ABELARD, Pierre (also Abaelard, Abailard, and Abeilard—1079-1142), French scholastic philosopher and theologian and one of the greatest intellectuals of the Middle Ages.

Born at Pallet near Nantes in Brittany, the eldest son of a noble Breton house, he studied first under Roscellinus, canon at Loches and founder of nominalism. At the Cathedral School of Notre Dame in Paris he became first the pupil of William of Champeaux, the father of verbalism, then by degrees his rival, and finally his antagonist. This rivalry resulted in a long duel which brought about the downfall of the philosophical theory of realism, till then dominant in the Middle Ages.

At 22 Abelard founded a school at Melun and then (1113-1115) studied theology under Anselm of Laon. Here also the disciple became the rival of the master and when Anselm expelled him from Laon, Abelard established a school of theology at Paris which became even more popular than the former school of Melun.

When engaged in an historical heresy which led to inevitable persecution, Abelard withdrew to a desert place in NE France, and turned hermit. It was not long, however, before students flocked to him from Paris and in gratitude for the consolation they brought him, Abelard consecrated the new oratory they built from him, the Paraclete, named after the third Person of the Trinity.

At 40 Abelard took monastic vows at St. Denis in Paris where he also lectured to many students. Before long he published his *Introduction to Theology* which, however, led to an accusation of heresy at the Council of Soissons (1121) where he was compelled to burn his book although he was not convicted of any error.

In 1126 he was called as abbot by the monks of St. Gilda in Brittany, who nevertheless treated him with contempt and violence.

In 1137 and again in 1139 Abelard was installed at St. Genevieve and enjoyed for a while a meteoric popularity, just before the final period of his restless career. A clash became inevitable

between Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux, at the time the most imposing religious personality and keenest philosopher of Europe.

When his new heresy trial opened in 1141 at Sens, Abelard appealed to Rome. He was, however, declared a heretic and the penalty of perpetual silence and confinement was imposed upon him. On his way to Rome to appeal his case he died April 21, 1142, at the monastery of St. Marcel. He was interred in the Paraclete, where 20 years later Heloise also was buried. At the destruction of the Paraclete during the French Revolution (1792), the sarcophagus was removed to Paris, and in 1816 it was transferred to the cemetery of Pere la Chaise.

While the influence exerted by Abelard on the minds of his contemporaries and the course of medieval thought was very great, he would have been little known in modern times if it were not for his relations with the beautiful and learned Heloise, niece of Canon Fulbert in the Cathedral of Paris, and the leading French woman of the Middle Ages. After a son was born to them (named Peter Astrolabus), they were secretly married.

Both Abelard and Heloise soon after entered monastic life but in separate place (except for a short time at the Paraclete) and kept up a correspondence among which the *Letters* of Heloise have kept their place among the great love letters of the world.

Abelard brought forcibly to the attention of the Middle Ages the theory now known as conceptualism. Anselm, under Platonic and Augustinian influence, had somewhat tacitly assumed that ideas, not only the idea of God, but the ideas of man and tree as well, are innate, or at least do not originate in sensory experience. Gaunilo disagreed. Abelard, much more consciously and thoroughly, worked out the Aristotelian theory of abstraction.

At the end of the third century Porphyry (233-304) had written I*ntroduction to the Categories of Aristotle* in which he asked: Do genera and species (man and tree, justice and temperance) really exist in themselves, or are they only concepts in a man's mind; and if they really exist, do they exist separately from things (separate from this man and that tree) or do they exist *in* these things? In

Abelard's day the main body of Aristotle's works was not known. Only four or five tractates were available, and these only in a Latin translation. But with this meager material, plus a few commentaries, Abelard undermined Augustinianism and prepared for the Aristotelian triumph of Aquinas.

Although the Platonic theory of Ideas provided a plausbile explanation of the Trinity (cf. Gregory of Nyssa), and although its Augustinian form furnished an intelligible basis for inherited sin, Abelard thought this type of philosophy to be essentially pantheistic. For if ideal universals are more real than sensory particulars, and if God, as most real, is most universal, it follows that individual men and trees are sub-species of God. Such were supposed to be the conclusions of John Scotus Erigena (810-877).

Besides this taint of pantheism, Abelard also criticized realism from the standpoint of logic. If *animal* is real (i.e., if the genus animal is an existing reality), and if man is a rational animal and horse is an irrational animal, it follows that the contrary attributes of rationality and irrationality attach to one and the same substance or reality, viz., *animal*. But no single substance can received contradictory attributes at the same time. Therefore the realistic theory of Ideas must be abandoned.

Opposed to Realism was the Nominalism of Roscellinus (1050-1120), who asserted that only individual things are real and that universals or species are mere words or sound in the air. This view, however, destroys the Trinity because the three Persons become three substances and the unity of the Godhead is reduced to a mere name.

Abelard attempted to escape between the horns of the dilemma by asking, What is a predicate? The consideration that one reality or substance cannot be predicated of another rules out both realism and nominalism. If *man* is a thing, one cannot say that Socrates is *man* any more than Socrates is Plato. Nor can the predicate *man* be a mere sound in the air, for this is also a nominalistic thing and Socrates is not a set of vibrations in the air.

Abelard concluded that the predicate was a concept, and to defend this position he tried to explain the genesis of concepts. The starting point is sensation by which we note that several things

have a common quality. We may then pay attention to this common quality and neglect the differences among the several things. This is the process of abstraction and the result is a concept. A concept is not a thing in nature as a man and a tree are, but it has its basis in a natural thing so that it is not a mere word or sound. Thus, although it exists in our mind subsequent to the existence of the thing (*universalia post rem*, somewhat as the nominalists claim), it also exists in the thing (*universalia in re,* the Aristotelian formula); but, to pay our respects to realism, it also exists before the thing (*universalia ante rem*) in the mind of God.

Abelard also wrote a disturbing treatise, *Sic et non* (*Yes and No*). It is a collection of disagreements among the Church Fathers, including the Scriptures themselves. No reconciliation of the inconsistencies is attempted. From this some have concluded that Abelard was trying to undermine the authority of the church and even of the Scriptures. His own claim was that he wanted to make his students think. In defense of his orthodox intentions it is noted that Thomas Aquinas himself used the same method, though Thomas argued the reconciliations in great detail.

Although he was twice condemned for heresy (one charge was that he held that the Jews had not sinned in demanding Christ's death) and was once pardoned, the question of Abelard's personal orthodoxy is relatively unimportant to us. Trinitarianism, Tritheism, and Unitarianism, however, are extremely important, even if they lead to discussions on the nature of predicates.

GORDON H. CLARK