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# ALAN OF LILLE

## THE FRONTIERS OF THEOLOGY IN THE LATER TWELFTH CENTURY

G. R. EVANS

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*For some good friends*

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## PREFACE

Alan of Lille (d. 1202–3) possessed a richly-stocked and many-sided mind. The range of his learning impressed his contemporaries, to whom he seemed to ‘know everything knowable’. He was up-to-the-minute in his understanding of the latest technical developments in the study of the liberal arts in an age when technical skills were advancing rapidly; he was a good Aristotelian in his logic. But he was also greatly influenced by Thierry of Chartres and Gilbert of Poitiers, who had lectured on Boethius’ theological treatises in the middle of the century. They, together with William of Conches in his lectures on Calcidius’ commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*, had helped to bring about a revival of interest in Platonist ideas. If anything, the Platonist outweighs the Aristotelian in Alan; he saw the technical *minutiae* of his learning as part of a grand plan in which they were transformed into something finer and higher and made to serve a theology in which there was a good deal of Neoplatonic philosophy.

In his *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, written in the Vandal Carthage of the late fifth century AD, the pagan Martianus Capella describes how the seven liberal arts can elevate the soul to be fit for heaven. That is Alan’s view of them, too. With his poetry and his Platonism braced by a sound grasp of Aristotelian logic and Pythagorean mathematics, he set out to lead his readers to the heights of an intellectual heaven, where the divine is all intelligibility. Like Augustine, Alan is a Christian Platonist through and through. But, unlike Augustine, he retained all his life the curiosity about what was new to him in secular and pagan teaching, which was so strong in Augustine before his conversion. Under a literary and ideological influence more Platonist than Aristotelian, Alan composed his famous symbolist

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epic, the *Anticlaudianus* (or *The Good and Perfect Man*), on Martianus Capella's model; he adopted the form of the *Marriage of Philology and Mercury* in his prosimetric diatribe, *Nature's Complaint*, a dream-like vision in which Alan sees Nature denouncing sodomy and all the other ways in which the intended paths of sexual activity have been perverted.

Yet, free as he felt to employ pagan authors, and wide though his eclecticism was, drawing even upon the Hermetic writings of the second and third centuries, with their teaching about the 'deification' of man through the use of his higher spiritual and rational powers, Alan was a most orthodox Christian theologian. He preached against the heretics in the south of France; he composed manuals for preachers and confessors, a dictionary of theological terms, every possible aid for the priest engaged in pastoral work.

Alan of Lille has not been neglected by modern scholars. His works are too conspicuous – even exotic – a patch of colour in the late twelfth-century scene not to attract attention. His writings present a number of difficulties, however. Because of the circumstances of their composition in the schools, where many of them began as lectures and went through a number of versions, enlargements and abbreviations, it is all but impossible to establish an authentic text for a number of Alan's works. Other pieces present problems of attribution. And Alan is not an easy author. He was fond of rare words; he loved subtlety and complexity and obscurity. His *Anticlaudianus* puzzled his contemporaries as much as it delighted them, and it has remained by far the most famous of his works, attracting a perhaps disproportionate amount of interest. There has been a series of specialised studies, but only M. T. d'Alverny has attempted a general survey. In her masterly assembling of the materials relating to his life and works she has provided a foundation upon which work on the texts can now go forward.

That is a long-term project, and there is no prospect of its advancing far enough in the foreseeable future to make a comprehensive and definitive study a real possibility yet. But a good part of Alan's work is now in print, much of it in modern editions; there is ample manuscript material. There is perhaps something

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to be said for making use of the texts we have as a basis for a consideration of Alan's achievement as a whole. For it does form a whole – Alan made a synthesis of many branches of contemporary scholarly and literary endeavour, simply by moving about so energetically among them.

Alan shows us a capacious and dexterous mind at work, a vast intellectual energy and a poet's passion. He was, above all, an innovator – not, perhaps, a profoundly original thinker, but an eclectic with that taste for experimental juxtapositions and new combinations of familiar notions which is so attractive in a number of twelfth-century scholars. Alan invented new words, new modes of expression, new forms and gestures, to try to meet changing contemporary needs. He was not an introspective, but a thoroughly extrovert thinker, addressing himself to the problem of popular heresy, or the student in need of a dictionary, or the congregation who came to hear him preach, with a sensitivity which enabled him to adapt what he had to say to their needs. For all his love of mystery, Alan was always practical; theory and practice go hand in hand in his writings. He liked to be able to reveal the existence of depths of truth beyond anything his readers have envisaged, and then to give them an explanation which would enable them to grasp something of that truth. He showed, as perhaps no other writer of the age was able to do, in exactly what way poetry and the *artes* alike could be made to serve the purposes of the theologian. It is in the context of his work as a theologian that his poetry is considered here. Although, philosophically speaking, it cannot be said to be of permanent value, his achievement is a very considerable one. Bernard Silvestris, whose *Cosmographia* showed Alan what might be done along these lines, cannot match it in magnitude. Peter the Chanter, who had Alan's range as a teacher, was not a poet.

The possessor of this rich, complex and quite individual mind remains an obscure figure. He has not attracted a biographer, largely, perhaps, because the materials for his life are fragmentary. He has little to offer the political historian because, unlike his contemporary John of Salisbury, he wrote no memoir, no political commentary (except in an oblique way in his sermons); he does not describe the famous teachers of his youth; he made no collection of his letters for publication. So little trace did con-

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temporary events leave in his writings that it is only with difficulty that they can be put into any sort of order and dated even provisionally.

Nevertheless, Alan was abundantly a man of his time as a scholar. If John of Salisbury has some claim to be among the most cultivated of his time, a man truly *cultus*, then perhaps we may claim for Alan the glory of being the most widely learned, *doctissimus*. Alan chose to remain a professional scholar rather than to pursue a career in ecclesiastical politics. And so we hear less of him. But, as we shall see, his horizon was in no way narrowed by the choice he had made.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

F. Giusberti's edition of the Prologue to Peter the Chanter's *De Tropis Loquendi* has recently been published in *Materials for a Study on Twelfth Century Scholasticism* (Naples, 1982), pp. 87–109. I should like to thank his widow for permission to make use of his preliminary work on the manuscripts.

Versions of some of the discussions which follow have been published in the following journals. I should like to thank their editors for permission to make fresh use of the material here:

‘“The Book of Experience”’; Alan of Lille’s use of the classical rhetorical topos in his pastoral writings’, *Analecta Cisterciensia*, xxxii (1976), 113–21; ‘Boethian and Euclidean axiomatic method in the theology of the later twelfth century’, *Archives internationales d’histoire des sciences*, ciii (1980), 13–29; ‘Alan of Lille and the threshold of theology’, *Analecta Cisterciensia*, xxxvi (1980), 129–47; ‘*Perfectus Homo*: Alan of Lille’s new creation’, *Paideia* (forthcoming); ‘Alan of Lille’s *Distinctiones* and the problem of theological language’, *Sacris Erudiri*, xxiv (1980), 67–86; ‘Peter the Chanter’s *De Tropis Loquendi*: the problem of the text’, *New Scholasticism*, lv, 1 (1981), 95–103.

I have to thank many friends and colleagues for their advice and interest, especially Professor J. Norton-Smith, who first introduced me to Alan of Lille, Professor C. N. L. Brooke, Dr A. Crombie, Dr D. P. Henry, the late Dr R. W. Hunt, and Sir Richard Southern.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- AGJ *Alain de Lille, Gautier de Châtillon, Jakemart Gièlée et leur temps*, ed. H. Roussel and F. Suard, *Actes du Colloque de Lille, 1978* (Lille, 1980)
- AHDLMA Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge
- An. Cist.* *Analecta Cisterciensia*
- Apostles' Creed N. M. Häring, 'The Commentary of Alan of Lille on the Apostles' Creed', *An. Cist.*, xxx (1974), 7–46
- Baldwin J. W. Baldwin, *Masters, princes and merchants* (2 vols., Princeton, 1970)
- Beiträge* *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*
- Bossuat Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, ed. R. Bossuat (Paris, 1955)
- Cahiers* *Cahiers de l'Institut grec et latin du moyen âge, Copenhagen*
- Coll.* *Collectanea Cisterciensia*
- CCCM Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis
- CCSL Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
- CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
- De Lage G. Raynaud de Lage, *Alain de Lille, poète du xiii<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1951)
- Gilbert of Poitiers Commentaries on Boethius by Gilbert of Poitiers*, ed. N. M. Häring (Toronto, 1966)
- MGH Quellen Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte der Mittelalters
- MGH SS Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum
- Nicene Creed N. M. Häring, 'The Commentary of Alan of Lille on the Creed of the Mass', *An Cist.*, xxx (1974), 281–303

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- Our Father N. M. Häring, 'A Commentary on the Our Father by Alan of Lille', *An. Cist.*, xxxi (1975), 149-77
- PG Patrologia Graeca, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1841ff)
- PL Patrologia Latina, ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1841ff)
- Quoniam Homines* 'La Somme "Quoniam Homines"', *AHDLMA*, xx (1954), 113-364
- RTAM* *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*
- Roberts P. B. Roberts, *Studies in the Sermons of Stephen Langton* (Toronto, 1968)
- R. Bén* *Revue Bénédictine*
- Sheridan J. J. Sheridan (tr.), *Anticlaudianus* (Toronto, 1973)
- Simon of Tournai, *Disputationes* Simon of Tournai, *Disputationes*, ed. J. Warichez, *SSLov*, xii (1932)
- SSLov Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense
- Stegmüller F. Stegmüller, *Repertorium Biblicum Medii Aevi* (7 vols., Madrid, 1950-71)
- Textes* M. T. d'Alverny, *Textes inédits d'Alain de Lille* (Paris, 1965)
- Theological Tractates* Boethius, *Theological Tractates*, ed. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, S. J. Tester (London, 1973)
- Thierry *Commentaries on Boethius by Thierry of Chartres and his School*, ed. N. M. Häring (Toronto, 1971)
- Two Questions* 'Deux questions sur la foi inspirées d'Alain de Lille', ed. G. Raynaud de Lage, *AHDLMA*, xiv (1943-5), 323-36
- Virtues and Vices* O. Lottin (ed.), 'De Virtutibus et de Vitiis et de Donis Spiritus Sancti', *Psychologie et Morale aux xii<sup>e</sup> et xiii<sup>e</sup> siècles*, vol. vi (Gembloux, 1960)
- Wright T. Wright, *Satirical Poets of the Twelfth Century* (London, 1872)

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

PETER ABELARD (1079–1142) was perhaps the most famous master of the first decades of the twelfth century. A pupil of the logician Roscelin of Compiègne, of William of Champeaux (founder of the house of St Victor in Paris) and of Anselm of Laon, the leading master of Biblical commentary, Abelard moved from logic to theology and was condemned for his opinions first at the Council of Soissons in 1121 and again at Sens in 1141. His offence lay at least as much in the manner of his approach to theological questions as in any doctrinal unorthodoxy of which he may have been guilty.

ADELARD OF BATH taught at Paris and Laon and travelled in Italy and Greece in the first decades of the twelfth century. An English scholar, respected at the Court of Henry I, he helped to bring works of Arabic scientific learning to the West.

ANSELM OF CANTERBURY (1033–1109) wrote as a monastic scholar; he never taught outside the schoolroom at Bec in Normandy where he had been Lanfranc's pupil; he succeeded Lanfranc as archbishop of Canterbury in 1093. His pioneering work in the use of elementary logical techniques in theology was as uncontroversial as it was philosophically profound. His *Proslogion*, the work of his period at Bec, contains a unique argument for the existence of God, the 'ontological' proof. His *Cur Deus Homo*, completed in exile while he was archbishop, puts forward the view that the Incarnation was a necessary act of God for the redemption of the human race.

BERNARD OF CHARTRES, elder brother of Thierry of Chartres (d. c. 1130), left no surviving writings. His reputation as a great

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teacher rests upon the reports of others, especially John of Salisbury, who describes his grammar lectures in detail.

**BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX** (1090–1153), abbot of Clairvaux, famous for his preaching and for his activities throughout Europe as a diplomat and papal adviser, had no taste for the academic life, although he was chosen as the Church's protagonist in the trials of Peter Abelard at Sens and of Gilbert of Poitiers at Rheims. He had a profound influence upon Alan as a preacher.

**BERNARD SILVESTRIS** is one of a group of scholars associated with the teaching of Bernard of Chartres and his brother Thierry. He was especially drawn to Calcidius' commentary, of the late third or early fourth century, on Plato's *Timaeus* and to the 'scientific' approach of the day to the interpretation of Genesis. His *De Mundi Universitate*, written in the 1140s, contains an account of creation which draws on Plato and on the Hermetic tradition.

**BURGUNDIO OF PISA** (fl. c. 1150), like Adelard of Bath, was a translator. His principal interest lay in the eighth-century Greek author John Damascene and his *Source of Knowledge*.

**CLAREMBALD OF ARRAS**, a pupil of Hugh of St Victor and Thierry of Chartres, made a contribution of his own to the corpus of twelfth-century commentaries on Boethius' *opuscula sacra*, of a modest and cautious kind, avoiding the controversial areas of Gilbert of Poitiers' commentaries.

**EADMER**, monk of Canterbury and devoted friend of St Anselm, was a historian and biographer, whose *Life of Anselm* is of exceptional intimacy and accuracy among hagiographies of the day.

**GEOFFREY OF AUXERRE**, student at Paris at the time of Abelard's condemnation at Sens, was converted to the monastic life by a sermon of St Bernard's and became Bernard's secretary. He continued to write, and is the author of polemical and theological works, as well as of the last books of the *Vita Prima* of Bernard himself.

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GILBERT CRISPIN (d. 1117), abbot of Westminster from 1105, had been a pupil of Anselm of Canterbury at Bec and remained his friend. He is the author of the *Disputatio Iudei et Christiani*, the most famous and influential of a number of dialogues between Christians and Jews written in the late eleventh and twelfth century.

GILBERT OF POITIERS (1076–1154), bishop of Poitiers, 1142–54, made his name as a master lecturing on Scripture and on the theological tractates of Boethius. His work was difficult and required an advanced knowledge of logic in his listeners. He was tried at Rheims in 1148 for views on the Trinity advanced, it was believed, in his commentaries. It proved impossible to determine exactly what he had intended and the attempted condemnation failed, although he was widely held in suspicion and opprobrium afterwards.

HERMANNUS JUDAEUS was converted to Christianity from Judaism as a result of discussions with several Christian scholars, notably Rupert of Deutz, composing an account of his conversion (*De Conversione Sua*) in which he describes how he was won over by an appeal to his intellectual vanity.

HONORIUS AUGUSTODUNENSIS, a mysterious figure, an eclectic and wandering scholar who can be connected with Ireland and Canterbury and many parts of Europe, is the author of the *Elucidarium*, an attempt to bring all Christian doctrine together in a convenient reference form, with condensed arguments to support the orthodox view. He was an admirer of St Anselm.

HUGH OF ST VICTOR, a kindly and painstaking schoolmaster with a rare capacity for reducing a vast body of material to order and explaining it simply, ran the school at St Victor, after William of Champeaux, throughout the 1120s and much of the 1130s. He taught the use of the *artes* as straightforward aids in Bible Study.

JOHN OF SALISBURY (c. 1115–80) spent twelve years in the French schools at the time when Abelard and Thierry of Chartres and Gilbert of Poitiers were teaching there, before entering the

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ecclesiastical civil service, where he served as secretary to the archbishop of Canterbury until his elevation to the See of Chartres shortly before his death. In his *Metalogicon*, written out of twenty years' reflection upon his days in the schools, he gives portraits of many of the masters of the time.

PETRUS ALPHONSUS, another converted Jew of a scholarly turn of mind, made a substantial contribution to the learning of the English Court of Henry I, especially in mathematics and astronomy.

PETER THE CHANTER (d. 1197), precentor of the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, is the author of a manual of universal preaching methods, and of a number of advanced study-aids for his students in the Paris of the second half of the twelfth century.

PETER COMESTOR adopted the approach of Peter Lombard in his teaching on Holy Scripture and speculative theology, avoiding the excesses of the use of dialectic to which the followers of Gilbert of Poitiers seemed to him to be prone.

PETER HELIAS is best known for his lectures on the grammatical textbooks of Priscian and Donatus in the middle of the century, which provided a foundation for new work in speculative grammar and helped to make grammar a subject intellectually satisfying in the same way as dialectic. Alan of Lille heard his lectures.

PETER LOMBARD (c. 1100–60) taught in Paris about 1139. His collection of patristic views on doctrinal topics, the *Sentences*, became the most widely used theological textbook of the Middle Ages, but he was also a commentator, who enlarged and perfected the *Glossa Ordinaria*.

PETER OF POITIERS was a pupil of Peter Lombard before 1159, himself a master by 1167; in 1169 he took Peter Comestor's chair at Paris. His *Sentences* constitute a *summa theologica* in miniature, analysing the problems of systematic theology in order, by reason and with the aid of the authorities.

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**PETER THE VENERABLE**, abbot of Cluny, was instrumental in making the first translation of the Koran into Latin. He also took in Peter Abelard when he needed a refuge on his way to Rome to appeal against his condemnation at Sens; Peter the Venerable was able to persuade him to remain at Cluny.

**RICHARD OF ST VICTOR** (d. 1173), pupil of Hugh of St Victor, was both a scholar and a mystic, writing on the Bible and on the doctrine of the Trinity and on the spiritual life. He was much interested by Anselm of Canterbury's proof for the existence of God, and put forward a modified theory of his own.

**ROBERT OF MELUN** (d. 1167), ran a school at Melun from 1142–8, and took over Abelard's chair of theology at Paris before becoming bishop of Hereford from 1163–7. John of Salisbury was one of his pupils.

**RUPERT OF DEUTZ** (1070–c. 1129 or later), abbot of Deutz near Cologne from c. 1120, had previously taught at Liège and Siegburg. His writings include a grand study of the Bible as a whole, the *De Trinitate et Operibus Eius*. He dissociated himself firmly from the work of the dialecticians in Biblical exegesis.

**SIMON OF TOURNAI**, another of the Paris masters of the middle of the century was the author of a series of *Disputationes* in which he collected together questions raised by his pupils in the course of the lectures he gave on the Bible; it seems that a time was set aside to discuss these each afternoon, in an early form of the later mediaeval *disputatio*.

**THIERRY OF CHARTRES**, brother of Bernard of Chartres, was author of commentaries on Boethius' theological tractates, and of an attempt to make a scientific reconciliation of Plato's *Timaeus* and the Genesis account of the beginning of the world.

**WILLIAM OF CONCHES** (c. 1080–c. 1145) was a grammarian and lecturer on Calcidius' commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*; he composed an encyclopaedia, the *De Philosophia Mundi*, containing an account of earlier and contemporary views on the creation and running of the world.