

Pecham, John Encyclopedia Article

Pecham, John

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PECHAM, JOHN (c. 1230–1292) was a Franciscan theologian, scientist, and educator; a provincial minister of the Franciscans and archbishop of Canterbury. Pecham was born in Sussex, in the vicinity of Lewes. Educated initially at the priory of Lewes and the University of Oxford, he joined the Franciscan order about 1250 and later in the decade was sent to the University of Paris for theological studies, earning the doctorate in 1269. Pecham was regent master in theology at Paris from 1269 to 1271, lecturer in theology for the Franciscan school in Oxford from about 1272 to 1275, provincial minister of the order from 1275 to 1277, master in theology to the papal Curia from 1277 to 1279, and archbishop of Canterbury from 1279 until his death in 1292.

Pecham's theology was typically Franciscan: conservative and centered on the teachings of Augustine. Indeed, Pecham became a leader in the opposition to the new—and in his opinion heterodox—Aristotelian and Averroist ideas circulating in the universities. For example, he took strong exception to Thomas Aquinas's views on the unity of substantial form. He defended such doctrines as the divine illumination of the intellect, complete hylomorphism (the idea that everything is a composite of form and matter), and plurality of forms. Pecham also became involved in the power struggle between secular and mendicant clergy, writing a series of pamphlets in defense of the mendicants. As an educator, Pecham followed Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon by incorporating mathematical science into the university curriculum (including the theological curriculum). He wrote two books on optics, one of which, *Perspectiva communis*, became the standard university textbook for several centuries. An energetic, reform-minded archbishop, Pecham fought for the preservation of ecclesiastical privileges against royal encroachment and campaigned against a variety of clerical abuses, such as nonresidence and the holding of multiple benefices.

Bibliography

On Pecham's ecclesiastical career, see David Knowles's "Some Aspects of the Career of Archbishop Pecham," *English Historical Review* 57 (1942): 1–18, 178–201, and Decima Douie's *Archbishop Pecham* (Oxford, 1952). For Pecham's philosophy, the most succinct and convenient source is D. E. Sharp's *Franciscan Philosophy at Oxford in the Thirteenth Century* (Oxford, 1930). On Pecham's scientific efforts see two works of my own: *John Pecham and the Science of Optics: Perspectiva communis* (Madison, Wis., 1970) and "Pecham, John," in the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, vol. 10 (New York, 1974), pp. 473–476. See the latter for additional bibliographic information.