

VI. Apertura de miras: relecturas de la creación de imágenes

*Open Mindedness: Exploring
Imagemaking again*



THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE PROSTITUTES' WINDOW EL CURIOSO CASO DE LA VENTANA DE LAS PROSTITUTAS

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ABSTRACT

The Parisian theologian Peter the Chanter first relayed the tale of the prostitutes who wanted to give a gift to the church in his *Summa de sacramentis et animae consiliis* from the end of the 12th century. This tale, which may have originated in the case study method used by Peter and his circle at the University of Paris, would only gain in detail. Allusions and retellings by Peter's students included Thomas of Chobham, who specified that the prostitutes wanted to give a stained-glass window (*fenestra vitrea nobile*) to the cathedral of Notre-Dame of Paris, but the bishop would not allow it. This essay seeks to assess the likelihood of such a gift, by examining both the textual tradition and the contemporary context of large-scale buildings, stained-glass windows, and prostitution, all of which add to the “truthiness” of the tale.

KEYWORDS: stained glass, prostitute (*meretrix publica*), Peter the Chanter, Thomas of Chobham, Notre-Dame of Paris, rose window.

RESUMEN

El teólogo parisino Pedro el Chantre (Peter the Chanter) relató por primera vez la historia de las prostitutas que querían hacer un regalo a la Iglesia en su *Summa de sacramentis et animae consiliis* de finales del siglo XII. Este relato, que podría tener su origen en el método de estudio de casos utilizado por Pedro y su círculo en la Universidad de París, sólo ganaría en detalles. Entre las alusiones y relatos de los alumnos de Pedro se encuentra el de Tomás de Chobham, que especifica que las prostitutas querían regalar una vidriera (*fenestra vitrea nobile*) a la catedral de Notre-Dame de París, pero el obispo no lo permitió. Este ensayo trata de evaluar la probabilidad de que se produjera tal regalo, examinando tanto la tradición textual como el contexto contemporáneo de los edificios de gran tamaño, las vidrieras y la prostitución, todo lo cual contribuye a la “verosimilitud” del relato.

PALABRAS CLAVE: vidriera, prostituta (*meretrix publica*), Pedro el Chantre/Peter the Chanter, Tomás de Chobham, Notre-Dame de París, rosetón.

Herbert Kessler has regularly used textual evidence to enrich our understanding of medieval art, in insightful discussions that toggle deftly between works of art and medieval writings. Of the numerous texts dealing with stained glass he has examined,¹ there is one series that, to my knowledge, he has never addressed: those dealing with the prostitutes who reportedly sought to offer a stained-glass window to the cathedral of Notre-Dame of Paris (Fig. 1). The sheer amount of time that Peter the Chanter and his circle at the University of Paris devoted to discussing prostitution led Herb's colleague John Baldwin to observe wryly that it was a topic guaranteed to keep a male clerical audience engaged.² Modern scholars have routinely treated the tale of the prostitute's gift as an actual benefaction.³ Yet, allowing that such an offer need not ever have been proposed allows us to focus on *why* clerics like Peter the Chanter and his circle discussed the tale and what they sought to communicate by means of it.

The tale of the prostitutes' gift is a story unfolded in two parts, beginning with Peter the Chanter (+1197), and taken up by his pupil Thomas of Chobham (+1233-36), with related comments by others in their circle, including Stephen Langton (+1228) and Robert of Courson (+1219).⁴ The Parisian university masters at the turn of the thirteenth century were numerous, but there was no single celebrity scholar, a context that contributed to fruitful group

¹ Among others, see H. L. KESSLER, "The Function of *Vitrum Vestitum* and the Use of *Materia Saphirorum* in Suger's St.-Denis" (1996), reprint in IDEM, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art*, Philadelphia, 2000, pp. 190-205; IDEM, "They preach not by speaking out loud but by signifying: Vitreous Arts as Typology", *Gesta*, 51(2012), pp. 55-70; and IDEM, "Consider the Glass, it Can Teach You": the Medium's Lesson", in *Investigations in Medieval Stained Glass: Medium, Methods, Expressions*, Elizabeth Carson PASTAN and Brigitte KURMANN-SCHWARZ (eds.), Reading Medieval Sources 3, Leiden, 2019, pp. 143-156.

² J. W. BALDWIN, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants: the social views of Peter the Chanter & his circle*, 2 vols., Princeton, 1970, I, p. 133. Other key works on the circle of Peter the Chanter include: M. GRABMANN, *Geschichte der Scholastischen Methode nach den gedruckten und ungedruckten Quellen*, 2 vols., Darmstadt, 1957, vol. 2, pp. 478-485; B. SMALLEY, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (1941) Notre Dame, IN, 1978, pp. 196-263; EADEM, "The Gospels in the Paris Schools in the late 12th and 13th centuries: Peter the Chanter, Hugh of St. Cher, Alexander of Hales, John of Rochelle", *Franciscan Studies*, 39 (1979), pp. 230-254; and E. CORRAN, *Lying and Perjury in Medieval Practical Thought: A Study in the History of Casuistry*, Oxford, 2018.

³ Scholars who discuss the tale include: Baldwin, *Masters*, I, pp. 135-136; R. I. MOORE, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*, Oxford, 1987, pp. 96-97; J. A. BRUNDAGE, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, Chicago, 1987, p. 393; W. KEMP, *The Narratives of Gothic Stained Glass*, trans. Caroline Dobson SALTZWEDDEL, Cambridge Studies in New Art History and Criticism (1987), Cambridge, 1997, p. 181; M. H. CAVINESS, *Stained Glass Windows*, Typologie des Sources du Moyen Age Occidental, 76, Turnhout, 1996, p. 59; W. VROOM, *Financing Cathedral Building in the Middle Ages: The Generosity of the Faithful*, trans. Elizabeth Manton, Amsterdam, 2010, pp. 246-248; and K. NOWACKA, "Persecution, Marginalization, or Tolerance: Prostitutes in Thirteenth-Century Parisian Society", in *Difference and Identity in Francia and Medieval France*, eds. M. COHEN, J. FIRNHABER-BAKER (eds.), Farnham, 2010, pp. 175-196 at p. 189.

⁴ BALDWIN, *Masters*, I: pp. 1-46 on those associated with his circle; Corran, *Lying and Perjury*, pp. 85-92.



Fig. 1. View of Notre-Dame of Paris from the west, with its rose window of c. 1220, before the fire of 2019 (Wikimedia Commons: Peter Haas, CC BY-SA 3.0)

interactions.⁵ Each of the figures in Peter's circle played a different role in relaying or augmenting the story. As will become clear, we also have to consider Maurice de Sully (†1196), who served as bishop of Notre-Dame during Peter the Chanter's entire tenure and oversaw the construction of the new Gothic cathedral visibly rising in Paris. I will argue that both building and bishop are essential actors in the tale, which has too often been taken at face value without sufficient contextualization.

PETER'S *PAUPERES*

Peter the Chanter first alluded to prostitutes who wished to offer a costly gift to the church in his great scholarly work on the sacraments and counsel for the soul, *Summa de sacramentis et animae consiliis*, of c. 1190-94:⁶

Similiter, hodie, si meretrices manentes in meretricio vellent de suo publice facere calicem, vel fenestram vitream, vel aliquid tale, non reciperet ecclesia propter scandalum; in privato posset recipere.

Similarly, today, if the prostitutes remaining in prostitution wished to publicly offer a chalice or a stained-glass window or something like that, the church would not accept it on account of the scandal; though it could be received in private.⁷

Peter's vague references to costly gifts, whether a chalice or a window, suggest that he offered the tale as a case for discussion, a surmise in keeping with Emily Corran's conclusion that the *Summa* "reproduced the Chanter's programme of teaching in the Paris schools."⁸ As such, it reads more persuasively as a brief and provocative classroom example than as reportage of something that occurred. In a related vein, Peter begins the tale with the adverb *similiter*,⁹ a scholarly term denoting analogy, which refers back to his discussion of Augustine's commentary prohibiting anything produced from sin to be offered to the Lord, indicating that he viewed it as an application of exegetical analysis.¹⁰

The case offers a characteristic instance of the kind of practical moral questions that theologians in Peter's circle liked to ponder. As Corran has recently emphasized, the casuistical method that Peter and his circle employed consisted in selecting ambiguous cases, noting that Peter the Chanter in particular "was not concerned with rehearsing established truths, but with exploring the peripheries of ethical teaching."¹¹ Within the medieval economy of salvation,

⁵ J. W. BALDWIN, "Masters at Paris from 1179-1215: A Social Perspective", in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, R. L. BENSON, G. CONSTABLE (eds.), Cambridge, MA, 1982, pp. 138-172 at pp. 138-139.

⁶ BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, pp. 53-54 on the date.

⁷ PIERRE LE CHANTRE, *Summa de Sacramentis et Animae Consiliis*, vol. III, 2a: *Casuum Conscientiae*, J.-A. DUGAUQUIER (ed.), Louvain, 1967, § 211, p. 175; J.-B. HAURÉAU, *Notices et extraits de quelques manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, 6 vols., Paris, 1890-93, vol. 2, p. 10, from Paris, BN MS lat. 9593, fol. 131.

⁸ CORRAN, *Lying and Perjury*, p. 70.

⁹ On scholastic language, see BALDWIN, *Masters*, p. 13; E. PANOFSKY, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism: An inquiry into the analogy of the arts, philosophy and religion in the Middle Ages* (1957), New York, 1971, pp. 27-35.

¹⁰ PIERRE LE CHANTRE, *Summa de Sacramentis*, pp. 174-175.

¹¹ CORRAN, *Lying and Perjury*, p. 70.

wealthy elites had regularly made gifts to the church with the understanding that they were contributing to their redemption,¹² but Peter the Chanter imagines a different kind of donor and considers the dilemmas such donors pose: were a prostitute's ill-gotten gains hers to keep? and moreover, could her sins be redeemed by a gift to the church?¹³

The mention of the prostitutes' gift occurs in the third part of Peter's multi-volume work, in the final section dealing with cases of conscience, in the second chapter having to do with restitution,¹⁴ in the section entitled "Whether the prostitutes, gamblers, etc., can legitimately retain that which they received shamefully, from those who gave it to them, or if it can be lawfully reclaimed."¹⁵ As his discussion unfolds, the "etc." alluded to in the title of this section broadens to include not only prostitutes (*meretrices publicae*) and gamblers (*aleatores*), but also actors (*hystriones*), lechers (*leccators*), and usurers (*feneratores*, understood to be Jews), whom he refers to collectively as *pauperes*. In other cases from his section, Peter also names several kinds of people not identified as social outcasts, including adulterers, clerics committing simony, doctors (*ioculatores*), and inventors, although the prostitutes have garnered the most attention. As these examples indicate, he is not focusing on the prostitutes, but moving from the general (his theme of restitution) to the particular (those from whom restitution might be required), and the principle (the importance of penance) to application in school exegesis (offering many topical examples).¹⁶

Peter alludes to prostitutes in several different ways. In this passage he calls them "prostitutes remaining in prostitution," a usage that partakes in the kind of rhetorical redundancy used for later medieval sex workers that Leah Otis has drawn attention to.¹⁷ Presumably, Peter piles on these alliterative layers in order to signal that these sex workers were unreformed, and that their monies came from the very activities you might guess they did.

Adroitly, Peter closes his example by suggesting that a private arrangement for a gift by the prostitutes might be made. He underscores the possibilities by his use of the subjunctive (*non reciperet... posset recipere*), which leaves open further negotiation. The brevity and vagueness of the story may indicate that he was adapting a case that was familiar at the time but withholding names and particulars, as he was known to do,¹⁸ but it is equally possible

¹² See A. J. DAVIS, *The Medieval Economy of Salvation: Charity, Commerce and the Rise of the Hospital*, Ithaca, 2019, pp. 33-48. Still useful is H. KRAUS, "The New Classes as Donors and Subjects", Chapter 4 in IDEM, *The Living Theatre of Medieval Art*, Philadelphia, 1967, pp. 63-97, and see E. C. PASTAN, "Patronage: A useful category of art historical analysis?", in *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Iconography*, C. HOURIHANE (ed.) London, 2017, pp. 340-355.

¹³ SMALLEY, *Study of the Bible* (as in n. 2), p. 212 offers a different example of how Peter "gets drawn away from his text on to the kind of topical problem that specifically attracts him."

¹⁴ For the structure of the volume, see the *Table analytique* in PIERRE LE CHANTRE, *Summa de Sacramentis*, pp. 431-441.

¹⁵ PIERRE LE CHANTRE, *Summa de Sacramentis*, p. 170: *Utrum meretrices, aleatores, etc., possint licite retinere que turpiter accipiunt, an qui eis dant, licite possint repetere ab eis.*

¹⁶ An adaptation of Smalley's description of Peter's method in "The Gospels in the Paris Schools" (as in n. 2), p. 240.

¹⁷ L. L. OTIS, *Prostitution in Medieval Society: the History of an Urban Institution in Languedoc*, Women in Culture and Society, Chicago, 1985, p. 16 explains that *meretrix* was the Latin word used by Roman jurists for a prostitute, but with the rising problem of prostitution in the twelfth century, the adjective "*publica*" was often added, to distinguish the professional whore, or *meretrix publica*, from the privately immoral woman.

¹⁸ See CORRAN, *Lying and Perjury*, pp. 75-84 for examples of the kind of cases to which Peter and his circle were drawn.

that Peter concocted the example to make a larger point. While logical in its broad outlines, it has often been noted that the significance of this section of Peter the Chanter's *Summa* starts to unravel, because the kinds of case studies Peter liked to pose themselves defied organization.¹⁹

PETER'S CIRCLE WEIGHS IN

The theme of the prostitutes' gift was taken up by Thomas of Chobham, Peter the Chanter's pupil, who is known to have continued discussions begun by his master.²⁰ Thomas's allusion to the prostitutes' gift occurs in his *Summa Confessorum* of c. 1216, a manual for confessors, and his focus is more concrete:

Vidimus tamen quod in eadem civitate volebant meretices fenestram vitream nobilem facere in maiori ecclesia, et non permittebat episcopus parisiensis hoc fieri, ne videretur earum approbare vitam quarum acciperet pecuniam.

We have seen however that in that city [of Paris] the prostitutes wanted to have a magnificent stained-glass window made for the cathedral [of Notre-Dame], and the bishop of Paris did not allow it, lest he be seen to approve of their way of life in accepting their money.²¹

Thomas provides the who, what, and where that are missing in Peter the Chanter's story. Peter referred to "the church" in general terms, but Thomas mentions the bishop of Paris, who is an absent presence in Peter's tale. The bishop can only have been Maurice de Sully, who oversaw the Gothic rebuilding of the cathedral of Notre-Dame.²² Thomas's choice of language further emphasizes the bishop's personal agency in turning down a desirable gift: he uses the imperfect tense, *non permittebat*, to refer to the bishop's rejection of the gift, which is not a single past action but a refusal along the lines of 'the bishop wasn't having it,' a recurring objection to the prostitutes' proposal(s). Thomas also specifies that the prostitutes wanted to give an impressive stained-glass window (*fenestra vitrea nobile*), to Notre-Dame of Paris. These details are why it has proved irresistible for modern scholars to augment Peter the Chanter's meager account with that of Thomas of Chobham. But the differences are important to emphasize: whereas Peter's work focusing on problems of conscience and restitution would have the prostitutes offering their gift as a form of repentance, Thomas concentrates on accepted teaching in emphasizing the bishop's refusal of their gift.

¹⁹ BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, pp. 13-14; SMALLEY, *Study of the Bible*, p. 212; and CORRAN, *Lying and Perjury*, pp. 68-73. CORRAN, *Lying and Perjury*, p. 67 also emphasizes that the third and final section of the *Summa* is a composite text and includes a combination of Peter's writing, student *reportationes* of his lectures, and posthumous additions by his students.

²⁰ On Thomas, see BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, pp. 34-36; E. CORRAN, "Moral Dilemmas in English Confessors' Manuals", *Thirteenth Century England*, 16 (2015), pp. 21-36, esp. pp. 24-30.

²¹ THOMAE DE CHOBHAM, *Summa Confessorum*, ed. F. BROOMFIELD (ed.), *Analecta Mediaevalis Namurcensia*, 25, Louvain, 1968, De Penitentiis cap. II, p. 349; quoted in English in KEMP, *The Narratives of Gothic Stained Glass* (as in n. 3), p. 181.

²² V. MORTET, *Maurice de Sully, évêque de Paris (1160-1196), étude sur l'administration episcopate pendant la seconde moitié du XII^e siècle*, Paris, 1890, [n.p.].

Thomas of Chobham's reference to the prostitutes' gift occurs in his chapter entitled "Why should the Church tolerate prostitutes?" It is a theme he pursues with ambivalence.²³ For Thomas, the toleration of prostitutes was a compromise, an accommodation along the lines of divorce, which Moses permitted to the Jews to prevent worse abuse.²⁴ Immediately prior to telling the story, Thomas reported that Parisian prostitutes were joining other women at the altar in blessing candles at Saturday Vespers,²⁵ but he undercuts this picture of inclusion by describing how if prostitutes were allowed at Mass "the stench of the brothel would mingle with the incense of the offering."²⁶ While largely in agreement with his master, Thomas conveys a more conventional tone in condemning the prostitutes' way of life and removing the concluding note of ambiguity offered by Peter the Chanter, when Peter allowed that the church might accept a gift in private that it would be bound to refuse publicly.²⁷ As Corran states succinctly, "Chobham's real interest was not in undecided matters, but in summarizing established and necessary guidelines."²⁸

The brief tale of the prostitutes' gift offers a scenario rich with irony, with the Parisian moral theologians debating the sex workers' reported eagerness to adorn a church that shunned and stigmatized them. Reading between the lines of Peter's and Thomas's analyses, you can almost "hear" the give and take of ideas exchanged in a classroom, as Peter's example for discussion – which is one among many he offers – becomes, in Thomas's retelling, established protocol based on the precedent of a window offered to Notre-Dame of Paris and apparently rejected by its bishop. Other members of their circle also weighed in on the matter in different ways: Stephen Langton affirmed that a prelate could accept whatever gifts he chose to in private, volunteering how he would handle things discreetly if prelate.²⁹ Robert of Courson held that the secret prostitute could tithe her earnings to the church, although he also oversaw some of the harshest measures against prostitution.³⁰ Thomas was thus joined by both Stephen Langton and Robert of Courson in placing emphasis on the bishop's discretionary powers, a focus that may help us to grasp what Peter the Chanter sought to communicate by means of the tale. As a dignitary of the chapter of Notre-Dame of Paris, Peter may not have wanted to criticize the bishop explicitly. In assessing the meaning of the story, we will examine in turn the putative donors, the biblical tradition of gifts from prostitutes, and the cathedral of Notre-Dame of Paris, before returning to the role of the bishop.

²³ THOMAE DE CHOBHAM, *Summa Confessorum*, p. 347: *Quare meretrices ecclesia sustineat*. See KEMP, *Narratives*, p. 183 on the translation of "*sustinere*," which can mean admit, tolerate, endure, or support.

²⁴ THOMAE DE CHOBHAM, *Summa Confessorum*, p. 348.

²⁵ THOMAE DE CHOBHAM, *Summa Confessorum*, p. 349.

²⁶ THOMAE DE CHOBHAM, *Summa Confessorum*, p. 349: *fetorem prostibuli portarent ad oderem sacrificii*. The full passage and its English translation are in Kemp, *Narratives*, pp. 180-181.

²⁷ See CORRAN, *Lying and Perjury*, pp. 78-84 for her discussion of "dissimulation", which she defines p. 78 as "forming coherent principles by which a priest can navigate difficult situations in which the usual rules fail to give useful guidance".

²⁸ CORRAN, *Lying and Perjury*, p. 91.

²⁹ BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, p. 136; II: p. 94, n. 140.

³⁰ BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, p. 135.

PARISIAN PROSTITUTES

Undeniably, prostitution was a pressing problem of the day and an opportunity for this “biblical moral school” to apply scriptural teachings to contemporary issues. Prostitutes were familiar figures in densely settled university towns such as medieval Paris (Fig. 2).³¹ Along with jongleurs, actors, magicians, and gamblers, they were virtual ex-communicants, who could not sue or give testimony in court, or be buried in consecrated ground.³² The descriptions that have come down to us were composed by male clerics, who focused on female prostitutes, lingering on their appearance, as well as their predatory and lustful nature.³³ The colorful picture painted by the preacher Jacques de Vitry (†1240), who was a young student when he came under Peter the Chanter’s influence and among the last generation of those in Peter’s circle to know him personally, is characteristic: Jacques describes bejeweled and flashily dressed women swarming the streets, dragging clerics off to their lairs by force, and yelling “Sodomite!” at any who refused them.³⁴ He also recounts crowded Parisian houses where masters conducted disputations with their students on the upper floors as the women argued with their pimps (*lenones*) below.³⁵ While the sensationalizing details of Jacques’ portrayal might be called into question,³⁶ there is strong corroborating evidence that the city’s densely concentrated population, squeezed by the influx of university students and displaced by years of ambitious building campaigns, including the royal project of encircling Paris with walls,³⁷ meant that there was daily contact between different social groups.³⁸

It is also noteworthy that, as pragmatic clerical commentators, the Parisian theologians directed their attention to the *management* of prostitution, not its eradication. Most in the circle of Peter the Chanter conceded that the profession had to be tolerated, lest its elimina-

³¹ On medieval prostitution, see V. L. BULLOUGH, J. BRUNDAGE, *Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church*, Buffalo, 1982, pp. 149-60 and 176-186; OTIS, *Prostitution*, pp. 15-24; BRUNDAGE, *Law, Sex*, pp. 389-396; J. ROSSIAUD, *Medieval Prostitution*, L. G. COCHRANE (trans.), Oxford, 1988; D. M. HAYES, “Mundane Use of Sacred Places in the Central and Later Middle Ages, with a focus on Chartres Cathedral”, *Comitatus*, 30 (1999), pp. 11-36, at pp. 31-34 on prostitutes using churches for trysts; and R. M. KARRAS, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others* (second ed.) London, 2012, esp. pp. 132-138.

³² See J. W. BALDWIN, “The Image of the Jongleur in Northern France around 1200”, *Speculum* 72.3 (1997), pp. 635-663.

³³ On prostitutes as members of the urban poor, see NOWACKA, “Persecution”, pp. 181-183, with further bibliography. Also see S. FARMER, “Down and Out and Female in Thirteenth-Century Paris”, *The American Historical Review*, 103.2 (1998), pp. 345-372; R. BLUMENFELD-KOSINSKI, “Marginalization in Medieval Culture: Christine De Pizan’s Advice to Prostitutes”, *Medieval Feminist Forum*, 27 (1999), pp. 9-15; L. PATERSON, “Gender Negotiations in France during the Central Middle Ages: The Literary Evidence”, in P. LINEHAN, J. L. NELSON (eds.), *The Medieval World*, London, 2001, pp. 246-266; and R. M. KARRAS, “Sexuality in the Middle Ages,” in *Ibidem*, pp. 279-293.

³⁴ *The Historia Occidentalis of Jacques de Vitry: A Critical Edition*, J. F. HINNEBUSCH (ed.), Spicilegium Friburgense, 17, Fribourg, 1972, pp. 82-83. English translation in NOWACKA, “Persecution”, p. 183.

³⁵ *Historia Occidentalis*, p. 91.

³⁶ On Jacques de Vitry’s reliability, see HINNEBUSCH, *Historia Occidentalis*, pp. 11-15; H. RASHDALL, *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3 vols, Oxford, 1936, vol. 3, pp. 439-41; and BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, p. 133 “more interesting than true.”

³⁷ BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, p. 71.

³⁸ NOWACKA, “Persecution”, pp. 183-195.



Fig. 2. Detail of the Prostitute expelling the Prodigal Son from the Prodigal Son Window of Chartres Cathedral, baie 35, c. 1220 (Photo: Snapageno)

tion court larger problems.³⁹ Peter himself argued that prostitutes should be allowed to attend services to prevent them from engaging in worse activities, adding that there were simply too many of them to exclude.⁴⁰ Even Robert of Courson, who advocated for the harshest measures, opted for displacement; Robert presided over the Council of Paris that initiated the decree of 1213, which expelled prostitutes from the city on pain of excommunication, directing that they be set apart according to the customs established for lepers.⁴¹ The decree ultimately proved to be unenforceable.

The discussions within Peter's circle did inspire some programs of social reform, notably in the work of another student of Peter the Chanter's, Foulques of Neuilly (†1201), who established a program to shelter prostitutes who wished to renounce their former life and to provide them with dowries if they wished to marry.⁴² Innocent III's letter of 14 April 1198 declaring

³⁹ OTIS, *Prostitution*, p. 23, citing Thomas Aquinas; KEMP, *Narratives*, p. 183, quoting Thomas of Chobham; BRUNDAGE, *Law, Sex*, p. 390, citing Augustine.

⁴⁰ BRUNDAGE, *Law, Sex*, pp. 310-311.

⁴¹ J. D. MANSI (ed.), *Sacrorum conciliorum nova, et amplissima collectio* (1778), Paris, 1903, vol. 22, col. 854, "De meretricibus"; OTIS, *Prostitution*, p. 23 (with English translation); MOORE, *Formation*, p. 97; NOWACKA, "Persecution", p. 185.

⁴² BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, pp. 136-137; NOWACKA, "Persecution", pp. 189-191, with further bibliography; and C. BERMAN, "Cistercian Nuns and the Development of the Order: The Abbey at Saint-Antoine-des-Champs outside Paris", in

that all who rescued women from brothels “performed a meritorious work for the remission of their sins,” may also have had its origin in ideas raised in the circle of Peter the Chanter.⁴³ These measures suggest an earnestness about the problems associated with prostitution, even if their efforts were woefully inadequate.⁴⁴ Peter’s tale, however, is not about the prostitutes, who serve as one of the catalysts for larger questions about the repentance of sinners and the church’s moral leadership that he sought to raise. For this reason, we turn now from the prostitutes to ecclesiastical discussions about them.

DEUTERONOMY: THE BIBLICAL TRADITION

The notion of prostitutes making offerings to the church is part of an exegetical tradition that harks back to Deuteronomy 23:18, “You shall not offer the wages of a prostitute or the price of a dog to the house of the Lord your God for a vow, because both of them are an abomination to the Lord your God.” This command elaborates on the unequivocal previous verse, “There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel.” Peter the Chanter and Thomas of Chobham were aware of Augustine’s commentary on Deuteronomy, and both cited it.⁴⁵

When Augustine turned to these verses, he largely upheld the Deuteronomic Code, affirming that the sin of prostitution could not be redeemed or mitigated by making a gift to the church.⁴⁶ But if Augustine focused on the sin, Peter and his circle redirected their attention to the sinner, urging that the prostitutes’ offering might be made in a spirit of expiation.⁴⁷

Within this context, the Parisian moralists might be seen as advocates for greater tolerance, although individual passages scarcely read as such. While Peter’s *Summa* is replete with references to the *pauperes* of society, it hardly shows deep compassion for them, let alone differentiates among them.⁴⁸ Moreover, in the same sections arguing for the prostitutes’ expiation, the Parisian moralists pursued the question of the prostitutes’ fraud in detail. This might be fraud in a prostitute’s appearance by means of cosmetics, or fraud in the presentation of her

The Joy of learning and the Love of God, Studies in Honor of Jean Leclercq, E. ROZANNE ELDER (ed.), Kalamazoo, 1997, pp. 121-156, esp. n. 11.

⁴³ BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, p. 137.

⁴⁴ As characterized by B. GEREMEK, *The Margins of Society in late medieval Paris*, J. BIRRELL (trans.), Cambridge, 1987, p. 176; also see the cautions about these initiatives in BLUMENFELD-KOSINSKI, “Marginalization”, p. 10.

⁴⁵ PIERRE LE CHANTRE, *Summa de Sacramentis*, pp. 173-174; THOMAE DE CHOBHAM, *Summa Confessorum*, pp. 351-352.

⁴⁶ AUGUSTINE, “Questions on the Heptateuch”, in IDEM, *Writings on the Old Testament*, vol. 14, trans. J. T. LIENHARD, S. DOYLE (trans.), B. RAMSEY (ed.), *The Works of Saint Augustine, A Translation for the 21st Century*, Hyde Park, New York, 2016, Book V, Question 38, p. 337. Augustine also labored over the interpretation of the phrase referring to “the price of a dog”, now generally understood as a slang reference to male prostitution, which was only rarely a focus of medieval discussion. See M. D. JORDAN, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*, Chicago, 1997, pp. 103-133 on cautions to confessors that delicately broach the issue of same sex copulation.

⁴⁷ THOMAE DE CHOBHAM, *Summa Confessorum*, p. 352: *Purget igitur meretrix peccatum suum / per penitentiam, quia purgato vitio munda erit pecunia quam accepit*. As BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, p. 135 emphasizes, Peter not only allowed prostitutes to give alms, but advocated that they should give alms.

⁴⁸ MOORE, *Formation* (as in n. 3), pp. 94-99 argues that the moral equivalence Peter makes among these different kinds of social outcasts creates a new category of social contamination.

noble or virginal status, any of which Peter's circle determined would require the prostitute to make financial restitution her client.⁴⁹ Thomas of Chobham opined that if a prostitute would have received half a penny in her natural appearance, but because of makeup she gained a penny, then she should restore the difference.⁵⁰

In making contemporary a biblical tradition about the offerings of sin, the discussion largely concerned the *wages* of prostitution, in keeping with theories of the "just price," widely deliberated upon in the Parisian circle.⁵¹ First, they established that a prostitute's earnings were hers to keep by turning to Roman law, which permitted prostitutes to retain their earnings.⁵² As Thomas of Chobham articulated, a prostitute's sin lay in offering her body, not in receiving the money she had earned, which she was entitled to keep.⁵³ Finally, they took up the reappropriation of these gains. Like a good accountant, Peter the Chanter reasoned, "Why should we require a usurer to part with his gains and not a prostitute?"⁵⁴ And, like a lawyer citing precedent, Thomas observed, "had not our Lord accepted the ointment of Mary Magdalen purchased from a life of sin?"⁵⁵

As these comments suggest, the discussions in the circle of Peter the Chanter sometimes proceed as though they were managing a hedge fund.⁵⁶ When responding to a question about gifts offered by a *leccator*, or lecher, sometimes used to refer to a male prostitute and therefore understood to be a particularly reprehensible person, Peter replied briskly: "The church can receive these funds in the same way as it receives the monies of any other unfortunate person."⁵⁷ R.I. Moore sharply observed that the scholars in the circle of Peter the Chanter "saw the principal ethical problem posed by prostitution as being whether it was right for the church to profit, through alms, from their earnings, and concluded ... that it was."⁵⁸ Setting aside the considerable authority of Augustine, then, Peter and his circle advocate a kind of moral money

⁴⁹ BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, p. 134.

⁵⁰ THOMAE DE CHOBHAM, *Summa Confessorum*, pp. 352-353; 403-404; PIERRE LE CHANTRE, *Summa de Sacramentis*, p. 172.

⁵¹ BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, p. 134; also see IDEM, "The Medieval Theories of the Just Price: Romanists, Canonists, and Theologians in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries", *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 49 (1959), pp. 1-92, with further bibliography.

⁵² BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, p. 134. On the medieval consensus regarding prostitutes' right to keep their earnings, see BRUNDAGE, *Law, Sex*, p. 393 with further bibliography.

⁵³ THOMAE DE CHOBHAM, *Summa Confessorum*, p. 296; also see PIERRE LE CHANTRE, *Summa de Sacramentis*, p. 171.

⁵⁴ BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, p. 135; PIERRE LE CHANTRE, *Summa de Sacramentis*, p. 175: *Quare ergo potius tenetur fenerator ad restitutioneum quam meretrix?*

⁵⁵ BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, p. 135; THOMAE DE CHOBHAM, *Summa Confessorum*, p. 352.

⁵⁶ DAVIS, *Medieval Economy* (as in n. 12), p. 34 has observed that "mendicant preachers and theologians used a vocabulary that was replete with market terminology to describe redemptive almsgiving as a kind of usurious loan to God that would be repaid a hundredfold".

⁵⁷ PIERRE LE CHANTRE, *Summa de Sacramentis*, p. 173: *Item. Queritur si leccator dederit pretium et ipsa accepto munere, nolit se supponere. De pecunia autem ecclesie poterit ipsa recipere sicut alius pauper.* According to B. BISCHOFF, "Living with the Satirists", in *Classical Influences on European Culture, A. D. 500-1500: Proceedings of an International Conference held at King's College, Cambridge, April 1969*, R. R. BOLGAR (ed.), Cambridge, 1971, pp. 83-94 at p. 91 the term appeared for the first time in literature from the late eleventh century, and generally referred to a debauched person. J. W. BALDWIN, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France around 1200*, Chicago, 1994, pp. 80-81, turns to contemporary literature to establish its connotations with male prostitution.

⁵⁸ MOORE, *Formation* (as in n. 3), p. 96.

laundering, wherein the prostitutes' profits (and those of their fellow *pauperes*) were turned to good use for their salvation.

Yet, while this might characterize the writings of the Parisian circle generally, when we turn to other writings of Peter the Chanter, notably his popular earlier manual on ethics known as the *Verbum abbreviatum* of c. 1187-91 we find that he had historically paid attention to societal outcasts. In a lengthy chapter from that work entitled "*Contra superfluitatem aedificiorum*," or "Against excess in buildings," Peter decried tall and expensive structures, comparing them to the biblical Temple of Babel, and observing that their costs were unfairly borne by the poor.⁵⁹ It makes little sense that in his *Summa* he would then merely seek to extract revenue from these very *pauperes* whose exploitation he had earlier protested.⁶⁰

Nonetheless, even if we accept that Peter genuinely and consistently drew attention to the plight of the *pauperes*, it is also possible that he was slyly alluding to the various kinds of private accommodations for revenue the bishop of Paris had transacted in his quest for building funds. In "Against excess in buildings," Peter complained that the lust for building had led to churches funded by usurers and robbers.⁶¹ This interpretation finds support in Caesarius of Heisterbach's exemplum about an infamous usurer who wished to make restitution.⁶² Unlike those in Peter's circle, who obliquely allude to the church or the bishop, Caesarius of Heisterbach names names. According to Caesarius, Bishop Maurice told the usurer to donate his money to the building campaign, whereas Master Peter advised him to first make restitution to all from whom he had taken, before giving alms to the church. Caesarius contrasts Peter the Chanter's moral rigor to the bishop's preoccupation with building funds.⁶³ Indeed, Peter's tale of the prostitutes' gift may be seen as the same complaint he lodges in his *Verbum abbreviatum*: namely, the lengths "the church" was willing to go in pursuit of revenue. To explore this interpretation, we turn now to another aspect of the tale that deserves attention, the gift the prostitutes were said to have wanted to offer to the church.

THE CATHEDRAL OF NOTRE-DAME OF PARIS

In both Peter's and Thomas's versions of the tale, the prostitutes are credited with offering a stained-glass window (*fenestra vitrea*), a gift that correlates directly with churches of

⁵⁹ *Nonne de lacrimis pauperum de angariis et perangariis infinitis construuntur turres et munitiones principum?* From PETER THE CHANTER, *Verbum abbreviatum*, Chapter 86 (Migne, *PL* 205: cols. 257 B and C), quoted in BALDWIN, *Masters*, II, p. 210, n. 91 (excerpt), and pp. 48-49, n. 31 (longer version). Also see the full translation of this chapter in G.G. COULTON, *Life in the Middle Ages: Selected, Translated & Annotated*, 4 vols., The Cambridge Anthologies, New York, 1930, vol. 2, no. 15, pp. 25-28, which is partially quoted and excerpted in T. G. FRISCH, *Gothic Art 1140-c. 1450: Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971, pp. 32-33. Also see E. M. SANFORD, "The *Verbum Abbreviatum* of Petrus Cantor", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 74 (1974), pp. 33-48; and BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, pp. 65-71.

⁶⁰ The different tone of the two works is often discussed: BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, pp. 297-302 contrasts the rhetoric of the *Verbum abbreviatum* to the subtleties of the *Summa*; CORRAN, *Lying and Perjury*, p. 71 calls the *Verbum abbreviatum* witty and direct, where the later *Summa* is dry and ambiguous.

⁶¹ Paraphrasing the vivid translation of COULTON, *Life in the Middle Ages*, vol. 2, p. 27.

⁶² CAESARIUS OF HEISTERBACH, *Dialogue on Miracles*, 2 vols., H. von E. SCOTT, C.C. SWINTON BLAND (trans.), New York, 1929, vol. I, Book III, Ch. XXXIII, pp. 119-120.

⁶³ See BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, pp. 308-09 pursuing the theme of the bishop's absorption in the construction of the cathedral.

the time, notably Notre-Dame of Paris. Stained-glass windows are indexical of the new Gothic structure's expense; in contrast to average homes of the day, the apertures of which were closed by simple wooden shutters, stained glass was one of the most conspicuous features of church buildings like Notre-Dame. The colored glass was costly to produce because of the labor-intensive procedures involved in transforming the molten sand, tinting it with the addition of metallic oxides, cutting, painting, and leading it, to create the type of vivid pictorial narrative shown here (Fig. 2).⁶⁴ Contemporaneous accounts from Saint-Denis suggest that the glazing was as expensive as the structure itself,⁶⁵ and costs only escalated with the increase in height of Gothic buildings and window size over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁶⁶

At thirty feet taller than prevalent medieval churches, Notre-Dame's size demanded new strategies as well as costly revisions that were undertaken in the decades after it was built.⁶⁷ Several of these retrofittings were projects designed to bring more light into the building by enlarging its windows. When the nave was built in the late twelfth century, its relatively small upper windows were so far from the ground that the interior remained dark, and they refashioned the upper windows only decades later, more than doubling their surface area.⁶⁸ Another project of remodeling may be observed in the extension of the cathedral's transept arms added in the mid-thirteenth century (Fig. 3). The new addition lengthened the transepts by half a bay or about 13 feet, allowing for impressive entrances to the north and to the south,⁶⁹ with

⁶⁴ On making a stained-glass window, see S. BROWN, D. O'CONNOR, *Medieval Craftsmen: Glass-Painters*, Toronto, 1991, pp. 46-64; CAVINESS, *Stained Glass Windows* (as in n. 3), pp. 45-57; and S. BROWN, "The Medieval Glazier at Work", in Pastan, Kurmann-Schwarz (eds.), *Investigations in Medieval Stained Glass* (as in n. 1), pp. 9-22.

⁶⁵ L. GRODECKI, *Les vitraux de Saint-Denis*, Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi, I, Paris, 1976, p. 28, n. 44.

⁶⁶ R. BRANNER, Review of Pierre du Colombier, *Les Chantiers des cathédrales*, Paris, 1953 in *Art Bulletin*, 37 (1955), p. 62. On the financing of large-scale medieval buildings, see the idealizing discussion in O. VON SIMSON, *The Gothic Cathedral: Origins of Gothic Architecture and the Medieval Concept of Order*, Bollingen Series 48 (1956), Princeton, 1974, pp. 159-82 and the stimulating reappraisal by J. W. WILLIAMS, *Bread, Wine & Money: The Windows of the Trades at Chartres Cathedral*, Chicago, 1993, esp. pp. 1-36. Important interventions include: R. S. LOPEZ, "Economie et architecture médiévales, cela aurait-il tué ceci?", *Annales, Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 7 (1952), pp. 433-438; H. KRAUS, *Gold was the mortar: the economics of cathedral building*, London, 1979; B. ABOU EL-HAJ, "Artistic Integration Inside the Cathedral Precinct: Social Consensus Outside?", in *Artistic Integration in Gothic Buildings*, V. Ch. RAGUIN et al. (eds.), Toronto, 1995, pp. 214-35; and VROOM, *Financing Cathedral Building* (as in n. 3), pp. 168-209.

⁶⁷ For the "gigantism" of Notre-Dame, see C. BRUZELIUS, "The Construction of Notre-Dame in Paris", *The Art Bulletin*, 69 (1987), pp. 540-569. For the revisions of Notre-Dame, see S. MURRAY, "Notre-Dame of Paris and the Anticipation of Gothic", *The Art Bulletin*, 80 (1998), pp. 229-253. Within its vast bibliography, three recent works may be singled out: A. ERLANDE-BRANDENBURG, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, John Goodman (trans.), New York, 1998; A. VINGT-TROIS (ed.), *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Strasbourg, 2012; and D. SANDRON, A. TALLON, *Notre-Dame de Paris: Neuf siècles d'histoire*, Lassay-les-Châteaux, 2013.

⁶⁸ On the transformation of the nave elevation of Notre-Dame, see G. VIOLLET-LE-DUC, "Découverte par Viollet-le-Duc des rose des travées de la nef", *Monuments Historiques*, fasc. 3 (1968), p. 108; R. BRANNER, "Paris and the Origins of Rayonnant Gothic Architecture under 1240", *The Art Bulletin*, 44 (1962), pp. 39-51, part. 47-48.

⁶⁹ D. KIMPEL, *Die Querhausarme von Notre-Dame zu Paris und Ihre Skulpturen*, Bonn, 1971; ERLANDE-BRANDENBURG, *Notre-Dame*, pp. 147-163. E.-E. VIOLLET-LE-DUC, "Rose" in IDEM, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI^e au XVI^e siècle*, Paris, 1869, vol. 8, pp. 38-69 at p. 40 referred to fragments of masonry he discovered, which he thought belonged to an earlier south transept rose window of 5 or 6 meters in diameter, and which he dated c. 1180. See D. SANDRON, "Le projet du XII^e siècle", in VINGT-TROIS (ed.), *Notre-Dame*, pp. 67-93 at p. 70 for a hypothetical reconstruction of the original transept roses.



Fig. 3. View of Notre-Dame of Paris from the south, with its rose window of c. 1260, before the fire of 2019 (Wikimedia Commons: sacratomato_hr - DSC_0732)

very large rose windows in the transept portals that dramatically highlighted the main altar.⁷⁰ Evidently, then, one reason why both Peter the Chanter's and Thomas of Chobham's stories involved a stained-glass window was to connect with the building visibly rising in Paris, which continued to receive costly modifications over the course of the thirteenth century.⁷¹ We may never be able to confirm the conclusion of the tale of the prostitute's gift, if indeed an actual benefaction was at stake, because the early accounts of Notre-Dame of Paris no longer survive and most of its approximately 200 medieval stained-glass windows were destroyed in campaigns of modernization undertaken in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁷²

Currently, the only extant medieval stained glass at the cathedral of Notre-Dame of Paris is in its three rose windows, which miraculously survived the fire of 15 April 2019. Completed over the course of the thirteenth century (c. 1220-60), Notre-Dame's rose windows encap-

⁷⁰ ERLANDE-BRANDENBURG, *Notre-Dame*, p. 162.

⁷¹ Peter's oblique references to Notre-Dame of Paris are noted in both V. MORTET, "Hugue de Fouilloi, Pierre le Chantre, Alexandre Neckam et les critiques dirigées au XII^e siècle contre le luxe des constructions", in *Mélanges d'histoire offerts à M. Charles Bémont*, Paris, 1913, pp. 105-137 at pp. 116-119; and COULTON, *Life in the Middle Ages* (as in n. 59), p. 26, n. 1.

⁷² The restorer Pierre Le Vieil (1708-72) claimed to have removed the last of Notre-Dame's early windows in 1741 at the direction of its clerics: P. LEVIEIL, *L'Art de la Peinture sur Verre et de la Vitrierie*, Paris, 1774, pp. 23-25.

sulate developments in medieval engineering, design, and iconography.⁷³ The south transept rose window of c. 1260 (Fig. 3), the most recent of its rose windows, demonstrates how glazed surfaces mushroomed in size and intricacy in the decades after Peter the Chanter had presciently decried the “superfluity” of the buildings going up around him. At 12.90 meters or 42 feet in diameter, the south transept rose is ten feet larger than its western rose, the earliest extant in the cathedral (contrast the western rose shown in Fig. 1 to Fig. 3).⁷⁴ This vast rose window pressures the limits of human vision to fully apprehend it (Fig. 4).⁷⁵ The medallions depict Christ in majesty, surrounded by apostles, martyrs and confessors, and angels carrying crowns in 85 separate circular compartments, none larger than 0.73 meters or about 29 inches in diameter.⁷⁶ These very small medallions in a very large window represent the greatest differential between medallion size and overall vitreous composition in the cathedral. Large and luminous windows like this move closer to a kind of imageless devotion, in leveraging size and enumeration over pictorial exposition.⁷⁷

Moreover, by virtue of facing the bishop’s palace adjacent to the south transept portal, this Glorification of Christ window positioned the bishop as the heir to Christ. This connection was further underscored by the exterior sculpture of the south transept portal, that depicts the martyrdom of St. Stephen, who as the first deacon was a predecessor to and type for the bishop.⁷⁸

The window thus contributes to a very impressive bishop’s entrance. Bishop Maurice de Sully began the palace outside of the south transept in c. 1160 around the same time that work began on the cathedral, and it only added to Peter the Chanter’s annoyance. The palace was destroyed in 1831, but Jean Fouquet’s view of Notre-Dame of Paris in the *Hours of Etienne*

⁷³ For the stained glass of Notre-Dame, see the overview in H. KRAUS, “Notre-Dame’s Vanished Glass, I. The Iconography”, *Gazette des beaux-arts*, 68 (1966), pp. 131-148 at pp. 131-135. The literature is surprisingly small, and includes: F. DE LASTEVRIE, *Histoire de la Peinture sur verre d’après ses Monuments en France*, Paris, 1857, pp. 41-42, 52-53, 132-142, with the earliest descriptions of its three medieval rose windows; Jean Lafond in M. AUBERT et al., *Les vitraux de Notre Dame et de la Sainte Chapelle de Paris*, Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi, France, I, Paris, 1959, pp. 13-67 [hereafter cited as Lafond, *Les vitraux de Notre Dame*]; Louis Grodecki and Catherine Brisac, *Gothic Stained Glass, 1200-1300*, trans. Barbara Drake Boehm (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 109-10, and Françoise Gatouillat, “Les vitraux anciens”, in Vingt-Trois, ed., *Notre-Dame* (as in n. 67), pp. 60-65.

⁷⁴ For the earliest rose window of c. 1220 in the west façade, see LAFOND, *Les vitraux de Notre Dame*, pp. 23-34; and E. C. PASTAN, “It Ought to be Mary: On the western rose window of Notre-Dame of Paris”, forthcoming in *Visualizing Gender and Sexuality in the Middle Ages*, a special issue of *Different Visions* in honor of Rachel Dressler. On the southern rose, see LAFOND, *Les vitraux de Notre Dame*, pp. 52-67.

⁷⁵ R. SUCKALE, “Thesen zum Bedeutungswandel der gotischen Fensterrose”, in *Bauwerk und Bildwerk im Hochmittelalter: Anschaulich Beiträge zur Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte*, K. CLAUSBERG, D. KIMPEL, H.-J. KUNST, AND R. SUCKALE (eds.), Giessen, 1981, pp. 259-294 at p. 285.

⁷⁶ See the restoration chart in LAFOND, *Les vitraux de Notre Dame*, planche 11; S. BERGER, D. SANDRON, “Des transformations radicales XIIIe-XIVe siècles”, in VINGT-TROIS (ed.), *Notre-Dame*, pp. 97-98, with a figure on p. 95.

⁷⁷ See H. L. KESSLER, “Turning a Blind Eye: Medieval Art and the Dynamics of Contemplation”, in *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, J. F. HAMBURGER, A.-M. BOUCHÉ (eds.), Princeton, 2006, pp. 413-39.

⁷⁸ See K. A. MORROW, “Disputation in Stone: Jews Imagined on the Saint Stephen Portal of Paris Cathedral”, in *Beyond the Yellow Badge: Anti-Judaism and Antisemitism in Medieval and Early Modern Visual Culture*, M. B. MERBACK (ed.), Brill’s Series in Jewish Studies, 37, Leiden, 2007, pp. 63-86.



Fig. 4. View of the south transept of Notre-Dame of Paris from the interior (Wikimedia Commons: Dennis Jarvis)

Chevalier of c. 1450 (Fig. 5) allows us a glimpse of the impressive structure.⁷⁹ In this illumination, the cathedral is prominent on the left, its two towers conspicuously taller than any other building, and it is riddled with fenestration, including its large western rose window. Second in prominence is the bishop's palace to the right of the cathedral facing the Seine, and the site to which the light emanating from the hand of the Lord appears poised to descend. The tall tower

⁷⁹ On the bishop's palace, begun c. 1160, see V. MORTET, *Étude historique et archéologique sur la cathédrale et le palais épiscopal de Paris du v^e au xii^e siècle*, Paris, 1888, pp. 69-77; VIOLLET LE DUC, "Palais", in IDEM, *Dictionnaire* (as in n. 69), vol. 7, pp. 14-17, with a plan and a view, figs. 7 and 8; visualized in SANDRON, TALLON, *Notre-Dame de Paris*, pp. 106-118.



Fig. 5. View of Notre-Dame of Paris in Jean Fouquet, The Hours of Étienne Chevalier, c. 1452-60 (Creative Commons Zero: New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975.1.2490)

of the palace is the only structure that even approaches the height of the medieval cathedral. This palace was a particular irritant to Peter, who demanded: “Why do you want your houses so tall? ... Do you believe that the devil cannot scale [their walls]?”⁸⁰ This physical context further explains why Peter’s anecdote might be construed as alluding to the various private accommodations for revenue the bishop had transacted. In choosing a notoriously expensive item like a stained-glass window associated with the building projects of Maurice de Sully, Peter sought to draw attention to the bishop’s expenditures. The fact that it was the prostitutes who offered the window in the tale served to further reinforce Peter the Chanter’s critique.

CONCLUSION

The success of the case study method employed in the Parisian schools depended on a certain “truthiness” or verisimilitude, meaning that to be effective, the case under consideration had to have recognizable and plausible elements, here evinced in prostitutes and a costly stained-glass window. In pursuing this curious case, however, scholars have mistaken the truthiness of Peter the Chanter’s tale for an actual donation, partly by supplementing it with details only later supplied by Thomas of Chobham.

But it is a case that strains credulity, with male moral theologians suggesting what the prostitutes and other *pauperes* might do with the disposable income they imagined them to possess. Taking the bait, one scholar even speculated that a window narrative devoted to the Prodigal Son (see Fig. 2) would allow the prostitutes the scope to advertise, while providing the church with a sermon on morality.⁸¹ Yet everything we know about Parisian prostitutes of the day suggests that they had little need to advertise, leaving aside the fact that they hardly come out well in the parable of the Prodigal Son. Had the choice of window subject truly been at the discretion of these would-be donors, they might have chosen themes that spoke to their salvation rather than their livelihood, or selected themes that emphasized the hypocrisy of their fellow Christians, or simply opted for a large window in a prominent location.

In offering the story of the prostitutes’ gift, the moral theologians in the circle of Peter the Chanter updated and made contemporary a biblical tradition about the offerings of sin. The fact that these theologians could envision a different kind of donor and contemplated the salvation of these *pauperes* is interesting in itself, although their writings hardly offer deep insight into those laboring in the shadows of the great cathedrals. The real focus of this example in Peter the Chanter’s *Summa*, as reflected obliquely in the work of other theologians in Peter’s circle and in other writings of Peter himself, as well as in the contemporary testimony of Caesarius of Heisterbach, was the moral laxity of churchmen focused on constructing ever more costly and gravity-defying buildings. If we persist in reading this tale as an actual donation, we may miss the ethical issue at stake, namely, what price Gothic?

⁸⁰ BALDWIN, *Masters*, I, p. 68, quoting from “*Contra superfluitatem aedificiorum*”; COULTON, *Life in the Middle Ages* (as in n. 59), p. 27.

⁸¹ KEMP, *Narratives* (as in n. 3), p. 181. On windows devoted to the Prodigal Son, a relatively rare theme before the thirteenth century, see G. B. GUEST, “The Prodigal’s Journey: Ideologies of Self and City in the Gothic Cathedral”, *Speculum*, 81.1 (2006), pp. 35-75. For other examples of subjects involving prostitutes, including Mary Magdalen and Mary of Egypt, see R. M. KARRAS, “Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend”, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 1 (1990), pp. 1-32.