

## **From Stumbling Block to Deadly Sin: The Theology of Scandal<sup>1</sup>**

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In the spring of 2002, Pope John Paul II issued his annual Holy Thursday letter to Roman Catholic priests. The Church had recently suffered a number of very public court cases involving accusations of pedophilia against high-profile clerics. “Grave scandal”, the pontiff wrote, his choice of words echoing that of his medieval predecessors, “is caused” by this.<sup>2</sup> In the spring of 2008 during his visit to the United States his successor Benedict XVI also used the word in a way that medieval clerics would have recognized when he referred to the “scandal given” by those who advocate access to abortion.<sup>3</sup> While ecclesiastical administrators in the Middle Ages rarely dealt with such questions, they did have to confront other behaviours which concerned them because, among other things, of their scandal-causing potential.

When we think of scandal in the twenty-first century we might associate it with the sexual misbehaviour of politicians and celebrities, or perhaps with the underhanded financial dealings of prominent business people. Our modern conception of scandal as outrage or shocking behaviour has been fed by mass media keen on revealing the clay feet of our idols. But when medieval people, especially moral theologians, thought of scandal they saw it also as a sin, and they

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was given at the International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI, May 11, 2008. I am grateful to Gerhard Jaritz who organized the session as well as giving a paper himself, and to Elena Lemeneva, the other participant in the session, for their stimulating conversations on this topic.

<sup>2</sup> The full text of the letter (in several languages, although not in Latin) can be found on the Vatican’s website, at [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/letters/2002/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_20020321\\_priests-holy-thursday\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20020321_priests-holy-thursday_en.html) (accessed August 10, 2006). The pope had earlier (June 11, 1993) written to American priests on the same subject. This letter is also online available at [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/letters/1993/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_let\\_19930611\\_vescovi-usa\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/1993/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_19930611_vescovi-usa_en.html) (accessed September 27, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Benedict XVI’s responses to American bishops, April 16, 2008, full text available at [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20080416\\_response-bishops\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/april/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080416_response-bishops_en.html) (accessed April 30, 2008).

defined it as anything done or said so as to incite others to sin, or even merely to provide them with a bad example. By the early thirteenth century, scandal was being called a possible capital fault – a mortal sin. Writing about 1216, Thomas of Chobham uses as an example of the sin of scandal a priest, who in fornicating sins twice: once in the fornication and a second time in the scandalizing of his parishioners, the salvation of whom would be jeopardized if they were to follow his example. In this way any sin could be compounded, becoming also the sin of scandal, if it were committed in front of others.

By way of introducing *scandalum*, I am going to look first at origins, and then at some of the major developments in theology. The word itself came into Latin from the Greek *skandalon*, which means “a trap, or a snare for an enemy”. In Latin the meaning slid into “cause of offence or stumbling”,<sup>4</sup> and this, in a theological sense, is how Christian thinkers understood it when they encountered it in their Vulgate Bible. We might merely be shocked by the bad example of outrageous behaviour; the souls of medieval people were imperilled by it.

In the Vulgate, *scandalum* occurs many times, in both testaments. The passages most often subjected to study by medieval writers were those in the Psalms<sup>5</sup> and the Gospels. In the Old Testament examples, the sense is always of “stumbling-block” or “trap”: an impediment placed in one’s way. We meet citations from the New Testament more often in later writers, especially the famous verses from Matthew, although our modern translations tend to obscure its presence by using the noun “offence” and the verb “offend” – words which today do not carry the same weight they once did. For example, “If thy right eye offend thee” is actually better rendered as “if thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. For it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body go into hell”.<sup>6</sup> A passage much glossed is this one:

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<sup>4</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford, 1971), s.v. “scandal”. J.F. Niermeyer’s *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden: Brill, 1976) gives “stone of stumbling, trap” as its first definition, thus including both meanings and conveying the sense that to cause scandal is a blameworthy offence against someone else.

<sup>5</sup> For example: *Absconderunt superbi laqueum mihi, et funes extenderunt in laqueum, iuxta iter scandalum posuerunt mihi*. The proud have hidden a net for me. And they have stretched out cords for a snare: they have laid for me a stumbling-block by the way side” (Ps. 139: 6)]. Unless otherwise noted, Latin quotations are from the *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam* (Madrid, 1985); English ones from the Douai version. The other citations are: Ex. 10:17; Ex. 23:33; 1Sam. 18:21; Ps. 48:14; Ps. 49:20; Ps. 68:23; Ps. 105:36; Ps. 118: 165; Ps. 140:9; Prov. 22:25; Ez. 7:19; Ez. 14:2-4; Ez. 14:17.

<sup>6</sup> *Audistis quia dictum est antiquis: Non moechaberis. Ego autem dico vobis: quia omnis qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendum eam, iam moechatus est eam in corde suo. Quod si oculus tuus dexter scandalizat te, erue eum, et proiice abs te: expedit enim tibi ut pereat unum membrorum tuorum, quam totum corpus tuum mittatur in gehennam. Et si dextra manus tua scandalizat te, abscide eam, et proiice abs te*. You have heard that it was said to

But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of scandals. For it must be that scandals come: but nevertheless woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh!<sup>7</sup>

In all its usages, in the typical Old Testament sense of a “stumbling block” and especially in the New Testament ones cited here of an “endangering offence”, the sin of scandal sets up the mutual responsibility of Christians for each others’ spiritual welfare.

When the early Church Fathers laid the foundations of Christian theology, they included the subject of scandal, not only as they worked their way through biblical exegesis, which we would expect, but sometimes in other ways as well. I cannot, of course, cite all the many examples of patristic exegesis and other writing dealing with scandal, but I will provide one or two examples, by way of demonstration of their thought. As early as the second century, for instance, we find Tertullian writing: “Scandal, unless I am mistaken, is an example of evil, not good, things, instructing towards transgression.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly the idea of the sin of the bad example was present very early on.

In the early fifth century Augustine preached on Matthew 18, placing in comforting opposition to the Gospel text, “Woe unto the world from scandals” the Psalm text, “Much peace have they that love thy law: and to them there is no scandal”.<sup>9</sup> He cites Job’s wife (like Eve) as an example of scandal, because she tempted her husband.<sup>10</sup> In the same sermon he warns his audience that any wife might be a scandal, or any friend who tries to persuade a person into wrongdoing.<sup>11</sup>

Jerome deals with the passages in Matthew as well, including Matthew 18. On Matthew 23: 13, he says that “Every teacher who scandalizes his disci-

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them of old: Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say to you, that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart. And if thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. For it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body go into hell And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee”] (Matt. 5: 27-30). I have supplied the last phrase from the King James, as the Douai version omits it.

<sup>7</sup> *Qui autem scandalizaverit unum de pusillis istis, qui in me credunt, expedit ei ut suspendatur mola asinaria in collo eius, et demergatur in profundum maris. Vae mundo a scandalis! Necesse est enim ut veniant scandala: verumtamen vae homini illi, per quem scandalum venit* (Matt. 18: 6-9).

<sup>8</sup> Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis*, cap. 3.3, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, v. 2 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1954), p. 1211.

<sup>9</sup> *Pax multa diligentibus legem tuam, et non est illis scandalum* (Ps. 118: 165).

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *Sermo 81*, 2, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina (henceforth: *PL*), v. 38.500 (Paris, 1865).

<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *Sermo 81*, 4, ed. Migne, *PL* 38.501.

ples with his evil deeds closes the kingdom of heaven before them.”<sup>12</sup> The idea that the person in a position of authority has a particular responsibility for the spiritual welfare of others is one that continued to exercise Christian thinkers for much of the next millennium.

Augustine’s and Jerome’s contemporary, John Cassian (ca. 365-435), known to us mainly because of his connection with monastic life, says that “the truth of the Scriptures may not be altered on account of scandalizing the weak.”<sup>13</sup> I include him here because this notion of the sacrosanctity of truth (biblical and doctrinal) becomes important in later discussions of scandal. Gregory the Great (d. 604) picks it up, writing that we should avoid, as much as possible, scandalizing our neighbours, but it is better to allow scandal than to relinquish truth.<sup>14</sup> Gregory also demonstrates a clear understanding of the Christian responsibility not to scandalize others:

Very commonly, when we do wrong things which are seen by our brothers, we are setting them a bad example, and with our foot as it were turned off the path, we leave distorted footsteps to those who follow, while by our own deeds we lead the way for others’ consciences to stumble.<sup>15</sup>

And Gregory is one of the first to focus on the special obligation of priests, first hinted at by Jerome, to avoid scandalizing their flock.

By the beginning of the medieval period, then, we find all the basics upon which the later theologians and canonists wrote: scandal as an impediment, scandal as a danger to the souls of one’s fellow Christians, scandal as a grievous sin, but not so grievous that truth should be sacrificed in order to avoid it.

In tracing the development of a theological idea in the high and late Middle Ages, it is exceedingly difficult to separate the various genres in which it is to be found, so I hope I may be forgiven for allowing the distinctions to blur, as they often did in the Middle Ages, among the three inextricably intertwined threads of theological writing, pastoral literature, and canon law. Indeed, by the

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<sup>12</sup> Jerome, *Commentariorum in Evangelium Matthaei*, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PL* v. 26.170 (Paris, 1884), lib. III, cap. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Cassian, *Collationes*, ed. J.-P. Migne, *PL* v. 49.1061 (Paris, 1874).

<sup>14</sup> Gregory, *Homiliae in Hezechihelem Prophetam*, Lib. 1, Hom. 7, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* v. 142, ed. Marcus Adriaen (Turnholt: Brepols, 1971), p. 85. Bede reiterates this nearly two centuries later. Bede, *In Marci Evangelium Expositio*, in *Opera*, ed. D. Hurst, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, v. 120 (Turnholt: Brepols, 1960).

<sup>15</sup> Gregory, *Moralia in Iob*, ed. Aristide Bocognano (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1974), Lib. 11, c. 63, p. 130. I have altered the translation found in *Morals on the Book of Job*, Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1844, 1845, 1847 [Vol. III, 1], 1850 [Vol. III, 2]), II, p. 39.

fourteenth century, writers like William of Pagula were drawing from moral theology and canon law to produce works of practical use for priests.<sup>16</sup>

I intend to focus first on the twelfth century, a period still feeling the influence of the landmark pontificate of Gregory VII in the century before, and then on the thirteenth-century edifices built on the twelfth-century foundations. As the reforming impulse extended throughout the church, the sin of scandal took on broader implications for both clergy and laity. Theologians continued the tradition of biblical exegesis, but went on by the early twelfth century to address complicated questions in sophisticated ways. An early example of a work that was widely disseminated and which became standard in all the schools by the mid-twelfth century is the *Glossa ordinaria* on the Bible. On Matthew 18, it gives the definition: “One scandalizes who gives the occasion of ruin by word or deed less right.”<sup>17</sup> “Note that as much as you can without sin, you ought to avoid scandalizing your neighbour,” and “the truth ought not to be abandoned on account of scandal.”<sup>18</sup>

It was during the twelfth century that ideas about scandal began to take on a more clearly social aspect; that is to say that the focus of the discussion was the individual Christian's relationship with the wider Christian commonwealth. The controversial and brilliant Peter Abelard (1079–1142) was an original thinker who interested himself in broad and complex ideas, including scandal. By Abelard's time, the sin of scandal had become attached often, but not exclusively, to sexual sins. In writing of the desecration of a building, for example, it is a sexual sin he chooses as the instrument of that desecration,<sup>19</sup> and it is clear that a sin performed in public so as to have the potential of corrupting others is more serious in the eyes of the law than the same, or even a lesser, sin committed privately. In his words:

Whatever can redound to the common ruin or public detriment should be punished with greater correction, and what causes greater wrong deserves...a heavier penalty, and the greater the scandal...the greater the punishment which it incurs..., even though a lighter fault has preceded it.<sup>20</sup>

This is about not only the individual's sin, but more importantly the public welfare.

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<sup>16</sup> John Philip Daly, ed., *An Edition of the Judica Me Deus of Richard Rolle* (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 1984), p. xxii.

<sup>17</sup> *Scandalizat qui dicto vel facto minus recto occasionem dat ruinam. Glossa ordinaria on Matthew 18. Biblia Latina cum Glossa ordinaria.* (Turnholt: Brepols, 1992). Facsimile reprint of the Editio Princeps, Adolph Rusch, Strassburg, 1480/1).

<sup>18</sup> *Glossa ordinaria* on Matthew 18.

<sup>19</sup> D.E. Luscombe, ed. and tr., *Peter Abelard's Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), pp. 42/43-44/45. On this question see Dyan Elliott, “Sex in Holy Places: An Exploration of a Medieval Anxiety”, *Journal of Women's History* 6 (1997), pp. 6-34.

<sup>20</sup> Luscombe, *Abelard's Ethics*, pp. 42-3.

Abelard warns confessors not to divulge what they hear: “Sometimes...by revealing sins either in anger or in levity, they [confessors] gravely scandalize the Church and place those who have confessed in great danger.”<sup>21</sup> Peter Lombard, whose immeasurably influential *Sentences* was produced around 1160, echoes this,<sup>22</sup> and the theme is carried through into the pastoral literature which began to flourish even before the Fourth Lateran Council’s Canon 21 mandated annual confession in 1215, causing a flood of confessors’ manuals, and other forms of what Leonard Boyle called “pastoralia”, which did not abate for perhaps two centuries.

Theological ideas about scandal were reflected in canon law, the *corpus* of papal edicts, conciliar canons, and diocesan statutes. The most widely influential work which compiles earlier canon law is Gratian’s *Decretum*, c.1140.<sup>23</sup> Here are found nearly four dozen mentions of scandal,<sup>24</sup> with some canons dealing directly with its dangers. We find Gratian showing, like many other clerical authorities, much concern about the morals of priests. He has this to say: those in sacred orders “discovered or publicly taken in perjury, theft, and fornication and other such sins,” should be punished, “because it is a scandal to the people of God for such persons to be placed over them.”<sup>25</sup> A fornicating cleric is not to appear in public “lest the crowd of the faithful suffer scandal in him”, and a priest is not to perform public penance, because this might scandalize the people as well.<sup>26</sup> A priest who is merely *believed* by the people to have committed evil deeds which cannot be proven is to be suspended from office until he has made

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<sup>21</sup> Luscombe, *Abelard’s Ethics*, pp. 104-5.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Lombard, *Sententiae*, lib. IV, dist. 21, *De poenis sacerdotis qui peccatum publicat confitentis*, col. 897. *Sententiae in Quatuor Libris Distinctae* (Rome: Collegium S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971). See quotation from Gratian, above. On the *Sentences* and its medieval commentators, see Marcia Colish, *Peter Lombard* (New York: Brill, 1994); G.R. Evans, ed., *Mediaeval Commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard: Current Research*, v. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2002); and Philipp W. Rosemann, *The Story of a Great Medieval Book: Peter Lombard’s Sentences* (Peterborough: Broadview, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Robert L. Benson, “Political *Renovatio*: Two Models from Roman Antiquity,” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable, with Carol D. Lanham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991, orig. pub. 1982), p. 340. On this subject, see Anders Winroth, *The Making of Gratian’s Decretum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>24</sup> See Timothy Reuter and Gabriel Silagi, *Wortkonkordanz zum Decretum Gratiani*, vol. 5 (Munich: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1990).

<sup>25</sup> Emil Friedberg, ed., *Corpus iuris canonici*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. I: *Decretum Magistri Gratiani* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1879). *Decretum* D 50.34, p. 193. Gratian is citing Rabanus.

<sup>26</sup> Friedberg, ed., Gratian, *Decretum* D. 82.5, p. 292. The chapter heading says that this comes from “Concilio Gangrensi”, but Friedberg’s note says this in an error, which he corrects, naming Theodore, archbishop of Ireland.

satisfaction, lest the faithful be scandalized by him.<sup>27</sup> Twenty years later, Bartholomew of Exeter expresses similar concern, similarly worded, about priests in his *Penitential*.<sup>28</sup> So clearly the concept of scandal was entrenched in canon law well before the end of the twelfth century.

In the early decades of the thirteenth century, scandal began to receive more nuanced treatment in pastoral manuals. And that was possible because of the work of Peter the Chanter, the Paris master who died in 1197.<sup>29</sup> Peter was the first to give an extended discussion on scandal; this appears in his *Summa de sacramentis*. Peter advances some distance from the biblical exegesis of the first Christian writers on scandal, not only in the lengthy treatment of the subject, but in the fact that he provides concrete examples of what constitutes scandalous behaviour, and in doing this he is moving the discussion into the arena of the practical application of Christian theory: how the Christian might conduct herself or himself to avoid harming a neighbour by scandal. In his work we can see clearly a growth of complexity in the analysis of the sin. He begins with a definition of scandal which he says is customary: “It is usual to say that scandal is when, provoked by your improper word or deed [lit., word or deed less right], your neighbour falls into ruin.”<sup>30</sup> One who causes this sins mortally. Particular care must be taken not to scandalize the weak, who are more easily harmed.<sup>31</sup>

An important contribution to the theology of scandal is Peter's addition to the advice of Gregory (and Bede) that the truth ought not to be abandoned on account of scandal. “To avoid scandal,” he says, “we should abstain from all lawful things which might be omitted, saving the truths of life [the Christian way of living so as to attain eternal life], doctrine [Christian teaching], and justice

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<sup>27</sup> Friedberg, ed., Gratian, *Decretum*, C. 2.5.13, p. 459. This appears also in the *Decretum* of Burchard of Worms, Liber Secundus, cap. 184, PL 140, col. 656.

<sup>28</sup> Adrian Morey, *Bartholomew of Exeter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), pp. 198 and 238, where he refers to Ivo, *Decr.* vi, 229, PL 161, c. 494. Morey gives a reference to Gratian's *Decretum*, D.vi, *de Poen.* c.2, ed. Friedberg, I, 1244, from which this is a direct quotation (see above, p. 26, n. 62), along with another to Peter Lombard (*Sent.* lib. iv, dist. xxi, c.7, [properly c.9?], p. 385) who also quotes Gratian verbatim.

<sup>29</sup> The classic work, still most valuable, on the Chanter and his circle is John W. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and His Circle I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

<sup>30</sup> Peter the Chanter, *Summa de sacramentis*, ed. Jean-Albert Dugauquier, *Analecta Mediaevalia Namurcensia*, vol. 16 (henceforth: Peter the Chanter, *Summa de sacramentis*) (Louvain: Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1967), pars 3, cap. 45, De Scandalo, §318, p. 372. Peter's editor says that this comes more likely from Jerome, *Commentarius in Evangelium Mattheum* lib. 2, cap. 15, in Matth.15:12, PL 26.111: *Et quia crebro teritur in Ecclesiasticis Scripturis, scandalum breviter dicamus quid significet. Skandalon et scandalum, nos offendiculum, vel ruinam et impactionem pedis possumus dicere.*

<sup>31</sup> Peter the Chanter, *Summa de sacramentis*, pars 3, cap. 45, 2a, p. 372.

[Christian law and order, and rectitude].”<sup>32</sup> That is to say that the preservation of those truths is a higher good which overrides the injunction against causing scandal. The Chanter appears to have been the first to express this caveat in just this way, previous writers not having given truth three aspects, while Peter’s pupils, and those who followed them, usually did.

The Chanter’s own pupils included the famous Englishmen Thomas of Chobham, sub-dean of Salisbury, Robert Courson, cardinal and papal legate, and perhaps Stephen Langton, who became Archbishop of Canterbury.<sup>33</sup> Both Robert and Thomas wrote important *Summae*, and Stephen Langton was a far from insignificant primate, many of whose sermons and other writings have survived.<sup>34</sup> All three touched on the subject of scandal, and in this they were developing the thoughts of their illustrious master.

Among these immediate successors of the Chanter, the most succinct treatment of the threefold truth is found in Thomas of Chobham’s *Summa confessorum*. Where the triple truth of life, doctrine, and justice is imperilled, he says, scandal is not to be avoided:

If someone is scandalized because I teach the truth, I will not cease because of [scandal]. Likewise if someone is scandalized because I judge fairly, I will not judge unfairly on account of this. Likewise if someone is scandalized because I live well, such as because I do not wish to go with

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<sup>32</sup> Peter the Chanter, *Summa de sacramentis*, pars 3, cap. 45, 2a, p. 375 and 376.

<sup>33</sup> George Lacombe asserts that Langton was rather a pupil of Peter Comestor. George Lacombe and Beryl Smalley, “Studies on the Commentaries of Cardinal Stephen Langton,” *Archives d’Histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 5 (1930), p. 8. But John F. Veal maintains that this is unlikely, and argues for the influence of the Chanter. Johannes F. Veal, *The Sacramental Theology of Stephen Langton and the Influence upon Him of Peter the Chanter* (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, Città di Castello, 1955), pp. 15-6 and 53-8. See also Powicke, *Stephen Langton*, p. 30: “It is probable that his master – the teacher to whom he owed most – was Peter the Chanter”. Finally, in his exhaustive study of the circle of Peter the Chanter, John Baldwin says that Langton was within the Chanter’s “inner group”, although his “position cannot be determined as clearly” as that of Robert Courson. “It is possible but not certain that Stephen was a student of the Chanter before he became a theological master at Paris, and later Archbishop of Canterbury. His theological interests ranged wider than Peter’s, ... but in Bible study and certain doctrines he followed the Chanter closely.” Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants* I, p. 18. Baldwin includes a concise portrait of Langton and his work on pp. 25-31. At the time when Peter the Chanter flourished, he was part of the academic community of masters and students in Paris which probably numbered only around two hundred. In 1207 the number of masters was limited by Pope Innocent III to eight. F.M. Powicke, *Stephen Langton* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1928), p. 26.

<sup>34</sup> Smalley calls him “the greatest biblical scholar of the late twelfth century,” *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964, orig. pub. Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), p. 181. She also discusses the modern chapter divisions of Scripture with which Langton is credited, pp. 222-4.



him to a brothel or because I do not want to get drunk with him, I will not abandon my good life on account of this.<sup>35</sup>

And by the next generation of writers, the threefold truth seems to have become a commonplace.

That next generation developed ideas about scandal ever more fully. Between 1215 and the middle of the thirteenth century, William of Auxerre (d. 1231),<sup>36</sup> Hugh of St.-Cher (fl. c. 1235), Alexander of Hales (d. 1245),<sup>37</sup> Raymond of Peñafort (d. 1275),<sup>38</sup> and the great doctor Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) produced significant writings on the subject, with Aquinas's fully developed section in his *Summa theologiae* surviving to become the theology of the sin which endures in the Catholic Church until the present day, although the publication of his work by no means ended the discussion.

All of these writers begin with the definition of scandal found in the *Glossa ordinaria* and adopted by Peter the Chanter: a word or deed less right which provides the occasion for ruin to one's neighbour. The thirteenth-century writers devote a great deal of space to the nature of the sin itself; is it, for example, one sin or two? Mostly they decide that it is a special kind of double sin – either two or two-in-one.

They elaborate on the Chanter's treatment, sometimes introducing new ideas. For example, William of Auxerre includes works of mercy among those things which may be abandoned on account of scandal, although since they serve the public good, they might be performed in secret.<sup>39</sup> Robert Grosseteste,

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<sup>35</sup> *Verbi gratia: si aliquis scandalizatur quia doceo veritatem, non propter hoc dimittam. Similiter si scandalizatur aliquis quia iudico equitatem, non propter hoc iudicabo inique. Similiter si aliquis scandalizatur quia bene vivo, ut quia nolo ire cum eo ad prostibulum vel quia nolo inebriari cum eo, non propter hoc dimittam bonam vitam meam.* Thomas of Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, ed. F. Broomfield (Louvain: Éditions Nauwelearts, 1968), Art. 7, Dist. 13, Qu. 3a, *Non omne scandalum est vitandum*, p. 568.

<sup>36</sup> William of Auxerre (Guillelmus Altissiodorensis), *Summa Aurea*, ed. Jean Ribailier (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1987), p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> The *Summa* which bears Alexander's name is largely a work of collaboration, begun by 1238, with John of La Rochelle, a Franciscan who died in 1245. John was a master of arts in Paris, then master in theology under William of Auxerre. See the articles on John by Ignace Brady in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité* (Paris, 1974), v. 8, cols. 599-602, and the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Washington, 1967), v. 7, p. 1057.

<sup>38</sup> Raymond of Peñafort, *Summa de paenitentia*, ed. Xaverio Ochoa and Aloisio Diez (Rome: Commentarium pro religiosus, 1976). I defend my inclusion of this canonist among the writers of *Questiones* and confessors' manuals by the wide distribution which his work enjoyed, and the extent of its influence.

<sup>39</sup> *Queritur postea utrum consilium sit dimittendum propter scandalum.*

*Videtur quod non, quia preceptum non est dimittendum propter scandalum; sed consilium est maius bonum quam preceptum; ergo non est dimittendum propter scandalum.*

bishop of Lincoln 1235-1253, also introduced new themes: the enunciation of scandal as a sin against charity, since it harms the neighbour one is commanded to love, and the connection of scandal and slander (“the destruction of a [good] name...is called scandal”)<sup>40</sup> which became pronounced in English writing, both clerical and lay, in the following century. So prominent did this theme become that by the middle of the fourteenth century concern for reputation seemed as important as the avoidance of sin, although a writer like John Bromyard is careful to say in his *Summa* that a good reputation is important not only for one’s own spiritual health but also for that of others, because they might learn from a good example.<sup>41</sup>

That connection between appearances and the avoidance of sin is also evident in the practical work of bishops. Big *summae* and smaller confessors’ manuals were one way of disseminating theological ideas, but bishops and archbishops performed that function when they raised the question of scandal in diocesan statutes and when they applied the theory in dealing with sinners. Stephen Langton, for example, in the Canterbury statutes issued just before the Fourth Lateran Council, decreed that priests might not keep concubines, as

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*Item, magis debeo diligere utilitatem meam spiritualem, quam aliquam utilitatem proximi sive corporalem sive spiritualem; sed in faciendo consilio est utilitas mea spiritualis; ergo non debeo dimittere consilium propter scandalum proximi.*

*Sed contra. Dicit auctoritas: Debemus vitare scandalum, quantumcumque possumus sine peccato; sed hoc possumus vitare scandalum sine peccato, quia non tenemur ad consilium; ergo dimittendum est consilium propter scandalum.*

*Forte dicetur ad hoc quod illa auctoritas intelligenda est, salva triplici veritate; sed si dimittatur consilium, non est salva triplex veritas, quia dimittitur ascensus de virtute in virtutem, quod est de veritate vite, et propter hoc non est dimittendum consilium propter scandalum; sed eadem ratione opera misericordie non sunt dimittenda propter scandalum, quia sunt de veritate vite, nec opera alterius virtutis, et sic nullum opus virtutis dimittendum est propter scandalum, quod est contra predicta”* William of Auxerre, *Summa aurea*, Lib. 3, Tract. 52, Cap. 4, p. 1026.

<sup>40</sup> Siegfried, “Robert Grosseteste’s Treatise on Confession, ‘Deus Est,’” *Franciscan Studies* 30 (1970), 218-293, p. 271. In the *Templum Dei*, under *ira*, (against which the remedy is patience), the list reads:

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| Rage:       | this is anger in the spirit for revenge                     |
| Blasphemy:  | this is anger in the mouth for corruption                   |
| Madness:    | this is anger in deed for harming                           |
| Mischief:   | this is when someone easily strikes or provokes another     |
| Scandal:    | this is injury or destruction of the [good] name of another |
| Homicide:   | this is extinction of human life                            |
| Savageness: | this is excessive harshness to animals                      |

Robert Grosseteste, *Templum Dei*, ed. Joseph Goering and F.A.C. Mantello (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), p. 48.

<sup>41</sup> John Bromyard, *Summa praedicatorum* (Venice, 1586), cap. 11, 274v-275r.

scandal arose from the practice.<sup>42</sup> Over a century later, in 1348, Bishop Hamo of Rochester heard an adultery case which had scandalized the community, and sentenced the guilty pair to pilgrimage and alms-giving.<sup>43</sup>

Scandal has always been important in the Catholic Church, from its relatively uncomplicated Old Testament beginnings through its nuanced elaborations in scholastic theology, canon law, and pastoral literature, and on into the letters of twenty-first-century popes. Its continued relevance is because the spiritual danger of the bad example refuses to go away. Unlike complex theological ideas like the Trinity, or the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the theory of scandal is not difficult to understand. It also has a social and communal aspect which makes it eternally relevant to those concerned about their own salvation and that of their fellow Christians.

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<sup>42</sup> *Nec in domibus propriis vel alienis publice concubinas, unde scandalum oriatur, tenere presumant, set eas a se prorsus expellant et longius faciant amoveri, nisi velint simul officio et beneficiis suis contra hoc agendo privari.* F.M. and C.R. Cheney (ed.), *Councils & Synods, with Other Documents Relating to the English Church* II, part I (1205-1265) and part II (1265-1313) (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> See Lindsay Bryan, "Marriage and Morals in the Fourteenth Century: The Evidence of Bishop Hamo's Register," *English Historical Review* 121 (2006): pp. 467-486.

## ***SCANDALA***

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Edited by

**Gerhard Jaritz**

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## Preface

At the 43<sup>rd</sup> International Congress of Medieval Studies which met in May 2008 at Western Michigan University I organized a session on “The Meaning, Role and Construction of *Scandalum*.” This volume contains the revised papers from among those that were read there, those of Lindsay Bryan, Elena Lemeneva, and myself. We also convinced Victoria Smirnova to contribute to this ‘Sonderband’ of *Medium Aevum Quotidianum*.

The use of the term *scandalum* in medieval written evidence can be found regularly in different contexts following various patterns and representing differing meanings: as capital sin, incitement to sin, slander and defamation, public offence, and so on. Recent studies have not paid much attention to this phenomenon. Only a comprehensive analysis by Lindsay Bryan has contributed to this exciting field of research.<sup>1</sup> For this reason we were particularly happy that Lindsay was also willing to contribute to the session at Kalamazoo and to the present volume.

The four papers here will not provide substantial new findings concerning the occurrence, application and function of *scandala* in medieval society. What they are intended for, however, is to animate scholars to devote themselves more to researching phenomena which, as individual cases, represented exceptional circumstances of life in the Middle Ages; taken as a group, though, they can be seen as having been part of medieval quotidianity.

Gerhard Jaritz

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<sup>1</sup> “‘Vae Mundo a Scandalis’: The Sin of Scandal in Medieval England” (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1998).