind."

A great many people who saw and read this treatise liked it very much, because it seemed to offer satisfactory answers to all questions posed by the subject. Since these problems appeared more difficult than any others, my solution of them

³⁵ Lucan, *Pharsalia* 8.94–98.

³⁶ See: Matt. 25:15–29.

³⁷ Abbey of Saint-Denis.

³⁸ See: Explanatory Notes, "Abbot Adam of Saint-Denis."

³⁹ Maisoncelle: Probably a cell of the Abbey of Saint-Denis near Nogent-sur-Seine, some 86 km./53 mi. to the southeast of Saint-Denis (and 66 km./39 mi. due east of Melun). It lay just beyond the royal domain, and within the county of Champagne.

⁴⁰ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica*: PG 29, 538. See: Explanatory Notes, "Origen."

⁴¹ "Tractatus de unitate et Trinitate divina," ed. R. Stölzle.

was considered the more subtle as their complexity became more apparent. As a result, my opponents became greatly incensed, especially those two old plotters, Alberic and Lotulf, who now that their masters and mine, William and Anselm, were dead, were trying to rule alone in their places, and, so to speak, to succeed them as their heirs.⁴² And they got together a council against me. Since both of them were conducting schools at Reims, they turned the archbishop, Ralph, against me with their repeated accusations, and persuaded him and Conon, bishop of Praeneste, who was then legate in France, to hold a sort of assembly which they called a council in the city of Soissons.⁴³ They summoned me to come there and bring with me the little book I had written on the Trinity; and I agreed to do this.

But before I came, my two enemies had so defamed my character among the clergy and people that, on the day of my arrival, the people almost stoned me and those few students of mine who were with me. People said, as they had been told, that I had taught and written that there were three Gods. As soon as I reached the city, I went to the legate and gave him my book to examine and judge, declaring that I was ready to receive correction or make amends if I had written or said anything that disagreed with the Catholic faith. But he immediately ordered me to take the book to the archbishop and those opponents of mine, so that those who had accused me in this affair might pass judgment on me and thus the saying might be fulfilled in my case that (Deut. 32:31) "even our enemies are our judges."

After they had thumbed through the book repeatedly, however, and found nothing of which they dared to accuse me in an open hearing, they postponed until the end of the council the condemnation of the book, which they so eagerly desired. Every day before the council met, I publicly expounded the Catholic faith in accordance with what I had written, and all those who heard me commended both my exposition of the words and my interpretation of them. When the people and the clergy saw this, they began to say to one another: "See, he is now speaking publicly and no one says a word against him. The council which, we have heard, was called especially to deal with him will soon be over. Have his judges admitted that they are in error, not he?" For this reason my enemies became angrier every day.

So one day, Alberic and some of his students came to me with malice in their hearts and, after a few flattering words, he said that he was very much surprised at one thing he had noticed in my book: this was that, whereas God had begotten God and there is only one God, I had still denied that God had begotten himself. I answered immediately: "If you like, I shall give you a reason for this." But he said: "We do not care anything for reason or for your interpretation in such matters, but only for the words of your authority." I replied: "Turn the page of the book and you will find my authority." He had a copy of the book, which he had brought with him. So I turned to the place, which I knew and which he had failed to see, or where he had looked only for something that might be damaging to me. With God's help I found at once what I wanted. It was a quotation from St. Augustine,

⁴² See: Explanatory Notes, "Alberic" and Abelard's other foes.

⁴³ See: Explanatory Notes, "Conon, bishop of Praeneste."

On the Trinity, Book I: "He who supposes that God is so powerful that he begot himself is the more in error because this is not true of God or of any spiritual or corporeal creature. For there is nothing whatsoever that may beget itself."⁴⁴

When the students whom Alberic had brought with him heard this, they were astounded and blushed for shame. In order to defend himself somehow, he said, "Yes, but this must be understood correctly." So I went on to say that it was nothing new, but for the present it did not matter, since he had asked me only for words and not for their meaning. If, however, he was willing to listen to both sense and reason, I declared that I was ready to show that, in saying what he had said, he had fallen into the heresy which teaches that the Father is his own Son. When he heard this, he flew into a rage and began to threaten me, asserting that neither my arguments nor my authorities would do me any good in this case. Then he went off.

On the last day of the council, before its members took their seats, the legate and the archbishop began to discuss with my adversaries and certain other men what they should do about me and my book, since this was the principal reason for which they had been called together. Having found nothing in my words or my writings, which they had before them, to charge against me, all of them were silent for a little while or less open in their accusations.

Then Geoffrey [of Lèves], the bishop of Chartres,⁴⁵ who was the most eminent of the bishops in his reputation for piety and in the dignity of his See, began to speak:

My lords, all of you who are present know that whatever the doctrine of this man may be, his teaching and his talent in anything he has studied have had many supporters and followers. You know that he has greatly diminished the fame of both his own masters and ours and that his vine, so to speak, has extended its branches from sea to sea. If you condemn him out of prejudice, as I do not think you will do, you should know that, even though you act justly, you will give offense to many people who will want to defend him. This is especially true because we find nothing deserving of public censure in the book we have here and because, as Jerome says, 'Manifest courage always has rivals, and lightning always strikes the highest peaks.'⁴⁶

Take care that you do not add to his fame by acting rashly, and cause us to be reproached more for the envy behind the charge than he is for its justice. For a false rumor, as Jerome also says, is quickly suppressed, and a man's earlier life is judged by his later actions.⁴⁷ However, you are disposed to proceed canonically against him, either his teaching or his writings should be brought before us and when he is questioned, let him answer freely. Then if he is convicted or if he confesses, he may be silenced altogether. This at least will be in accordance with the saying of St. Nicodemus who, when he wished to free the Lord himself, said (John 7:51): 'Is it the way of our law to judge a man without giving him a hearing and finding out what he is about?'

⁴⁴ Augustine, *De Trinitate* 1: PL 42, 82.

⁴⁵ See: Explanatory Notes, "Geoffrey of Lèves."

⁴⁶ *Liber quehebr. in Genesim*, Praef.: PL 23, 983b; quoting Horace, *Odes* 2.10, 11–12.

⁴⁷ Jerome, *Ep.* 54, *ad Furiam* 13: PL 22, 556; CSEL 54, 480.

On hearing this, my opponents interrupted him at once, exclaiming: "Oh, this is really excellent advice! He wants us to try to challenge the verbosity of a man whose arguments and sophistical reasoning the whole world cannot resist." But surely it was much more difficult to argue against Christ himself and yet Nicodemus demanded that he should be heard according to the prescription of the Law.

When the bishop could not make them agree to his proposal, he tried to restrain their envy in another way, by saying that those who were present were too few to discuss such a serious matter and that this case required a more thorough examination. For this reason, he recommended further that my abbot, who was present, should recall me to my abbey, the monastery of Saint-Denis, and summon there a large number of more truly learned men who would decide, on the basis of a very careful investigation, what was to be done. The legate agreed to this last proposal and so did all the rest. Soon afterward, the legate rose to celebrate Mass before he entered the council and he sent through Bishop Geoffrey his permission for me to return to my monastery to wait for the decision.

Then my enemies realized that they would have accomplished nothing if this case should be dealt with outside the diocese, where they could exercise very little influence. Since they did not, apparently, have much faith in the justice of their case, they persuaded the archbishop that it would be most disgraceful for him if the case were transferred elsewhere for a hearing, and that it would be dangerous if I were to be acquitted in this way. Rushing at once to the legate, they made him change his mind and compelled him against his will to condemn the book without any inquiry, to burn it immediately in the sight of all, and condemn me to perpetual imprisonment in a strange monastery. It should be enough to have the book condemned, they declared, that I had presumed to read it publicly, though it had not been approved by the authority of the Roman pontiff or the Church, and that I had given the book itself to several people to be copied. They also said that it would be of great benefit to the Christian faith if the example they made of me prevented similar presumption on the part of many others.

Since the legate was not the scholar he should have been, he was used to taking the archbishop's advice, just as the archbishop in turn relied on the advice of my enemies. As soon as the bishop of Chartres realized what was afoot, he reported their schemes to me, and strongly advised me not to be too greatly disturbed, since everyone could see how outrageous their actions were. I should have no doubt, he declared, that the open violence of their jealousy would be most discreditable to them and advantageous to me. He urged me not to be distressed by my imprisonment in a monastery, for he knew that the legate, who was doing this under pressure, would set me entirely free in a few days, after he had left this place. So, weeping himself, he comforted me in my tears as best he could.

[The Burning of His Book]

When I was called before the council, I went at once and without any further consideration or discussion, they forced me to throw my book into the fire with

my own hand, and it was burned. In order to have something to say, one of my adversaries muttered that he understood it was written in the book that only God the Father was Almighty. Catching this remark, the legate was astounded and told him that no one could believe that even a small child would make such an error when, he said, our common faith holds and professes that there are three Almighties. When he heard this, a certain Thierry, who was the master of a school, mockingly quoted the statement of Athanasius: "Yet there are not three Almighties, but one Almighty."⁴⁸ His bishop began to reprove him as one guilty of speaking against the divine majesty, but Thierry boldly challenged him and, recalling the words of Daniel, said (Dan. 13:48-49): "Are you such fools, men of Israel, as to condemn an Israelite woman without trial, without investigation of the truth? Go back to the place of judgment, and judge the judge himself, you who have set up such a judge for the instruction of faith and the correction of error that he condemns himself out of his own mouth. Today, by the divine mercy, deliver from his false accusers this man who is as innocent as Susanna once was."

Then the archbishop arose and, changing the words as was necessary, confirmed the statement of the legate, saying: "Truly, my Lord, the Father is Almighty, the Son is Almighty, and the Holy Spirit is Almighty, and anyone who dissents from this is clearly in error and should not be listened to. Yet, if it is agreeable to you, it would be well for this brother of ours to expound his faith before all of us, so that it may be approved or, if necessary, censured and corrected." But when I got up to profess and explain my faith, to say what I believed in my own words, my enemies said that all I needed to do was to recite the Athanasian Creed, which any schoolboy could have done as well. So that I should not claim the excuse of ignorance, as if I were not familiar with the words, they had the text brought for me to read. Amid sighs, sobs, and tears, I read it as well as I could. Then, like a criminal and a convict, I was turned over to the abbot of Saint-Médard to be taken off to the cloister, as if to prison, and the council was immediately dissolved.

Thinking I was going to stay with them for a long time, the abbot and monks of that monastery welcomed me with the greatest joy and tried in vain to comfort me by showing me every consideration. O God, who judges equity, with what gall of soul, what bitterness of spirit did I in my madness challenge you, and furiously accuse you, repeating again and again the lament of St. Anthony: "Good Jesus, where were you?"⁴⁹ Yet, although I felt then, I cannot now express the great sorrow that surged up in me, the bitter shame that confounded me, the deep despair that attacked me. I compared what I was now suffering with those bodily wounds I had endured earlier and I thought that I was the most wretched of men. I considered that earlier betrayal slight in comparison with this and I mourned far more over the damage to my reputation than over the injury to my body. I had come to receive that earlier wound through some fault of my

⁴⁸ See: Explanatory Notes, "Thierry of Chartres" who is apparently intended. For the statement of Athanasius, *Symbolum Quicunque*, cf. Denzinger, *Enchir. Symb.* 24, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Athanasius, *Vita s. Antonii interpr. Evagrii*: PL 73, 132d.

own, but I had been brought to suffer this most flagrant violence by the sincere purpose and the love of our faith that had impelled me to write.

When everyone who heard the story protested strongly that this was a cruel and ill-considered act, the men who had taken part in it disclaimed their responsibility and put the blame on others. My opponents themselves even denied that this had been done on their advice, and the legate publicly denounced the jealousy of the French in this affair. He was at once moved to repentance and after some days—for he had been forced to appease their envy for a time—he sent me back from that alien monastery to my own. But almost all of the monks who had been there were now my enemies because the evil of their lives and their shameless ways made them consider utterly suspect a man whose criticism they could hardly endure.

After a few months fortune gave them an opportunity to try to ruin me. One day, as I was reading, I came across a certain statement of Bede's in which, commenting on the Acts of the Apostles, he claimed that Dionysius the Areopagite was bishop of Corinth rather than bishop of Athens.⁵⁰ This seemed quite contrary to the view of those who boasted that their St. Denis was the same Areopagite who, according to the account of his life, was bishop of Athens. After discovering this evidence of Bede's that contradicted our tradition, I jokingly showed it to some of the brothers who were standing about. They became most indignant, protesting that Bede was a liar and that their own Abbot Hilduin was a more trustworthy authority. He had traveled extensively in Greece investigating this matter, they said, and having found out the truth, he had removed every doubt in his writings about the saint's deeds.⁵¹ But when one of the monks challenged me by asking what I thought about the contradiction between Bede's statement and that of Hilduin, I replied that the authority of Bede, whose writings are consulted by the whole Latin Church, seemed to me more weighty.⁵²

[His Persecution by His Abbot and Fellow-Monks]

Greatly incensed by this, they began to shout that now I had shown openly that I had always been an enemy of our monastery! By denying that their patron was the Areopagite, I had boldly insulted the whole kingdom and deprived it of the honor that was its chief glory. I answered that I had not denied this, nor was it of any importance whether he had been the Areopagite or someone else, since he had won so bright a crown with God. But they ran at once to the abbot and made this accusation against me. He was delighted to hear it and rejoiced to find an opportunity to suppress me, for living as he did a more evil life than the others, he feared me more than they did. He called his chapter and the monks together and threatened me severely, saying that he would immediately inform the king of my attacks on the abbey that is the glory and crown of his kingdom. Meanwhile,

⁵⁰ Bede, *Expositio super Acta Apostolorum* 17: PL 92, 981b.

⁵¹ Hilduin, *Vita S. Dionysii*: PL 106, 14–15; cf. MGH, *Ep. Carol. aevi* III, 327–35.

⁵² I follow here the reading *graviorem* (for *graviorum*), as suggested by E.A. Synan and E. Jeanneau, "Some Remarks on the Muckle Translation of Abelard's *Adversities*."

the abbot ordered me to be well guarded until he handed me over to the king. I offered to submit to discipline according to the Rule, if I had offended in any way, but in vain.

Then I became horrified at their wickedness and having suffered ill-fortune for so long, I was in utter despair, feeling that the whole world was conspiring against me. So with the approval of a group of my fellow-monks who felt sorry for me and aided by some of my students, I fled secretly at night to the neighboring territory of Count Thibaut, where I had earlier stayed for a while in a priory.⁵³ The count, in fact, knew me slightly, and was full of sympathy for my troubles, which had been reported to him. There I began to live in the town of Provins, in a priory of monks from Troyes, whose prior had earlier been a dear friend of mine, and was very fond of me.⁵⁴ He was overjoyed at my arrival and took the best care of me. Then one day, my abbot happened to come to that town on some business with the count. When I heard this, the prior and I went to the count and asked him to persuade the abbot to absolve me and give me permission to live the monastic life wherever I might find a suitable place.

The abbot and his companions agreed to consider the matter, saying that they would give the count an answer that same day, before they left. But after they had talked it over, they decided that I wanted to transfer myself to another abbey, which they thought would be a tremendous disgrace to them. They took great pride in the fact that I had come to them when I became a monk, as if scorning all other monasteries, and now they said they were threatened by the worst dishonor if I rejected them and went to another monastery. So they would not listen to anything the count or I said. They threatened me with immediate excommunication if I did not return at once and even forbade the prior with whom I had taken refuge to keep me any longer, on pain of being forced to share my excommunication. When we heard this, the prior and I were greatly distressed. But the abbot, having left in this obstinate mood, died a few days later.

After a new abbot had been named, I went with the bishop of Meaux to ask him to grant me the permission I had sought from his predecessor.⁵⁵ At first he did not consent to my request, but with the help of my friends I appealed to the king and his council and obtained what I wanted.⁵⁶ In fact, Stephen, who was then the king's seneschal, summoned the abbot and his friends and demanded to know why they wished to hold me against my will.⁵⁷ He declared that this might easily become a scandal to them and was useless in any case, since there could be no harmony between my way of life and theirs.

I knew the king's council was of the opinion that the more disorderly an abbey was, the more dependent it was on the king and the more profitable to him because of its temporal wealth. I believed, therefore, that it would be easy

⁵³ Thibaut II, 1102–1152, Count of Blois and Chartres, after 1125 Count of Champagne as well.

⁵⁴ Saint-Ayoul, whose prior was Radulf.

⁵⁵ See: Explanatory Notes, "Suger, abbot of Saint-Denis." Burchard was bishop of Meaux (1128–34).

⁵⁶ King Louis VI (1108–1137)—who was, however, much influenced by Suger.

⁵⁷ See: Explanatory Notes, "Stephen of Garlande," who was head of the court faction to which Abelard was clearly attached, often to Abelard's advantage.

to obtain the consent of the king and his council, and I did get it. But in order that my monastery should not be deprived of the fame it had enjoyed because of me, the monks agreed that I might withdraw to any place of retirement I desired, on condition that I did not become subject to any other abbey. This was agreed and confirmed on both sides, in the presence of the king and his council.

I then retired to a solitary place that I had known before, in the country near Troyes. There, on land given to me by friends, and with the permission of the bishop of the region,⁵⁸ I built, at first of reeds and thatch, an oratory dedicated to the Holy Trinity.⁵⁹ Hidden away there with one of my students, I could truly sing to the Lord (Ps. 54:8): "Far would I flee; the wilderness should be my shelter." When my former pupils learned where I was, they began to flock together here from every direction, leaving the cities and towns to live in this desert place. Instead of large houses, they built themselves little huts; they ate wild herbs and coarse bread in place of dainty foods; they laid down thatch and straw for themselves instead of soft beds, and piled up heaps of turf for tables.

You really would have thought that they were imitating the early philosophers of whom Jerome writes in his second book *Against Jovinian*:

Through the five senses, as if through open windows, vices enter the soul. The metropolis and citadel of the mind cannot be taken unless the enemy breaks through the gates—If one takes delight in circuses, in the contests of athletes, in the agility of jugglers, in the beauty of women, in the splendor of jewels and clothing, and other things of this kind, the soul is taken captive through the windows of the eyes and the prophecy is fulfilled that 'Death has entered in through our windows.' When the thin edge of disturbance, as it were, has entered through these gates into the citadel of our mind, what becomes of its liberty, its fortitude, its meditation on God? What happens, above all, when the sense of touch recalls its past pleasures and forces the soul to endure the memory of its vices and, in a way, to experience what it does not do?

Prompted by these considerations, many philosophers have left the crowded cities and suburban gardens, where the watered fields, the shady trees, the twittering of birds, the crystal fountain, the murmuring streams, are so many pleasures for eyes and ears, lest their fortitude of spirit should be softened and their modesty corrupted, by the luxury and abundance of their possessions.

Indeed, it is not good to look often upon these things by which you may one day be ensnared and to give yourself up to the experience of pleasures which you will find it hard to forego. Even the Pythagoreans shunned experience of this kind and used to live in solitude and deserted places. Although Plato was a rich man—Diogenes used to trample on his bed with muddy feet—yet to free himself for the study of philosophy, he chose for his Academy a villa far from the city, in a place which was not only deserted, but also pestilential. Here the assaults of lust might be defeated by frequent illness and its anxieties, and his disciples might enjoy no other pleasures than the discussion of studies.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ See: Explanatory Notes, "Hato, bishop of Troyes."

⁵⁹ See: Explanatory Notes, "Paraclete."

⁶⁰ Jerome, *Contra Jovinianum* 2.8: PL 23, 310–312.

The Sons of the Prophets, the followers of Elisha, are also said to have led this kind of life. Jerome himself spoke of them as the monks of that time, when he wrote to the monk Rusticus about them: "The Sons of the Prophets, who are described as monks in the Old Testament, built small huts for themselves near the River Jordan, and leaving crowds and cities, lived on meal and wild herbs."⁶¹ My students built such huts for themselves near the River Arduzon and they seemed more like hermits than scholars.

But the larger the crowd of students who thronged there and the harder the life they endured under my teaching, the more glorious my enemies thought this was for me and the more humiliating for themselves. When they had done all they could to injure me, they were sorry to see everything working together for my good and so, in Jerome's words: "Jealousy sought me out, as Quintilian says, even in my hidden retreat, far from cities and markets, courts and crowds."⁶²

They complained and lamented secretly among themselves, saying: "'Look, the whole world has turned aside to follow him (John 12:19).' We have accomplished nothing by persecuting him but to make him more famous. We have tried to extinguish his renown, but instead we have made it more brilliant. It is obvious that in the cities students have everything they need at hand and yet they reject all civilized pleasures to rush to the wilderness with all its deprivations and willingly make themselves miserable."

At that time it was chiefly intolerable poverty that drove me to conduct a school, for "I had no strength to dig, and I was ashamed to beg for alms" (Luke 16:3). So, returning to the art that I knew, I was compelled to labor with my tongue rather than my hands. For their part, my students provided whatever I needed in the way of food and clothing. They also tilled the fields and paid the cost of building, so that no domestic cares should distract me from study. Since my oratory could hold only a small number of them, they were obliged to enlarge it and in doing so they improved it by building with stone and wood.

This oratory was founded and afterward dedicated in the name of the Holy Trinity. But because I had sought refuge there and when I was in despair, I had, by the grace of divine consolation, found a little peace again, I later called it the Paraclete in memory of this benefit.⁶³

Many people who heard this were very much surprised and some of them were extremely critical, saying that it was not permissible for any church to be dedicated especially to the Holy Spirit rather than to God the Father. They claimed that it should be dedicated either to the Son alone or to the whole Trinity, according to ancient custom. They were, no doubt, led to make this false accusation by their erroneous belief that there is no distinction between the Paraclete and the Holy Spirit Paraclete. But the Trinity itself, and each Person of the Trinity, as he is called God or Helper, may also be called Paraclete, that is, the Comforter, as the Apostle rightly says (2 Cor. 1:3–4): "Blessed be the God

⁶¹ Jerome, *Lib. Heb. Quest.*, in *Genesim*: PL 23, 984a.

⁶² Quintilian, *Declamations* 13.2.

⁶³ See: Explanatory Notes, "Paraclete."

and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father and the God who gives all encouragement. He it is who comforts us in all our trials;" and as Truth says (John 14:16), "He shall give you another Comforter."

What is there to prevent dedicating the house of the Lord to the Father or the Holy Spirit just as to the Son, since every church is consecrated in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit alike, nor does any of them possess anything separately? Who would be so bold as to erase from above the door the title of him to whom the house belongs? Since the Son has offered himself as a sacrifice to the Father and accordingly, in the celebration of the Mass prayers are addressed especially to the Father and the Host is offered as a sacrifice, why does not the altar belong especially to him to whom the sacrifice is made? Is it any more correct to say that the altar belongs to him who is sacrificed than to him who receives the sacrifice? Or will anyone assert that the altar is rather that of the Lord's cross or his sepulcher, or of St. Michael or St. John or St. Peter or any other saint who is not sacrificed there, and to whom sacrifice or prayers are not offered?

Surely even among the idolaters, altars and temples were not said to belong to any but those to whom they intended to offer sacrifice and obeisance. Perhaps, however, someone will say that neither churches nor altars should be thus dedicated to the Father, because there is no external action of his that entitles him to a special solemnity. Yet this argument plainly detracts from the Trinity itself and does not detract from the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit himself, because of his coming, has the feast of Pentecost, just as because of his Advent, the Son has the festival of the Nativity. As the Son was sent into the world, so also the Holy Spirit, by coming to the disciples, deserves his own solemnity.

Does it not, indeed, seem more reasonable that a temple should be dedicated to him than to either of the other Persons, if we carefully consider apostolic authority and the operation of the Spirit himself? To none of the three Persons except the Holy Spirit does the Apostle specially ascribe a spiritual temple. He does not speak of the temple of the Father or the temple of the Son, but the temple of the Holy Spirit, writing thus in the first epistle to the Corinthians (6:17, 19): "The man who unites himself to the Lord becomes one spirit with him." And also: "Surely you know that your bodies are the shrines of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in you. He is God's gift to you, so that you are no longer your own master." Everyone knows that the sacraments conferring divine benefits, which are performed in the Church, are ascribed especially to the operation of divine grace, which means the Holy Spirit. In baptism we are born again of water and the Holy Spirit and then, for the first time, we become the special temple of God. In confirmation also, the sevenfold grace of the Spirit is conferred, by which the temple of God is adorned and dedicated.

No wonder, then, that we dedicate a material temple to that Person to whom the Apostle specially ascribes the spiritual temple! To which Person can a church be said more properly to belong than to him to whose operation are attributed all the benefits which are administered in the church? I do not claim, however, that when I first called my oratory the Paraclete, I meant to dedicate it to only one Person, but I named it thus for the reason that I have given before, in memory of

the comfort I received. Yet if I had done it on the grounds that many believe, it would not be unreasonable, although it is not customary.

[His Persecution by Certain "New Apostles"]

If, while I was living here, my body was hidden, my fame now spread mightily throughout the whole world and, like the poetic image called "Echo" because it has sound but no substance, it resounded far and wide.⁶⁴ Since my former adversaries could now do nothing themselves to hurt me, they incited against me certain new "apostles," in whom everyone believed most devoutly.⁶⁵ One of them prided himself on having reformed the life of the canons regular, the other, that of the monks. As these men went about the countryside preaching and brazenly slandering me in every possible way, they made me for a time an object of scorn to certain ecclesiastical and secular authorities. They spread such sinister tales about my faith as well as my life that they turned even my best friends against me. If any of them still kept some of their old love for me, they concealed it altogether for fear of these men.

God himself is my witness that I never heard of any meeting of churchmen without thinking that they intended to condemn me. Stunned by fear, like a man who expects at any moment to be struck by lightning, I was always waiting to be dragged before a council or an assembly as a heretic or an irreligious person. If I may compare the flea with the lion, the ant with the elephant, my rivals persecuted me no less bitterly than the heretics once persecuted St. Athanasius.⁶⁶ Often, God knows, I fell into such despair that I was ready to leave Christendom and go over to the Saracens and there, by paying whatever tribute they demanded, to live a Christian life in peace among the enemies of Christ.⁶⁷ It seemed to me that they would be even better disposed toward me because, from the charge made against me, they would suspect that I was not a good Christian and so they would think that I could be more easily converted to their own religion.

[His Election as Abbot and His Reason for Accepting the Office]

While I was constantly assailed by this great anxiety and, as a last resort, was planning to flee to Christ among the enemies of Christ, I had an opportunity that gave me some hope of escaping from these conspiracies. Instead, I fell into the hands of Christians and monks who were far more savage and wicked than the Saracens. There was in Brittany, in the diocese of Vannes, an abbey called

⁶⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3.359.

⁶⁵ Abelard may have been referring to Bernard of Clairvaux and Norbert of Xanten, contemporary prime spokesmen of the Cistercian and Premonstratensian reform movements.

⁶⁶ Athanasius (295–373): The patriarch of Alexandria known among other things for his vigorous, contentious defense of the orthodox view of the Trinity against Arian heretical teachings.

⁶⁷ See Jeremy duQuesnay Adams, "Les horizons sociopolitiques du monde de Pierre Abelard," pp. 32, 37–38.

Saint-Gildas-de-Rhuys,⁶⁸ which had been left desolate by the death of its abbot, and the monks unanimously elected me as his successor, with the consent of the lord of the land.⁶⁹ It was easy for them to obtain the permission of my own abbot and fellow-monks. So the enmity of the French drove me to the west, just as that of the Romans drove St. Jerome to the east. God knows, I would never have agreed to this except that I hoped to escape from the persecution which, as I have said, I never ceased to endure.

This is certainly a barbarous country, and I was not familiar with its language.⁷⁰ The evil and incorrigible life of these monks is notorious almost everywhere, and the people of the region are uncivilized and lawless. So, as a man who is terrified by a sword hanging over his head dashes toward a precipice and at the last minute escapes one death only to meet another, I deliberately fled from one danger to pursue another. Here, where I could hear the ocean's frightful roar, where the land's end did not permit me to flee any farther, I often repeated in my prayers the words (Ps. 60:3): "From the end of the earth have I cried unto thee while my heart is overwhelmed."

Everyone, I think, now realizes how that undisciplined community of monks I had undertaken to rule tormented my heart with anxiety day and night, as I worried constantly about the dangers to both my soul and my body. I felt very sure that if I should try to force them to live according to the Rule they had professed, it would cost me my life, and that if I should not do so to the best of my ability, I would lose my soul. Besides, a certain tyrant of a lord, the most powerful in that region, had seized the opportunity offered by the disorder of the monastery and had long since brought it completely under his control. He had, in fact, appropriated to his own uses all the land adjacent to it and harassed the monks themselves with heavier exactions than he would have imposed on Jews subject to tribute.

The monks kept hounding me for their daily needs, though the community had nothing for me to give them. All of them had been supporting themselves and their concubines, and their sons and daughters, from their own purses. They delighted in harassing me in this way, and they also stole and carried off whatever they could, to make me fail in my administration of the abbey and thus force me to relax my discipline or get out altogether. The people of the whole region are savage and lawless, and there was not a single soul to whom I could turn for help, since I was opposed to the conduct of all alike. Outside the abbey that tyrant and his henchmen were constantly oppressing me; inside the abbey the monks were incessantly plotting against me, so it seemed that the words of the Apostle were written especially for me (2 Cor. 7:6): "All was conflict without, all was anxiety within."

⁶⁸ *The Abbey of Saint-Gildas-de-Rhuys*: the abbey, whose monks and neighbors spoke Breton instead of French, was located relatively inaccessibly on the Atlantic coast some 125 km./80 mi. west of Abelard's birthplace in the French-speaking part of Brittany; it was dedicated to the Romano-British saint, Gildas of Strathclyde, who came from Britain in the sixth century.

⁶⁹ Canon III, Duke of Brittany, 1112–1148, a ruler concerned to sponsor monastic reform.

⁷⁰ See Adams, "Les horizons sociopolitiques du monde de Pierre Abelard," pp. 30–32.

I wept when I considered what a useless and miserable life I was living and how fruitless it was both to myself and to others. Before I had left them for these monks, I had been of great service to my students, but now I could do nothing either for them or for my monks. I realized how impotent I had proved to be in everything I had undertaken and attempted, so that everyone might very well say of me (Luke 14:30): "Here is a man who began to build, and could not finish his building!" I was in utter despair when I compared the evils from which I had escaped with the plight into which I had now fallen. Now regarding my earlier troubles as nothing, I often said to myself with heavy sighs: "I deserve to suffer these things, because I deserted the Paraclete, the Comforter, and thrust myself into true desolation. In my efforts to escape what were only threats, I have rushed into actual dangers."

What tormented me most was the fact that after I had left my oratory, I could not provide suitably for the celebration of the divine office there. The place was so poor that there was hardly enough for the needs of one man. But the true Paraclete himself offered me real comfort in my desolation and supplied what was necessary for his own oratory. It happened that the abbot of Saint-Denis⁷¹ somehow acquired, on the pretext that it belonged by ancient right to his monastery, the abbey of Argenteuil, where Heloise, now my sister in Christ rather than my wife, had entered the religious life.⁷² He then forcibly expelled from it the community of nuns of which my friend was prioress.

After these nuns had been scattered as exiles in various places, I realized that the Lord had given me an opportunity to provide for my oratory. I returned, therefore, to the Paraclete and invited Heloise there with those nuns from her former convent who had remained faithful to her. On their arrival, I granted and gave to them the oratory itself and everything belonging to it, and Pope Innocent,⁷³ with the assent and indeed, at the request of the bishop of the diocese,⁷⁴ has since confirmed this grant of mine to them and their successors by a privilege in perpetuity.⁷⁵

At first, these nuns lived in poverty there and endured the most extreme deprivation, but soon they were comforted by the protection of the divine mercy they devoutly served. He showed himself a true Paraclete to them and made their neighbors merciful and kind to them. God knows, I think they have enjoyed greater increase in worldly goods in one year than I would have achieved in a hundred, if I had stayed there. As the female sex is certainly weaker, their wretched poverty is the more appealing to men's hearts, and their virtue is more pleasing to both God and man. God has granted such grace in the eyes of everyone to that sister of mine who rules over the others, that the bishops loved her as a daughter, the abbots as a sister, the laity as a mother, and all alike marveled at

⁷¹ See: Explanatory Notes, "Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis." He acquired the abbey of Argenteuil in 1129 on the authority of presumably forged letters.

⁷² See: Explanatory Notes, "Argenteuil."

⁷³ See: Explanatory Notes, "Pope Innocent II."

⁷⁴ See: Explanatory Notes, "Hato, Bishop of Troyes."

⁷⁵ See: Explanatory Notes, "Paraclete." On 28 November 1131, Innocent II confirmed Abelard's gift of the Paraclete to Heloise.

her piety, her prudence, and the incomparable sweetness of her patience in all things. Withdrawing to her cell, she sought to devote herself without distraction to sacred meditations and prayers, and as she rarely let herself be seen, the world outside became more insistent in its demands for her presence and her spiritual instruction.

[The Accusation of Lewdness against Him]

Before long all of their neighbors began to reproach me bitterly because I paid less attention to these poverty-stricken nuns than I could or should have done. They said that I could easily obtain help for them, at least by my preaching. So I began to visit them more often, in order to help them in any way that I could. But the outcome of these visits was malicious gossip about me, and what I did from sincere charity was denounced most shamelessly by my detractors, with their usual wickedness. They claimed that I was drawn there by carnal desire and that I could never really bear to be separated from the woman whom I had once loved. I often thought of the complaint of St. Jerome, who said when he wrote to Asella about false friends: "No fault is found with me but my sex, and that only happens when Paula comes to Jerusalem."⁷⁶ He also says, "Before I became acquainted with the family of the holy Paula, my praises were sung throughout the city and almost everyone judged me worthy of the supreme pontificate... But I know that through good and evil report we attain to the Kingdom of Heaven."⁷⁷

When, I say, I recalled this insulting charge against so great a man, I took no little comfort in it. If my rivals had found in me as much cause for suspicion, what slanders, I asked myself, would they not heap upon me! But now that the divine mercy has freed me from any reason for this suspicion, what basis remains for it when the power to commit these acts has been taken from me? What is the meaning of this latest shameless accusation? For such a condition so completely banishes any suspicion of lust from men's minds that those who wanted to have their wives more carefully watched had eunuchs to protect them, as sacred history reports of Esther and the other maidens of King Ahasuerus.⁷⁸ We read also that the powerful eunuch of Queen Candace guarded all her riches and that, in order to convert and baptize him, Philip the apostle was directed to him by an angel.⁷⁹ Surely, the freer such men have been from any suspicion of this kind, the greater the dignity and familiarity they have achieved among modest and honorable women.

Indeed, as we are told in the sixth book of the *Ecclesiastical History*, when Origen, the greatest of Christian philosophers, undertook to instruct women in sacred learning, he laid violent hands on himself, in order to remove altogether this

⁷⁶ Jerome, *Ep.* 45, *ad Asellam* 2: PL 22, 481: CSEL 54, 324.

⁷⁷ Jerome, *Ep.* 45, *ad Asellam* 3–6: PL 22, 481–83; CSEL 54, 325, 328.

⁷⁸ Esther 2:3.

⁷⁹ Acts 8:26ff.

ground for suspicion.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, I thought that in this the divine mercy had been kinder to me than to him, because what Origen did through imprudence and thereby incurred great blame was done to me by another's crime, so that I might be set free for a similar task. Because this happened to me so quickly and so unexpectedly, it hurt me much less, for I was sleeping heavily and felt scarcely any pain when they laid hands on me. But the less I suffered then from my wound, the more prolonged is my present suffering through slander and I am more cruelly tormented by the damage to my reputation than by the mutilation of my body. For, as it is written (Prov. 22:1): "Precious beyond all treasure is good repute."

As St. Augustine reminds us in his sermon *On the Life and Morals of the Clergy*: "The man who, trusting in his conscience, neglects his reputation is cruel to himself." Before that, he says, "We take forethought for what is honorable, as the Apostle says, not only before God, but also in the sight of all men. For ourselves the testimony of our conscience is enough; for your sake, it is important that our reputation should not be tarnished and that it should shine among you. Conscience and reputation are two things: conscience for yourself and reputation for your neighbor."⁸¹

Imagine the charges that my malicious enemies, if they had lived in those times, would have brought against Christ himself for his members, that is, his prophets and his apostles, or the other Holy Fathers, when they saw them, though whole in body, joined in such familiar association with women! St. Augustine also points out in his book *Concerning the Works of Monks* that women were associated with the Lord Jesus Christ and his apostles as such inseparable companions that they accompanied them even in their preaching.

For this reason faithful women who possessed earthly goods went with them and ministered to them from their means, so that they might not lack any of the necessities of life. If anyone doubts that the apostles permitted women of holy life to travel about with them wherever they preached the Gospel, let them hear the Gospel and learn that they did this, following the example of the Lord himself. For as the Gospel says:

Then followed a time in which he went on journeying from one city to another, preaching and spreading the good news of God's kingdom. With him were the twelve apostles and certain women whom he had freed from evil spirits and from sicknesses, Mary who is called Magdalen, who had seven devils cast out of her, and Joanna, the wife of Chusa, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who ministered to him with the means they had.⁸²

Pope Leo IX, replying to the letter of Parmenianus, *On Monastic Zeal*, says:

We declare that it is absolutely unlawful for a bishop, priest, or deacon to give up the care of his wife for the sake of the religious life and not to supply her with food and clothing, but he should not live with her carnally. This, we read, was the case

⁸⁰ Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.8: PG 20, 538. See: Explanatory Notes, "Origen".

⁸¹ Augustine, *Sermo*. 355.1: PL 39, 1569a; referring to 2 Cor. 8:21.

⁸² Augustine, *De opere monachorum* 4–5: PL 40, 552–53: CSEL 41, 538–39; referring to Luke 8:1ff.

with the holy apostles, as St. Paul says: 'Have we not the right to travel about with a woman who is a sister as the Lord's brethren do and Cephas?' See, you fool, he did not say: 'Have we not a right to embrace' but 'to travel about with a woman,' meaning that their wives might be supported by them from the rewards of their preaching, not that there might be carnal intercourse between them.⁸³

Surely, from a purely human point of view the Pharisee who said to himself concerning the Lord (Luke 7:39): "If this man were a prophet, he would know who this woman is that is touching him and what kind of woman, a sinner," could have suspected evil on the part of the Lord far more reasonably than my enemies have done in my case. Those who saw his mother entrusted to the care of a young man, or the prophets living and associating with widows, could derive from these things a much more likely suspicion. What would my slanderers have said if they had seen Malchus, the captive monk of whom St. Jerome writes, living in the same room with his wife? How they would have condemned as a crime what that distinguished doctor commended highly when he saw it saying: "There was a certain old man named Malchus, a native of that place and an old woman also in his hut, both full of such zeal for religion, and they so wore down the threshold of the church that you would have believed them Zachary and Elizabeth in the Gospel, except that there was no John with them!"⁸⁴

Why, finally, do my enemies refrain from slandering the Holy Fathers? They founded monasteries of women, as we have often read—indeed, we have even observed this—and they also provided for them, following the example of the seven deacons whom the apostles appointed to serve the tables and care for their wives in their place. The weaker sex needs the help of the stronger so much that the Apostle decrees that the man is always over the woman, as her head. As a symbol of this, he also commands that she should always have her head covered. I am very much surprised, therefore, to see that the custom of setting abbesses over women, as abbots are placed over men, has long since crept into the monasteries and that men as well as women bind themselves by professing the same Rule, although that Rule contains many things that can by no means be performed by women, whether they are superiors or subordinates. In many places, too, against the natural order of things, we see abbesses and nuns even ruling over the clergy themselves, who in turn rule over the people, and the more power these women wield over the men, and the heavier the yoke to which they subject them, the more easily the men may be led to evil desires. This is what the satirist [Juvenal] has in mind when he says: "Nothing is more insufferable than a rich woman."⁸⁵

Reflecting often on these things, I made up my mind to provide for these sisters as well as I could. I felt that if I could manage to watch over their affairs in person, they would have greater respect for me and also that I would be better able to supply them with all they needed. As I was being persecuted by the monks who should have been my sons more cruelly and more actively now than by my

⁸³ Cf. Card. Humbert, *Contra Nicetam monachum monasterii Studii* 27: PL 143, 997d–998a; referring to 1 Cor. 9:5.

⁸⁴ Jerome, *Vita Malchi*: PL 23, 56a.

⁸⁵ Juvenal, *Satires* 6.460.

fellow-monks earlier, I continued to turn to the nuns as to a haven of peace in that raging tempest, and I found some rest there for a little while. Although I had no success with my monks, I felt that I might at least do something for those nuns and that this would be as beneficial to me as it was to them in their weakness.

But now Satan has so frustrated me that I cannot find a place where I can rest or even exist. A wanderer and a fugitive, like the accursed Cain, I am carried hither and thither. "Conflicts without, and anxieties within," as I said earlier, torment me constantly, or rather, anxieties both without and within, and conflicts as well as anxieties.⁸⁶ Far more dangerous to me and more constant than persecution by my adversaries are the attacks of my monks. I have them always with me and I must perpetually endure their plotting. If I leave the cloister, the violence of my enemies looms as a threat to my body, but within the cloister, I must always suffer the savage and deceitful schemes of my sons, I mean the monks entrusted to me as their abbot, or father. How often have they tried to poison me, as his monks tried to kill St. Benedict!⁸⁷ If for this reason that great father deserted his perverse sons, I should be encouraged to follow his example openly, in order not to be considered, in facing certain danger, a bold tempter rather than a lover of God, indeed, my own murderer.

While I was protecting myself from these daily plots of theirs as best I could, by watching what was given me to eat and drink, they tried to kill me in the very sacrifice of the altar, by putting poison in the chalice. On another occasion, when I had gone to Nantes to visit the count who was ill and I was staying at my brothers' house, my monks attempted to have a servant in my retinue poison me, thinking that there I would not be on my guard against such a plot. But by divine providence it turned out that, while I did not touch the food prepared for me, one of the monks I had brought with me ate it unwittingly and dropped dead. Then the servant who had prepared it was terrified both by his own conscience and by the evidence of the deed, and he fled.

After these attempts had made their wickedness clear to everyone, I became more open in my efforts to evade their plots as well as I could and I withdrew from the congregation of the abbey to live in cells with a few of my monks. Then, if the others suspected that I intended to go anywhere, they bribed robbers to waylay me on the highways or byways and try to kill me. While I was struggling to live amidst these dangers, one day the hand of the Lord chanced to strike me a mighty blow, making me fall from my horse and break a vertebra in my neck. This fracture has hurt and weakened me much more than my earlier injury.

By excommunicating them, I managed to curb for a time the unbridled rebelliousness of my monks and to force those whom I feared more than the others to promise me on their own word and by oaths publicly sworn that they would leave the abbey altogether and would not harass me any more. But they

⁸⁶ 2 Cor. 8:5; Gen. 4:14.

⁸⁷ Benedict reluctantly left his hermitage at Subiaco to become abbot of a monastery at Vicovaro where the rigor of his rule caused the resentful monks to attempt to poison him. He eventually returned to his hermitage.

later publicly and shamelessly broke the word they had given and the oaths they had sworn. Even though they were finally compelled by the authority of the Roman pontiff, Innocent,⁸⁸ through his own legate sent for this purpose, to make this and many other promises in the presence of the count and the bishop, they have still not been tamed. Recently when I returned to the abbey, after those I have mentioned had been expelled, and entrusted myself to the remaining monks of whom I was less suspicious, I found them worse than the others. With the help of a lord of the region, I have just barely escaped from these monks who threaten me not now with poison, but with a sword at my throat.

I am living even now in this danger, and every day I feel that a sword is hanging over my head, so that I can scarcely breathe easily from one meal to the next. I am like the man who, when he imagined that the greatest happiness consisted in the power and wealth acquired by the tyrant Dionysius, noticed the sword secretly hanging over him by a thread and so he came to know the nature of the happiness that human power brings.⁸⁹ This is the kind of treatment that I, a poor monk elevated into an abbot, experience constantly: the wealthier I have become, the more miserable I am. I only hope that my example may restrain the ambition of those who seek the same goal.

This, my beloved brother in Christ and my old and most devoted companion in the monastic life, is the story of my calamities against which I have struggled constantly almost from the cradle, and which I have written down at the thought of your sorrow and the injustice you have suffered. It should suffice, as I said at the beginning of my letter, to make you consider your trouble little or nothing compared with mine, and help you to endure it the more patiently, the less important you consider it to be. Take comfort always in what the Lord foretold to his followers concerning the followers of the devil (John 15:18, 20): "They will persecute you just as they have persecuted me. If the world hates you, be sure that it hated me before it learned to hate you. If you belonged to the world, the world would know you for its own and love you." According to the Apostle (2 Tim. 3:12): "All those who are resolved to live a holy life in Christ will meet with persecution." In another place, he says (Gal. 1:10): "Do you think it is man's favor, or God's, that I am trying to win now? If, after all these years, I were still courting the favor of men, I should not be what I am, the slave of Christ." As the Psalmist says (Ps. 52:6): "Those who please men are put to shame, because God despises them."

Reflecting on this, St. Jerome, whose heir in the abuses of slander I consider myself to be, says in a letter to Nepotian: "If, as the Apostle says, I still pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."⁹⁰ When he wrote to Asella about false friends, Jerome also said: "I thank my God that I am worthy of the world's hatred."⁹¹ To Heliodorus the monk, he wrote: "You are gravely mistaken, my brother, if you think that there is ever a time when the Christian does not suffer

⁸⁸ Pope Innocent II.

⁸⁹ Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 5.20–21.

⁹⁰ Jerome, Ep. 52, *ad Nepotianum* PL 13, 537; CSEL 54, 436.

⁹¹ Jerome, Ep. 45, *ad Asellam* 6: PL 22, 482; CSEL 54, 327.

persecution... 'For our adversary, like a roaring lion, goes about, seeking someone to devour, and do you think of peace? He sits in ambush with the rich.'"⁹²

Encouraged, then, by these lessons and examples, let us bear our troubles with less concern, the more unjustly we have suffered them. If they do not add to our merit, at least let us not doubt that they are useful for our purification. Since everything is ruled by divine providence, it should at least comfort each faithful soul, in every affliction, to know that the sublime goodness of God never permits anything to happen that he has not ordained and that he himself brings to its best conclusion whatever has been done perversely. So we are right in saying to him in every situation (Matt. 6:10), "Thy will be done."

Finally, consider how comforting for those who love God are the words of the Apostle (Rom. 8:28): "We are well assured that everything helps to secure the good of those who love God." This is what the wisest of wise men had in mind when he said in the Proverbs (Prov. 12:21): "Nothing can befall the just man to do him hurt." In saying this, he shows that those clearly depart from righteousness who grow angry at any trouble of theirs, when they know very well that this happens to them by divine decree. They are ruled by their own wills rather than by the divine will, and preferring their own will to the will of God, rebel in their heart of hearts against that which is signified by the words "Thy will be done."

Farewell.

⁹² Jerome, Ep. 14, *ad Heliodorum* 4: PL 22, 349; CSEL 54, 349; referring to 1 Pet. 5:8 and Ps. 10:8.