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Heloise and liturgical experience at the Paraclete

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ABSTRACT. *This article considers Heloise's activity as abbess of the Paraclete, examining what contribution she may have made to its liturgical practice. It relates the testimony of Peter the Venerable and Hugh Metel to Heloise as inspirational leader and author to what we can learn about her from Abelard's preface to the Paraclete Hymnal. In particular, attention is directed to the understanding of Mary Magdalen at the Paraclete by both Abelard and Heloise. This suggests, I argue that 'Epithalamica' and the Easter plays are part of Heloise's literary output, and that she exercised a major influence on Abelard.*

In his letter to Heloise, written after he had come back from a trip to Spain in 1142/43, Peter the Venerable celebrates both her learning and her gift for spiritual leadership. He compares her to Miriam, remembered in Exodus 15:20–21 as having danced in celebration of the defeat of the Egyptian army. The Song of Miriam was part of the liturgy of Easter and was understood as prefiguring the celebration of the resurrection by Mary Magdalen: 'You have sung with Miriam, when Pharaoh had drowned, a song of praise . . .'.[1] Peter then compared her to Deborah, 'who roused Barak, a judge in Israel, against the heathen'. Deborah and Barak are recalled in Judges 5:1 as together composing a song about the warriors of Israel that celebrated the victory of a woman over Sisera, the enemy of Israel. The abbot of Cluny comments that, as Heloise knows, *debora* means 'bee' in Hebrew. 'For you will make honey, not only for yourself but because you have collected whatever is good through different people and from different people, you give back completely'.[2] Peter the Venerable develops this comparison of Heloise to a bee making honey in order to describe her genius in offering spiritual edification. He converts an allusion, originally made by Jerome to encourage Praesidius to imitate the victory of Deborah, into an image of Heloise's genius as a writer collecting wisdom from many different sources.[3] What exactly was Peter the Venerable talking about?

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[1] See in this issue, Wulstan, p. 6. Giles Constable, ed., *The Letters of Peter the Venerable*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass, 1967), 2:177, dates this letter (115) to 1144.

[2] Letter 115, ed, Constable, 1: 305.

[3] Jerome, *Epistula ad Praesidium*, ed. Germain Morin, *Bulletin d'ancienne littérature et d'archéologie chrétiennes* 3 (1913), 58: 'Esto et ipse apes: Debborae victoriam dare, Barach te cum Sisaram persequatur, et liberato Israhel judicum carmen ingemines, ut Christi mella componas'.

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More specific detail about Heloise's reputation as a writer is offered by Hugh Metel (*c.* 1080–*c.* 1150), an Augustinian canon of Toul in Lorraine. In the first of two letters that he addressed to her, he singles out her gift in creating new combinations of words, an image adapted from a line of Horace:

> Your reputation, flying through the void, has resounded to us; what is worthy of resounding from you has made an impression on us. It has informed us that you have surpassed the female sex. How? By composing, by versifying, by renewing familiar words in a new combination, and what is more excellent than everything, you have overcome womanly weakness and have hardened in manly strength.[4]

Heloise did not respond to Hugh Metel's request that they engage in literary dialogue. In Letter 17, a second effort to win her attention, Hugh waxed even more extravagantly about her genius as a writer:

> And indeed, if it is right to say so, and indeed because it is proper to say so, your pen surpasses or is at least equal to the pens of the Doctors, as I may speak to keep your peace, and save your thanks.

The fact that Hugh, a great admirer of Bernard of Clairvaux, was anxious to make contact with Heloise, while being a severe a critic of Peter Abelard, is itself significant. Heloise was seen by her contemporaries as a learned religious woman, respected by those committed to the cause of religious reform. Hugh's eagerness to enter into literary dialogue with Heloise echoes Abelard's comment made in the *Historia calamitatum* that bishops loved her as a daughter, abbots loved her as a sister, and lay-people as a mother: 'In everything they marvelled at the incomparable generosity of her patience. The less she allowed herself to be seen, so that she might give herself to holy prayers and meditations in the secret of her cell, the more eagerly those who were outside begged for her presence and the advice of her spiritual conversation'.[5] Even though Heloise criticized Abelard for eulogising her spiritual self-sufficiency, there can be no doubting that she was perceived by contemporaries as a figure whose teaching and writing were widely sought after. Her capacity to win respect within circles committed to religious reform helped her obtain papal approval for the foundation of the Paraclete (or the oratory of the Holy Trinity as it was still called in official documents) on 28 November 1131.[6] Heloise remained on good terms with Bernard of Clairvaux, who asked Pope Eugenius III to grant her a favour that she was asking from Rome in 1150.[7]

Some insight into the distinctive character of Heloise's intellectual concerns is preserved within Abelard's preface to the hymnal that he composed for the

[4] Hugh Metel, Letter 16. The allusion is to Horace, *De arte poetica* 45–7. See my 'Hugh Metel, Heloise, and Peter Abelard: the Letters of an Augustinian Canon and the Challenge of Innovation in Twelfth-Century Lorraine', *Viator* 32 (2001), 59–91, which includes a new edition and translation of Letters 16–17.

[5] J. Monfrin, ed., *Abélard, Historia Calamitatum* (Paris, 1967), 101; Hicks, *La vie et les Epistres*, 37.

[6] C. Lalore, ed., *Cartulaire de l'abbaye du Paraclet*, Collection des principaux cartulaires du diocèse de Troyes 2 (Paris, 1878), 1–2.

[7] *Ep.* 278, *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, ed. Jean Leclercq, 8 vols. (Rome, 1957–77, hereafter *SBO*), 8:190.

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Paraclete. He emphasizes from the outset that the initiative for wanting to create a new body of hymns lay with Heloise and other religious women rather than with himself:

> I have composed what are called *hymns* in Greek, and *tillim* in Hebrew in response to your prayers, my sister Heloise, once dear in the world, now most dear in Christ. As you, with the women of holy profession who dwell with you, often urged this, I asked your intention in this. I thought that it was unnecessary to create new ones for you, since you had a multitude of old ones and it seemed sacrilegious to prefer or consider equal new ones by sinners to the old songs of the saints. While different things were put to me by different people, you put forward this reasoning, I recall, among other things: 'We know that in Psalms as in hymns the Latin, and particularly the Gallican church follows custom rather than authority. For we are still uncertain who is the author of the translation that our Church, the Gallican, employs . . . The custom of long convention has prevailed so long in this that, while in other things we hold the exemplars of blessed Jerome, in the Psalter that we employ regularly we follow what is false. There is such great confusion of the hymns that we use that the heading of a title never or rarely distinguishes what or whose they are . . . and there is frequently such *inaequalitas syllabarum* that they scarcely fit the melody . . .' For several feasts, you added, proper hymns are lacking, as for the Innocents, the Evangelists, of those holy women who were not at all either virgins or martyrs. Finally, you asserted that there were several in which often it was necessary for those who sing them to lie, either because of the necessity of the season, or because of an assertion of falsity.[8]

Abelard then reports Heloise's argument that just as many Psalms were clearly written to be recited at night, so there were night hymns, with phrases like 'Rising in the night, let us all keep watch', which manifestly made those singing them liars if they were sung at the wrong time.[9] Often it was not so much negligence as necessity or some other arrangement, 'particularly in parishes or smaller churches, because of the daily work of people for whom everything has to be done during the day'.[10]

Of particular value are the comments that Abelard attributes to Heloise about hymns that she finds distasteful in the extravagance of their piety:

> It is not only the non-observance of the appropriate season or time of day that creates a lie, but also the composers of certain hymns who through compunction of spirit proclaimed other things or through desiring without foresight to extol the saints in zeal for piety, went beyond due measure in some things, so that we often proclaim some things in them [these hymns] quite against our conscience, quite foreign from the truth . . . With what presumption we do not fear to sing each year: 'Martin equal to the apostles', or speak glorifying individuals immoderately about their miracles: 'to whose holy tomb the limbs of the weak frequently [turn] for the sake of health' etc. Let your discretion decide.[11]

As Abelard never quotes from hymns in his theological writing from the 1120s, it seems plausible to assume that in attributing these complaints about current practice to Heloise, he was reporting her opinions with some accuracy.

[8] Chrysogonus Waddell, *Hymn Collections from the Paraclete*, 2 vols., Cistercian Liturgy Series 8–9 (Trappist, Ky., 1989, 1987; hereafter *Paraclete Hymnal*), 2:5, and see in this issue Wulstan, pp. 3–4.
[9] *Ibid.*, 7–8.
[10] *Ibid.*, 8.
[11] *Ibid.*, 8–9.

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Giles Constable has emphasized that there is a long monastic tradition of valuing sincerity in liturgical prayer. The Rule of Benedict had required 'that our mind may be in agreement with our voice [*ut mens nostra concordet voci nostrae*]'.[12] This precept did not give licence, however, to change liturgical texts that one considered inappropriate. Augustine had argued that word and action had to agree, but he never embarked on any process of liturgical reform. His preference for the traditional Gallican Psalter over Jerome's *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* provoked Heloise's accusation of inauthenticity, as reported by Abelard. The established tradition was that one had to adapt one's mind to the liturgical texts prescribed by the Church, rather than change the liturgy in the interests of 'authenticity'.

Although there had been some ventures in the Carolingian period to reform liturgical hymns, and many new sequences were incorporated into the existing repertory, it was only in the twelfth century that dissatisfaction with traditional hymnody resulted in radical revision of liturgical practice. There were serious efforts in the late eleventh century to cleanse the hymn repertory of certain excesses. Stephen Harding (*d.* 1134), who left Molesme in 1098 to found a new religious community at Cîteaux, had been brought up on the reformed liturgical traditions of Marmoutier, but then purified these at Cîteaux to exclude any hymns not supposedly by St Ambrose, and thus presumably not intended by Benedict.[13] His emphasis on reason and authority as the only basis for authentic monasticism provided justification for a radical revision of liturgical experience in the twelfth century, not just within the Cistercian fraternity, but in other religious communities which shared a similar desire to return to 'first principles'. The first generation of Cistercians defined their identity more by shared liturgy than by institutional structures. Under Bernard of Clairvaux they sought out the antiphonary used in Metz because it was the most authentically 'Gregorian', but they found it 'faulty in both singing and writing, excessively disordered and contemptible in almost everything'.[14] Such were the attitudes of hostility to established tradition that made liturgical experimentation possible at the Paraclete during the 1130s.

Heloise's ethical stance, that liturgy should be truthful in its linguistic expression, extends Cistercian emphasis on the concordance of word and heart in prayer, but with a significant difference. Whereas the Cistercians resolved the problem of inauthenticity by going back to the texts and melodies of Ambrose, Heloise suggested to Abelard that they should have a completely new set of hymns, in which there was no problem with *inaequalitas syllabarum*, as sometimes

[12] Giles Constable, 'The Concern for Sincerity and Understanding in Liturgical Prayer, Especially in the Twelfth Century' (1986), reprinted in Constable, *Culture and Spirituality in Medieval Europe* (Aldershot, 1996).

[13] Stephen Harding, *Monitum*, ed. Chrysogonous Waddell, *The Twelfth-century Cistercian Hymnal*, 2 vols., Cistercian Liturgy Series 1 and 2 (Trappist, Ky., 1984; hereafter *12th-cCistH*), 2:12 (and see 1:7–22).

[14] *Prologus in Antiphonarium quod Cistercienses canunt ecclesiae*, *SBO*, 3:315.

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was the case in Cistercian texts. Heloise's ethical argument, as reported by Abelard, did not emphasize inner intention as distinct from outward form; rather she argued that, whether in relation to hymns or to protestations of love, the outward words had to conform to inner reality. In the *Institutiones nostre* there is no attempt to justify eating meat or drinking wine by reference to purity of intention, as in Abelard's Rule; instead, austere observances were upheld, justified by imitation of the example of Christ and the early apostles.[15] Her emphasis on truthfulness did not have only evangelical authority. The younger Seneca had argued in a letter to Lucilius: 'Let us speak what we feel [*sentimus*], let us feel what we speak: speech should be in agreement with life [*concordet sermo cum vita*]'.[16] What was new was that Heloise was applying these ideals to hymn literature.

Of particular importance for understanding the early liturgy of the Paraclete is Waddell's discovery that two liturgical manuscripts (a thirteenth-century Ordinal, and a fifteenth-century copy of the hymns of the Paraclete from Chaumont), reveal a liturgy influenced in part by early Cistercian practice, although with some significant changes.[17] While all our manuscript sources were copied after the twelfth century, the fact that the Chaumont manuscript includes a rare copy of the early Cistercian hymnal, as it existed prior to the reforms of 1146/47, corroborates Waddell's finding that the *Institutiones* (which he attributes to Heloise) were also influenced by early Cistercian practice. Exactly what liturgy was followed when Heloise went from Argenteuil to the Paraclete in 1129 is not clear. In the early years (1129/31), Abelard apparently kept his distance, provoking Heloise to demand he pay more attention to the community. This is the period in which Heloise may have decided to follow early Cistercian usages because of their sympathy with authenticity. It was her willingness to take Cistercian enthusiasm for the *Hebraica veritas* further than normal, in recitation of the Lord's prayer, that alarmed Bernard of Clairvaux.[18]

Waddell suggests that Abelard's detailed knowledge of early Cistercian liturgical practice may have come from his discovery that elements of it were already being practised at the Paraclete. This would explain an otherwise puzzling statement, attributed by Abelard to Heloise, that there were no hymns specially for the Holy Innocents, the Evangelists, or women who were neither virgins nor

[15] See Patrologia Latina (hereafter PL) 178:258–336 (the *Rule* = Letters VIII and IX; *the Institutiones* are printed at 313–17).

[16] Seneca, Letter LXXV, as cited by Constable, 'The Concern for Sincerity', 17 (see n. 12 above).

[17] Edited in Chrysogonus Waddell, *The Old French Paraclete Ordinary and the Paraclete Breviary* 1, Cistercian Liturgy Series 3 (Trappist, Ky., 1985), 183 (hereafter *OFPOrdinary*) and in Waddell, *The Old French Paraclete Ordinary and the Paraclete Breviary* 1, Cistercian Liturgy Series 3 (Trappist, Ky., 1985) respectively. Waddell observes that the Chaumont manuscript (C) includes the early (first recension) Cistercian hymnal, a large collection of Abelard's hymns, preserved in its original form in Brussels, Bibl. Royale, MS 10147–58, fols. 81–96v (B), a special Holy Week Office by Abelard, a few occasional hymns by Abelard, and a number of traditional hymns from unidentified sources. See Waddell, *12th-cCistH*, 1:48.

[18] Waddell comments at length on Abelard's Letter X (a rejoinder to Bernard on the subject of the Lord's Prayer) and the hymnal in *12th-cCistH*, 1:64–70.

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martyrs. As Waddell points out, there were plenty of such hymns available in traditional monastic repertory, but these had all been purged by the early Cistercians on the grounds of not having been supposedly written by St Ambrose.[19] The hymn for Mary Magdalen in the earliest Cistercian records does not seem to come from the Milanese tradition, but was adapted from a non-'Ambrosian' Palm Sunday hymn. This, a standard hymn for all virgins, had to suffice for the remembrance of her feast day.[20] In the writings of St Ambrose, Mary Magdalen never functioned as a role model in the same way as the Virgin Mary. The early Cistercian abbeys, like Clairvaux, were dedicated to the Virgin, not to Mary Magdalen. Heloise may have been interested in Cistercian ideals of authenticity, but she was clearly frustrated with the limited repertory the early reformers had prescribed, as well as with certain aspects of their theological perspective. This frustration led her to ask Abelard to compose a hymnal for the Paraclete. A significant number of these hymns were incorporated into the Paraclete liturgy, although alongside other hymns and liturgical texts from Cistercian sources.[21]

The thirteenth-century Ordinal of the Paraclete refers to a significant number of sequences that were sung at the abbey.[22] One of these is 'Epithalamica', preserved alongside 'De profundis', 'Virgines caste' and Abelard's 'Dolorum solatium' in the Nevers manuscript.[23] Waddell has argued that 'Epithalamica', 'De profundis' and 'Virgines caste' are all compositions of Abelard.[24] The text of 'Epithalamica' was subsequently reproduced in a late medieval breviary from Béziers, a further indication of its circulating in southern Aquitaine, and Dronke saw that one of the Easter plays in the Vic manuscript was textually related to 'Epithalamica'.[25] This sequence had a particular function within the Easter Sunday liturgy at the Paraclete: its text, which paraphrases and develops imagery from the Song of Songs, is the Easter Song sung by the women who came to the tomb, only to discover that Christ had risen.[26] Abelard had provided an elaborate discussion of the precedent set by Mary Magdalen and the other women who first proclaimed the resurrection. He describes these women as *apostolas* to the male apostles (*apostolos*), a favourite theme in his writing for the Paraclete.[27] Here, as

[19] Waddell, *12thcCistH*, 1:70, responds to the expression of surprise about Heloise's complaint, voiced by Joseph Szövérffy, *Peter Abelard's Hymnarius Paraclitensis*, 2 vols. (Albany, NY, 1975), 2:10 n. 9.
[20] *Ibid*., 61
[21] Waddell, *Paraclete Hymnal* 1:84–5.
[22] Waddell, *OFPOrdinary*, 348–9.
[23] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, nouv. acq. lat. 3126. See in this issue, Wulstan, p. 12.
[24] Chrysogonus Waddell, '*Epithalamica*: An Easter Sequence by Peter Abelard', *Musical Quarterly* 55 (1986), 239–71. Drawing on Waddell's research, much still unpublished, I have listed some manuscripts of these three sequences in *Peter Abelard*, Authors of the Middle Ages (Aldershot, 1995), 69–70.
[25] Vic, Museu Episcopal, MS 105 (CXI). Peter Dronke, *Nine Medieval Latin Plays* (Cambridge, 1994), 83–105; and see in this issue, Wulstan, pp. 14–16.
[26] Abelard, Sermon 13, PL 178:485A-D.
[27] Abelard, Letter VII, Hicks, *La vie et les Epistres*, 114. Abelard calls Mary Magdalen 'apostola apostolorum' in Sermon 13, PL 178: 485A. Katherine Ludwig Jensen observes indirect precedents for the phrase in the writings of Hippolytus and Gregory the Great (the first person to identify Mary Magdalen with the woman of bad reputation, who poured ointment on Christ's feet, in

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in his sermons to the Paraclete, Abelard is fond of celebrating the ardour of the love of Mary Magdalen, all the more devout for having been a sinner.[28]

One feature of the 'Epithalamica' is a striking parallel between two of its stanzas and a passage in Letter 84 in the *Epistolae duorum amantium*. Heloise expresses her longing to find her beloved in imagery derived from the Song of Songs. In the context of 'Epithalamica', the meeting is between Mary Magdalen and the risen Christ. The similarity of vocabulary with this letter of Heloise must raise the possibility that 'Epithalamica', an integral part of the Paraclete liturgy, is by Heloise. Abelard's Easter hymns ('Christiani, plaudite', 'Da Marie timpanum', 'Golias prostratus est' and 'Veris grato tempore') are quite different in character from the 'Epithalamica' because they do not draw on the Song of Songs; and as David Wulstan has pointed out, those for the Ascension, which do include imagery from the Song, are more muted than 'Epithalamica' in their use of such imagery.[29] Abelard's hymns are always models of elegance and scriptural knowledge, but they are never as openly erotic in character.

A section of the 'Epithalamica' begins one of the Easter plays found in a twelfth-century manuscript from Vic. The first of these plays presents a dialogue between three women and a merchant who sells them ointment, so as to anoint Christ's wounds. Mary Magdalen then urges her sisters that, despite their sorrow, they can be confident about the love offered by Jesus, and that they should hasten to the tomb. In the second play Mary engages in a dialogue with the angels, and then with the gardener.

There is also a striking correspondence between the verse in the dialogue of the three Marys with the merchant and the verse within the love letters: a fascination with creating a distinct rhyme for each stanza. Peter Dronke describes the five strophes beginning 'Tanta sorores gaudia' in the play of the Three Marys as 'a virtuoso invention' and a 'masterpiece of vowel-play, unique in its time', and he compares it with the same technique employed by Walther von der Vogelweide in the late twelfth century.[30] Its occurrence in the Vic play is not in fact quite as unique as Dronke claimed. In the love letters, the man (Abelard) uses the technique for his first love poem (20), and again in an exchange of verses

Luke 7: 36–50), 'Maria Magdalena: *Apostola Apostolorum*', in *Women Preachers and Prophets Through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley, 1998), 58–60. She traces the development of the idea in a tenth-century homily attributed to Odo of Cluny (PL 133:713–21) and its citation in a sermon by abbot Hugh of Cluny to the nuns of Marcigny (PL 159:952); see Dominique Iogna-Prat, 'La Madeleine du *Sermo in Veneratione Sanctae Mariae Magdelenae* attribué Odon de Cluny', *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen Age* 104.1 (1992), 37–70. Jerome repeats the idea that the women at the tomb were apostles to the apostles (*Commentarius in prophetas minores: In Sophoniam*, Prol., Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina 76A, p. 255). Ingrid Maisch is incorrect in asserting that Abelard was the first to use the phrase; see *Mary Magdalene: The Image of a Woman Through the Centuries* (Collegeville, Minn., 1998), 38.

[28] Letter VII, Hicks, *La vie et les Epistres*, 108: 'Et sicut in illo Marthe, ita in isto novimus obsequium Marie, que quidem in hoc exhibendo tanto fuit devotior, quanto ante erat fuerat criminosior'.

[29] See in this issue Wulstan p. 15; and also Waddell, *Paraclete Hymnal*, II, nos. 42–5 (Easter) and 46–99 (Ascension).

[30] Dronke, *Plays*, 87–8. On the Walther question, see Wulstan, pp. 7–8, 17 in this issue.

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with the woman. He composes five verses, each half ending with a half-rhyme on a different vowel, to which she replies (clumsily repeating an '-is' rhyme twice), while he replies more skilfully with a distinct rhyme for each line.[31] In his prose letters, the man prefers to avoid the more traditional style of rhyming phrases, instead ending his phrases with preferred rhythms (the *cursus*). She by contrast seems to enjoy the technique of half-rhyming phrases, a style judged by Peter Dronke to be 'archaic' in the twelfth century. This is also the style used in 'Virgines caste', another sequence performed at the Paraclete that could also be a composition of Heloise. Dronke thought that 'Epithalamica' was composed by 'one of the sisters at the Paraclete'. The metre, in addition to the common imagery and themes in these texts, has led Wulstan to ascribe them to Heloise.[32]

Although little is known about the liturgy of Argenteuil prior to the expulsion of Heloise and her nuns in 1129, it probably included dramatic adaptations of *Quem queritis* in the Easter liturgy or dramas about the nativity and the Feast of Holy Innocents, such as were performed by the nuns of the abbey of Holy Cross, Poitiers.[33]

Heloise was sympathetic to movements of religious reform that embraced women as much as men. The poem added to the mortuary roll of blessed Vital of Savigny at Argenteuil in 1122 is an elegant composition that picks up the same theme of grief (*dolor*) as is developed in many of Heloise's love letters, as also in the refrain to the Easter play, *Heu quantus est noster dolor!*[34] It reflects admiration for Vital's pastoral activity, which included special attention to 'redeeming' fallen women and incorporating them into a religious community. Heloise's complaint to Abelard that there were no hymns specifically to honour women who were neither virgins nor martyrs has a particular resonance in the light of this enthusiasm for Vital. When Heloise dedicated the first daughter house of the Paraclete at Trainel (shortly before 1142) to the patronage of Mary Magdalen, she was echoing Robert of Arbrissel's dedication of the first daughter house of Fontevrault in 1100. Already in the late eleventh century, Mary Magdalen was becoming seen as an alternative model of sanctity, of particular appeal to lay society.[35] It is only in the first half of the twelfth century that dedications to Mary Magdalen begin to grow in number.[36] The attitude of writers like Marbod of Rennes and Geoffrey of Vendôme towards Robert's interest in women was

[31] Letter 38a, 38b, 38c; see Constant J. Mews, *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard* (New York, 1999; hereafter *LLL*), 218–20. Wulstan demurs on this matter: he tells me that he thinks the rhymes in these letters are 'more coincidental than systematic'.

[32] See in this issue, Wulstan, pp. 20–3.

[33] Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago, 1991), 138–40; see also Diane Dolan, *Le drame liturgique de Pâques en Normandie et en Angleterre au Moyen Age*, Publications de l'Université de Poitiers. Lettres et Sciences Humaines 16 (Paris, 1975).

[34] Mews, *LLL*, 162–3 and Letters 25, 49, 53, 57, 69, 82, 90, 104.

[35] See Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, 'Was Mary Magdalen a Magdalen?' in *Media Latinitas: A Collection of Essays to Mark the Occasion of the Retirement of L. J. Engels*, ed. R. I. Nip, *et al*., Instrumenta Patristica 28 (Turnhout, 1996), 269–74. I am grateful to Juanita Ruys for bringing this paper to my attention.

[36] For a recent survey, see Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen. Myth and Metaphor* (London, 1994), 111–23.

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one of uncompromising misogyny. Like Abelard, Heloise was opposed to these negative attitudes.[37]

In the 1130s Abelard became an enthusiastic advocate for the idea that Mary Magdalen was 'the apostle of the apostles'. In writing to Heloise, he reminded her of the phrase of Jesus, reported in Matthew 21:31, about how prostitutes would enter the kingdom of God before the Jews, to explain how such publicly vilified women had been raised to a special place of divine favour.[38] Matthew 21:31 was a line of scripture that never attracted attention in patristic literature, because it contradicted a deeply rooted assumption that virginity was the only sure way to enter the kingdom of heaven.[39] Whereas traditional monastic spirituality identified the Virgin as the archetypal Bride, at the Paraclete the Bride is Mary Magdalen.

When Heloise asked Abelard for hymns about the Holy Innocents, the evangelists and women who were neither virgins nor martyrs, none of these figures had a place of honour in the early liturgy of the Paraclete. Because this theme of Mary Magdalen as apostle to the apostles does not occur in the *Historia calamitatum* or in any of the theological writings from the 1120s, it could well be possible that it was Heloise who provoked Abelard to think in this direction. In the two hymns that he composed in honour of Mary Magdalen, Abelard remedied this deficiency, but still emphasized the traditional image of Mary as 'a blessed sinner' whose feastday 'makes sinners rejoice'. Through her contrition she earned the mercy of God, of which the Pharisee was unaware.[40] By contrast, there is no such allusion to Mary Magdalen as a sinner, either in 'Epithalamica' or in the Easter plays, in which she is portrayed simply as the lover of the risen Lord. In the Three Marys, the one allusion to her former way of life occurs in her dialogue with the merchant, from whom she wishes to buy ointment to anoint the wounds of her crucified Lord. There is never any sense, however, that she has been a sinner.

The image of Mary Magdalen, implicit to varying degrees in 'Epithalamica' and the two Easter plays, takes Abelard's ideas about 'the apostle of the apostles' in a new direction. In many ways, these texts foreshadow wider developments in religious music and drama that take place over the next hundred years. Even within the Cistercian order itself, Bernard of Clairvaux transformed an austere spirituality by reflecting on the human experience of love and grief as a way of coming to understand the love of God, manifest through the suffering of Christ on the cross. Whereas the abbot of Clairvaux did not go as far as Abelard in arguing that human nature was not under any legitimate yoke to the devil,

[37] Mews, *LLL*, 67–9; see also the perceptive analysis of Jacques Dalarun, 'La Madeleine dans l'Ouest de la France au tournant des XIe-XIIe siècles', *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen Age* 104.1 (1992), 71–119.

[38] Abelard, Letter VII, Hicks, 138.

[39] The CETEDOC database of patristic authors reveals that Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome each cited Matthew 21:31 (*publicani et meretrices praecedunt vos in regnum dei*) only once in their writings, and never as a basis for extended discussion.

[40] Waddell, *Paraclete Hymnal*, 2, nos. 96–7.

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Bernard dwelt extensively on the process by which love brings a soul to God, occasionally using Mary Magdalen as an example of a sinner who discovered the love of God.[41] His first devotion, however, was not to Mary Magdalen, but to the Virgin Mary. It took an unknown Cistercian disciple of Bernard, sometime in the second half of the twelfth century, to transform Bernard's reflections into a new life of Mary Magdalen.[42]

The Cistercian liturgy as a whole was transformed by 1146/47 with the implementation of radical changes. It seems that the difficulties of establishing an 'authentic' liturgy had led to multiplicity of local practices. Bernard was asked to oversee the production of a new antiphonary in the interest of imposing order over diversity.[43] While the traditional 'authentic' Ambrosian hymn texts were retained, other versions of the melodies, or indeed new tunes, were introduced: these were often more sensuous and expressive than the plain Milanese equivalents adopted by the first generation of Cistercians.[44] At Cluny itself, Peter the Venerable introduced liturgical reforms that sought to respond to the challenge set by Cistercian example, sometime before 1147.[45] Although a precise date for the Cistercian reforms is difficult to determine, the fact that Abelard makes no allusion to them in his preface suggests that they may have been drawn up after he wrote the Paraclete Hymnal. In 1141, Peter the Venerable made critical comments about the many 'false' songs sung in the church, which were very similar to the complaints attributed by Abelard to Heloise to justify his composition of a new hymn on St Benedict.[46] When he praised Heloise's gift for spiritual edification, 'with the hidden sweetness of sacred letters', he seems to be referring to her gift at reworking scripture in new and exciting ways. If Heloise was as celebrated a writer as Hugh Metel says she was, it seems implausible to think that she never contributed to making the liturgy of the Paraclete as distinctive and original as it was. It is possible that Peter the Venerable was himself responsible for promoting the diffusion of texts like 'Epithalamica' and the Easter play. It is striking that manuscripts of both texts survive in places like Le Puy and Vic, where Peter the Venerable was himself travelling, en route to Spain during a twelve-month period between 1142 and 1143.[47]

More research is needed on these and other texts before any final judgement can be made concerning the literary activity of Heloise. Nonetheless, it is clear that enquiry must stretch wider than the narrow group of letters to Abelard

[41] Bernard, *Sermo super Cantica Canticorum* 22.9, SBO, 1:135.
[42] PL 112: 1431–1508
[43] See above, n. 41.
[44] Some of these are contrasted by Waddell, *12th-cCistH*, II, in facing texts.
[45] Statuta Petri Venerabilis Abbatis Cluniacensis, ed. Giles Constable, in *Consuetudines Benedictinae Variae* (*Saec. XI–Saec. XIV*), Corpus Consuetudinum Monasticarum 6 (Siegburg, 1975), 90; see Joseph Szövérffy, '"False" Use of "Unfitting" Hymns: Some Ideas Shared by Peter the Venerable, Abelard and Heloise', *Revue bénédictine* 89 (1979), 187–99, reprinted in Szövérffy, *Psallat Chorus Caelestium. Religious Lyrics of the Middle Ages: Hymnological Studies and Collected Essays* (Berlin, 1983), 437–49.
[46] Letter 124, ed. Constable, *Letters*, 1:318.
[47] On his travels in these years, see Constable, *Letters*, 2:262.

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that have been the subject of such interest since they were discovered by Jean de Meun. Scepticism about the traditional image of Heloise as a romantic heroine has had a positive effect in drawing attention to the monastic context of the Paraclete. Anonymous liturgical texts need as much attention from literary scholars as anonymous love letters in any effort to discern their connection to more clearly identifiable writings by Abelard and Heloise. We need to identify the distinctive direction of religious culture and liturgical experience at the Paraclete: it was not simply a reassertion of traditional Benedictine monasticism.

Heloise reawakened Abelard's creative gift for both melody and lyric composition in the 1130s. The *planctus* provide a particularly poignant effort to bring to life figures from Scripture in whom Heloise had a long-standing interest. There seems to be no reason to doubt Abelard's claim in the preface to his hymnal that he originally did not see any need for the composition of new hymns, and that it was only through Heloise's persuasion that he changed his mind. Yet Abelard was not the only creative figure at the Paraclete. Heloise was a woman of great literary gift, whose skills had initially attracted the attention of Abelard when she was living in the cathedral cloister of Notre-Dame. She had many frustrations with the hypocrisy which she found in much religious life. This did not stop her from applying her literary gifts to benefit the community of nuns for which she had become responsible at the abbey. As with so many new or reformed religious communities in the twelfth century, new liturgical compositions and melodies helped create a new sense of community.

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