

<https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/23889.html>

Translated letter:

To Peter, most reverend lord and father and venerable abbot of Cluny, Heloise, God's and his humble servant: the spirit of grace and salvation.

The mercy of God came down to us in the grace of a visit from your Reverence. We are filled with pride and rejoicing, gracious father, because your greatness has descended to our lowliness, for a visitation from you is a matter for great rejoicing even for the great. Others are well aware of the great benefits conferred on them by the presence of your sublimity but, for my own part, I cannot even formulate my thoughts, much less find words for what a benefit and joy your coming was to me. Our abbot and Lord, on the 16th November of the past year you celebrated a Mass here in which you commended us to the Holy Spirit. In Chapter you fed us by preaching the word of God. You gave us the body of our master and so yielded up the privilege which belonged to Cluny. To me too whom (unworthy as I am to be called your servant) your sublime humility has not disdained to address as sister in writing and speech, you granted a rare privilege in token of your love and sincerity: a trental of masses to be said on my behalf by the abbey of Cluny after my death. You also said that you would confirm this gift in a letter under seal.

Fulfil then, my brother or rather, my lord, what you promised to your sister, or I should say, to your servant. May it please you too to send me also under seal an open document containing the absolution of our master, to be hung on his tomb. Remember also, for the love of God, our Astralabe and yours, so that you may obtain for him some prebend either from the bishop of Paris or in some other diocese. Farewell; may the Lord keep you, and sometimes grant us your presence.

His reply:

Translated letter:

To our venerable and dearest sister in Christ, the handmaid of God, Heloise, guide and mistress of the handmaids of God, brother Peter, humble abbot of Cluny: the fullness of God's salvation and of our love in Christ.

I was happy, very happy, to read the letter from your Sanctity, where I learned that my visit to you was no transitory call, and which made me realize that I have not only been with you, but in spirit have never really left you. My stay, I see, was not one to be remembered as that of a passing guest for a single night, nor was I treated as 'a stranger and a foreigner among you' [Gen.23:4], but as 'a fellow-citizen of God's people and member of God's household' [Ephes.2:19]. Everything I said and did on that fleeting or flying visit of mine has remained so firmly in your holy mind and made such an impression on your gracious spirit that, to say nothing of my carefully-chosen phrases on that occasion, not even a chance, unconsidered word of mine fell to the ground unheeded. You noted all, you committed all to your retentive memory in the warmth of your unbounded sincerity, as if all were the mighty, the heavenly, the sacrosanct words or deeds of Jesus Christ himself. You may have been prompted to remember them in this way by the injunctions on receiving guests in our common Rule, which belongs to us both: 'Let Christ be worshipped in them, who is received in their persons' [Bened.Rule, 53.7]. Perhaps you were also reminded of the Lord's words concerning those given authority, though I have no authority over you: 'Whoever listens to you listens to me' [Luke 10:16].

May I ever be granted this grace from you: that you will think me worthy to be remembered, and will pray for the mercy of the Almighty upon me, along with the holy community of the flock

entrusted to your care. I am repaying you now as far as I can, for long before I saw you, and particularly since I have come to know you, I have kept for you in the innermost depths of my heart a special place of real and true affection. I am therefore sending you, now that I have left you, a ratification of the gift of a trental I made you in person, in writing and under seal, as you wished. I am also sending the absolution for Master Peter you asked for, similarly written on parchment and sealed. As soon as I have an opportunity, I will gladly do my best to obtain a prebend in one of the great churches for your Astralabe, who is also ours for your sake. It will not be easy, for the bishops, as I have often found, are apt to show themselves extremely difficult when occasions have arisen for them to give prebends in their churches. But for your sake I will do what I can as soon as I can.

Further:

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McNamer, Elizabeth Mary. *The Education of Heloise: Methods, Content, and Purpose of Learning in the Twelfth Century*. E. Mellen Press, 1991.

Mews, C. J., and Neville Chiavaroli. *The Lost Love Letters of Heloise and Abelard: Perceptions of Dialogue in Twelfth-Century France*. 1st ed, St. Martin’s Press, 1999.

Morton, Vera and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, trans. *Guidance for Women in Twelfth-Century Convents*, Boydell & Brewer, 2003.

podcast: http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime_20050505.shtml

blog: <https://yvonneseale.org/blog/2018/11/25/teaching-abelard-and-heloise/>

tags:

women, religion, family, education