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# What Was Open in/about Early Scholastic Thought?

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ABSTRACT: This chapter examines the meaning of the term *aperire* (to open) in the schools of the twelfth century and within early scholastic thought. It argues for a shift from a traditional understanding of opening as a revelation received from God, towards a more technical definition of opening as applying dialectical logic to a text. The act of opening was employed polemically, both in debates between scholastic masters and to distinguish Christian from Jewish exegetical practices.

KEYWORDS: scholasticism; exegesis; dialectic; disputation; Christianity; Judaism; Hugh of St Victor

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# What Was Open in/about Early Scholastic Thought?

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## INTRODUCTION: DIFFICULT OPENINGS

In the urgent and bitterly fought disputations of the high scholastic period, one of the claims frequently made in dialectical treatises is that a concept has been 'clearly shown' or 'clearly proved' (*constat aperte, probat aperte*).[1] In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, such phrases are commonly found in arguments about the nature of the authority wielded by the institutional Church. Franciscan writers asserted that the principles of mendicant life could be made out *aperte* from reading the text of the Gospel and understanding the life of Francis.[2] The same methodological point was asserted in an even more polarized intellectual context when William of Ockham, James of Viterbo, and Marsilius of Padua each claimed that their own definition

1 For example, Henry of Ghent, *Opera omnia*, 38 vols (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1979–2018), VI: *Quodlibet II*, ed. by R. Wielockx (1983), q. 8, p. 39: *sequitur apertissime*; q. 17, p. 122: *apertissime declaratur*. Henry uses these in relation to expounding the meaning of Origen's *Commentary on Exodus* and Avicenna's *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* respectively.

2 See e.g. Bonaventure, *Bonaventurae opera omnia*, ed. by PP. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 10 vols (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1882–1902), V: *Quaestiones disputatae de perfectione euangelica* (1891), q. 4, a. 3, conclusio, p. 195.

of papal *potestas* — and the limits they placed on it — resulted from a clear or open (*apertus*) interpretation of Scripture, Aristotelian political theory, and the evidence of the canons.[3] Each of these scholastic authors asserted that his reading was both 'open' and the only correct interpretation of the authorities. These were not merely speculative or hypothetical arguments, but disputes with sharp practical edges, often concerning how the competing legal and moral jurisdictions of the most powerful institutions in medieval Christendom were to be reconciled.

The appeal to something shown *aperte*, or an argument that a 'major premise is clear' (*maiora est aperta*), runs through these later scholastic texts.[4] These authors also use the verb *aperire* to similar effect, for example in a construction like *aperire digneris*: if this is your premise, you ought to show me or demonstrate it.[5] In this high scholastic world, once something is understood *aperte*, it is demonstrated beyond question — it is an established premise which can be built upon in the next stage of the argument, or in the next *distinctio*.[6] Ac-

3 James of Viterbo, *De regimine christiano*, ed. and trans. by R. W. Dyson (Leiden: Brill, 2009), II. 5, p. 192; II. 10, p. 324. Cf. Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor pacis*, ed. by C. W. Previté-Orton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), I. 9. 5, p. 33: *ut apparet ex Aristotelis aperta sententia*; I. 9. 9, p. 35: *quamvis indubie tenendum secundum veritatem, et Aristotelis apertam sententiam*; I. 11. 4, p. 45: *Et his amplius dicit aperte Aristoteles IV Politicae [...]*; II. 5. 5, p. 151: *de his enim loquitur Apostolus aperte, cum dixit [...]*.

4 William of Ockham, 1 *Dialogus*, III. 4: *Maior est aperta; minor exemplo et ratione probatur* (The major premise is clear; the minor is proved by example and by argument). The text of the *Dialogus* used here is taken from the British Academy's online edition, edited and translated by John Kilcullen and others <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/pubs/dialogus/ockdial.html> [accessed 22 December 2019].

5 William of Ockham, 1 *Dialogus*, V. 12: *Unde si possunt trahere hoc ex scripturis autenticis, aperire digneris* (So if they can extract this out from genuine writings, would you kindly show me). This is Ockham's student seeking explanation from his master about the different meanings that can be drawn out of the phrase *Romana ecclesia*.

6 Cf. Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, ed. by Charles H. Buttimer (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1939), III. 8, p. 58: *aperta significatio* is a meaning which can be understood straightforwardly, without further investigation — the first and most obvious meaning of a word; cf. also III. 5, p. 56, for the idea that something which can be understood *apertius* can also be understood *brevius*. In V. 3, p. 97, Hugh promises an example which will be *brevi et aperto*. There is probably an association here with something which can be understood quickly, as soon as the physical text has been opened. For a translation of this text, see *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. by Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

cordingly, in these works, the term *apertus* (open) is not opposed to *clausus* (closed), but is more typically contrasted with *obscurus*: that which is obscure, a text or authority which does not readily disclose its information, or one requiring further investigation and exposition by a master skilled in reading such texts.[7]

It goes without saying that this appeal to a text which has been successfully 'opened' is as much, if not more, a rhetorical as a logical strategy. When William of Ockham notes that he has demonstrated a proposition *aperte*, he is not describing a particular kind of scholastic methodology, but is rather stating that an idea or principle has been expounded to his own intellectual satisfaction. Indeed, the claim *videtur apertissime* is often made after William has brought forward the most contentious part of his argument — whether about the designation of heretics, the power of the Pope alone or in council, or the status of Rome before Constantine.[8] It serves as a way of indicating that a question has been settled, and that an incorrect interpretation has been put right. The same blurring of logical and rhetorical claims can be found in Dante's *Monarchia*. There Dante expounds on the relationship between temporal and spiritual powers, seeking to make the case for the necessity of a single world emperor. He turns to the text of Luke 2. 1, recording Augustus's decision to impose a tax across the Roman Empire. In Dante's reading, one can 'clearly perceive' (*aperte intelligere possumus*) from this passage that, at the time of Christ's birth, 'the Romans exercised jurisdiction over the whole world'.[9] This statement, in turn, becomes the basis for Dante's claims about the providential nature of Roman imperial authority. Both Dante and Ockham were making particular and specific arguments which, when taken together, were intended to redefine quite drastically the sphere of papal authority. In short, propositions presented as *aperte* were often far from settled.

7 This is a point made most clearly in introductory guides for the study of Scripture, e.g. Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, VI. 4, pp. 117–22.

8 William of Ockham, 1 *Dialogus*, V. 35 (on erring against faith).

9 Dante, *Monarchia*, ed. and trans. by Prue Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), II. 8, pp. 82–84: Exivit edictum a Cesare Augusto, ut describeretur universus orbis; in quibus verbis universalem mundi iurisdictionem tunc Romanorum fuisse aperte intelligere possumus.

When this high scholastic disputational literature has been translated into English, the term *aperte* usually ends up as 'clearly', 'plainly', or 'evidently'. This is typically done with little consistency, but used to indicate the certainty and force behind the speaker's argument. This is not inaccurate insofar as it conveys the sense of the locution, but, as a practice of translation, it tends to elide *aperte* with terms like *patenter* or *manifeste*.[10] Such practices of translation make it more difficult to appreciate why *aperte* was a particularly meaningful term for scholastic theologians, and the polemical edge it contained, with implications about correct interpretation. If nothing else, then, this contribution is a plea for intellectual historians to read closely and consistently the small words and phrases which scholastic theologians used to underline their arguments.

I have begun with some of the many appearances of *aperire* in high scholastic thought, where its rhetorical and logical functions can be seen plainly. But those functions were a legacy of how the term had been integrated into the technical vocabulary of early scholasticism in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. *Aperire* was, of course, not a new term; but it was adapted and its old associations developed and redesigned for use in the dialectical teaching practices of the schools and universities. Thus, as a word in the scholastic lexicon (I make no claims for anywhere else), studying the meaning of *aperire*/*aperte* over the course of two centuries — from *c*. 1050 to *c*. 1250 — can provide a revealing way of thinking about the development of scholastic thought, and the relationship between dialectic and rhetoric.

Charting the scholastic use of *aperire* also compels the historian to consider the development of scholastic method and scholastic attitudes towards the pages on which their authorities could be read. It brings us to the now-classic argument of Mary and Richard Rouse that one of the key features of scholasticism — what distinguished it from forms of learning and teaching which preceded it — was that it provided a new model for the organization of knowledge.[11] Schools

10 While *patenter* and *manifeste* both convey the same idea of 'opening', they describe a state rather than suggesting the same agency, dynamism, or movement implied by *aperte*/*aperire*. *Patenter* (from *patere*) denotes being open, *manifeste* (*manifestare*) something which is exhibited or shown.

11 Richard H. and Mary A. Rouse, '"Statim invenire": Schools, Preachers, and New Attitudes to the Page', in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 201–28.

needed texts which were readily searchable, capable of use by multiple students, which adhered to a somewhat standardized framework and recognizable models (hence, for example, the increasing importance of an alphabetical approach). Scholasticism is defined by a reorganization of the page, and a new relationship with what is on the page. By the same token, examining the shifting technical sense of *aperire*, we find an echo of this: the term came to denote a more standardized process of expounding and explication.

Over the course of a century and a half, the meaning of *aperire* underwent significant change. It moved from describing God as opening the human senses or performing acts of revelation to describing a mode of textual analysis undertaken by the *magister*, something closer in meaning to *ostendere* or *intelligere* (the three were increasingly used as synonyms). This was not a straightforward or consistent process. Nevertheless, the changing meaning of *aperire* does in some way map onto the way in which dialectic came to supersede older commentary traditions. This is not to suggest that we should resurrect old stereotypes of the hard and fast distinctions between long-standing 'monastic' and newer 'scholastic' forms of learning, or that a new and brutal public rationalism trampled over and superseded an earlier meditative and private approach to Scripture.[12] Certainly, however, the turn of the eleventh century saw a new interest in the different ways in which one might divide up authoritative texts and the techniques for exploring their meaning. Moreover, once *aperire* was increasingly associated with the interpretation of a text by a master, and given a technical meaning, it also gained a rhetorical function. It allowed the lines between those who could and could not correctly 'open' the text to be drawn more sharply; it allowed the process of textual interpretation to be turned to a more polemical purpose.

12 Cf. Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. by Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982). Note that at least two of the authors examined here — Gilbert Crispin and Honorius Augustodunensis — were members of monastic communities.

## FROM REVELATION TO INTERPRETATION

Let me begin in the later decades of the twelfth century, with Alan of Lille's *Distinctiones*.[13] This is a text Alan prepared as a reference tool for preachers, as a digest of theological learning, a work which, assembled in alphabetical order, provides entries defining the meanings and associations of terms which a scholar or preacher might need to know — ranging from *abyssus* to *zelotes*. Alan also notes significant scriptural passages featuring the word in question. Some of these words have obvious doctrinal or religious significance, such as *prophetare* or *Psalterium*; but other terms — even small ones such as *pro* — require discussion because understanding their meaning will shape one's reading of Scripture. Typically, Alan provides more detailed entries for words which recur often in Scripture or which can sustain multiple meanings.[14]

While we might associate Alan with an experimental approach to new intellectual forms, and the 'white heat' of scholastic learning, he provides a discussion of *aperire* which maintains its connection to an act of opening undertaken by God, i.e. the meaning of the term found in older monastic commentaries. In those earlier medieval texts, *aperire* describes the revelation or the exposure of divine truths — either on a small scale or a large scale.[15] It is an act performed by God, which changes the lives of humans on earth, or through which some aspect of the divine is made known to humankind in a way which they could not grasp of their own accord without provision made by God.[16] This meaning lies somewhere between a sense of preparation and revelation. Alan's examples are God 'opening' the heavens, or Christ's actions in ushering in the Resurrection and Last Judgement.

13 Gillian R. Evans, 'Alan of Lille's Distinctiones and the Problem of Theological Language', *Sacris erudiri*, 24 (1980), pp. 67–86.

14 A good example is the term *oculus* (*Patrologia Latina* [henceforth: *PL*] 210. 879–81). Alan notes that it can represent the contemplative life, but one can also speak of the *oculus Dei* which distinguishes between the good and the bad. From this Alan then moves to discuss the significance of the pupil, distinguishing light from dark.

15 See e.g. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob*, ed. by Marc Adriaen, 3 vols (Turnhout: Brepols: 1979–85), I (1979), V. XXXVI. 66, pp. 264–66, explaining that there are some aspects of the divine too great for the human mind to be opened to, and in such cases the mind is kept reverentially shut.

16 Alan of Lille, *Distinctiones*, *PL* 210. 703B–C.

*Aperire* can also refer to God's actions in 'opening' the senses of a single individual, providing them with some special knowledge. In short, *aperire* describes a model of divine action and intervention in the created world: the human sinner makes a request, but divinity does the opening. Alan gives the example of Psalm 118. 19: 'open to me the gates of righteousness' (*aperite mihi portas justitiae*).[17]

There are limitations to what we can infer about theological change from Alan's *Distinctiones* alone. They belong to a genre of texts intended as a point of reference for theological terms, not as a comprehensive guide to the complexities of scriptural interpretation. Yet this text still shows evident continuity with earlier medieval senses of *aperire*.[18] Alan's use of the term has much in common with pre-twelfth-century glosses on Matthew 7. 7: *pulsate et aperietur vobis* (knock and it shall be opened unto you). Earlier commentators understood this passage as describing the fact that while humans must prepare themselves to receive divine revelation, knowledge is only bestowed upon them (*opened* for them) by God.[19] Alan of Lille's succinct description of the sense of *aperire*, however, does not fully represent the complexity of the discussions taking place in the schools around this term. Twelfth-century scholastic commentaries on the Old Testament seem to be — gradually, fitfully — moving towards a definition of opening which placed an emphasis on the process of human exposition rather than divine revelation, and towards an understanding of opening which is most closely associated with the handling of a text rather than the opening of (for example) the human heart or human mind. This is not a uniform development, but it is discernible in multiple commentaries. Moreover, this is most visible when commentators discuss how to treat the books of the Old Testament.

17 This meaning was not lost in later centuries — given its scriptural foundations, it continued to be employed, e.g. in Dante, *Monarchia*, II. 7, pp. 76–78, which describes the act of trial by combat as a way of God's judgement being 'opened' up to humankind.

18 See e.g. Bede's commentary on Song of Songs 5. 5: *surrexi ut aperirem dilecto meo*, discussing how the process of opening is one of opening to the Lord. See Bede, *In Cantica canticorum*, IV. 5.19, *PL* 91. 1157B.

19 See e.g. Pascasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Matheo*, ed. by Beda Paulus, 3 vols (Turnhout: Brepols, 1984), I, pp. 434–35; cf. Bede, *In Cantica canticorum*, III. 3.13, *PL* 91. 1123A.

This is the case in Abelard's commentary on the *Hexameron*, which probably dates to the early to mid-1130s.[20] I take Abelard because, at least here, he looks rather similar to his contemporaries — caught between two different meanings of *aperire*. Abelard begins his commentary allegorically, and associates the act of 'opening' with the different ages of the world: Christ's decisive intervention in human history, through the Incarnation, has opened a new age.[21] Likewise, the other act of opening he discusses is that associated with Genesis 1. 3 ('let there be light'). There, God brought light into being and thus opened the world, making it intelligible through light.[22] Elsewhere in this *Hexameron* commentary, however, Abelard begins to describe the process of opening in quite a different way, and one which puts considerably more emphasis on human ability to pursue the meaning of the text. To 'open' is to discover what can be understood from the text, and then to teach it. If Genesis can be opened *diligenter*, then one is also able to learn and explain many things about the human body and the human soul.[23]

This sense of *aperire* as exposition could also move beyond a purely scholastic audience, into texts concerned with the wider instruction and edification of a Christian laity; this is the sense in which the early twelfth-century theologian Honorius Augustodunensis sometimes employed the term. Although the details of his career remain obscure, Honorius's intellectual programme involved translating the essential premises of scholastic knowledge into a more readily comprehensible format.[24] His use of *aperire* reflects this desire. Honorius's commentary on the Psalms begins with a contrast between knowledge that is hidden *per involucra et aenigmatica tecta*, and those things which are available *aperta*.[25] The Psalms can be read; but they must be accessed through the Incarnation — Christ is the interpretive key to

20 Abelard, *Expositio in Hexameron*, ed. by Mary Romig (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), p. lxxiv.

21 Ibid., [8], p. 5: *ut, qui prophetae verba largitus est, ipse nobis eorum aperiat sensum*.

22 Ibid., [45], p. 17.

23 Ibid., prologue, p. 5: the act of commentary on Genesis is to expound what is *obscura*.

24 For some discussion of the complicated problem of his identity and career, see V. I. J. Flint, 'The Career of Honorius Augustodunensis : Some Fresh Evidence', *Revue bénédictine*, 82.1–2 (1972), pp. 63–86.

25 Honorius Augustodunensis, *Expositio Psalmorum*, *PL* 172. 269C.

understanding its figurations. Honorius goes some way to explaining how this may be done as he sets out for the reader how individual Psalms may be broken down and divided up for scrutiny.[26] One task for the reader is to understand what the text would mean if its meaning were stated openly (*ac si aperte dicat*).[27] This relationship between 'open' knowledge and systematic exposition is evident elsewhere in Honorius's writings. He introduces his *Sacramentarium* as a text which is intended to open (*aperiatur*) the complexities of the divine office to the ignorant (*ignaris*).[28] Opening here is connected to new methods of learning and exposition, an attempt to teach and instruct. The purpose of instruction may require the restructuring or reframing of a text by a master. Honorius, however, never goes as far as to suggest that everything in the Bible can be read *aperte* or rendered open;[29] and he maintains (like many other authors, and in keeping with the text of Scripture) that *aperire* can be an injunction addressed to God, in the hope of divine revelation or fulfilment.[30] Overall, however, like many of those who would follow him in the twelfth century, Honorius equates the master's job in the expounding of Scripture with the work of opening.[31]

As with so much of medieval exegesis, ambivalence in meaning and emphasis was the order of the day: commentators could use *aperire* either to afford priority to divine power or to underline the efforts of the human master in the act of opening. Within the twelfth-century schools, there remained scope to invoke the idea of opening

26 See e.g. ibid., *PL* 172. 284B–C: *de divisione hujus Psalmi*.

27 Honorius Augustodunensis, *Expositio in Cantica canticorum*, I. 1, *PL* 172. 360B. This is of course a common phrase in much medieval writing, and is not particular to Honorius.

28 Honorius Augustodunensis, *Sacramentarium*, prologue, *PL* 172. 737C.

29 Honorius Augustodunensis, *Quaestiones et responsiones in Proverbia*, *PL* 172. 325C.

30 Honorius Augustodunensis, *Expositio Psalmorum*, on Psalm 50. 17: *Domine, labia mea aperies*.

31 See e.g. Peter the Chanter's *Verbum abbreviatum*, ed. by Monique Boutry (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004); in I. 1, p. 19 (glossing Matthew 27. 51), Peter develops an analogy about how the meaning that was hidden and concealed in the writing of the Prophets is made comprehensible — opened — when one relates those texts to the life of Christ (*ad intelligendum aperta et manifesta facta sunt*). One might also cite Hugh of St Victor's *Didascalicon*, another text for those beginning the study of Scripture; VI. 6, p. 123, discusses the relationship between *obscuris* and *apertis*: the Old Testament promises the truth but hides it, the New Testament announces it and makes it manifest.

in a more traditional and less technical fashion, according to a model in which God opened the text to human senses in order to permit human understanding. This usage was more equivocal about the association between *aperire* and *intelligere*; it continued to ascribe the act of opening to God. It can be seen in Peter of Poitiers's *Allegoriae super tabernaculum Moysi*, a work of the 1170s/80s.[32] The nature of glossing is discussed in the prologue: glossing is the process by which we see that the parts of Scripture that were once obscure and impenetrable can become intelligible.[33] This is not an act performed by humans alone — Peter of Poitiers relies on the model of *pulsate et aperietur vobis* (Matthew 7. 7): God opens mysteries to human comprehension; humans then set to work on them. Nevertheless, Peter of Poitiers's prologue does, at the very least, associate the act of glossing with the receipt of 'opened' information, and the opened information provided exclusively to Christians through Scripture.[34] Broadly speaking, in the context of the schools of twelfth-century northern France, *aperire* was being lined up as something less mystical, something increasingly more like the process of *expositio*, and something more closely aligned to the teaching of a text, just as that process of teaching was in itself becoming more clearly defined.[35]

The above examples of opening demonstrate that this language was applied to many different kinds of texts; but most commonly these twelfth-century discussions of how to open a text were focused on the interpretation of the Old Testament and how the seemingly obscure, occasionally contradictory, passages of those books could be explicated.[36] The centrality of the Old Testament in this process of scholastic opening is best illustrated by considering Hugh of St Victor's writing on Noah's ark. This encompasses two works composed between 1125 and 1130: *De arca Noe morali* and the *De arca Noe mystica*

32 Peter of Poitiers, *Allegoriae super tabernaculum Moysi*, ed. by Philip S. Moore and James A. Corbett (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1938).

33 Ibid., prologue, p. 1.

34 Ibid., I, p. 31.

35 Cf. Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*, III. 9, pp. 58–59; VI. 12, pp. 129–30, emphasizing that a text is examined through dividing it into parts.

36 Cf. Abelard, *Sic et non*, ed. by Blanche B. Boyer and Richard McKeon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976–77), prologue, p. 97, recognizing the particular difficulty of opening the meaning of the Old Testament Prophets.

(also known as the *Libellus de formatione arche*). The two texts tend towards the same point: encouraging the reader to take the ark as a model for their own spiritual advancement, as well as a key to understanding the history of salvation.[37] The *Moral Ark* examines the different ways in which the ark might be interpreted, according to the four senses of Scripture: historically, in the sense of physical dimensions of the ark;[38] morally, as the institutional Church;[39] allegorically, as standing for wisdom;[40] and anagogically, as a model for the operation of grace.[41] These three latter kinds of interpretation are only possible if one has the correct understanding of the historical ark — its size and construction. Hugh is, first and foremost, concerned that any 'opening' of the text begin from certain and established historical parameters. Imagining the ark is one way in which scriptural history can be grasped: through it the Old Testament can be understood, and through it one can perceive parts of a history of salvation that is yet to come.

Hugh is particularly concerned with the allegorical significance of the opening of the windows of the ark, and how this conveys the relationship between human activity and divine revelation.[42] Noah opened the windows of the ark in order to send out birds to search for land; this kind of opening provides a model for the way in which the human soul might use reason to search out its heavenly destination.[43] But while humans may be capable of opening the windows of the ark, the doors could only be opened (or reopened) by the Lord, allowing humankind to finally leave the ark and continue on their journey to salvation. Hugh accords scope to the scholastic master and human intellect, but continues to recognize the importance of divine grace. The same idea is conveyed in the *Mystic Ark*, where Hugh returns to the opening of doors and windows: God will open the door and the

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37 Hugh of St Victor, *De archa Noe, Libellus de formatione arche*, ed. by Patrice Sicard (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001). For a detailed discussion, see Conrad Rudolph, *The Mystic Ark: Hugh of Saint Victor, Art, and Thought in the Twelfth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

38 Hugh of St Victor, *De archa Noe*, I. 4, pp. 18–23.

39 Ibid., I. 5, pp. 23–32.

40 Ibid., II. 1, pp. 33–34.

41 Ibid., III. 2, p. 57.

42 Ibid., II. 2, pp. 35–37.

43 Ibid., II. 2, p. 35.

good will walk through it, while the wicked will try to break down the doors to salvation, but will not be admitted.[44]

Hugh of St Victor underlined the active part taken by the human intellect in the process of opening up salvation history to understanding. His act of opening went beyond the page. Hugh 'opened' the text of the Old Testament by creating a wall painting to accompany the text: a complex diagram depicting both Christ and the ark which was reproduced on the walls of St Victor and could be used as an image for teaching. Indeed, Conrad Rudolph has argued that the text of the *Mystic Ark* represented an instruction manual for reproducing that image, enabling scholars outside St Victor to depict Noah's ark as a visual representation of salvation history.[45] This emphasis on understanding is repeated throughout the texts of the *Moral Ark* and the *Mystic Ark*: one of the challenges for the teacher is to convey to the reader or listener what could be understood through a simple unfolding of the text.[46] Only when the complete image had been depicted and made visible to the eye would it be possible to understand the relationship between parts and whole.[47] This was, in a certain sense, the 'opening up' of the text further by translating it into an image through which Scripture could be understood, certainly a process of opening in the sense of making it fit for teaching, recognizing divisions and subdivisions. Most importantly, Hugh's act of opening was an act of teaching: it was being done before an audience and for the improved understanding of that audience.

A similar practical aim can be traced further on into the thirteenth century, in Robert Grosseteste's commentary on the *Hexameron*.[48] Like many before him, Grosseteste tries to explain what it means to 'open' the text. The first point he makes is about the relationship between the teacher/expounder and his listeners or readers. Although this is a *Hexameron* commentary, Grosseteste here takes the example

44 Hugh of St Victor, *Libellus de formatione arche*, vii, p. 152.

45 Conrad Rudolph has argued that the text of the *Mystic Ark* should be understood as a *reportatio* (*'First, I Find the Center Point': Reading the Text of Hugh of Saint Victor's The Mystic Ark* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2004), pp. 9–32).

46 Cf. Hugh of St Victor, *De archa Noe*, i. 4, p. 23.

47 Ibid., i. 3, p. 10.

48 Robert Grosseteste, *Hexaëmeron*, ed. by Richard C. Dales and Servus Gieben (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

of the Gospels. The Gospels, he explains, are sadly brief. That is because not every event of Christ's life could be written down in detail: if one held the writers of the Gospels to this standard, then the world would not be able to contain everything that could be related about the life of Christ.[49] Instead, the authors were obliged to offer a brief summary, along with rules for living. Grosseteste believes that Scripture contains everything (including the whole of the supernatural, details of humankind's restoration and future glory) but for this to be realized it must be expounded.[50] That, then, means that the work of those who come after is to open out Scripture, an act of instructive expansion, in order to spell out what should be done to restore humankind.

*Aperire* in the twelfth century was undergoing a significant redefinition. As the examples above suggest, it was coming to be more closely aligned with the dialectical method and the technique of scholastic instruction. The complexity of the Old Testament drove scholastic theologians to think about what it meant for a text to be opened; it was increasingly associated with the application of human *ratio*: many of the seemingly obscure mysteries of Scripture were capable of being opened — if the student took the right interpretative approach.

## OPENING AND POLEMIC

The above twelfth-century discussions of *aperire* are, for the most part, concerned with correct reading for the sake of improvement of Christian understanding, particularly in deciphering the status of the Old Testament and its relationship to the post-Incarnation world. Matters of 'clear' interpretation or opening are not yet enlivened by the later political arguments about the status of poverty, the correctness of Aristotelian political principles, or the proper ordering of institutional hierarchies within the Church. Ostensibly, then, it seems that twelfth-century commentaries offer increasingly 'practical' ideas about opening, but nothing as sharply polemical as later thirteenth-century texts. But to assume this would be to draw a false contrast. There was one context in which arguments about 'opening' served an explicitly

49 Ibid., i. 4. 1, pp. 51–52.

50 Ibid., i. 4. 1, p. 52.

argumentative purpose: in anti-Jewish disputational literature. In such texts, the difference between Christianity and Judaism is constructed upon the Christian ability to interpret the Old Testament correctly, and Jewish inability or unwillingness to do so.

Anti-Jewish diatribes were not, of course, new in the twelfth century, but the twelfth century certainly saw an expansion of a literature in which Christian and Jewish speakers disputed the merits of their relative religious practices and beliefs, and their access to spiritual truth. Some of these texts were based on real exchanges between Christian and Jewish scholars; others were clearly more 'abstract' exercises, written for the purpose of defining and vindicating Christian orthodoxy.[51] As has long been recognized, this disputational literature is in itself evidence of hardening Christian attitudes towards the presence of Jewish communities in Latin Europe, and one facet of increasing Christian violence against Jews in these societies.[52] A central claim in the texts of many of these debates is that what sets a Christian reader apart from a Jewish one is the ability to interpret Scripture in accordance with reason. One can here see how the concept of *aperire* impinged on these arguments; to use that Latin term was to claim that even 'obscure' passages of the Old Testament were capable of being opened, and that it was possible to distinguish between correct and incorrect openings of the text through the application of human reason. Thus, in the disputational literature of Gilbert Crispin, Peter Alfonsi, and Peter Abelard, it is Jewish unwillingness to appreciate the Christian method which is the problem. Christians explain the tools for opening the Old Testament, but Jewish readers refuse to utilize them. In these texts, *aperire* does not merely describe a process of textual exposition; it denotes the superior Christian ability to access the divine truths hidden in holy texts.

That association between Christian reason and correct opening is repeatedly asserted in Gilbert Crispin's *Disputatio Iudei et Christiani*,

51 The literature on this point is plentiful, but see esp. Anna Sapir Abulafia, 'Jewish–Christian Disputations and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance', *Journal of Medieval History*, 15.2 (1989), pp. 105–25.

52 Cf. M. Soifer, '"You say that the Messiah has come ...": The Ceuta Disputation (1179) and its Place in the Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics of the High Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval History*, 31.3 (2005), pp. 287–307.

written in the last decade of the eleventh century.[53] Gilbert, abbot of Westminster, had been a student of both Lanfranc and Anselm at Bec; as Alex Novikoff has argued, Gilbert's approach to the dialogue form was undoubtedly shaped by his training at Bec, an experience which also imbued him with a concern for how Christian truth could be accessed through human reasoning.[54] In Gilbert's *Disputatio*, the Christian speaker sets out the difference between Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Old Testament. He explains that Christians have opened up those profound mysteries, while the Jews have not. Here the act of opening becomes tied up with the idea of correct interpretation: through Christ the text has been opened to humans, and thus Scripture can be understood (*intelligere*). This is supported by invoking the words of Psalm 77. 2: *aperiam in parabolis os meum; loquar propositiones ab initio* (I will open my mouth in parables, I will explain things that were hidden from the beginning).[55] Rather than a process of revelation by God to man, this is Christian knowledge speaking to Jewish ignorance. In the *Disputatio*, it is Christian learning that opens up the Prophets and the law, converting *enigmata* to *aperta*;[56] the Christian who comes to the text of the Bible will understand the message it seeks to convey *apertissime*.[57] It is striking that in Gilbert's *Disputatio*, *aperire* is used almost exclusively by the Christian speaker: the term is characteristic of Christian claims about Scripture; it is not a word associated with the Jewish participant.

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53 Gilbert Crispin, *Disputatio Iudei et Christiani*, in *The Works of Gilbert Crispin, Abbot of Westminster*, ed. by Anna Sapir Abulafia and Gillian R. Evans (London: British Academy, 1986), pp. 1–53. For the influence of Gilbert's dialogue beyond the context of Jewish–Christian disputation, see David Berger, 'Gilbert Crispin, Alan of Lille, and Jacob ben Reuben: A Study in the Transmission of Medieval Polemic', *Speculum*, 49.1 (1974), pp. 34–47; Berger's point is that the rhetorical techniques used by Gilbert Crispin against Jews went on to be used against heretics in the twelfth century.

54 See Alex J. Novikoff, 'Anselm, Dialogue, and the Rise of Scholastic Disputation', *Speculum*, 86.2 (2011), pp. 387–418 (esp. pp. 408–12). Gilbert's dialogue is also notable for the fact that he introduces it as based on a real debate with a Jewish merchant from Mainz.

55 Crispin, *Disputatio*, 31, p. 15.

56 Ibid., 104, p. 35.

57 Ibid., 94, p. 32. The use of the superlative here and elsewhere is striking, and indicates the metaphorical use and scholastic development of the term *aperire*. On a literal level, 'open' is a binary state, not one of degree; something is either opened or closed.

A decade or so after Gilbert's *Disputatio*, Peter Alfonsi's anti-Jewish *Dialogus* (*c.* 1110) yoked the term *aperire* to *demonstrare*. Alfonsi's *Dialogus* begins not with Scripture, but with the Christian speaker (Peter, modelled on Alfonsi himself, a convert to Christianity) discussing with the Jew the nature of the created universe — matters of climate, time, and astronomy. Even in the world of natural science, the Christian demonstrates his superior ability to open up the knowledge of the universe. Where the *Dialogus* differs from the *Disputatio* is in the fact that Alfonsi's Jew — named Moses — is keen to learn how the Christian scholastic methodology of opening texts works — whether applied to philosophical matters or the text of Scripture; he is an interested student of *ratio*. Thus Moses asks Peter to 'speak more plainly' (*quaeso apertius loquere*) and to explain through analogy, in order that he might follow the subtleties of the Christian argument.[58] Peter explains to his Jewish interlocutor how to decipher information on the page, explaining that what Moses seeks to understand about the orbit of the sun is made comprehensible through viewing a diagram.[59] Before they arrive at the topic of Scripture, the Christian speaker has been positioned as the individual able to open up the meaning of the written word. From this point, Peter moves into more familiar arguments about the Old Testament, a text which is not 'sufficiently open to all' (*nec omnibus satis aperta*).[60] It is only those who recognize that the Prophets of the Old Testament speak in allegories, prefiguring the future, who can open the text in accordance with reason (*ratio*) and who are capable of understanding (*intelligere*). Throughout the first several books of the *Dialogus*, the Jew wishes to be able to open the texts (*apertius intelligere volo*), but must turn to the Christian for instruction in the method of doing so.[61] In turn, he praises the Christian for using 'the most open and most unchallengeable arguments' to make

58 Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogus*, I, *PL* 157. 544C: *adhuc, quaeso, apertius loquere, et per aliquam similitudinem rem tam subtilem ostende*. Translation: Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogue against the Jews*, trans. by. Irven M. Resnick (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), p. 55.

59 Ibid., I, *PL* 157. 548C: *oculis subjecta aperte demonstrate descriptio*.

60 Ibid., I, *PL* 157. 553A (trans. by Resnick, p. 72).

61 Ibid., I, *PL* 157. 556A–B; see too III, *PL* 157. 586C, in which the Jew thanks his Christian interlocutor for explaining that which he was ignorant of, but still wishes for one further point to be opened for him (*sed unum restat quod mihi postulo aperiri*).

his case.[62] It is not until book IV of the *Dialogus* that discussion of the process of 'opening' turns to Mosaic law and the Prophets of the Old Testament.[63] Moses challenges Peter to explain how Scripture can be opened — Peter responds by working through the texts set before him, line by line. This is not a meditation on Scripture but an induction into a scholastic method of opening texts; the text which has been opened then provides a convincing proof of Christian truth.

Lastly in this sequence of dialogues, we can consider Peter Abelard's *Collationes*, written between the late 1120s and early 1130s. Abelard's text is distinct in that it is a three-part dialogue between a Christian, a Jew, and a Philosopher. The latter figure represents a kind of classical (pagan) philosophy; he recognizes a divine if natural principle but does not recognize the authority of Christian Scripture. The work begins with a dialogue between Christian and Jew before moving on to a dialogue between Christian and Philosopher.

On multiple occasions, Abelard's Christian informs his Jewish interlocutor that Jewish social and religious practices, supposedly informed by Mosaic law, are wrong, premised on a straightforward misunderstanding of the text: *unde te aperte legis scriptura reprehendit* (the biblical text of the law openly shows that you are wrong).[64] Scripture *aperte docet* (openly teaches) the opposite of Jewish practice.[65] On the one hand, this is an appeal to a technical theological process (i.e. interpretation of specific Old Testament passages). On the other, it is also explicitly polemical — in the context of a debate between a Christian and a Jew to explain who has mastery of scriptural interpretation. The idea of opening the texts is allied to the idea of providing *testimonia* — evidence for the understanding of Christian writers.[66]

62 Ibid., IV, *PL* 157. 593B: *et apertissimarum et inexpugnabilium luce rationum, hujus a me infidelit tis errorem tulisti* (you have lifted the error of infidelity from me with the clearest and most unconquerable arguments; trans. by Resnick, p. 139).

63 See too ibid., VIII, PL 157. 619C, in which Peter explains that there are multiple statements from the Prophets which can demonstrate still more clearly (*apertius ostendere*) Christian arguments about the status of Christ as both God and man.

64 Abelard, *Collationes*, ed. and trans. by J. Marenbon and G. Orlandi (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), I. 48, p. 58. Marenbon translates *aperte* as 'clearly' rather than 'openly'.

65 Ibid., I. 51, p. 60.

66 For testimonies and how they might be used, according to audience, see ibid., I. 26, p. 36; II. 143, p. 152.

The world of the *Collationes* is one in which the texts of Scripture are to be cracked open by human enquiry — rather than waiting for revelation by God.[67] This approach is most apparent when the Christian explains his intellectual method not to the Jew but to the (pagan) Philosopher. The Philosopher complains that the Christian is not arguing from reason (the agreed-upon basis for their discussion), but from the authority of Scripture, which the Philosopher does not accept and therefore cannot find persuasive. The Christian's response is that 'my purpose is not to put to you my own view, but to open up to you the common faith and teaching of our fathers' (*sed commune maiorum nostrorum tibi fidem seu doctrinam aperire*).[68] These are put before the Philosopher so they may be understood, so he may be able to comprehend the basis for the Christian's arguments. To put something openly (*aperte dicere*) is to explain its meaning;[69] *aperte ratione* (open reasoning) describes the process by which Christians work through Scripture.[70]

Two points should be drawn out of this discussion of anti-Jewish disputational literature. The first is a caveat: *aperire* was one important way of marking the distinction between Christian and Jew, but it was not the only tool for drawing such contrasts; other techniques were available. For instance, Peter the Venerable's attack on both the Jews and the Talmud, *Adversus Iudeorum inveteratem duritiem*, written in the mid-1140s, was more focused on the idea of Jewish 'blindness' than a Jewish failure to open up, divide, or analyse texts.[71] The second is that *aperire* was applied in one way in dialogues between Christians and Jews, and in quite another way in works intended to educate Christian students. A useful point of comparison is the *Elucidarium* of Honorius

67 More broadly, this parallels other twelfth-century discussions about how wisdom should be extracted from texts, including those over the significance of allegory and *integumenta*. It was understood that ancient authors had concealed profound theological or moral truths under literary 'veils', which only adept interpreters would be able to uncover. Strange, unusual, or disturbing language and images were not to be taken straightforwardly, but understood as such veils. The idea was applied both to Scripture and to classical texts, especially Ovid.

68 Abelard, *Collationes*, II. 168, p. 178.

69 Ibid., II. 221, p. 216.

70 Ibid., II. 223, p. 220.

71 Peter the Venerable, *Adversus Iudeorum inveteratam duritiem*, ed. by Yvonne Friedman (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985).

Augustodunensis, a pastoral text probably intended for the training of priests of limited learning. Here the Christian *discipulus* asks a series of questions of the Christian *magister*, each relating to the doctrines, traditions, and practices of the Church. The *magister* elaborates, the explanation serving the honour of God and the utility of the Church.[72] This is not a discussion of method premised on a need to vindicate a particular reading of religious authorities, but a straightforward and very unspeculative explication of ideas. The Christian student never doubts the way in which the master has come to his answer — i.e. his method for reading text and tradition — he merely seeks further knowledge.[73]

## CONCLUSION: WHO WAS OPENING FOR?

This contribution began by considering the 'academic' use of *aperire* in biblical commentaries before coming to its more polemical use in scholastic anti-Jewish disputational literature. This structural choice should not be taken as implying that the former chronologically preceded the latter; quite evidently, that was not the case. The use of *aperire* in theological commentaries overlapped and interacted with its use in disputational literature. Christian belief about why Jews misinterpreted the Old Testament informed Christian theologians' understandings of how they should approach Scripture, and vice versa. The twelfth-century Latin scholastic world valued, above all things, the correct application of methodology and argument: the schools shaped a vision of Christianity which was not simply defined by the doctrines derived from Scripture, but by the technical way in which Christians handled and dissected Scripture.

Finally, we should consider whether tracing out the dimensions of *aperire* in this way provides us with anything new in thinking about the dimensions and development of scholastic thought. There can be little doubt that the scholastic method did introduce a new sense of what it meant for a text to be opened. Even as more technical terms were being developed for the way in which one read, taught, or commented

72 Honorius Augustodunensis, *Elucidarium*, I, *PL* 172. 1109.

73 Ibid., I, *PL* 172. 1133C.

on Scripture, scholastic thought was also repurposing the older term *aperire* and providing it with new, technical dimensions. But those technical aspects equally gave rise to a rhetorical and disputational function. That may have begun with a focus on the methodological opening of the Old Testament, but it would soon come to be applied to the opening of any kind of authoritative text, including texts which had not been written by Christians but which could be put to use in the construction of Christian political society.

The changing associations of *aperire* help us perceive some of the new aspects of early twelfth-century scholastic method. This was about a 'public' culture of teaching: the text opened not just for the individual master, but for the instruction of students, according to a process that could be followed and imitated. *Aperire* had to be made explicable; it came to stand for a methodology (closely associated with logical and dialectical processes) that could reach greater numbers of students and which could be replicated across different schools, each time arriving at a successful 'opening' of the text. There is a dismal irony implicit in this process. Making the process of 'opening' a text a demonstration of scholastic reason allowed others to be cast as unreasonable interpreters. To expound a text — to open it up, whether on the page or on the walls of St Victor — had the effect of making Christendom narrower.

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