CISTERCIAN FATHERS SERIES: NUMBER EIGHTY-THREE

Aelred of Rievaulx

Homilies on the Prophetic Burdens of Isaiah

Translated by
Lewis White

Introduction by
Marsha L. Dutton

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Contents

Abbreviations ix

Introduction xv

Bibliography lxix

Letter from Aelred, Abbot of Rievaulx to
the Most Reverend Bishop Gilbert of London 1

Sermon for the Coming of the Lord: On the Eleven Burdens 5

Homily 1 On where it says, *The burden of Babylon that Isaiah, son of Amos, saw* 22

Homily 2 On the many kinds of vision, and which kind makes someone a prophet 30

Homily 3 From where it says, *Over the dark mountain* to *Let the leaders enter the gates* 39

Homily 4 On the same section 47

Homily 5 On the same section considered morally 54

Homily 6 From where it says, *I commanded* to *Those rejoicing in my glory* 62

Homily 7 From where it says, *The voice of a crowd* to *To those coming from a distant land* 69

Homily 8 From where it says, *From the height of heaven* to *Will decay and crumble* 76

Homily 9 From where it says, *Torments and pain* to *The moon will not shine forth its light* 84

Homily 10 Also from *Behold, the day of the Lord is coming* to *I will visit evil on the cities* 93

Homily 11 From where it says, *And I will visit evil on the cities* to *Will not show mercy to the sucklings of the womb* 101

Homily 12 On the same section explained morally 110

Homily 13 From where it says, *And Babylon will be* to *He will make them rest on their own soil* 118

Homily 14 From where it says, *The foreigner will be joined* to *Worms will be your covering* 134

Homily 15 On the same section explained morally 142

Homily 16 From where it says, *How did you fall* to *I will be like the Most High* 152

Homily 17 On the same section in a different sense 160

Homily 18 From where it says, *Is this the man* to *Nor fill the face of the world of cities* 170

Homily 19 From where it says, *And I will rise over them* to the end of the burden of Babylon 180

Homily 20 From the beginning of the burden of the Philistines to where it says, *And your remnants I will kill* 191

Homily 21 On the same section explained morally 201

Homily 22 From where it says, *Wail, O gate* to the end of the burden of the Philistines 212

Homily 23 From the beginning of the burden of Moab to where it says, *their voice was heard as far as Jahaz* 220

Homily 24 On the same section explained morally 234

Homily 25 From where it says, *For this the lightly armed soldiers of Moab* to *The lion . . . and for the rest of the land* 245

Homily 26 On the same section explained morally 255

Homily 27 From where it says, *Send forth the lamb, O Lord* to *swiftly rendering what is just* 268

Homily 28 On the same section explained morally 278

Homily 29 From where it says, *We hear Moab's pride* to where it says, *I have taken away the voice of the treaders* 288

Homily 30 On the same section explained morally 298

Homily 31 On where it says, *My belly will sound forth to Moab* to the end of the burden of Moab 308

Scriptural Index 317

Topical Index 340

Abbreviations

Ant	Antiphon
CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CF	Cistercian Fathers series
CS	Cistercian Studies series
CSQ	*Cistercian Studies Quarterly*
Ep	Epistola, letter
H, HH	Homilia, homily, homilies
Hesbert	René-Jean Hesbert. *Antiphonale Missarum Sextuplex*. Brussels and Paris: Vromant et Cie, 1935.
LXX	The Greek Septuagint version
PL	Patrologia Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne
Pref	Preface
Pref Mass	Preface to the Mass
Prol	Prologue
RB	*Regula sancti Benedicti; Regula Monachorum*
Resp	Responsory

S, SS	Sermo, Sermones
Symb apost	*Symbolum apostolorum*
Tract	Tractatus, tract
Var	Old Latin version
Vita A	*Vita Aelredi*; Walter Daniel, *The Life of Aelred of Rievaulx and the Letter to Maurice*. Trans. Maurice Powicke. CF 57. 1950; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1994.
Vulg	Vulgate

Works of Aelred

Adv	Sermo in adventu Domini
Anima	*De anima*
Ep	Epistle to Gilbert Foliot
Iesu	*De Iesu puero duodenni*
Inst incl	*De institutione inclusarum*
Mira	*De quodam miraculum mirabili*
Oner	Homilia de oneribus
Orat past	*Oratio pastoralis*
Spec car	*Speculum caritatis*
Spir amic	*De spiritali amicitia*

Works of Other Writers

Alexander III

Ep Aet	Epistola *Aeterna et incommutabilis*

Antiphons (ed. Hesbert)

In ass	In assumptione Sanctae Mariae
In comm Confess	In communi Confessorum
In comm Dedic Eccl	In communi Dedicationis Ecclesiae
In comm Martyr et Confess	In communi Martyrum et Confessorum
In comm Virg	In communi Virginum
In nat Dom	In nativitate Domini
Pro defunct	Pro defunctis
5 HM	Feria V in cena Domini

Augustine

C acad	*Contra academicos*
C Adim	*Contra Adimantum Manichaeum*
C Faust Manich	*Contra Faustum Manichaeum*
Civ Dei	*De civitate Dei*
C Max Arrian	*Contra Maximinium Arrianum*
Conf	*Confessiones*
Div quaest	*De diversis quaestionibus*
Doct chr	*De doctrina Christiana*
Enchir	*Enchiridion*
Gen ad litt	*De Genesi ad litteram*

In ev Ioann	*In Evangelium Ioannis tractatus*
In Ps	*Enarrationes in Psalmos*
Trin	*De Trinitate*

Bede

In Cant	*In Cantica Canticorum*
In Gen	*In principium Genesis*

Benedict

RB	*Regula sancti Benedicti; Regula Monachorum*

Bernard

OS	Sermo in festivitate omnium sanctorum
SC	*Sermones super Cantica Canticorum*

Cassian

Conl	*Conlationes*

Cicero

De fini bon et mal	*De finibus bonorum et malorum*
Off	*De officiis*
Tusc	*Tusculanae disputationes*

Pseudo-Dionysius

Cael Hier	*De caelesti hierarchia*

Gregory the Great

Mo	*Moralia in Iob*
Eu	*Homeliae in Euangelia*
Hiez	*Homiliae in Ezechielem*
Reg past	*Regula pastoralis*

Hugh of St. Victor

Didasc	*Didascalicon*

Isidore

Etym	*Etymologiae*

Jerome

Ep	*Epistulae*
In Ez	*Homeliae in Ezechielem*
In Isa	*In Isaiam*
In Matt	*In Matthaeum*
In Naum	*In Naum prophetam*
In Zach	*In Zachariam prophetam*
Nom	*Interpretatio Hebraicorum nominum*

Leo the Great

Tract	*Tractatus*

Lucretius

Rer nat	*De rerum natura*

Origen

In Cant	*In Canticum Canticorum*
In Ex	*Homeliae in Exodum*
In Gen	*Homeliae in Genesin*

Responsories (ed. Hesbert)

In comm Apost	In communi Apostolorum
In comm Confess	In communi Confessorum
In comm Dedic Eccl	In communi Dedicationis Ecclesiae
In comm Martyr et Confess	In communi Martyrum et Confessorum
In Dom Quinq	Dominica in Quinquagesima
In nat Dom	In nativitate Domini

Virgil

Aen	*Aeneis*

Introduction to *Prophetic Burdens of Isaiah*[1]

Marsha L. Dutton

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . . What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:1-5, 14)

The thirty-one homilies on *The Prophetic Burdens of Isaiah,* an extended commentary on Isaiah chapters 13 through 16, are far and away the least read of the works of Aelred, a twelfth-century abbot of the Yorkshire Cistercian abbey of Rievaulx. To some extent their neglect reflects the fact that until recently they were only widely available in J.-P. Migne's Patrologia Latina, as *Sermones de oneribus*.[2] But in 2005 Gaetano Raciti's critical edition appeared in Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis,[3] and Pierre-Yves Emery's French translation was published in 2006.[4] The homilies now appear here in English for the first time in Lewis White's translation.

[1] I am grateful to Christopher Coski, Fr. Brendan Freeman, ocso, Br. Brian Kerns, ocso, Fr. Stephen Muller, ocso, Lewis White, and the monks of Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey for their contributions to my understanding of this work.

[2] Aelredi Rievallis Abbatis, *Sermones de Oneribus*, ed. J.-P. Migne, PL 195 (Paris, 1855), 361–500.

[3] *Homiliae de oneribus propheticis Isaiae*, ed. Gaetano Raciti, CCCM 2D (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005).

[4] *Homélies sur les fardeaux selon le prophète Isaïe,* trans. Pierre-Yves Emery, Pain de Cîteaux 25, 3rd series (Oka, Québec: Abbaye Notre-Dame-du-Lac, 2006).

The title of this translation, like Emery's, retains Raciti's use of *homilies*, but, unlike the French, it replaces Migne's title with the English version of Raciti's title: *Homilies on the Prophetic Burdens of Isaiah.* Aelred refers to the work in this way in his cover letter to Gilbert Foliot, bishop of London from 1163–1187 (Ep 6). His distinction between sermon and homily also comes from that letter, though unexplained: "to the sermon that was written previously . . . we have attached nineteen homilies on the burden of Babylon, three on the burden of the Philistines, and nine on the burden of Moab" (Ep 9).

These homilies are the most ambitious and challenging of Aelred's works. They are also puzzling, raising numerous questions, such as, Why is this work a series of homilies rather than a unified treatise? Is its date significant? Who is its intended audience? Why did Aelred ask Gilbert Foliot, bishop of London, to evaluate his work?

The complexity of the homilies raises problems of its own with its constant shifting of the signification of words and images. White argues that such ambivalence is essential to their meaning, that as human life and experience are inherently equivocal, these homilies directly confront that equivocality: "Far from being a symptom of confusion, Aelred's ambivalence provides a glimpse into his worldview. His bold reinterpretations . . . illustrate a world in which everything is confused and everyone is weighed down. *De Oneribus* is ambivalent because the world is ambivalent: any phenomenon can lead either to redemption or perdition."[5]

Because of the multiple meanings that Aelred assigns to words and images over the course of his commentary, reading the homilies requires particular effort. In explaining *Babylon*, for example, the subject of well over half of the thirty-one homilies, he ranges from the relatively straightforward "confusion" (H 1.17) to "the world as Christ found it" (H 3.9) to much greater complexity with "that world that is always impure, the world that *dwells in wickedness,* the world for which the one who overcame the world does not pray, the world from which those who conquer the world are chosen to greater obscurity" (H 13.2). Not surprisingly, then, the dark confusion represented by

[5] Lewis White, "*Bifarie itaque potest legi:* Ambivalent Exegesis in Aelred of Rievaulx's *De Oneribus*," CSQ 42, no. 3 (2007): 299–327; rept. CSQ 52, no. 3 (2017): 395–423, here 395–96.

Babylon seems tacitly to govern the work. White warns of the burden the constant shifting meanings place on its readers: "Any attempt to understand *De oneribus* in its integrity . . . must confront its brash ambivalence by investing Scriptural images with contradictory referents."[6]

At the same time, Aelred is clear about the spiritual obligation to emerge from confusion. Early on he points to the value of instruction in aiding humans to return to their "original form . . . when he who formed us reforms us" and defines that form as wisdom (H 1.3). He also makes it clear that he is undertaking the responsibility of providing that instruction. Any reader of these homilies must thus remain alert to the way their equivocalities extend outward from terminology to subject matter to textual interpretation to questions of audience and purpose, because Aelred intends his work to lead the audience not just to acquaintance with Isaiah but to wisdom. He insists on the importance of his work's explication of Isaiah when he writes, "This holy prophet is so deep in meaning, so lofty in mysteries, so clear sighted in foretelling future events, so delightful in moral instruction . . . that at times it seems as though he were carried to heaven itself to lay bare the secrets of divine wisdom" (H 1.8).

Aelred's Life

Aelred was born in 1110 to a family embedded in the church of England's north country. Nothing is known of his female ancestors except that they were the wives and mothers of priests at a time when such families were usual and valued. The names and occupations of several of his paternal predecessors, however, are well documented. His father, Eilaf, and paternal grandfather—also Eilaf—were both priests of the church of St. Andrew in Hexham. His grandfather had previously been sacristan of the cathedral of Durham until in 1083 William of Saint-Calais, the new Norman bishop of Durham, expelled the married priests of the cathedral chapter; only the one widowed priest stayed behind. The elder Eilaf's father, Alfred son of Westou,

[6] White, "*Bifarie itaque potest legi*," 395.

had also been a priest at Durham, with responsibility for the shrine of Saint Cuthbert, and he is credited with having brought the bones of Bede there.[7] Earlier yet, a member of the family had reportedly been among the Lindisfarne priests who carried Cuthbert's body in flight from the Viking invaders who ravaged England's coast.[8]

This genealogy explains a great deal about Aelred's life. Above all, faith in God and service to God were an old family tradition. But Aelred must also have grown up on stories showing that even the most protected and apparently secure of lives are vulnerable to sudden overturning, with either terroristic raids or new ecclesiastical policies coming to the same thing in the end: expulsion from home, exile, and search for refuge, followed by new beginnings. Safety, Aelred learned early, is always fragile; here there is no true city.

Before Aelred was born, Gregorian reform had struck down another of the family's certainties: that priests' sons could become priests as well. After the church had repeatedly and unsuccessfully endeavored to end clerical marriage, in 1093 the policies of Pope Gregory VII won out when the synod of Melfi ruled that sons of priests could only be admitted to holy orders if they first took vows of celibacy as monks or canons.[9] For Aelred and his brothers Samuel and Æthelwold, like other sons of priests around the Christian world, this decision required

[7] See *De Sanctis Ecclesie Haugustaldensis et Eorum Miraculis,* in *Aelredi Rievallensis: Opera Historica et Hagiographica,* ed. Domenico Pezzini, CCCM 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 75–110; Aelred of Rievaulx, "The Saints of the Church of Hexham and their Miracles," in *Lives of the Northern Saints,* trans. Jane Patricia Freeland, ed. Marsha L. Dutton, CF 71 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2006), 65–107.

[8] James Raine, ed., *The Priory of Hexham,* 2 vols., Surtees Society 44 (Durham, UK: Andrews, 1864), 1:l–li. Raine includes a genealogical chart tracing Alfred, son of Westou, back to one of the Lindisfarne priests. See also Squire, *Aelred of Rievaulx*, 5.

[9] Johannes Dominicus Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum . . . collectio* (Florence, 1775), 20:724; Melfi, canon 14: "Presbyterorum filios a sacris altaris ministeriis removendos decernimus, nisi aut in coenobiis aut in canonicis religiose probati fuerint conversari." See Christopher Brooke, "Gregorian Reform in Action: Clerical Marriage in England: 1050–1200," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 12, no. 1 (1956): 1–21; Jennifer D. Thibodeaux, *The Manly Priest: Clerical Celibacy, Masculinity, and Reform in England and Normandy, 1066–1300* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

new vocational choices.[10] Aelred's brothers pursued secular lives, and it appears that Aelred considered doing the same, in his case as a member of the court of King David I of Scotland, where he apparently spent the years 1124 to 1134. But after this decade of discernment, he returned to the path of his male ancestors as a monk in the Cistercian monastery of Rievaulx, founded in 1132.

After entering Rievaulx, perhaps with help from King David and Archbishop Thurstan of York,[11] Aelred seems to have taken on significant responsibility in the young abbey. In 1142 his abbot, William, sent him to Rome along with three other prelates to protest the political appointment of the new archbishop of York, a relative of King Stephen. On their return—perhaps after a stop at the abbey of Clairvaux, where Bernard was abbot—Aelred became Rievaulx's novice master; soon afterward he was appointed the first abbot of Rievaulx's second daughter house, St. Laurence of Revesby. There he stayed for five years, until in 1147 being elected third abbot of Rievaulx itself.[12] Until his death in January 1167, he continued as abbot while Rievaulx grew in size and prominence; he himself, like many Cistercian abbots of the time, traveled widely, preached regularly, and wrote prolifically. When he died, Walter Daniel says, he was buried in the chapter house at Rievaulx, next to Abbot William.[13]

Aelred delivered most of his known sermons—182 in Gaetano Raciti's critical edition—as chapter talks for the year's liturgical feasts, the dates on which Cistercian abbots were required to preach to their communities.[14] He also wrote the thirty-one Isaian homilies

[10] Richard of Hexham, "History of the Church of Hexham," in Raine, ed., *The Priory of Hexham*, 2:1–62, here 55.

[11] See Marsha L. Dutton, "The Conversion and Vocation of Aelred of Rievaulx: A Historical Hypothesis," in *England in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Daniel Williams (London: Boydell, 1990), 31–49, here 42–47.

[12] See Walter Daniel, *The Life of Aelred of Rievaulx and the Letter to Maurice*, [chap.] 26, trans. Maurice Powicke, CF 57 (1950; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1994), 115 (hereafter Vita A).

[13] Vita A 60; CF 57:140.

[14] *Sermones I–XLVI, LXVII–LXXXIV, LXXXV–CLXXXII*, ed. Gaetano Raciti, CCCM 2A, B, C (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989, 2001, 2012). Peter Jackson has identified a sermon as the one preached by Aelred at the translation of the relics of King Edward the Confessor in 1163: "*In translacione sancti Edwardi confessoris*: The Lost

and thirteen treatises, six devoted to monastic and spiritual subjects, three about the lives and miracles of English saints, and four concerning historical and political topics, three of which he addressed to King Henry II (r. 1154–1189).[15] By the end of 2017 all of Aelred's treatises and sermons had been published in critical editions through Brepols Publishers' Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis series; all have also appeared or are forthcoming in French and English translations, and many have been translated into Dutch, Italian, and Spanish.[16]

It is easy to assume that English clergy in these centuries were sheltered from the rough and tumble of the world that surrounded them, but Aelred's family history dispels that image. It also, of course, helps to explain the activity that characterized Aelred's life and writing and perhaps led, toward the end of his life, to his authorship of these homilies, filled with scenes of threatened apocalypse but permeated with promises of God's forgiveness, protection, and blessing to those who repent of their sin, seek God in faith, hope, and love, and look toward God's light.

The Prophetic Homilies

Manuscript and Editorial History

The original manuscript of Aelred's homilies apparently no longer exists, but according to Walter Daniel, Aelred wrote it "with his own hand" (*manu sua scribendo consummauit*).[17] Aelred seems to confirm that claim when he says toward the end of the introductory Epistle to Foliot, "I have written thirty-one homilies [*cum XXXI homelias stilo*

Sermon by Aelred of Rievaulx Found?" ed. Peter Jackson, trans. Tom License, CSQ 40, no. 1 (2005): 46–83. On the sermons, see n. 51 below.

[15] Two of these were written in 1153–1154, before Henry of Anjou became king; a third dates to 1161–1163.

[16] See Pierre-André Burton, "Bibliotheca aelrediana secunda supplementa," in *A Companion to Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167),* ed. Marsha L. Dutton (Leuven: Brill, 2017), 295–324. For an overview of Aelred's works, see my chapter in the same book, "Aelred of Rievaulx: Abbot, Teacher, and Author," 17–47, here 35–43.

[17] Vita A 32; CF 57:121.

tradidissem]," and at the end of the final homily, "I now lay down my pen [*stilum suspendo*]" (H 31.26). Raciti cautiously argues on the basis of the surviving manuscripts that the homilies were written in under a year and a half, perhaps between spring 1163 and before mid-1164. He bases the *terminus a quo* on the assumption that the first meeting between Aelred and Foliot took place after Foliot ascended the episcopal throne in March 1163, and the *terminus ad quem* depends on the April 1164 death of the antipope Victor IV, as Aelred seems to indicate in the twenty-third homily that as he wrote the papal contest between Victor and Alexander III was still underway.[18]

The epistle that begins the work indicates that Aelred sent the autograph manuscript to Foliot, but he probably first arranged for two copies to be made, as Raciti speculates that the two best surviving twelfth-century manuscripts, one from Clairvaux, derive from it.[19] Nineteen essentially complete manuscripts of the work survive, all but one from the twelfth or thirteenth centuries. Another eleven manuscripts containing partial versions or fragments of the work also survive from the thirteenth through the sixteenth centuries.[20]

The *editio princeps* of the work, published by Richard Gibbon in 1616, depends on the somewhat abbreviated version of the homilies found in one twelfth-century manuscript, though supplemented with readings from another early manuscript. In 1662 Bertrand Tissier produced a new edition, using the two manuscripts known to Gibbon but for the most part accepting the abbreviated text, judging it the more authentic. As Raciti points out, though, Tissier "tacitly readjusted" that text by incorporating various readings from the more complete version, "borrowed in an eclectic fashion." Tissier's version appeared in 1855 in the Patrologia Latina.

[18] Gaetano Raciti, Introduction to Ælred of Rievaulx, *Homeliae de oneribus propheticis Isaiae*, CCCM 2D (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), V. Aelred could have begun writing before Foliot's consecration, and even if he wrote homily 23 before learning of Victor's death, the fact that another eight homilies follow it means that the total time of writing may well have taken longer than Raciti calculates.

[19] Raciti, Introduction, VIII.

[20] This survey of the manuscript and editorial history comes from Raciti, Introduction, VII–XV.

The shorter text was regarded as Aelred's original version until in 1957 Charles Dumont, at work on a critical edition of the homilies that never appeared, reported that he had examined sixteen manuscripts of the work. Of these only two, from the thirteenth century, contained the shorter version, while the longer text was present in six twelfth-century manuscripts, four of English provenance and one probably from Rievaulx's daughter house of Wardon. Three thirteenth-century manuscripts with Cistercian provenance also contained the longer version. From this evidence Dumont concluded that the longer version must have been Aelred's original: "the conformity of the manuscripts from the Order is thus frankly in favor of the longer reading. . . . As for the short reading, it seems that we are in the presence of an abbreviation of the text . . . . That conviction rests not only on the majority of manuscripts (14 against 2), but also on their age and their origin."[21]

Aelred's Sources

(1) The principal source for Aelred's homilies is Isaiah 13 through 24, immediately following the familiar passages on the Peaceable Kingdom and the prophecy of celebration and divine praise in chapters 11 and 12. In sharp contrast to these promises of peace, Isaiah devotes the next nine chapters to proclaiming the devastation to come upon Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Assyria, Damascus, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, and Tyre, as well as the destruction of Jerusalem herself, and finally judgment upon the entire earth:

> Listen, a tumult on the mountains as of a great multitude!
> Listen, an uproar of kingdoms, of nations gathering together!
> The Lord of hosts is mustering an army for battle.
> They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens,
> The Lord and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole earth.

[21] Charles Dumont, "Autour des Sermons 'De Oneribus' d'Ælred de Rievaulx," *Collectanea Cisterciensia* 19 (1957): 114–21, here 116–17 [my translation]; White, "*Bifarie itaque potest legi*," 398.

> Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty! . . .
> See, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,
> To make the earth a desolation, and to destroy its sinners from it. . . .
> I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity;
> I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant and lay low the insolence of tyrants. (Isa 13:4-6, 9, 11)

Isaiah's visions offer little hope of rescue for the people of the nations that have wreaked violence upon Israel and Judah. Of Babylon he declares, "I will blot out all remembrance of Babylon and destroy all her people, including the offspring she produces" (Isa 14:22), and of the Moabites he promises only that "Moab's splendor will disappear, along with all her many people; there will be just a few insignificant survivors left" (Isa 16:14).

Aelred is explicit from the beginning about his focus on these prophecies, and his reference to Isaiah's work in the epistle to Foliot anticipates the emphasis he puts on it as prophetic. In the first homily he explains his general pedagogical purpose: "I will now take up the book of Isaiah to examine a small portion of it with you. Although you may be quite familiar with it from the commentaries of the saints, I think it is highly useful for us to repeat what they said, if not differently, at least in another fashion" (H 1.7). Later, addressing Jesus, he again links himself and his project to Isaiah: "You who inspired holy Isaiah to write, inspire me too, I beg you, to understand what he wrote" (H 1.25). He devotes the second homily to the nature of prophecy, determining that Isaiah's visions were prophetic because received through intellectual vision, "by which the mind, transcending all matter and all physical images and likenesses, rests in the very light of Truth" (H 2.14). He concludes, "only the intellectual vision makes someone a prophet . . . that which is perceived in the Truth, in whom whatever will be is made, is both bright and certain" (H 2.24).

Isaiah's abrupt movement away from the beauty of peace promised through the prophet by God and to the damnation that awaits the sinful—the insolent, the arrogant—is of particular interest to

Aelred, who in historical works such as *Genealogy of the Kings of the English* repeatedly called attention to God's promise of peace and prosperity to England when her monarchs walk in God's way but in other works juxtaposed promises of blessing with the terrors that await the damned, as in the last section of *Formation of Recluses* and in Sermon 48.[22]

Aelred's Isaian homilies, however, offer much more hope to those who listen than do Isaiah's prophecies. Although Aelred too writes extensively of the misery that will come upon those who have turned away from God in their arrogance and love of the world, he also regularly interposes promises of blessing. In the tenth homily, for example, commenting on Isaiah's prophecy of destruction to Babylon (Isa 13:14), he moves rapidly back and forth from hope to destruction: "Beginning from *The voice of the crowd in the mountains,* [the prophecy] announced the peace that the conversion of the kings and nations bestowed upon the church. It went on to speak of the ruin or conversion of those who fell away by yielding to persecutions, or who disgraced themselves with vices during times of peace" (H 10.2). Later, after explaining Moab as "the wisdom of the world" (H 23.7) and "the wise people of the world who oppose the Gospel's teaching" (H 25.1), he says that the church by appropriating worldly wisdom, which he identifies with "dialectical argument," has accepted and transformed it: "Such argument, which had opposed the church, has begun to serve it in the wise who have converted" (H 25.4). And he ends the work as a whole with a vision of harmony.

Such changes reflect the three ways in which Aelred primarily departs from Isaiah. The first, of course, is that he presents the Isaian burdens from the perspective of explicitly Christian teaching, with God's love made known through Christ's coming and cross. He signals that shift in the manuscript by preceding his homilies with the sermon for Advent, which redefines the prophets' Day of the Lord from a day of darkness and damnation to the day of light in which mercy precedes and so redefines Judgment. As White points

[22] Aelred, *De institutione inclusarum* 33 (hereafter Inst incl); CCCM 1:678–79; CF 2:99; S 48; CCCM 2B:17–21; CF 80.

out, "thematically, Aelred interprets Isaiah in light of the Lord's coming, which means that implicit in any text describing destruction is the possibility of redemption."[23]

A second departure from Isaiah, directly related to the first, is Aelred's three-part exegesis of Isaiah's prophecies of devastation. Aelred repeatedly explains to his audience how to respond morally to Isaiah's warnings by replacing pride with humility or vice with virtue, often going on to provide the allegorical meaning of a passage and interpreting Isaiah's threats to the nations as relating to the soul of the Christian. He does not, however, apply each of these meanings to each verse, and indeed different homilies present different exegetical levels, with the moral interpretation most often divided from the literal in different homilies and signaled explicitly in the work's Table of Contents present in the manuscripts. Additionally, as White notes, the literal and the allegorical readings tend to coalesce in the homilies, because Aelred understands Isaiah to be consciously writing of the incarnation and the early church, with his visions expressed in figurative language but pointing to literal fulfillment in the future, as Aelred demonstrates: "There, this same Isaiah, gazing upon the incarnation of the Word, spoke of what had not happened yet as if it had, saying, *A little one was born to us, a son was given to us* [Isa 46:10]. There too, looking on his passion, he said, *We saw him, and there was no beauty* [Is 53:2]" (H 17.11).[24]

Aelred is often explicit about his movement from one level to another and about his allegorical rephrasing of Isaiah's language even while insisting on its literal truth. In the fifteenth homily he writes, "Let us break open the heavenly storehouses that holy Isaiah hid under the husk of parables, since the Holy Spirit has poured forth the light of truth . . . . But because we gave an allegorical interpretation in our last sermon to you concerning these matters, let us continue with the moral reading of this same part" (H 15.3). In his commentary on the burden of the Philistines, he explains Isaiah's reference to the death of Ahaz (Isa 14:28) as allegorically referring to the devil and to the life of Ahaz as the devil's kingdom (H 20.4); he moves back and forth from historical to allegorical

[23] White, "*Bifarie itaque potest legi*," 398.

[24] Personal communication.

meaning throughout that homily. At the beginning of the next homily he again calls attention to a change in exegetical level: "So, brothers, descending from the allegorical mountains to the moral plains [*allegoricis montibus ad plana tropologica*], let us return to the beginning of the burden itself. . . . Take a look at what happens, dear brothers, when the virtues naturally take the place of uprooted vices. The more progress one makes, the more pride, now closer to the virtues than to the vices, grows bitterly strong" (H 21.1–2).[25]

A third Aelredian departure that is inseparable from the others is the interpretive mode most characteristic of these homilies, an almost infinite multiplication of meanings. Burton has referred to this pattern as a "lecture aux éclats" or "splintered reading," recalling the fragmentation that results from an explosion, visible in the cloud of debris that arises from the detonation of a building.[26] The splintering is partially accomplished by Aelred's fluctuating redefinitions of words with consequent application to new situations. This approach represents the equivocal and ever-shifting nature of reality, which both causes and results from the human inability since the Fall to see truth, something that Aelred emphasizes toward the end of the homilies (H 22.10).[27]

The pattern of verbal and hence substantive differentiation begins immediately in the first homily and expands with the incrementally growing meaning of the work's two core terms, *burden* (*onus)* and *Babylon*. Of *burden* Aelred writes, "There is a burden that weighs down, and a burden that crushes. Sickness weighs down; iniquity crushes. Temptation weighs down; damnation crushes" (H 1.12). After defining *Babylon* as "confusion," Aelred explains that it "represents the world. The world is surely the place where all things are

[25] Aelred uses the same three-part exegetical pattern in *Iesu puero duodenni,* again following Gregory in placing the allegorical level before the moral, unlike, e.g., Cassian.

[26] Burton, *Aelred de Rievaulx*, 554–55. See also Pierre-André Burton, "Une lecture 'aux éclats' du Cantique des cantiques. Les enjeux de l'herméneutique biblique selon saint Bernard. Un commentaire du *Sermon 23 sur le Cantique*," *Cîteaux* 57 (2006): 165–241.

[27] See, e.g., *Speculum caritatis* (hereafter Spec car) 1.3.9; CCCM 1:16; CF 17:91–92; *De Anima* (hereafter Anima) 1.32, 36; CCCM 1:694, 695; CF 22:50, 52–53; S 49.5; CCCM 2B:23; CF 80.

confused. Here the good live with the wicked, the chosen with the condemned" (H 1.17). He then divides the condemned into three groups—those still alive and participating in the Christian community, those alive but already separated from the community, and the third already dead and "handed over to eternal punishment" (H 1.18, 19). He similarly groups the chosen into three groups: those not yet called (Jews or pagans), those called but not yet justified (Christian sinners), and saints, those already justified but not yet glorified (H 1.18, 19). So the splintering progresses.

Both White and Elias Dietz have used the word *ambivalence* to reflect the postlapsarian reality that characterizes Aelred's homilies. White explains this pattern of multiplying possibilities as not merely a rhetorical device but in many ways the substantive core of the homilies, mirroring both the confusion of the world and the multiple ways in which God acts in the world to warn, to test, to punish, and to reward. And Dietz has shown the complexity of meaning that it reveals to be key to all of Aelred's works, noting that "Aelred is always keenly aware of the multiplicity of possible meanings and of the numerous consequences that flow from any choice or act."[28]

While Aelred's thirty-one homilies closely follow Isaiah 13–16 in articulating the destruction that will come upon those who turn away from God in arrogance and disbelief, they are also profoundly informed by a Christian understanding of the world as complex rather than simple, infused with moral and spiritual meaning and informed by an ever-increasing multiplicity of possibilities demonstrating God's power and purpose. By juxtaposing these possibilities, he allows them to illuminate one another: "Holy Isaiah . . . also includes a word concerning the happiness of those whom this sinking burdens not for ruin, but for salvation. And everywhere it is clear that the power is God's, and yours, Lord, mercy; *because you render to all according to their works,* dividing *day from night, light from darkness.* Thus the darkness appears even thicker when compared to the light, and the light shines more abundantly by the gathering darkness" (H 1.13).

[28] White, "*Bifarie itaque potest legi*," 395; Elias Dietz, "Ambivalence Well Considered," CSQ 47, no. 1 (2012): 71–85, here 72; Burton, *Aelred de Rievaulx,* 566–67.

(2) A second principal source for Aelred's work is three books of Jerome's eighteen-book *Commentary on Isaiah*, one of his seventeen commentaries on the Hebrew prophets written between 392 and 416.[29] In 397, reportedly at the request of Bishop Amabilis in Gaul,[30] Jerome commented on Isaiah's eleven visions of doom to the foreign nations, at the literal or historical level in the first book, then in the second and third books moving into the moral and anagogical levels. When in 408–410 he expanded his work into a three-part exegesis of all of Isaiah, he inserted the earlier portion, on Isaiah 13 through 23, unchanged, as books five, six, and seven.

At the beginning of the fifth book Jerome explains his interpretive plan: "I will attach the beginning of the sixth book in accordance with tropology, and . . . I will pursue the summit of the spiritual understanding [*spiritalis intelligentiae*]."[31] A little later he develops this image: "I will briefly annotate what I have learned, laying down the foundations of the Scriptures. For the rest . . . we must build the spiritual edifice upon these foundations, in order to point to the perfect adornment of the church by setting in place a roof."[32] He expands his plan in book 6: "Thus, by the same effort by which the fifth book summarized history, the sixth and seventh will touch upon anagogy."[33]

Early in his fifth book Jerome articulates his understanding of Isaiah's prophecies in characteristically lexical terms, focusing on

[29] *Commentaire de Jérôme sur le prophète Isaïe,* I–IV, V–VII, ed. R. Gyson et al., Vetus Latina: Aus der Geschichte der lateinischen Bibel 23, 27 (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1993–1994), 24 (cited as In Isa); Jerome, *Commentariorum in Isaiam Prophetam Libri Duodeviginti,* PL 24. For the dates of Jerome's biblical commentaries see *St. Jerome: Commentary on Isaiah,* trans. Thomas P. Scheck, Ancient Christian Writers no. 68 (New York and Mahwah, NJ: The Newman Press, 2015), 20. Scheck's Introduction is my source for what follows.

[30] William Henry Fremantle reports of Hereclius, "a deacon of Pannonia at the end of the 4th century," that "his bishop, Amabilis, after urging Jerome many times by letters to interpret for him the visions of Isaiah, and receiving no reply, enforced his request by the personal agency of Heraclius" ("Hereclius [23]," in *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines,* ed. William Smith and Henry Wace, vol. 2 [London: John Murray, 1880], 904).

[31] Jerome, In Isa 5.1; Scheck, *St. Jerome*, 226.

[32] Jerome, In Isa 5.2; Scheck, *St. Jerome,* 227.

[33] Jerome, In Isa 6.1; Scheck, *St. Jerome,* 292.

the Hebrew word *messa* (משא) from Isaiah 13:1 and objecting to the Septuagint's translation: "The Hebrew word *messa* [משא] can be understood either as a 'burden' or a 'weight' (*onus*). And everywhere the word is used, what follows is full of threats. I marvel, then, that the translators of the LXX wanted to render 'vision' [ορασις] for such a wretched condition."[34] He continues with Isaiah's prophecies of God's punishment to the nations, to be followed by eternal damnation.

Like Isaiah, Jerome occasionally writes of God's rescuing his people, but whereas Isaiah promised that to Israel, Jerome considers it either in purely allegorical terms or with specific reference to Christians. So he allegorizes Isaiah 14:1-4, itself a promise of redemption to Israel: "Now here is the progression: after Babylon has been deserted forever . . . *the Lord will have mercy upon Jacob,* namely upon the one who throws down his vices, *and he will choose Israel,* the one who sees God with his mind."[35] When commenting on Isaiah 14:24-25, in which God promises to crush the Assyrian and remove his yoke from his people, he interprets the beneficiaries of the promise as Christians: "when all the enemies will have been placed under Christ's feet, so that the last death is destroyed, then the very heavy yoke of the *Assyrian* will be *taken away from* the saints. . . . Thus, with the yoke of the Assyrians removed, they see the resting place, that it is good, and the land, that it is very abundant, and they place their necks under Christ's yoke to labor, and they become farmers of men."[36]

Jerome's commentary is useful to Aelred in presenting a Christian perspective on Isaiah rather than a Jewish one, though Jerome more commonly writes of Christ in terms of virtue or as Lord or Judge rather than as an agent of mercy. When he writes of God's sparing

[34] *Verbum Hebraicum messa uel onus uel pondus intellegi potest. Et ubicumque praepositum fuerit, minarum plena sunt quae dicuntur. Vnde miror LXX translatores in re tristi uoluisse ponere uisionem* (Jerome, In Isa, 160). Jerome translates *messa* as "burden" in his Vulgate translation of Isaiah, retained by some English Bibles (e.g., the King James and the Douay Rheims), but many other English Bibles (e.g., the New Revised Standard Version and the New American Bible) use either *prophecy* or *oracle*.

[35] Jerome, In Isa 6.21; Scheck, *St. Jerome,* 305.

[36] Jerome, In Isa 6.22; Scheck, *St. Jerome*, 318.

Zion, he explains, "*Because the Lord founded* it, and he is its foundation, but he founded it upon the foundation of prudence, justice, strength, and moderation, by which names Christ is understood."[37]

But Aelred differs from Jerome in offering much more opportunity for individual repentance and salvation. As White notes, "For Jerome, Babylon is simply the land of wickedness. The prophecies against Babylon unambiguously foretell universal doom . . . Without exception, Babylon's inhabitants will be burdened with torment on the Day of the Lord."[38] Thus while Jerome explains that the Moabites will suffer for only three years, Aelred allegorizes the three years as both the three ages of the church ("the times of calling, of trial, and of consolation") and the three stages of spiritual progress, conversion, purgation, and contemplation (H 31.16, 19), both of which systems end in blessing. Further, toward the end of the homilies Aelred depicts the daughters of Moab as ready for spiritual progress, able to emerge from the darkness of sin, to climb toward the spiritual marriage, and to seek the light of God. In his final homily he offers their reconciliation, relying now on the passage from Isaiah 16:11 but enlarged to refer to God and the church. Jerome takes Isaiah's passage "Therefore my heart will sound like a harp for Moab" as referring to the time "when the false joy has been changed into mourning and tears. . . . Moab . . . will try to enter into the sanctuaries of the church to make them his own, and to pray and implore, but he will not prevail."[39] But Aelred uses the passage precisely to speak to the various voices of the church singing in harmony through the cross (H 31). As White comments, however, Aelred is not consistently more encouraging than Jerome, in some places countering Jerome's positive outlook with cautious ambivalence.[40]

Although Aelred never names Jerome's commentary, so deviating from his usual practice of frequently citing his sources, he relies heavily on it. About ten times he uses passages from Jerome's fifth book, through the end of his discussion of Moab (In Isa 5.75), and around

[37] Jerome, In Isa 6.35; Scheck, *St. Jerome*, 322.
[38] White, "*Bifarie itaque potest legi*," 400.
[39] Jerome, In Isa 6.43; Scheck, *St. Jerome,* 332.
[40] White, *"Bifarie itaque potest legi,"* 405.

175 times from the sixth book, which covers only the first three burdens and which is thus coterminous with Aelred's own homilies.

(3) Aelred incorporates numerous readings from other patristic sources; Raciti lists fifteen in his edition, ranging from Origen through Ps-Dionysius through the Venerable Bede, as well as medieval authors such as Bernard of Clairvaux. He also catalogues liturgical citations and reminiscences of Aelred's other works.[41] Prominent among the patristic sources, not surprisingly, are Augustine (sixteen works), Gregory the Great (four), and Jerome (seven besides the *Commentary on Isaiah*). Of Augustine's works Aelred most frequently cites *On Genesis according to the Letter,* predominantly in the second homily, where he cites but expands Augustine's taxonomy of visions.[42]

Although Raciti has noted only seven passages in the homilies from Augustine's *City of God,* its thematic influence is obvious in the numerous homilies concerned with the historical development of the church, which Burton and Philippe Molac have explained as fundamentally concerned with the theology of history. Most obviously, Isaiah's juxtaposition of the peace promised to Israel with the damnation due the nations recalls Augustine's distinction between the City of God and the City of Man by distinguishing the joint presence in this world of the blessed and the damned. Aelred makes much the same point in his eleventh homily: "O brothers, there are two peoples, two nations, and two kingdoms: the good and the wicked, the wise and the foolish, the chosen and the condemned. But at the time in which all things are mingled together and confused, one cannot detect to which nation or people any given person belongs. This is because many people are good insofar as outward appearance goes but are wicked in the depths of their conscience" (H 11.10). Similarly Aelred seems to echo Augustine in identifying Nero as a type of both the Antichrist and of the devil, both of whom

[41] Raciti, *Homeliae de oneribus*, 362–86.

[42] Guglielmo Scannerini explains both Aelred's treatment of Augustine's visionary types and his inclusion of the visionary experience of the Gilbertine nun in H 2 as indicating "a pastoral sensibility" in its effort to make the subject of the homily accessible ("Mystica o misticismo? Un approcio patristico ad Aelredo di Rievaulx, *De oneribus* S. *2 [3],*" *Analecta cisterciensia* 54, no. 1–2 [2002]: 134–85, here 165).

appear throughout: "The Romans' emperor at that time, the wicked Nero, is fittingly compared to a poisonous basilisk" (H 20.17).[43]

Of Gregory's works, Aelred most often relies on the lengthy *Moralia in Iob,* whose thematic and methodological echoes are particularly pervasive in these homilies. Time and again Gregory returns to the explanation of human suffering as sent by God both to punish the wicked and to give them a chance to reform, and to warn good people of the suffering that will ensue if they abandon God, or to give them pain now so that it will not await them in the life to come: "[Almighty God] liberally anticipates many of those who perpetrate unlawful and perverse actions and converts them to the performance of holy deeds, and other people who are dedicated to upright behavior he corrects by means of a trial that intervenes. By this means he afflicts those who please him as though he were not pleased."[44]

Gregory's three-part exegetical method in the *Moralia*—interpreting passages in Job at literal, allegorical, and moral levels—also influenced Aelred's work. Using Jerome's imagery, Gregory explains his use of the method in a letter to Bishop Leander of Seville:

> We must make it clear that some passages are subjected only to a brief literal commentary and others to a thorough allegorical interpretation in order to bring out the typical sense; others are discussed using only the tools of allegory to make clear the moral sense, and others again are interpreted using all these means together, the three senses that we diligently search out. First and foremost we base ourselves on the sacred history, then we elevate the mind's construction into an edifice of faith through the typical meaning, and finally we adorn the building with exterior color through the charm of moral action.[45]

[43] See further Philippe Molac, "Théologie de l'histoire chez Aelred d'après les sermons *De oneribus*," in Intentio Cordis: *Temps, histoire, mémoire chez Aelred de Rievaulx. Collectanea Cisterciensia* 73 (2011): 86–98, here 91.

[44] Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Iob* 24.XVIII.14 (hereafter Mo); ed. Marcus Adriaen, CCCM 43, 43A, 43B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979); *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job,* trans. Brian Kerns, 6 vols., CS 249, 257, 258, 259 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2014–2017) (vols. 5–6 forthcoming 2019–2020).

[45] Gregory, Letter to Leander 3, in Mo 1:4; *Moral Reflections on Job*, 1:51. A little earlier in the letter Gregory explains the allegorical sense as "the higher sense leading to contemplation."

Like Aelred, Gregory offers differing meanings for most images and scriptural passages. For example, at the historical level he explains Job as a good man suffering unearned pain, but at the allegorical level he presents him as Christ, or the church, as in *Moralia* 6.I.1. Aelred's use of this method allows him to complicate his commentary on Isaiah's prophetic message, showing each threat as able to lead either to repentance or to recalcitrance, and so to salvation as well as damnation.

(4) Finally, Aelred's deep familiarity with Scripture and the liturgy of the church and monastery informs these homilies in both language and argument. Repeatedly he silently incorporates liturgical antiphons and responses into the text. The prophetic books and the Psalms are particularly full of passages in which God condemns his ungrateful people, promising for example that the day of the Lord will be a day of darkness not light (Amos 5:18) and declaring his ability to turn plowshares into swords and rivers into deserts (Joel 3:10; Ps 106:33). In the New Testament as well God declares that he will cast sinners into outer darkness (e.g., Matt 8:12). Both the Old and New Testaments also tell of God's promise to rescue and save his people, as he remembers that his creatures are his people and the sheep of his pasture: "For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passes away and does not come again" (Ps 77:39).[46]

Aelred's Audience

Most scholars have assumed with good reason that the intended audience of this work is the monks of Rievaulx. Aelred says in the letter to Foliot that he wrote the homilies as a response to his monks' request; in the first homily he explains his rhetorical choices as a preacher and teacher to his community, he regularly ends homilies by acknowledging his listeners' need for rest, and he concludes his final homily by saying that while waiting for a response from Foliot, "we will attempt something else that seems either useful or pleasing for your instruction or for the instruction of others" (H 31.26). He

[46] Marginal notes in the translation below indicate Aelred's incorporation of scriptural passages and their liturgical use.

often says that both he and his community need a break or promises to return to the same topic on the next day. Even the homiletic form of the work indicates his desire that it be understood as personal, addressed to those whom he hopes to inspire and guide. Of particular interest in that regard in terms of both audience and rhetorical intention is a passage in the first homily:

> Because many of you grow bored with the same sermon and the same reading repeated again and again, we need to renew what seems old and familiar, either by adding certain ideas or at least by changing the words. In this way we can rouse the attentiveness that we seek and call the heart back from its useless and vain digressions to what is useful. So the mind that in its boredom had fled the familiar can, after being renewed by the sweetness of a reading or sermon, beneficially return to that from which it had been unconsciously distracted. (H 1.6)

Later Aelred speaks more personally to his community: "I confess, dear brothers, that things have not worked out as I had thought. For it seemed to me that we could deal with the mysteries of our discourse's burdens in a few sermons. But this first burden, which we still have in our hands, has already detained us for many days" (H 11.1). One of the most expansive of such explanations comes at the end of a homily, apparently as he prepares to depart on a journey, perhaps to attend the annual Cistercian general chapter at Cîteaux:

> We have explained these things briefly, because the mind has already hastened to other things that must be said. For it is time to take a journey that the Order's law demands of us, to which desire rouses us and affection invites us. But how will I be separated for such a long time from my heart's desire [*a uisceribus meis*]? I will be separated, I say, *in the body*, but not *in the spirit*. And I know that I will be as present in affection and spirit as I am absent in body. . . .
>
> But think, beloved, of what was written of the Lord Jesus just when his physical presence was about to be taken from his disciples: *Eating with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem.* We have already gotten up from the table after our sweet banquet, and in a little while we will depart. Following his example, we command you, we beseech you, we remind you not to leave Jerusalem.

> For Jerusalem means peace. We commend peace to you, we command peace among you. May Christ *himself*, who *is our peace*, making *both into one*, keep you in the unity of *spirit* and *in the bond of peace.* I commit you to his protection and consolation under the wings of the Holy Spirit. May he restore you to me and me to you in peace and safety. (H 14.17–19)

The following homily, implicitly preached after Aelred's return from his journey overseas, begins with his joy at finding the community living in that peace.

So it is not surprising that most scholars consider the work to be monastic teaching. Thomas Renna writes that its goal is to inculcate monastic culture: "Aelred gave his monks a lesson in how to read the scriptures . . . . actually a concealed lecture in the school of the cloister."[47] Molac similarly defines it as intended for monks: "Aelred thus in the first place aims to catechize his monks in the sense of the birth of Christ in the soul."[48] And Burton seems to take it for granted that Aelred's primary audience is his community, e.g., "Aelred applies to the spiritual exegesis of the Scriptures that same sharp pastoral sense he demonstrated throughout his two abbacies and that . . . led him to push to great extremes his efforts to adapt to and satisfy the personal needs of each one of his brothers."[49]

But several aspects of the homilies resist this view. They are in the first place too long for such use, even if so defined only rhetorically. And as Raciti points out, they "are not the fruit of actual preaching, recorded on the fly by secretaries. . . . This biblical commentary in the form of homilies is thus essentially a written creation."[50] Moreover, they are not clearly sited within the liturgical year. Whereas Cistercian abbots were required to preach at the beginning of Advent, no expectation existed for a long series of

[47] Thomas Renna, "Aelred of Rievaulx and Isaiah," in *The Joy of Learning and the Love of God: Studies in Honor of Jean Leclercq,* ed. E. Rozanne Elder, CS 160 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 253–68, here 261.

[48] Molac, "Théologie de l'histoire," 91.

[49] Burton, *Aelred de Rievaulx,* 555.

[50] Raciti, Introduction, V.

sermons explicating Isaiah.[51] Finally, the concerns and tone of the homilies that address themes of pride, hypocrisy, love of the world, carnal sin, vice, apostasy, the fall of Satan, and even the tripartite history of the church seem peripheral to the needs of monks; however thematically integrated into the work as a whole, as individual units they seem unlikely to resonate meaningfully within the monastery. While it is true that manuscripts of Aelred's liturgical sermons contain some sermons, such as SS 47, 48, and 76, that resemble some of these homilies, they are there grouped with many that are explicitly pastoral.

The rhetorical method and voice of many of these Isaian homilies castigating the powerful in church and kingdom seem to point instead to a message that is not primarily monastic or pastoral but one closer to Isaiah's, proclaiming a theological and ethical message to an audience that needs to be shaken, challenged, confronted, driven either to stay on the right path or to return to it, with damnation the sure result of failure. As White has noted, Aelred's letter to Foliot "reads like a document intended for public consumption."[52] His words thus suggest an overlap between two possible audiences, the monks of Rievaulx and the public figures represented by Foliot, to whom Aelred sends the homilies. Aelred's constant writing since at least the 1150s to and for those men whose decisions governed Scotland and England had surely not diminished by the mid-1160s, especially given the public conflict not just between church and crown but within the church itself.[53]

In offering the Isaian homilies to Foliot, Aelred seems to imply that they, like his better-known historical treatises, are intended for a public audience. Some of them in fact make that reading almost irresistible, as when in one of his fiercest attacks on prelates, he attacks the powerful and the hypocritical:

[51] Danièle Choisselet and Placide Vernet, eds., *Les* Ecclesiastica Officia *Cisterciens du XII^ème^ siècle*, La Documentation Cistercienne 22 (Reiningue: Abbaye d'Œlenberg, 1989), 190. See Domenico Pezzini, "The Sermons of Aelred of Rievaulx," in *A Companion to Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167)*, ed. Marsha L. Dutton (Leuven: Brill, 2017), 73–97, here 74.

[52] White, "*Bifarie itaque potest legi*," 420.

[53] See Vita A 32; CF 57:121.

> This is also the case for those in Christ's church whom pleasures and wantonness deform, whom ambition crushes, to whom poverty is a burden and the Gospel an object of ridicule. . . . Because the church now reigns in faith, many of them publicly preach it, although they secretly disparage it. They argue in the schools as though they were in favor of faith, but they mock the same faith in the bedroom and in hidden nooks. They use their profession of faith to obtain a full pantry, a stuffed pocketbook, and privileged *greetings and the highest seats.* But when it comes to the perfuming room and chalices, to the bedrooms and *hidden disgraceful things*, they casually dismiss the catholic faith, they explain away the resurrection of the body as impossible, they mock the Last Judgment, and they excuse lust as a natural need. (H 10.5)

Some of these passages echo another theme found in Aelred's historical works, about the necessity of close cooperation between public power and the church, echoing the tenth-century Benedictine Reform's emphasis on cooperation between church and crown[54] and, in Aelred's *Genealogy of the Kings of the English* (1153–1154), the lengthy address of King Edgar (r. 959–975) to "the fathers of the churches and monasteries":

> I refrain from pointing out that their corona is not evident or their tonsure not appropriate, that the indecency of their clothing, the insolence of their bearing, and the filthiness of their speech express the madness of their inner being. What is more, the extent of their indifference at the divine offices is apparent when they scarcely deign to be present at the sacred Vigils, when they seem to gather at the holy solemnity of the Mass to fool around rather than to chant. . . . they wallow in reveling and drunkenness, in debauchery and licentiousness, so that the houses of clerics are reckoned brothels for prostitutes and gathering places for actors. There is gambling, dancing, and singing, and vigils drawn out to the middle of the night with frightful clamor.[55]

[54] See for a recent survey of this movement Jacob Riyeff, Introduction, in Saint Aethelwold of Winchester, *The Old English Rule of Saint Benedict with Related Old English Texts,* ed. Jacob Riyeff, CS 264 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2017), 1–26, here 4–11.

[55] *Genealogia Regum Anglorum* IX; CCCM 3:41; CF 56:98–99.

Even scholars who assume Aelred's primary audience here to be monks recognize the homilies' suitability for those in the world outside as well. Pezzini, for example, assumes a more extensive audience: "The addressee of the work is Aelred's monastic community. . . . But considering his great personal effort in composing it and his public dedication of the work to Gilbert Foliot, the potential audience must be far larger, as is well expressed by the word *Babylon*. . . . It is necessary to keep this large horizon in mind while reading Aelred's large frescoes of past and contemporary history. Although the main perspective is certainly monastic, the perspective goes well beyond that world."[56] Burton too interprets them as intended for audiences outside the cloister, to invite emulation of monastic life: "Like Bede Aelred urged secular and ecclesiastical leaders to adopt something of the spirituality of the cloister."[57] And Renna, in fact, sees such passages on the church as sufficiently disruptive to his explication of the work as designing a monastic moral journey that he calls attention to that disruption: "This historical scheme, appearing as it does at the conclusion of the final sermon (as if this were a major theme in the entire set of sermons), comes as something of a jolt."[58]

Scholars' indecision on this question reflects the fact that Aelred seems intentionally to leave his audience as well as his argument imprecisely defined. So in his homily bewailing the current decline in collaboration between kings and bishops, he cries out, "Woe to us who have fallen on these unhappy times in which the sun seems to have turned to darkness!" He then poses the question that he expects his audience to ask—and he refuses to answer it: "What darkness, you ask? I do not want to say, brothers, I do not want to say, lest I should seem to place *my mouth in heaven*" (H 10.9).[59]

It is not unusual for Aelred to employ the rhetorical strategy of raising questions that he either thinks his listeners want to ask or that he thinks they should ask, especially in his dialogical treatises. In such cases he tends to evade the question he himself has raised, either promising to come back to it later or responding with another

[56] Pezzini, "The Sermons," 95.

[57] Burton, *Aelred de Rievaulx*, 262.

[58] Renna, "Aelred of Rievaulx and Isaiah," 259.

[59] Raciti notes Aelred's allusion here to Ps 72:3-9: "For I envied the arrogant. . . . Their mouths lay claim to heaven."

question.[60] Here he employs the same evasive strategy, placing a question on the lips of those to whom he apparently speaks but then explicitly deflecting the question, explaining his refusal as intended to avoid arrogance but in fact calling extra attention to the question by his refusal. It seems likely that he avoids the question about the target of his attack not—or not solely—out of desire to avoid personal arrogance but out of self-protectiveness, as the tenth homily and some others come close to castigating powerful living figures.

But if Aelred intends the homilies that contain such passages not for the monks of Rievaulx but for public figures, then for whom? As the named recipient of the work Foliot is the first obvious candidate. Despite Aelred's warm words of greeting in the epistle, he might well have viewed Foliot's public animosity from at least as early as 1162 toward the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, as a matter of arrogance and resistance to lawful authority—as Becket certainly did. But scholars have not indicated that Foliot was corrupt, tyrannical, or heretical in his life or work, and even when criticizing his behavior with regard to Becket, they suggest no improbity in his life or episcopal role, the characteristics that Aelred most insistently attacks. The forcefulness of his condemnations in these passages seems out of proportion to what is known today about Foliot.

A more obvious Aelredian target in these homilies is Becket himself, on whom judgments are more widely mixed. After being Henry's close companion and then his chancellor between 1155 and 1162, when he became archbishop of Canterbury, Henry presumably anticipated a continuing close collaboration between them. But rather quickly Becket began to develop an understanding of his new office that drew him apart from Henry's political expectations, not only taking on habits of personal piety such as wearing a hair shirt underneath his vestments but also insisting on greater autonomy for the church in England and its authority over the lives of clerics. Soon a deep division had developed between crown and church and between Henry and Becket, and in 1164 Becket fled to France, taking refuge for two years in the Cistercian abbey of Pontigny.[61]

[60] See, e.g., *De spiritali amicitia* 1.69; CCCM 1:301; CF 5:69.

[61] Jean Truax examines the Becket affair and Becket's relationship with Cistercians in England and France, with particular attention to Aelred (*Aelred the Peacemaker,* CF 251 [Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2017], 194–222).

While discussing the political context within which Aelred wrote these homilies, Burton implies a similar reading of the passages dealing with the church:

> if, in April 1164, the storm had not yet broken, the sky was nevertheless darkening, and lightning was violently scorching the horizon. In January 1164, Thomas had gathered all his strength to resist the king's desire to force the English episcopate to sign the Constitutions of Clarendon, severely limiting the judicial power that ecclesiastical authorities had until then exercised. He had even, as a supreme insult, presented himself before the court flaunting his archiepiscopal crosier before him. Gilbert Foliot would reproach him for this: "If the king were to brandish his sword . . . as you now brandish yours, what hope can there be at making peace between you?"[62]

It is hard to believe that Aelred would not have had Becket in mind during at least some of the period while he was writing these homilies. His relationship, however tenuous, with both Foliot and Henry II during that critical period—at just the time of Becket's flight to France—may have led him to want to state his own position on the conflict, either as another spokesman for the English church or as a supporter of Henry and Foliot. Aelred's close attention to public affairs in England and his praise and decades-long support for King Henry were already clear from his historical works. These homilies may indicate a desire to speak his own piece on current affairs, now as a preacher and prophet rather than a historian.

The Three Parts of the Work

Raciti's edition of Aelred's homilies and White's translation both follow the three-part manuscript composition. After the commendatory letter to Bishop Gilbert Foliot comes an Advent sermon devoted to Isaiah 13–16, titled "Sermon on the Coming of the Lord: On the Eleven Burdens" (*Sermo in Adventu Domini: de undecim oneribus*),

[62] Burton, *Aelred de Rievaulx*, 538.

which Aelred says he delivered to his community and which led the community to ask him to speak at more length on the topic.[63] The thirty-one homilies follow.

Bishop Gilbert Foliot and the Epistle from Aelred

Foliot (ca. 1110–1187), to whom Aelred apparently sent the homilies, is best remembered today as the bishop of London who stood by Henry II during his conflict with Becket. That familiar identification of Foliot has two consequences: his name is much better known than that of other medieval bishops of London, and he is reduced in popular memory to a simple antagonist, with his own great gifts both personal and public forgotten. Most of those today who recognize his name are simply unaware of him as a man of religion, scholarship, and integrity, all of which may have led Aelred to select him as recipient and arbiter of his homilies.[64]

Scholars have generally praised Foliot's character and accomplishments. David Knowles, for example, called him, "the man of probity whom even a pope reverenced for his austerity of life, the mirror of religion and glory of the age, the luminary who shed a lustre even on the great name of Cluny."[65] A little later he expanded on this description:

> [his character] is that of an able, efficient, prudent, tactful, eminently respectable churchman, a man in high position in a graded, orderly

[63] Migne numbered this sermon 1 of 32 in his 1855 printing, creating an enduring problem for scholars wishing either to locate or cite a particular passage. In Raciti and the translation below, this Advent sermon is designated as Adv, with the *De oneribus* homilies numbered 1 through 31.

[64] This brief biographical sketch of Gilbert Foliot depends for the most part on David Knowles, *The Episcopal Colleagues of Archbishop Thomas Becket: Being the Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford in Hilary Term 1949* (Cambridge: University Press, 1951), 37–49; and "Foliot, Gilbert (c. 1110–1187)," *The Dictionary of National Biography, http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.library.ohio.edu/view/article/9792?docPos=1.* The DNB entry focuses largely on Foliot's support of King Henry in his conflict with Becket.

[65] Knowles, *Episcopal Colleagues*, 37–38.

> society, obeying and enforcing its laws with an equitable recognition of the tribes without the law—barons, it might be, and kings. He would seem to have taken particular pains to be on good terms with his colleagues; letters of recommendation and support are numerous . . . . Foliot had the reputation of a man of letters and of an ascetic; he was a monk, and therefore had learned to obey and be obeyed . . . . He had been for many years a religious superior, and in outward behaviour and mental characteristics he bore the stamp of a dignified and cultured life.[66]

Foliot came from an English family with notable ecclesiastical ties. His maternal uncle, Robert de Chesney, was the bishop of Lincoln (1148–1166), and another uncle was a monk of Gloucester Abbey before becoming abbot of Evesham Abbey. Although Foliot's paternal line is uncertain, his father is thought to have been Robert Foliot I, who served as steward to David of Scotland before David became king, the same role that Aelred himself later filled in David's reign.[67] After becoming a monk of Cluny, the younger Foliot became one of its priors before in 1139 England's King Stephen, presumably because of Foliot's already distinguished reputation, named him abbot of Gloucester. In 1148 Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury, proposed him to Pope Eugenius III as bishop of Hereford; Eugenius immediately appointed him to the see. Upon Theobald's death in 1161, it was widely assumed that Henry would appoint Foliot, clearly a rising man in the church, as archbishop of Canterbury, but those expectations were dashed when in 1162 Henry instead named Becket.

Foliot was outspoken in his opposition to that appointment. Indeed he was, as Knowles approvingly reports, the only bishop to oppose the king's choice: "This of itself is creditable rather than the reverse. . . . for a worldly chancellor to be forced upon a recalcitrant electing body was a thing deplorable in itself . . . . Indeed, we may feel that with such principles and in such a cause Foliot should have refused consent come what might."[68] Over the

[66] Knowles, *Episcopal Colleagues,* 41–42.

[67] Although the origins of the family are unknown, it is usual to pronounce the name in an English rather than Norman fashion, i.e., to rhyme with *got* rather than *go.*

[68] Knowles, *Episcopal Colleagues*, 45.

following years, then, even as Becket increasingly militated for the rights of the church against the crown, Foliot supported Henry in his opposition. But here Knowles does not admire Foliot's course: "Disappointed ambition, perhaps all the more painful because unacknowledged, . . . the strong personal bias; the unfortunate series of accidents which made him an almost *ex officio* leader of the opposition and advocate of the king—all these contributed to make of Gilbert Foliot the adversary of his archbishop and, once adversary, his talents and reputation made him inevitably the one to whom all who opposed the archbishop looked for leadership and counsel."[69]

In the letter preceding the homilies, Aelred refers with unalloyed praise to Foliot's accomplishments and reputation as a man of faith and scholarship. And despite the public furor surrounding the conflict between Henry and Becket, he makes no reference to the conflict itself or to Foliot's role therein: "among the countless tasks that either the royal majesty's authority or the needs of pastoral care impose on you, you are a cultivator of wisdom, a friend of peace, eager for spiritual knowledge, attentive to reading, and, . . . among the sweet delights of prayer, you lighten the trouble of encroaching cares by frequent meditation on the Holy Scriptures" (Ep 2).

Like Knowles, David N. Bell combines praise for Foliot's strengths with criticism for Foliot's continuing animosity toward Becket:

> [Foliot] was the mirror of holiness, the exemplar of truth and justice, adorned with virtues, pre-eminent in learning, and pure in religion.
>
> What, then, can we say of his conduct between the years 1162 and 1170? How can we explain those major blemishes which mar the cold perfection of this model of pious integrity: perjury, personal ambition (though Gilbert himself denied it), and a fierce hatred . . . . Even John of Salisbury, whose cautious and balanced mind was one of the best of his age, could only see him as the *archisynagogus,* clamouring for innocent blood."[70]

[69] Knowles, *Episcopal Colleagues,* 49.

[70] David N. Bell, "The Commentary on the Lord's Prayer of Gilbert Foliot," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 56 (1999): 80–101, here 81–82.

Foliot's resistance led Becket to excommunicate Foliot twice. After the first instance, when in 1169 Becket excommunicated Foliot for insubordination, Foliot obtained papal absolution. But in 1170, after Foliot attended the illicit coronation of Henry's oldest son, known as the Young King,[71] Becket issued a second excommunication, which Knowles regards as "an essential link in the circumstances that led to the murder [of Becket]."[72]

Foliot's obvious preeminence in Henry's reign both before and during Becket's exile placed considerable distance of renown, rank, and power between him and Aelred. The common scholarly opinion is that the two men knew each other only slightly, having on some occasion been introduced in London,[73] as Aelred seems to imply in his epistle to Foliot: "the memory of your humility together with your kindness encourages me, you who came before me in the blessings of sweetness when I was in London. Astounded and shaking before such dignity, I was greeted by a kind of embrace of love by someone from whom it would have been a great thing merely to be looked at" (Ep 8).

It seems possible, however, as both Burton and Jean Truax have suggested, that the two men had met much earlier, when Aelred was a young man at the court of King David,[74] or later, perhaps at Henry's court. Some earlier acquaintance between them would help to explain Aelred's report of the warmth of a meeting in London, after Foliot's episcopal promotion. After (according to the fourteenth-century *Peterborough Chronicle*) having helped to persuade Henry to

[71] Young Henry died in 1183, six years before his father.

[72] Knowles, *Episcopal Colleagues,* 97–101.

[73] Squire says, "Aelred's relationship with the austere opponent of Thomas of Canterbury is not quite clear, his letter, in spite of its effusions about love and friendship, being almost as enigmatic on this question as the character of the bishop himself. . . . It was evidently to the friendship of the Gilbert who, whatever his political affiliations, had the reputation of being a good monk, that Aelred aspired" (*Aelred of Rievaulx,* 134). See also Truax, *Aelred the Peacemaker,* 94–95.

[74] Pierre-André Burton says that if Gilbert was indeed the son of Robert, "it is difficult to see how they would not have crossed paths at some point prior to 1163, since Robert served as steward to David while David was still Count of Huntingdon" (*Aelred de Rievaulx*, 537). See also Truax, *Aelred the Peacemaker,* 94.

support Alexander III in the papal schism that ended in 1161,[75] Aelred was invited to write a new life of Edward the Confessor and, according to Walter Daniel, to preach at the translation of his relics in 1163. He and Foliot could hardly have failed to meet on that occasion.[76]

In referring to the two men's meeting in London, Aelred sets the tone for the favor he writes to ask. He begins with warm praise for Foliot, acknowledging Foliot's busy workload while declaring his desire for Foliot's friendship. He goes on to recall the divine love that led to the incarnation and the purpose of the incarnation itself, so that "as though on a kind of middle ground, wretchedness and mercy could meet, strength could unite itself to weakness, the Word and the soul could be in one flesh, and, among these three, there could be one person, both God and human being" (Ep 3). Thus he articulates the grand theme of God's love that runs throughout the homilies.

Aelred then boldly descends from this theological exordium to ask Foliot to serve as an outside reader on his manuscript, offering it "to your consideration and discernment" (Ep 6). He explains that the homilies he encloses are currently incomplete, an introductory sample of a fuller work to be written if Foliot approves, but to be discarded if Foliot rejects them: "I have put down my pen [*suspendi calamum*] until judgment comes forth from your countenance on the things that I have written and your eyes have taken account of them all. Thus, according to the decision that you reach, everything I have written will be destroyed, corrected, or confirmed" (Ep 7).

[75] *Chronicon Angliae Petriburgense,* ed. J. A. Giles, Caxton Society 2 (London, 1845), 98. See also Vita A 32; CF 57:121; and Peter Jackson, "*In translacione sancti Edwardi confessoris*."

[76] See for Aelred's presence at the translation, James Craigie Robertson, ed., *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, 7 vols., Rolls Series 67 (London: Longmans, 1875–1885), 3:57 n. 1. Knowles reports that at the end of the event Becket took Saint Wulfstan's gravestone, "to which, it was believed, St Wulfstan of Worcester's staff had adhered when he was unjustly threatened with deposition by a Westminster synod, driven by William the Conqueror. It might defend him too against enemies, traitors and tyrants" (*Thomas Becket,* 95). Aelred tells the story about Wulfstan's staff in *Vita Sancti Edwardi, Rex et Confessoris* XXXVI (CCCM 3A:164–68; CF 56:220–25). See Marsha L. Dutton, "The Staff in the Stone: Finding Arthur's Sword in the *Vita Sancti Edwardi* of Aelred of Rievaulx, *Arthuriana* 17, no. 3 (2007): 3–28.

Though it is common to refer to Aelred's epistle as dedicatory, in fact Aelred does not dedicate the homilies to Foliot, with a letter like those preceding many of his other works.[77] Instead, he writes to ask Foliot to read and evaluate his lengthy work—essentially to serve as its editor. He also acknowledges that Foliot will have to sacrifice spare time to do so: "Therefore, although it may be a great thing for a wise person to have at least a little time to give to leisure, I beg you not to be annoyed, my lord, to lose a moment to trim what is excessive, add what is lacking, or destroy all of what we have written. . . . According to your judgment, I am ready either to stop here or to continue further" (Ep 9).

While the graceful theological paragraphs that precede Aelred's request help to mute its audacity and obscure the unlikelihood that Gilbert will agree, the request is unmistakably presumptuous, as Aelred himself declares (Ep 8). The suggestion that the superbly busy bishop of London would have the time or interest to read thirty-two lengthy and difficult sermons written by a presumably slight acquaintance of inferior rank of both birth and position simply astonishes. Moreover, the claim that after having written such a lengthy commentary Aelred would be prepared either to destroy it at a word from Foliot or to continue writing on the eight remaining burdens is similarly unconvincing. In practical terms, the thirty-one existing homilies on three Isaian burdens would have required roughly another eighty homilies on the remaining eight, adding up to almost two-thirds of the number of his surviving liturgical sermons.

The most striking aspect of this letter, though, is that which initially seems least surprising: Aelred's powerful paragraphs on the incarnation, with particular emphasis on the way Christ's descent from glory into human life equalized human relationships, with the high and the low meeting together. Rhetorically, this passage attempts to justify Aelred's reaching out to Foliot, as Dietz points out: "it is

[77] Five of his treatises begin by stating that he writes in response to a request, another three volunteer advice or information, two lack such letters but purport to record a conversation initiated by one or more monks, and one addresses an audience gathered for the translation of relics. Only *Homilies on the Prophetic Burdens of Isaiah* asks anything from the addressee.

surprising to notice with what ease Aelred shifts from one level to another: the real purpose of this beautiful and deep passage was to justify the fact that a lowly abbot dared to send his work to such an eminent prelate!"[78] But, more important, it establishes the central theme of the homilies that follow: God's love for his creation, the love that "is common to God, angels, and human beings" and that links all "for whom there is one faith, one hope, one charity" (Ep 4).

So Aelred here for the first time declares the subject of his work, rendering the theological exordium not merely a rhetorical exercise but the thesis of all that is to follow, linking this letter substantively to the homilies themselves. White makes just that point: "The introductory *Epistola ad Gilbertum* is thematically integral to this series of homilies. . . . The letter focuses on the unity of opposites, a theme to which homily thirty-one, the last in the collection, dramatically returns."[79] It also not so incidentally departs from the argument of Aelred's two principal sources. For while Isaiah and Jerome both proclaim the doom that God proclaims to the nations, with only occasional glimpses of rescue for his people, Aelred turns that proclamation on its head. Citing the incarnation as precedent and evidence, he proclaims God's love for his people, God's desire to show mercy to sinners, and God's promise of salvation to those who hear and respond. Indeed in the epistle itself Aelred gives no hint of the darker side of the homilies: the damnation of the proud who refuse God's mercy, followers of Satan and the Antichrist and unyielding in their apostasy.

This letter raises three questions of its own. What was Aelred's goal in writing it? What did he actually expect of Foliot? And what in fact did Foliot do? No correspondence exists recording whether he politely rejected the request or simply ignored it, and the autograph manuscript that he presumably received apparently no longer exists. Clearly, however, Aelred neither destroyed what he had written nor added to it, perhaps an indication that Gilbert recommended neither course to him, whether through expressed approval or silence. Or of course perhaps Aelred simply ignored Gilbert's decision, whatever it was.

[78] Dietz, "Ambivalence Well Considered," 80.
[79] White, "*Bifarie itaque potest legi*," 420.

The Sermon for the Coming of the Lord

Aelred's sermon for Advent follows the epistle to Foliot. It too focuses on the entry of God's love into the world in the incarnation. It begins with the proclamation of the Day of the Lord: "It is time, dear brothers, *for us to sing to the Lord of mercy and judgment*. For it is the coming of the Lord, of *the Almighty, who came and is to come*" (Adv 1).[80] It is a long sermon, much longer than most of Aelred's liturgical and miscellaneous sermons, and it seems unlikely to have been preached in this form. It is also, as Pierre-André Burton has shown, a conscious and effective introduction to the thirty-one homilies that follow,[81] in part by pointing to the essential ambiguity of human destiny as defined in 1 Thessalonians 5. This theme resonates in both content and argumentative structure throughout the homilies, echoing Paul's explication of the Day of the Lord as both darkness and light, promising "sudden destruction" to the "children of darkness" and salvation through Christ for "the children of light, children of the day."

After the initial proclamation of Christ's coming, the sermon returns to the grand theme of Christ's mercy: "he showed himself humble in his humanity, powerful in his miracles, strong in overcoming the demons, and gentle in taking on our sins. And all of this came forth from the fountain of mercy" (Adv 6). Aelred then introduces Isaiah's prophecies, continuing the theme of Christ's power over evil, now expressed with violence as his cross destroys the yoke that has burdened his people: "*the Lord* raised his *rod over the sea and* raised *it in Egypt's path*" (Adv 7). The rest of the sermon deals with the victory of the cross. After listing Isaiah's eleven burdens, Aelred explains the meaning of the word *burden* in simple terms but with a dual effect: "And what is a *burden* except a kind of weight that pulls the soul down to the earth, making it pay attention to base things and ignore the things above?" (Adv 10).

[80] Squire gives the title "Darkness and Light" to his seventh chapter, which discusses the homilies (Squire, *Aelred of Rievaulx,* 129). This sermon also appears in the Durham Collection, as number 47 of Aelred's complete sermons ("In Annuntiatione Dominica," CCCM 2B:98–105). The following sermon also anticipates the themes and language of the homilies.

[81] Burton, *Aelred de Rievaulx,* 545.

The sermon then addresses each of the burdens in turn, explaining their meanings and exemplifying the way they are characteristically experienced, regularly extending that experience to monks. So of the burden of Babylon Aelred writes, "This is a burden that weighs down many, curving them down toward lower things. . . . Oh brothers, what king does not laboriously acquire what he covets? What king is so safe that he fears no one? What king loses something without pain? But let us turn this idea back on ourselves. Does none of us, I ask, sigh under the weight of this burden? Does no remnant of worldly love remain in us?" (Adv 12–13).

Again, after defining Dumah (Isa 21:11) as meaning *silence,* Aelred notes first that "silence burdens and stillness weighs down many people. . . . their head aches, their stomach rumbles, their eyes cloud over, their kidneys trouble them. But everything pleases them when they go out, wandering here and there" (Adv 24). He then turns to monastic behavior: "So if you see a monk living in the cloister who looks in all directions, constantly yawning, stretching his hands and feet, setting aside his book only to take it up again, finally running about from place to place and from auditorium [*auditorio*] to auditorium as though something had stung him, do not doubt that he sighs under the burden of Dumah" (Adv 24).

As the sermon approaches its end, Aelred directs his listeners to the ways in which they must respond to their burdens. He speaks pastorally, reminding each monk of his own trial and offering guidance in resisting and rejecting it: "If the burden of Egypt rests upon you, cast off the works of darkness and equip yourself with arms of light" (Adv 40). And "if on account of the burden of the beasts of the south your desire fades from weariness, reflect and know that if you reject the burden of charity you will justly bear the burden of damnation" (Adv 41). He concludes the sermon with a return to Christ's mercy, to culminate when Christ comes in Judgment: "Thus, brothers, *let us sing to the Lord of mercy and judgment,* the mercy we experience and the Judgment we await. Let us embrace the former and fear the latter, that we be found devout here, and free from care there, by the favor of our Lord" (Adv 44). So he again associates the Day of the Lord with both mercy and Judgment, still offering hope and trust in God's generosity.

This juxtaposition of mercy and Judgment echoes a long passage in Aelred's treatise *The Formation of Anchoresses*, directing the contemplative audience to Christ sitting in Judgment. Aelred here points out that those who will be damned see only a face of anger, while those who stand on Christ's right see the same face they had seen in life.[82] This double vision is precisely that to which Aelred points in the Advent sermon and the thirty-one homilies, with the darkness of Christ's gaze turned upon the arrogant, the apostates, and the followers of the Antichrist, and the amiability of his gaze upon those who endure the suffering of the world while looking to and welcoming his mercy, coming finally to harmony in his love. Aelred concludes this sermon with that same opposition: "Whoever neglects the time of mercy should fear the time of Judgment, because he who redeemed us through mercy will judge us through justice. . . . Let us embrace the former and fear the latter, that we may be found devout here, and free from care there, by the favor of our Lord" (Adv 44).

This lengthy sermon is in every way a monastic discourse, abundantly full of doctrinal explication, scriptural interpretation, and pastoral guidance. It represents Aelred's preaching at its best, showing both rhetorical range and clarity of thought and language. It is long but never tedious, and it speaks to both non-monastic and monastic men and women as it celebrates the coming of the Lord in the new season. It is no wonder that Aelred's monks should have asked him for more of the same.

The Thirty-One Prophetic Homilies

The thirty-one Isaian homilies are neither so straightforward nor so explicitly pastoral as the Advent sermon. Aelred presents the work in two ways, as both a series of only loosely related homilies in three parts and a treatise with a single source and purpose: to instruct the faithful and so to reform them to wisdom, their original likeness to God. The discontinuous homiletic form allows him to explore a variety of concerns and address a variety of audiences, whether monks whom

[82] Inst incl 33; CCCM 1:678–79; CF 2:99.

he guides through moral and spiritual progress or princes and prelates whom he seeks to chastise and correct. Aware of the complexity of his subject, and writing in such a way as to make that complexity inescapable, Aelred takes particular care from beginning to end of the homilies to clarify what he is doing. Raciti notes that he sought "to weave a sort of vast medieval tapestry . . . , but a clearly defined global plan, a text supplemented by numerous clarifications, . . . orients the reader through a work whose weft does not lack complexity."[83]

Despite having described the work to Foliot as containing nineteen homilies (well over half of the work) on the burden of Babylon, Aelred actually devotes the first two of these nineteen to establishing the subject, purpose, structure, and method of the work. He begins with a powerful theological exordium defining God as the cause and end of all things, as being itself, with all his creatures participating in that being: "just as God is the being of all things that exist, so too is he the life of the living and the wisdom of all the wise" (H 1.2). He begins with this truth, he explains, because humankind then "began to be foolish and to live foolishly" and continues to live in that foolishness until God himself brings about reformation. The work thus begins with God, Creation, the Fall, and the way men and women may be led back from unlikeness to likeness through instruction. Giving that instruction in faith, hope, and love, with the help of Scripture, is Aelred's stated purpose.

Having spelled out the theological underpinnings and the purpose of the work, Aelred goes on to explain his source and method. He first introduces Isaiah: "I will now take up the book of Isaiah to examine a small portion of it with you. Although you may be quite familiar with it from the commentaries of the saints, I think it is highly useful for us to repeat what they said, if not differently, at least in another fashion. Let us bring to light just as God provides what they passed over as obvious or insignificant, gathering seeds from their reasoning" (H 1.7). A little later for a first time he identifies Isaiah's own purpose as fundamentally Christian, saying that "He reveals in prophecy . . . things about Christ and the church's mysteries [*sacramenta*]" (H 1.9).

[83] Raciti, Introduction, VI.

Aelred goes on to identify his method of interpreting by multiplying meanings as grounded in Scripture and informed by the Holy Spirit, with proper discernment requiring awareness of those meanings' correspondence to faith, hope, and charity. Only in the final portion of the homily does he move to the announced subject of the work, again identifying and defining his key terms, *burden* and *Babylon*.

Rather than advancing as expected into exposition of the burden of Babylon, however, the second homily again digresses to consider how Isaiah saw the burdens with which God would afflict the nations, and asking what made his visions prophetic. Aelred answers these questions by narrowing the visionary taxonomy that Augustine had offered in *Genesis according to the Letter.* Augustine had defined three categories—*corporalia*, *spiritualia*, and *intellectualia*—with the third containing both reason's grasp of things like mathematics and logic, and the experience of divine things, which Guglielmo Scannerini calls mystical.[84] Aelred divides these three into six—sensory, imaginative, phantasmal, spiritual, rational, and intellectual—with the last two equivalent to Augustine's single *intellectualia.* So he divides understandings that are natural to the human mind from what can be known through God alone, without participation of the senses, imagination, or reason, as meaning is received "in the very light of truth" (H 2.14). Only those understandings, those sights, he says, are prophetic.

In a narrative that ends this second homily, Aelred offers an exemplum of such prophetic visions, in it echoing his previous explanation of God as being. He tells of the Gilbertine nuns who after leaving behind things of earthly experience and devotion are "taken up by a kind of inexpressible and incomprehensible light," therein seeing "nothing except that which is and 'is the being of all things' " (H 2.18). So he narratively prepares his audience for what is to come in the remaining twenty-nine homilies.[85]

[84] Augustine of Hippo, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim,* in *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Opera,* ed. Joseph Zycha, CSEL 28.1 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1894), 12.6–37.

[85] For a helpful discussion of Aelred's treatment of the Augustinian taxonomy, see J. Stephen Russell, "Vision and Skepticism in Aelred's *De Oneribus,*" CSQ 49, no. 4 (2014): 485–91; and Scannerini, "Mystica o misticisimo?" 146–50. Both

Having identified Isaiah's visions as prophetic, Aelred now reinterprets them, transforming their figurative language into more familiar explanations. He never implies that his commentary is more truthful than Isaiah's, but rather simpler and more accessible to his contemporary audience, implicitly recognizing that verbal signification is by its very nature multileveled, complex, and varying over time and space.

Thus although the Advent sermon serves as the prologue to the work, establishing both the theme of God's conjoined deeds of mercy and Judgment and introducing Isaiah's eleven burdens, these first two homilies provide a further theological preface to the work that follows. Taken together, the sermon and the homilies manifest the themes initiated in the Epistle and the Advent sermon: the incarnation as the manifestation of God's love and the way in which faith, hope, and love enable men and women to experience that love now and always—trusting in God's promises, hoping for their fulfillment, and loving God in heart and deed.

Aelred's use of the traditional patristic senses of Scripture in his interpretation are vital to his purpose in this work, allowing him to transform Isaiah's prophecies of nearly universal darkness and devastation into an opportunity for salvation for many. He explains that the damned and the blessed live together in the world Isaiah saw: "the prophet described the world in general with the name of Babylon. He understood the world to be divided between the chosen and the condemned, and that each would be either weighed down or crushed" (H 20.1).

Aelred thus repeatedly expands the Isaian lens by providing different ways of understanding each of the divine punishments Isaiah promises to the people, complicating the prophecies by multiplying their meanings, alternating between warnings of impending divine punishment and promises of redemption through the cross of Christ. These constant expansions and alternations emphasize the importance of his method, often rendering the homilies difficult to parse. White explains the effect of the persistent and incremental multiplication of possibility: "because it is confusing, perhaps it also seems

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authors also consider the relationship between Aelred's distinctions and the Gilbertine exemplum.

to be confused. It somehow manages to be about everything, even contradictory things. With bewildering regularity, Ælred carefully interprets a verse of Isaiah's burdens only to contradict himself a few lines later."[86] But the approach is neither inadvertent nor truly confusing. For just as Aelred takes care to signal his shifts between exegetical levels and from one to another of the three foreign nations, he also makes clear his intentionality in offering multiple ways of understanding names, terms, and images, as when he writes of Moab, "because we explained above that Moab could be spoken of in two ways, according to the conversion of some and the turning away of others, this verse seems to explain which Moab is being talked about" (H 31.6).

In this way Aelred repeatedly points to the cosmic reality that defines his work, recalling throughout the opening line of the Advent sermon that Christ's coming means both mercy and Judgment, and that his cross means both redemption and damnation. For the lived reality of these homilies is just that: that since the Fall men and women have lived in a world characterized at all times by both misery and grace, it is simply not always possible to tell which is which, but in all times God's love pierces through the darkness.

THEMES AND ARGUMENT

In the course of the homilies Aelred identifies light with both divine and human activity and understanding. In the Advent sermon, he refers first to "the works of light" and "the arms of light," then moves to "the shining light of wisdom" and "the light of the Scriptures," opposing these phrases to "the works of darkness," "those who hate the light," and "children of darkness" (Adv 27, 40, 43, 20). In the homilies too he uses light sometimes for human seeking and effort as guided by God and sometimes of God's illumination. Of the community's fervor in prayer, he writes, "the lifting up of the voice can express that fervor that is so necessary for an assembly of brothers. This fervor leads to that interior fire spreading everywhere

[86] Lewis White, *"Bifarie itaque potest legi,"* 395.

through the sound from the mouth. The brothers can thus raise one another up and light a spark in one another, until one flame springs from the many" (H 5.10). Of Augustine's words on the fall of Lucifer, he says, "With the light of so great an authority leading the way, we may thus examine the deep abyss of this part of Scripture all the more securely for being more brightly lit" (H 16.3). Linking apostates with Lucifer, he writes, "after works of light, after a good beginning to a good monastic life, [they] turn back from the fellowship of the saints to *works of darkness* as though falling from heaven" (H 17.25). Regarding the role of faith in comprehending "Christ's incarnation and, following from it, humanity's restoration," he cries out, "If only that light would at least shine for me through a small chink I could then at least explore that heavenly secret with one eye, drawing for myself at least a small droplet of divine sweetness and a pleasant memory of the delight explored" (H 26.16). Ultimately the light that he describes as reaching and guiding believers in this life is the light of God: "After abandoning the darkness of error and ignorance, they must be bathed in saving light and say with the prophet, *The light of your face is imprinted upon us, Lord*" (H 28.4).

While Aelred most often links darkness with worldly cares, ignorance, wickedness, and sin, with the outer darkness into which the wicked are cast, and with the prince of darkness, Satan, he sometimes also connects it with the darkness where God is (H 4.14) or with the obscurity of certain portions of Scripture (HH 3.18; 27.2). But in almost every case he counters even this darkness with light: the light of faith (H 4.14), the light of truth (e.g., H 22.13), saving light (H 28.4), and the inaccessible light in which God dwells (H 28.9). He weaves the evangelical emphasis on God's light overcoming the darkness within his interpretive commentary, moving from Babylon, enslaved by ignorance and confusion, to the Philistines, dominated by pride, to Moab, the worldly wise. The upward movement offered by God's mercy to these three nations, he shows, is one of spiritual progress into the light, not through human self-sufficiency and pride, the overarching sin of the three nations, but through the conquering cross of Christ, raised over and illuminating the dark mountain of Babylon (HH 4 and 5).

Aelred exemplifies this theme of a dark world constantly experiencing God's presence with recurrent homilies on the history,

contemporary state, and future of the church. For the church, like the world in which it lives, contains both darkness and light, populated not only by the chosen but also by the condemned, caught in the shadows of postlapsarian human experience. In this work, therefore, it embodies the experience of Christians, upheld by God but struggling toward the light.

Aelred examines the historical church in about half of the homilies as a motif translating the individual's journey from conversion to contemplation into the journey of the body of Christ, with the two journeys—individual and corporate—interwoven. Names of popes and events in church history occur alongside summary categorizations of the ages of the church, sometimes four but more often three. Aelred interprets Isaiah 13:10 (*Because the stars of heaven will not shine forth their light*) as prophesying four ages, from the beginnings to Judgment: "We can thus understand that the prophet, learned in the Spirit, ordered his prophecy to treat first the preaching of the apostles, then the persecution of the church, after that, the conversion of the nations and the tranquility of peace—and so also, the repentance of the fallen and the dread of death—and finally, the time of the Antichrist, with the reward of the righteous and the damnation of the wicked" (H 9.23).

In the final homily Aelred returns to the theme as a fulfillment of Isaiah 16:14, but this time stopping short of Judgment: "The prophecy describes three periods of the church: the times of calling, of trial, and of consolation. The church was called by the preaching of the apostles, tried by the persecution of the martyrs, and consoled by the conversion of rulers" (H 31.16). This list thus culminates with a hoped-for time within history (H 31.16).

In other cases, however, Aelred considers the history of the church more particularly. He explains the Isaian promise that "*the Lord . . . will still choose from Israel*" (Isa 14:1) as foretelling the conversion of the Jews, a topic that runs throughout the homilies: "First he chose the apostles, disciples, and the crowd of believers from Israel, so that the early church might be founded. He will also *choose* many at the end of the world with whom the last times of the church will be adorned. But by *choosing*, we understand that not all the Jews found at that time will be saved" (H 13.25).

Aelred's treatment of the church is by no means incidental to his overall purpose, but a conscious embodiment of his concern with a

world divided between darkness and light. Scholars have in fact identified this topic as a dominant theme in the work. Burton links the recurring homilies on the history of the church to Aelred's Christology, pointing to the way that the listing of the three ages of the church "derives from the three comings of Christ," with Christ standing "at the center of this theology of history." He thus argues for reading the work as "a general interpretation relating to the formation of Christ in history."[87]

Just as Aelred uses the church both to insist on Christ's presence in the world and to exemplify the lived experience of the condemned and the chosen, he also approaches the subject through insistent attention to human vice and virtue, urging conversion to virtue through God's aid. Aelred addresses the theme more or less insistently in thirty of the thirty-one homilies, with vices defined early on as those things that hold the citizens of Babylon captive (H 3.5), other times as relevant in terms of human relationship to God:

> So virtue and its reward of blessedness are the region of likeness. The region of unlikeness is vice and wretchedness. Humanity first became unlike God through vice, so that it could rightly become unlike him through wretchedness. For this reason, we must first become like him by virtue, so that someday we may be made like him in blessedness. Furthermore, the more full of vice we are, the more we are unlike God, and therefore more distant from him. But the more virtuous we are, the more similar we are to God, and therefore closer to him. (H 7.14)

Several scholars have explained this dynamic as designing a spiritual and essentially monastic journey to God through abandonment of vices and adherence to the theological and cardinal virtues. Molac interprets the homilies as explaining "the monastic way as the imitation of Christ himself in his spiritual combat in the desert,"[88] and Renna writes of the way Aelred's homilies guide monks to correct the vices represented by Babylon, the Philistines, and Moab (love of the world, pride and vainglory, and worldly wisdom) by adhering

[87] Burton, *Aelred de Rievaulx*, 563.
[88] Molac, "Théologie de l'histoire," 92.

to the virtues characteristic of the monastic life. He emphasizes that Aelred "never lets his audience forget that he's talking about virtues appropriate to the cloister: vigils, fasts, contrition, with the monk in a constant state of conversion."[89]

In allegorical terms that reach beyond the cloister, however, Aelred shows the journey defined by the history of the church and the struggle between vice and virtue all to be subsumed by the effect of the incarnation in the world, resisting the darkness of ignorance and worldly distraction that obscures God's light, overcoming the pride and despair of grace that results in "heaping vice upon vice" (H 21.7), and finally piercing through and incorporating even the world's wisdom into divine teaching (H 29.7). Thus throughout the homilies Aelred calls his audience back to God through reliance on faith, hope, and charity and the teachings of Scripture as he guides them to restore humankind to wisdom.

While writing of God's power to transform, Aelred also insists on the aspects of the soul as created, with reason, memory, and will, that allow men and women to know, remember, and obey God. So he indicates that human abilities have a role to play in emerging from darkness into light. Pointing to the role of Scripture in teaching through the power of the Holy Spirit, he also commends reason, authority, and experience as human traits that feed the theological ones. Far from rejecting human abilities, he argues them to be God-given and essential to the nurturing of faith, hope, and charity (H 21.14).[90]

At the same time, though, he makes it clear in his allegorizing of the burdens of Babylon, Philistia, and Moab that because of the debasement of the soul through the Fall, human ability is ineffective on its own. Of the Philistines he writes, "All of Philistia is brought low when reason falls into error, the memory of God falls into forgetfulness, and the will falls into wantonness. All is brought low when the heart occupies itself with shamefulness, speech with duplicity, and works with base affairs and iniquity" (H 22.10). He reiterates this point when discussing Moab: "The three forms of sin—in

[89] Renna, "Aelred of Rievaulx and Isaiah," 258.

[90] For further instances of Aelred's treatment of this topic, see Aelred, Spec car 1.3.9; CCCM 1:16; CF 17:91–99; Anima 1.32, 36; CCCM 1:694; CF 22:50, 52–53.

thought, word, and deed—can also be called a fork in the road. The three powers of the soul, through which every sin occurs, namely, memory, will, and reason, can also fittingly be called a fork in the road. Therefore, those who give in to this triple concupiscence—those who do wrong in thought, word, and deed—have the wretched lot of living at Moab's fork in the road. Their memory is disfigured by thought, their will is corrupted by pleasure, and their reason is weakened by consenting to sin" (H 24.27).

Throughout, however, God controls and guides, with his light working through the darkness, and Aelred promises that that light will illuminate even the Day of Judgment. Though Isaiah and Jerome both promise that day to be one of cruelty for sinners, Aelred's explication of Isaiah's words moves rapidly from the perspective of sinners cast into darkness to that of the blessed, who experience it as a day of light:

> That day will be cruel, . . . Finally, when Judgment is given on the last day, they will be utterly crushed and driven down to hell.
>
> [The prophecy] continues, *because the stars of heaven will not shine forth their light. The sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shine with its light* [Isa 13:10]. Indeed, on the Day of Judgment, when Christ appears in glory, this brightness will overwhelm all the stars. As a small lamp in sunlight seems not to give forth any light, so will onlookers perceive the stars to be dark on that day. (H 9:20, 21–22)

With this inversion of the Isaian curse he silently recalls to his audience the alternative revelation made to John the Evangelist: "The city does not need the sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it" (Rev 21:23, 24).

THE END

Although in the Epistle to Foliot Aelred described his work as unfinished, hinging on Foliot's response to determine whether or not he would continue it, the last five homilies consciously conclude

it, showing it to be incomplete only in the sense that in this life the Christian's journey to God is incomplete. Beginning in homily 27 Aelred offers a vision of the end of the Christian experience in this life, tracing the culminating steps of the progression from darkness to light and then to celestial harmony, with God and humankind resonating in the unity of the cross. In these homilies he moves quickly through the history of salvation as seen through the incarnation into the vision of the God who dwells in light, linking the visions of Isaiah to those of John the Evangelist, bringing together the lamb, the spiritual marriage, the new wine of the kingdom, contemplative vision, and the harp with many strings. As he has done throughout the work, he interweaves scriptural images, now replacing those of darkness and damnation with those of radiant light and salvation.

Homilies 27 and 28 initiate this closing movement as Aelred once again proclaims the coming of Christ. Here Christ comes as the lamb promised by God to Isaiah but also as light, emerging from the darkness of language, allegory, and Scripture:

> *God will come from the south, and the Holy One from a shady, dense mountain.* Behold, dear brothers, as our Lord Jesus bursts forth from this dense forest of allegorical words. He was hidden in its shady thickness up to the point where the prophet says, *Send forth the lamb, O Lord, the ruler of the land, from the rock of the desert to the mountain of the daughter of Zion* [Isa 16:1]. Truly, *my beloved stands behind our wall, looking through the windows, peering through the lattice.* [Song 2:9]
>
> Is there anyone who has heard the Lord Jesus saying in the gospel, *Examine the Scriptures,* etc., who does not know that we must seek him in the Scriptures? But the darkness of these very Scriptures, the riddles of words, and the narrative's allusions are like a kind of wall between us and him. In fact, those spiritual craftsmen who raised this wall for us installed windows and lattices in it, through which the beloved often lets his lovers see him. Thus no one may doubt that he whom the clear parts of Scripture plainly show is also to be found everywhere in the obscure parts. (H 27.1–2)

Here Aelred accomplishes two purposes, one theological and the other pedagogical. He proclaims the coming of the Lord now as

literal rather than figurative or allegorical, and he acknowledges his own role in that proclamation, instructing his audience in order to re-form them into wisdom, tacitly once again pointing out the relationship between himself and Isaiah as his prophetic predecessor. A little later he connects the Isaian prophecy to Jeremiah, to John the Baptist, and to the whole history of the church, now reaching back even to the synagogue: "The apostles came from this synagogue and brought the lamb *who took away the sins of the world* to the Gentiles with their preaching. In this way, the lamb could reign over the entire world. The church would thus be born from the synagogue as though it were Zion's daughter, whose mountain is the height of faith, the grandeur of hope, and the more excellent way of charity" (H 27.6). So Aelred eliminates the old division between synagogue and church, acknowledging Jesus' ancestors and the Jewish prophets as ancestors of the church. Just as he originally insisted on Babylon as "the whole world," enslaved in darkness, now he declares the whole world—Jew and Gentile alike—to be governed in faith, hope, and charity through Christ.

In the next homily Aelred again points out the literal fulfillment of the prophecies. But now he adds John the Evangelist's image of Christ as bridegroom to that of the lamb:

> A clear prophecy concerning the Lord should neither be wrapped up in allegorical layers nor diminished by moral allusions. For nothing nourishes faith or builds up morals more than to read that the holy prophets foretold what we now perceive to be so clearly fulfilled. For what is clearer than to hear the blessed Baptist point out the lamb, of whom we read in the prophet that he would come? The prophet said, *Send forth the lamb, O Lord, the ruler of the land,* whereas the Baptist cried out, *Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.* The same Baptist says elsewhere of him, *He who has the bride is the bridegroom.*
>
> Who is this bride? It is she whom the Father addresses in the psalm: *Listen, daughter, and see, and bend your ear, and forget your people and your father's house* [Ps 44:11]. (H 28.1–2)

Both the traditional liturgical use of Psalm 44 for Vigils of the feast of the Annunciation and the first line of the Rule of Saint Benedict ("Hear, oh son, the teaching of your master, and bend the ear of your

heart") resonate in this passage, though Aelred mentions neither.[91] With them, however, he introduces the Virgin Mary as bride, the church as prefigured in Mary, and perhaps also the monk who hears. So he again signals the movement from the world of confusion and darkness into the light so long foreseen, inviting his hearers not only to hear but also to respond, to bend, to incline toward the lamb and to join in the mystical marriage with Mary and the church, the mother and bride of Christ. The richness of the language and imagery here is enhanced by Aelred's insistence in both homilies 27 and 28 that what he declares is a matter of neither allegorical nor moral teaching, but the literal truth.

A little later Aelred introduces the Moabites, the figurative subject of the last nine homilies, finally readying themselves to approach the lamb and enter into the spiritual marriage. As Isaiah had prophesied that they would suffer for only three years, Aelred invites them now in the third age of the church, which he has defined as both consolation and contemplation, to rise from their sin through Christ's cross and to ascend to God: "So Moab's daughters must climb from the lower to the higher to be joined in saving marriage to that lamb *who,* sent forth *from the rock of the desert,* takes away *the sins of the world.* After abandoning the darkness of error and ignorance, they must be bathed in saving light and say with the prophet, *The light of your face is imprinted upon us, Lord*" (H 28.4).

A little later Aelred writes again of "the daughters of Moab" as they move toward light, now on a spiritual journey: "When they then strive to cross over from carnal to spiritual love as though *from darkness to light*, . . . they must first flee both the vices and occasions for vice. Thus, growing feathers first in the nest of discipline and later in the nest of wisdom, they may climb from the lower to the higher, from the human to the divine, and from the earthly to the heavenly" (H 28.17). This then is the route for all who hear Christ's call, first to abandon the darkness of ignorance and to be illuminated by God's light, then to mature in wisdom, to cross to spiritual light, and finally to climb to the heavenly realm.

Finally Aelred invites the daughters of Moab to take flight, enabled by the goal itself: "Like an eagle that, borne on the wings of

[91] *Obsculta, o fili, praecepta magistri, et inclina aurem cordis tui* (RB Prol. 1).

contemplation, flies in the highest heaven, they may thus open their eyes to gaze fixedly on the splendor of the very sun near at hand" (H 28.16). This is the spiritual journey that he has limned throughout, from darkness to light, from earthly blindness to full vision and to love:

> As you were formed for life, so too may you be illuminated for knowledge. When you learn from the Scriptures to refer everything that lives and perceives to the love of God and neighbor, you will climb the mountain of contemplation borne on two wings, namely, knowledge and love. You will then learn to form the structure of this earthly tabernacle according to the heavenly one, and you will hear with Moses, *Look, make everything according to the pattern that was shown to you on the mountain.* (H 28.20)

This journey upward does not go uninterrupted, though, for as Aelred has written elsewhere, in this life even spiritual progress is inconsistent, unstable.[92] As he writes of the spiritual development of the daughter of Moab in homily 28, he recalls the dangers to those who "would rather remain safely below than attempt what is above" (H 28.19). The double possibility, as he has made clear throughout the homilies, is always before the one called to the vision of God, so that those who trust in themselves rather than God are likely to fall short: "Seeking sustenance by their own effort, they sometimes climb the heights of heaven in flight, and sometimes they sink down with tucked wings" (H 28.10). Just after the repeated lyrical passages inviting the audience to the spiritual marriage and contemplation of God's light, then, Aelred steps back from celestial anticipation to warn against human sin, juxtaposing the invitation to heavenly light in the previous homily with its absence from "those who, blinded by sin, persevere in the darkness of their errors" (H 29.1).

In the next homily, however, Aelred again looks toward beatitude, now introducing the various kinds of wine available to the seeker, from the wine of love to the wine of rejoicing, the wine of wisdom, and finally the wine that, "squeezed from the vineyard of

[92] See, e.g., Inst incl 31; CCCM 1:667, 673; CF 2:85, 92; *De Iesu puero duodenni* 30–31 (hereafter Iesu); CCCM 1:276–77; CF 2:37–39.

Scripture . . . makes glad the entire city of God" (Ps 45:5; H 30.8). Again, however, he steps briefly backward, acknowledging that even as one continues to approach God, the taste of divine experience may be alloyed by the wine of bitterness, the wine of lust, the wine of compunction, all of which distract and afflict humans in this life. After recalling "the wine of doctrine from the vineyard of the knowledge of Scripture" (H 30.8–9), he completes the discussion with another kind of wine, not, however, the anticipated wine of the experience of the kingdom, but one useful in this life that continues, a wine that converts and inspires those who drink of it: "Finally, there is the wine of the evangelical and apostolic teaching, *the new wine*, which, coming down from the heavenly storeroom into the apostles' hearts, begets virgins throughout the entire world and makes the hearts of the faithful drunk with the desire for perfection" (H 30.9). With this imagery he again declares Christ's power in this world and indicates the desire that leads his followers forward as they here taste what they will drink in time to come.

Although the audience may hope that the work will conclude with contemplation like that of the Gilbertine nuns if not with the experience of beatitude, it ends instead with a return to the church.[93] But Aelred now at last depicts the church not as riven by ambition and discord, but as harmonious, defined by Saint Paul's image of the variety of spiritual gifts, celebrated as a musical celebration of "the conversion of many after Christ's gospel shone forth" (H 31.1). The church and the chosen thus remain harmoniously in the present, still waiting to sing the anthem of the church triumphant.

At this point again Aelred emphasizes that Isaiah speaks not from a pre-Christian misunderstanding of the visions he has received but as Christ himself. The image Isaiah offers seems inept, bathetic, but Aelred appropriates and redeems it by insisting on it, quoting it in three of the first five sentences of the homily and crediting it not only to Isaiah but also to Christ: "*On this account,* he says, *my belly* [*venter*] *will sound forth to Moab like a harp* [Isa 16:11]. This is the voice of the

[93] Of Aelred's works only Inst incl concludes in heaven, at the Last Judgment (Inst incl 33; CCCM 1:677–81; CF 2:97–102); like these homilies, Iesu leads the contemplative back from gazing on heavenly mysteries to exercising care for the neighbor (Iesu 29–31; CCCM 1:275–78; CF 2:36–39).

prophet, or of Christ speaking in the prophet" (H 31.1). Aelred goes on to offer two ways of understanding this image—the church as Christ's belly, and God's belly as Scripture, and he links both to the cross. So he brings his constant concern with the church and Scripture into a final unity through Christ, and he incorporates both into his explanation of human blessedness:

> There [in the belly] the heart provides a living impulse for the entire body, there the liver feeds the body's heat and distributes life-giving blood to all the limbs, there reside the other interior organs, each with its appointed function for the body's nourishment. So it is in the church, where the Lord has appointed *some apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers in the work of ministry, in building up the body of Christ.*
>
> There are also many strings on the harp, each with its own sound. Yet all are arranged by certain proportions and calculations in such a way that all agree in one harmony, and one beautiful tone arises from them all. So too in Christ's church there are various ranks and various orders, each with diverse gifts of virtues. Yet all are founded in one charity. Through charity, they compose one beautiful tone by bringing together many virtues. (H 31.2–3)

A little later he reprises the image, now declaring this harmony to reside in the relationship between what is hidden and what is known:

> . . . every holy person has a spiritual belly. . . . Just as the belly's contents are locked up in a prison from everyone's eyes and concealed from everyone's knowledge, so *no one knows what is worked in a person except for* that *person's* conscience *that is within.* Happy the soul in which all things have been arranged and ordered like the strings of a harp, in which the virtues agree with one another and the inner corresponds to the outer. (H 31.7)

Finally, however, Aelred insists that human achievement, even in the journey toward God, is impossible through human effort alone. The virtues he writes of here are not those in which the Philistines and Moabites trusted in their pride, but are essentially Christ's, part of his cross: "Virtues are like spiritual strings, which, stretched between two pieces of wood, the upper and the lower, represent the mystery of the cross" (H 31.8). So he concludes as he began, with the

incarnate God, with Christ who came into the world to save his people, with the cross that overcomes the dark confusion of Babylon rather than being overcome by it. From beginning to end, that is the message of this work.

Conclusion

Aelred presents his work on Isaiah's prophecies as dual, both a three-part series of only loosely related homilies and a treatise with a single source and end: to instruct the faithful and reform them into their original form of wisdom—their likeness to God through Christ. The homiletic form allows Aelred to explore a variety of concerns and to address a variety of audiences, from monks to princes and prelates, and the treatise allows him to develop a complicated but ultimately unified argument about the man or woman loved, sought, and redeemed by Christ's incarnation. Like light itself, the work exists throughout as both particle and stream, its separate insights always comprising a single whole.

Throughout his life as a writer Aelred had experimented with different forms for different audiences; this late work can be recognized as one more instance of his writerly expression and experimentation, one last opportunity to put down in pen and ink—with his own hand—some of the things he had thought about while he was mostly housebound in his late years, while the kingdom was experiencing a new kind of internal conflict as the great bishops of the English church battled one another. The homilies thus also serve to link Aelred's ascetic, historical, hagiographical, and homiletic works, gathering up the fragments of his life and thought into one great final vision.

The monks of Aelred's community are present in almost every one of the homilies as he greets them and sends them off to bed, acknowledging his own prolixity and their fatigue, insisting on his love for them as he prepares to leave them and again when he returns, even tacitly associating them with both the Virgin Mary and Moab in the culminating rise to spiritual marriage and contemplative vision. The deep commitment he has to his community thus resounds clearly here as in all his works. At the same time, his frustration with and

despair at the enduring pride, arrogance, and apostasy among prelates and princes—all of which had over the decades of his life led England and the church to conflict, schism, and persecution—recurs in homily after homily. That too was after all a lifelong concern.

Above all, however, Aelred proclaims the incarnation, Christ's coming to bring God and humankind together and, through faith, hope, and love, to reform God's people. He writes of the light that came into the world in Creation and again in the incarnation, and of the possibility that men and women both lay and religious might come to drink of the wine of love and rejoicing, to embrace the bridegroom, and to gaze toward the light as though borne on eagles' wings.

Marsha L. Dutton

Christmas 2017

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Letter from Aelred, Abbot of Rievaulx to the Most Reverend Bishop Gilbert of London

1. To the beloved and loving holy father Gilbert,[1] bishop of London, who is worthy to be embraced with all the sweetness of devotion, Brother Aelred of Christ's poor who are at Rievaulx renders due obedience with all affection.

2. I have heard, most blessed father, that among the countless tasks that either the royal majesty's authority or the needs of pastoral care impose on you, you are a cultivator of wisdom, a friend of peace, eager for spiritual knowledge, attentive to reading, and that, among the sweet delights of prayer, you lighten the trouble of encroaching cares by frequent meditation on the Holy Scriptures. I have thus become eager for you,* not only desiring knowledge of your serenity, but also—because I am speaking foolishly*—daring to desire your very friendship.

*Oner 15.28
*2 Cor 11:21

3. For, forgetting both your loftiness and my lowliness, I rely on the laws of love,* in which nothing is lowly, nothing lofty. This love brought heaven to earth's level and planted the Lord of heaven in earthly members, so that the Word became flesh and dwelt

**amor*

[1] Gilbertus Foliot, ca. 1110–1187. Abbot of the monastery of St. Peter of Gloucester 1139–1148, bishop of Hereford 1148–1163, bishop of London 1163–1187.

among us.* This love pulled God down and raised humanity up.* Thus, as though on a kind of middle ground, wretchedness and mercy could meet,* strength could unite itself to weakness,* the Word and the soul could be in one flesh,* and, among these three, there could be one person, both God and human being. What is lofty, then, that love does not pull down, or what is base that it does not lift up, making them one in himself? Conserving rather than confusing each nature's properties, with the soul so wonderfully serving as a mediator, he joined heaven to earth, God to flesh, and spirit to dust.

*John 1:14
*Luke 1:52
*Ps 84:11
*2 Cor 12:9; 13:4
*Gen 2:24; Eph 5:31

4. Further, I see in every creature, whether irrational or senseless, a kind of vestige of love, through which what is diverse is joined, what is incongruent is brought into harmony, and what is contrary is united. For the likeness of love appears in other creatures, but it is in the rational mind that love's truth is at work.* Loving is common to God, angels, and human beings. Love, therefore, not directed toward something beyond nature, joins nature to nature, so that there is one heart and one soul in those for whom there is one faith, one hope, one charity.*

*Aelred, S 68.3-4; Aelred, Spec car 1.21; Aelred, Spir amic 1.53–55
*Acts 4:32; Eph 4:4-5

5. Likewise, my mind, following the impulse of love,* in a kind of spiritual movement passes beyond everything that is yours but not you, and beyond everything that is around you but is neither yours nor you. Subtly passing through even the body's mass, it pours itself entirely into the very bosom of your mind, blending yearning with yearning, perception with perception, and spirit with spirit. My spirit may thus be renewed by taking part in your spirit; from the light of your perception, my perception may obtain the light of knowledge; and my affection may be fostered by the sweetness of your affection. There I see how good you are, there I embrace and perceive how wise you are, there I delight and taste how worthy of love you are.

*Ezek 1:12

6. So it is, most loving father, that I have come to the conclusion that I should submit my learning in holy letters, if I have such a thing, to your consideration and discernment. Thus your authority may confirm what I have perceived rightly, the truth may shine forth for me by your teaching where I have wavered, and your holy severity may correct me where I have strayed. Although I once discussed the prophetic burdens of Isaiah briefly, touching on each of them in the gathering of the brothers, many asked me to address them at greater length. And so I yielded to the desire of those whose progress I am bound to serve.

7. Therefore, beginning with the burdens of Babylon and from there moving on through the burdens of the Philistines to the secrets of the Moabite burden,* I have written thirty-one homilies. Lest by chance I should run, or have already run, in vain,* I have put down my pen until judgment comes forth from your countenance on the things that I have written and your eyes have taken account of them all.* Thus, according to the decision that you reach, everything I have written will be destroyed, corrected, or confirmed. Therefore, although reading these things may appear unworthy of such wisdom, yet the eagerness of love dares to demand it. This is the love that embraces charity in such a way that it throws itself almost irreverently at majesty.

*Isa 13:1–16:14

*Gal 2:2

*Ps 16:2

8. Furthermore, the memory of your humility together with your kindness encourages me, you who came before me in the blessings of sweetness when I was in London.* Astounded and shaking before such dignity, I was greeted by a kind of embrace of love by someone from whom it would have been a great thing merely to be looked at.* From there this presumption has arisen, most blessed father, of desiring the fulfillment of the acquaintance of your favor toward me that began at that time, and of not losing hope that my

*Ps 20:4

*Acts 9:6; Mark 5:33

mind, knocking on the gates of your friendship, could be led into the inner room.

9. Therefore, although it may be a great thing for a wise person to have at least a little time to give to leisure, I beg you not to be annoyed, my lord, to lose a moment to trim what is excessive, add what is lacking, or destroy all of what we have written.* Therefore, to the sermon that was written previously, which gave us the occasion of writing the others, we have attached nineteen homilies on the burden of Babylon, three on the burden of the Philistines, and nine on the burden of Moab. According to your judgment, I am ready either to stop here or to continue further.*

*Oner 31.26

*see also Oner 31.26

Sermon for the Coming of the Lord: On the Eleven Burdens

1. It is time, dear brothers, *for us to sing to the Lord of mercy and judgment*.* For it is the coming of the Lord, of *the Almighty, who came and is to come*.† But how or to what place will he come or did he come? It is clearly his voice that says, *I fill heaven and earth*.* But how could he have come to heaven or earth if he fills heaven and earth? Listen to the gospel: *He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world did not know him.** He was, therefore, both present and absent. He was present because he was in the world; he was absent, because the world did not know him.

*Ps 100:1; 1 Pet 4:17; Exod 15:1, 21
†Rev 1:8; 1:7
*Jer 23:24
*John 1:10

2. *He is not far*, says Paul, *from any one of us. In him we live, move, and are*.* And yet *salvation is far from sinners*.* He was near in terms of his essence, but far in terms of his grace. How could he not be far, since he was neither recognized, believed, feared, nor loved? He was far from sinners: he did not call back the wandering, raise up the downtrodden, ransom the captives, or raise up the dead. He was far, I say, when he neither bestowed a heavenly reward upon the righteous nor openly imposed eternal damnation on the wicked.

*Acts 17:27-28
*Ps 118:155

3. The unrecognized one came so as to be recognized; the unbelieved, to be believed; he who was not feared, to be feared; the unloved, to be loved. Thus, he who was essentially present came mercifully, so

that we might recognize his humanity, believe in his divinity, fear his power, and love his kindness. *His humanity appeared* in the taking up of our weakness,* his divinity in performing miracles, his power in overthrowing the demons, his kindness in welcoming sinners.

*Titus 3:4; Matt 8:17

4. From his humanity he was hungry;* from his divinity he fed five thousand people with five loaves of bread.* From his humanity he slept in the boat;† from his divinity he commanded the sea and the waves.§ From his humanity he died;‡ from his divinity he raised up the dead.# Likewise, from his power he threw the Pharisees out of the temple,≈ and from his kindness he ate with tax collectors and sinners.◊ From his power the demons trembled;∞ from his kindness he forgave the woman caught in adultery.° Finally, from his power he threw to the ground those seeking to bind him;Δ from his kindness he restored his persecutor's severed ear to its place along with his health.⊙ And we should attribute everything that pertains to his first coming to his mercy.

*Matt 4:2; 21:18 and parallels
*Matt 14:17-21 and parallels
†Mark 4:36-38 and parallels
§Matt 8:26; 2 Macc 9:8
‡Matt 27:50
#Matt 27:52
≈John 2:15
◊Luke 5:29-32 and parallels
∞Matt 8:29 and parallels
°John 8:11
ΔJohn 18:6
⊙Luke 22:51

5. Consider, if you will, what God is, and why he laid aside such majesty, why he emptied himself of such power,* why he weakened such strength, why he brought low such loftiness, why he made a fool of such wisdom.* Is this human righteousness? Far from it. *Everyone turned aside, all were made useless; there* was *no one who* did *good*.* What then? Did he lack anything? Not at all. *His is the earth and its fullness.** Or did he by chance need us for something? By no means. He is *my God,* and he does not need *my goods*.* What then? Truly, Lord, it is not my righteousness, but your mercy; not your lack, but my need.* For *you said, "Mercy will be built in the heavens."** This is clearly so, for wretchedness abounds on earth. Therefore, of your first coming, *I will sing to you of mercy, Lord*.*

*Phil 2:7
*Aelred, S 50.18
*Ps 13:3
*Ps 49:12
*Ps 15:2
*Aelred, S 50.18
*Ps 88:3
*Ps 100:1

6. For it was from mercy that, having become human, he took *our weaknesses* on himself.* From

*Matt 8:17

mercy he instilled faith in his divinity by miracles.* It was just as much from mercy that he revealed the demons' shrewdness to us and emptied their power.* From mercy, he did not reject the prostitute's touch, but approved her devotion.* Thus he showed himself humble in his humanity, powerful in his miracles, strong in overcoming the demons, and gentle in taking on our sins. And all of this came forth from the fountain of mercy, all flowed forth from the depths of goodness. And therefore, in this your first coming, *I will sing to you of mercy, Lord.** Rightly, because *the earth is full of your mercy.**

*Mark 16:20
*1 Cor 15:24
*Luke 7:37-50
*Ps 100:1
*Ps 118:64

7. Behold the oil that rotted the yoke of our captivity, as holy Isaiah says: *On that day his burden will be taken away from your shoulder and the yoke from your neck, and the yoke will rot from the oil.** What is this day, what is this burden, what is this yoke? Listen to what the prophet had just said: *The Lord will raise the scourge over him*—over the king of Assyria—*according to the blow of Midian at the rock of Horeb and his rod over the sea, and he will raise it in Egypt's path.** For after the devil, who is *the king of all the children of pride*,* was scourged and beaten, *the Lord* raised his *rod over the sea and* raised *it in Egypt's path.**

*Isa 10:27
*Isa 10:26
*Job 41:25
*Isa 10:26

8. The sea is the world, the rod is the cross, and Egypt's path is that *broad and wide way that leads to death.** Thank you, Lord Jesus, for raising your *rod over the sea*,† for laying low the pride of the world before your cross and subjecting *powers and principalities* to it.* Truly, Lord, your cross weighs down the world's waves; it calms persecutions' storms and lessens temptations' hurricanes. You also raised your cross *in Egypt's path*,* blocking *the wide road that leads to death* and pointing out the narrow, constricted way *that leads to life*.*

*Matt 7:13; Prov 12:28
†Isa 10:26
*Col 2:15
*Isa 10:26
*Matt 7:13; Prov 12:28

9. Or do you not know? Have you not perceived it? Have you not experienced it?* Sometimes, the ardor of concupiscence boils in the flesh, anger rages in the

*see Isa 40:28

mind, and offended bitter words break out at every moment. A person's entire inner world is put to confusion like the sea stirred up by a violent wind.* But when Jesus lifts his cross above this sea, everything grows calm, everything grows quiet.* Furthermore, my brothers, what led you into this narrow, constricted path of salvation?† Was it not the example of the Lord's passion and cross that he *lifted in Egypt's path*?§

*Job 1:19

*Isa 10:26; Matt 8:26 and parallels
†Matt 7:14
§Isa 10:26

10. Rightly on this day, that is, at the time of grace, at the time of mercy, at the time when the cross is raised up, when the world is subjected to Christ, when *the prince of this world is cast out*,* on this day, I say, at this moment, *his burden is taken away from your shoulder.** What burden? We read about many kinds of burdens in the Scriptures. For instance, holy Isaiah describes eleven burdens to us in his prophecy: *The burden of Babylon,** *the burden of the Philistines,*† *the burden of Moab,*§ *the burden of Damascus,*‡ *the burden of Egypt,*# *the burden of the desert of the sea,*≈ *the burden of Dumah,*◊ *the burden in Arabia,*∞ *the burden of the valley of vision,*° *the burden of Tyre,*Δ *and the burden of the beast of the south.*⊙ And what is a *burden* except a kind of weight that pulls the soul down to the earth, making it pay attention to base things and ignore the things above?

*John 12:31

*Isa 10:27

*Isa 13:1
†Isa 14:28
§Isa 15:1
‡Isa 17:1
#Isa 19:1
≈Isa 21:1
◊Isa 21:11
∞Isa 21:13
°Isa 22:1
ΔIsa 23:1
⊙Isa 30:6

11. Such a burden sometimes comes to us from love of the world, and this is the burden of Babylon; sometimes from allowing unclean spirits in,* and this is the burden of the Philistines; sometimes from a kind of natural and unavoidable need, and this is the burden of Moab; sometimes from the darkness of ignorance, and this is the burden of Egypt; sometimes from our natural weakness, and this is the burden of Damascus; sometimes from the persecution of evildoers, and this is the burden of the desert of the sea; sometimes from a hidden mental agitation, and this is the burden of Dumah; sometimes from the consideration of death and the dread of our final destiny, and this is the burden of Arabia; sometimes from vanity when we make

*Ps 77:49

progress, and this is the burden of the valley of vision; sometimes from distress at what we must bear, and this is the burden of Tyre; and sometimes from charity when we wish to benefit others, and this is the burden of the beast of the south.

12. First, then, we need the burden of Babylon to be taken away from our shoulders.* Babylon means *the world*, whose love is cupidity. This is a burden that weighs down many, curving them down toward lower things. It burdens its wretched victims in three ways: by labor, by fear, and by pain. We laboriously attain what we covet, we possess it fearfully, and we lose it painfully. Oh brothers, what king does not laboriously acquire what he covets? What king is so safe that he fears no one? What king loses something without pain?

*Isa 10:27

13. But let us turn this idea back on ourselves. Does none of us, I ask, sigh under the weight of this burden? Does no remnant of worldly love remain in us?* Why is it that certain people who have abandoned their possessions do not fear to seek those of others? For the sake of such possessions, labors weary them, pain tortures them, and fear crushes them. What about those who, although they brought little or nothing to the monastery, do not cease taking whatever they can from the monastery in order to give to others? They demand rudely, become angry if they do not get what they want, are pained if they are corrected, and go into a rage if they are summoned. Are they free of this burden?

*Aelred, Spec car 1.29.85; Oner 5.3; 19.10

14. What about those whom parental affection binds to such an extent that they do not hesitate to sacrifice religion and undergo many labors for them, and on account of this spend empty days and sleepless nights?* What shall I say of those who seek honor? What burden do they sustain? At times they fawn, at times they slander, at times they go mad because of others' success, at times, frustrated in their hope, they

*Aelred, S 53.14; Esth 6:1

rise up with curses even against their own parents. So, brothers, all such people conform themselves to this age.* We therefore say that they belong to Babylon's name, to be miserably crushed by that burden of punishment that the prophet describes concerning Babylon.

*Rom 12:2

*Isa 14:28 **15.** The burden of the Philistines follows,* whose *Jerome, Nom 6 name means *falling down from drink.** The Philistines represent those who, drunk on pride, have fallen from *Isa 14:12; 2 Cor 5:2 their heavenly dwelling.* They weigh down wretched people, sometimes by temptation, sometimes by affliction. They burdened the Egyptians by many great plagues, just as you read in the psalm: *He sent the anger of his displeasure upon them; displeasure, anger, and* *Ps 77:49 *trouble, brought in through evil angels.** They burdened the heart of Judah with avarice, the heart of the Pharisees with envy, and the heart of Pilate with foolishness. They burden the hearts of the faithful with many temptations, insulting the heart that consents to them, *Isa 51:23 saying, *Bow down so that we may pass over*.*

*Isa 15:1 **16.** The burden of Moab comes next,* which means *Jerome, Nom 6 *from the father*,* expressing those natural needs that a father always pours into his son by generation. These include the unavoidable need to eat, drink, and sleep, and other needs that pertain to bodily care. What sort of burden is this, dear brothers, that, after *the brightness* *Acts 26:13 *of the sun*,* compels us to return to the care of this flesh as to a rotting corpse? What sort of burden is this that compels us to attend to the stomach's burdens after the spiritual food of the mind? What sort of burden is this that demands daily payment of wretched subjection from us? This burden will compel us tomorrow to fill the empty stomach that we fill today!

17. What shall I say? How many cares and concerns do these needs impose on wretched mortals? This *Phil 3:19 burden is such that some people's *God is* their *stomach.** They are even willing to sell off righteousness and divine doctrine for the sake of the stomach's pleasure,

or rather, its burden! *For people such as this*, as Saint Paul says, *serve their own stomachs rather than the Lord Jesus Christ*.* Further, what a burden we bear in differentiating between foods, desiring some and rejecting others. Some foods knot the stomach, others aggravate the head, others clog the chest, still others weigh down the heart with corrupt humors! *Rom 16:18

18. But what shall I say of those whom this need compels sometimes to murmur, sometimes to disparage, sometimes even to quarrel? They grow sad if the food is plainer, if simpler drinks are served, if the food is prepared later or with less care.* We can call brothers such as these *Moab.* They live carnally according to carnal generation, and the weight of punishment that the prophet recounts in the burden of Moab will burden such unhappy brothers. *Aelred, S 63.28

19. The prophecy of the burden of Damascus follows.* Damascus means *shedding blood*,* expressing that inborn corruption in us that somehow draws and attracts us against our will to sin.* This is the law in our *members* that fights against *the law of* our *mind* and *leads* us *captive to the law of sin that is in* our *members*.* Every vital faculty in the body comes from blood, but the vital faculty in the soul comes from reason. You know how sin's natural movement sometimes nearly absorbs reason's very power by a kind of power of pleasure, bleeding the entire soul dry, as it were. But some have this sensation and do not consent; they are attacked, but not conquered; they are burdened, but not brought down. Such people sustain the burden from Damascus, but they are not Damascus. But those who consent and offer their *members* as *arms of iniquity to sin* are indeed Damascus,* shedding their own blood and killing themselves with their own hands. They surely know that they will be crushed by the weight of punishment that is described in the burden of Damascus. *Isa 17:1 *Jerome, Nom 41 *Aelred, SS 63.28; 72.15; Jas 1:14-15 *Rom 7:23 *Rom 6:13

20. Then follows the burden of Egypt.* Egypt means *darkness*.* There are two types of darkness: the dark- *Isa 19:1 *Jerome, Nom 73

ness of ignorance and the darkness of iniquity. Oh brothers, this burden that we carry from our ignorant blindness is not easy. In many situations, we do not know what is useful, what is not useful, what we should praise, and what we should reject. So we often call *evil good and good evil.** But *we also do not know what to pray for as we should*† and we walk forward in the light of the Scriptures *feeling our way as though it were night*.* Such people are burdened by Egypt, but they are not burdened with Egypt, with those, namely, who are Egypt, that is, *darkness, children of darkness*.* The Lord says this about them in the gospel: *All who do evil hate the light*.* And the apostle says, *Those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk, are drunk at night*.* Such people are weighed down by the same weight of punishment with which the holy prophet teaches that Egypt will be punished.

*Isa 5:20; Aelred, SS 55.22; 83.13
†Rom 8:26
*Job 5:14
*1 Thess 5:5
*John 3:20
*1 Thess 5:7

21. The burden of the desert of the sea follows.* The deserted sea is the crowd of the condemned, who, abandoned by God and separated from the company of the saints, weigh down the holy church with a load of persecutions. They will be punished later by the weight of punishments that the prophet designates in this burden.

*Isa 21:1

22. Further, the sea represents those people who are shaken by the various storms of passions and vices, who are always in motion, "who are always wandering and never stable,"* *never remaining in the same place*.* Sometimes they are puffed up with pride, sometimes they boil with anger, sometimes they are sad, sometimes frivolous, sometimes weighed down by silence, and sometimes falling apart from laughter. *They overstep the commands of their elders* and disturb the peace of the brothers.* Yet as long as they fear, as long as they feel pain, as long as they accept correction and do not avoid making amends, they are not the deserted sea. But if, falling into the depth of evil, they show contempt, if they loudly complain when

*RB 1.11
*Job 14:2
*Matt 15:2; RB 23.1

corrected, if they respond in a way that lacks honor, peace, and order but, filled with pride, rise up with angry words against the very person who corrects them so that they must be abandoned to themselves, you should not doubt that they should be called a deserted sea.

23. Woe to those who, abandoned by God and humanity, are left *to the desire of their heart*, to walk *in their own devices!** The Lord speaks to them through the prophet, saying, *I will take my zeal away from you and will not grow angry anymore.** You know, dear brothers, what a heavy burden such people place on the shoulders of the saints. The prophet groaned under this burden, saying, *Sinners built on my back.*† Truly, such people have built on our back, burdening us with their daily disturbances.* They add sin upon sin and join insult to insult.* They are insolent, proud, *detractors, hateful to God,** disobedient toward their elders, not adapting to their peers. Such people know that they will meet with the weight of the punishments contained in this burden.

*Ps 80:13

*Ezek 16:42; Aelred, Spec car 1.26.75; Oner 1.15; 6.5; 21.11

†Ps 128:3

*RB 65.7

*Isa 30:1

*Rom 1:30

24. After this, the prophet describes the burden of Dumah.* Dumah means *silence*.† You know, brothers, that silence burdens and stillness weighs down many people. All things are burdensome to such people when they are silent or at rest: their head aches, their stomach rumbles, their eyes cloud over, their kidneys trouble them. But everything pleases them when they go out, wandering here and there* and talking. They forget their pains, and all of their members work properly. O, how great is the power of the tongue, which brightens the eyes, soothes the head, makes the kidneys function properly, and strengthens *the weakened knees*!* It makes the weak tireless in their work, gives patience to those fasting, readies us for journeys, makes us quick to obey. So if you see a monk living in the cloister who looks in all directions,* constantly yawning, stretching his hands and feet, setting aside

*Isa 21:11

†Jerome, Nom 26

*Judg 15:5; 1 Sam 23:13

*Isa 35:3

*Judg 15:5; Exod 2:12

his book only to take it up again, finally running about from place to place and from auditorium to auditorium as though something had stung him, do not doubt that he sighs under the burden of Dumah.*

*Aelred, S 43.24–25

25. There is yet another kind of silence that leads to a severe punishment for many people. This is the silence arising from shame and confusion,* which hinders confession and prevents the forgiveness of sins. The prophecy does not fail to describe the burden of punishment that such silence deserves.

*Ps 70:13

26. It is here that the prophet adds the burden in Arabia.* Arabia means *evening*,† which is the end of day and the beginning of night. I think this fittingly represents the hour of death, which places a heavy weight of fear on almost all mortals. For who can avoid this burden, to which even the Savior freely submitted himself as an example? For when death drew near, as the evangelist says, *he began to fear and grow sick*.* The entire human race lives under this burden of fear,* unless perhaps there is someone who is certain of a blessed life after death, someone whose desire or gaze does not feel even the bitterness of death.

*Isa 21:13

†Jerome, Nom 21

*Mark 14:33

*Heb 2:15

27. Further, evening, which as we have said is the end of day and the beginning of night, expresses the fall of those who, after works *of light*, begin performing *works of darkness*.* Their *last state turns out worse than before*,* and the weight described in this burden of Arabia surely crushes them.

*Rom 13:12

*Matt 12:45 and parallels

28. The burden of the valley of vision follows.* *Vision* refers to contemplation, and *valley* to humility or a casting down. For some people's contemplation is humble, others' is downcast. The saints' is humble, the philosophers' is downcast. For if virtue grows, make sure that humility is preserved. If vanity burdens you, you know the kind of battle that the soul making progress must sustain. Otherwise, the acclamation of human praise will sneak in, flattery will

*Isa 22:1

undo your progress, and the heart will swell within. The more the saints advance, the heavier the burden of vanity that wearies them. And so they climb higher, only to be unwillingly pulled back down at times.

29. But these people—*because what was known of God was shown forth in them**—who saw *the invisible things of God through created things, vanished in their own thoughts and their foolish heart grew dark.** They fell from the mountain of contemplation to the valley of error. Therefore *they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the image of a corruptible person, beasts, and snakes.** And if you wish to know what sort of burden such people deserve, listen to what follows: *Because of this, God handed them over to disgraceful passions,* and *God handed them over to the desires of their hearts,* and *God handed them over to their false perception.** *Rom 1:19 *Rom 1:20-21 *Rom 1:23 *Rom 1:26, 24, 28

30. Those whose warped intention twists the knowledge of Scripture or heavenly instruction toward human praise or temporal gain also belong to the valley of vision. This is because vision signifies knowledge, and valley represents an earthly intention. The prophecy declares how great is the punishment that all such people should expect.

31. Next comes the burden of Tyre,* which means *narrowness*.* This burden consists of the bitterness of repentance, the labor of continence, and bodily sickness. What then? Is there no burden in bodily practices and in the observation of the Rule? What of the labor of continence? What is more laborious, what is more difficult, what must be kept amid more dangers, what is more easily lost? *Isa 23:1 *Jerome, Nom 30

32. There is another kind of narrowness of heart that self-will produces, which is the opposite of the breadth of heart that the love of God and neighbor brings about. Self-love grows out of self-will. Those who love their own will are burdened by the will of others. Such people therefore seek *what is theirs, not what* pertains to others.* They are ready to do everything that their *Phil 2:21

own will suggests but sluggish and reluctant to do "that which is imposed on them."* Of such people the apostle says, *People will be lovers of themselves.** They will not escape the weight of punishment described in the burden of Tyre.

*RB 7.49; 5.14

*2 Tim 3:2

33. The burden of the beasts of the south is last.* The south wind, which is warm, represents the Holy Spirit. So you read in the Song of Songs, *Arise, north wind, and come, south wind, blow through my garden.** Happy the soul that is the beast of this south wind, that is governed, in other words, by the bridle of its moderation, that in all things is brought under its will! Happy of course is the soul over which the Holy Spirit rules, directing all of its works, arranging its thoughts, ordering its movements, and regulating its habits! It is written of such souls, *Wherever the impulse of the Holy Spirit led, there they went when they walked.** And the prophet says of them, *You made a path for your horses in the sea.*†

*Isa 30:6

*Song 4:16

*Ezek 1:12; Origen, In Cant 2.6.5, 12

†Hab 3:15

34. Paul was a beast of this south, saying, *We did not receive the spirit of this world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things given to us by God.** You see how he is governed everywhere like the beast of the south by the bridle of its master: he is forbidden by the Spirit to preach in Asia,* he is advised by the Spirit to visit Macedonia,* he is roused by the Spirit to preach to the Athenians,* and obliged by the Spirit, he hastened to Jerusalem.* You see how the Holy Spirit sits upon him like his beast. Sometimes the Spirit tightens the reins so that he cannot go where he wants; at other times he spurs him on so that he hastens where the Spirit wills.*

*1 Cor 2:12

*Acts 16:6

*Acts 16:10

*Acts 17:16

*Acts 20:22

*Origen, In Cant 2.6.5, 12

35. What do we think, my brothers? Do beasts of this sort carry no burden? But as beasts of the south, their burden is also from the south. What sort of burden, you ask? Listen to the apostle: *God's charity was poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who was given to us.** So in this charity, what kind of burden

*Rom 5:5

did Paul bear? He himself would say, *Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is scandalized, and I do not burn?** And again, *I am greatly saddened and my heart aches constantly for my brothers and sisters according to the flesh.** Whoever is a beast of the south is burdened by others' weakness, others' needs, and others' perversity. The beast of the south's burden is the hunger of the poor, the oppression of the needy, the wretchedness of the sick, the temptation of those advancing, the fall of the weak. They are also burdened by the people's distress, the abandonment of orphans, the groaning of widows, the affliction of captives.* Does not blessed Paul, as though weighed down by this burden, come down from the secrets of heaven to the bed of the weak?*

*2 Cor 11:29

*Rom 9:2-3

*Gregory, H 5 on the Gospel 3; Aelred, Inst incl 28

*2 Cor 12:2-4

36. But you too, brothers, have fled from the midst of Babylon in the north* and now *live in the land of the south.* *Bear one another's burdens, and so,* like the beasts of the south, *you will fulfill Christ's law.*† Whoever fails to carry a brother's burden is certainly not a beast of the south. Which burdens must you carry? *The sicknesses of body or mind** that we have recounted in these burdens as best we could.

*Jer 51:6

*Isa 21:14; Gen 24:62
†Gal 6:2

*RB 72.5

37. We could also say, brothers, that the beasts of the south represent those who obtain the Holy Spirit's gifts through their office rather than through merit.* These gifts include prophecy, healing, and others of this sort.* Whomever they ordain is ordained, whomever they curse is cursed, whomever they bless is blessed, whomever they bind is bound, and whomever they absolve is absolved.* But this is only insofar as they do all this according to the laws of the church rather than by their own initiative. So it is that Balaam blessed the people of God,* wicked Caiaphas prophesied,† and wicked Judas performed miracles like the other apostles.§ So it is that many will come *on that day*, saying, *Did we not prophesy in your name and perform many miracles in your name? And then I will say to*

*1 Cor 12:7-10

*1 Cor 12:28

*Matt 16:19; John 20:23

*Num 23:11-12, 25-26; 24:10-13
†John 11:51
§Matt 10:1 and parallels

them, says the Lord, *I never knew you*.* Such people should be called beasts rather than people, because *they serve their own stomachs rather than the Lord Jesus Christ*.† They desire earthly things and condemn the heavenly. These people are wretchedly weighed down by that burden with which Isaiah terribly threatens certain beasts of the south.

*Matt 7:22-23; John 11:47; Aelred, Spec car 2.9.22; Oner 4.9; Jerome, In Matt 1
†Rom 16:18; Phil 3:19

38. We have broken this barley loaf as best we could,* but in our haste, we have dropped many fragments. You who are at leisure,† therefore, whom Christ has kept free from cares, *gather what is left of the fragments so that they are not lost*.§ Each of you should look carefully at yourself to see what burden you are bearing now and if there are any you fear to bear in the future.

*Matt 14:19 and parallels; John 16:9
†Matt 20:6
§John 6:12

39. Those under Babylon's burden should hate it and cast it off. If you are conformed to its works, you will not be free from its punishments. If you are under the burden of the Philistines, do not let their drinks intoxicate you. If you do, you will become like them first in blame and later in punishment. If you feel you are laboring under that burden of Moab, concern yourself with fulfilling your bodily needs in such a way that Nebuzaradan does not destroy the walls of Jerusalem.* Nor should you satisfy your needs in such a way that you forever burn with them. If the burden of Damascus weighs upon your shoulders, be careful that you do not harm yourself, and so sowing *in the flesh*, you do not reap *corruption from the flesh*.*

*2 Kgs 25:8, 10; Gregory, Mo 30.XVIII.59

*Gal 6:8

40. If the burden of Egypt rests upon you, cast off the works of darkness and equip yourself with arms of light.* If here you freely hand your mind over to inner darkness, you will someday unwillingly be tormented by outer darkness.* Further, if the burden of the desert of the sea attacks you with evil persecutions, do not grow weak, do not let yourself be broken, or you will impatiently suffer what they maliciously inflict. But if the burden of Dumah makes you impatient

*Rom 13:12

*Matt 8:12

of silence, or if shame or confusion hinders confession, beware the weight of punishment with which the prophet threatens such silent ones. If you are weighed down by the burden of Arabia, if you fear natural death, behave in such a way that your conscience is not the reason for your fear. Otherwise, not only will Arabia weigh you down, but the burden of eternal damnation will also crush you with Arabia.

41. If you are sighing under the burden of the valley of vision and fighting against vanity, be careful not to fall from the mountain of contemplation into the valley of error. There you will be overwhelmed with that weight that the prophet describes in the burden of the valley of vision. If under Tyre's burden your soul sinks into a timid hopelessness because of present *labors and pains*,* beware above all else the narrowness of self-will. Thus you will joyfully advance with expanded heart through all the difficulties of this life* and so escape *the eternal weight* of misery that Tyre threatens.† Finally, if on account of the burden of the beasts of the south your desire fades from weariness, reflect and know that if you reject the burden of charity you will justly bear the burden of damnation.

*Sir 14:15; Ps 89:10

*Ps 118:32; RB Prol 49

†2 Cor 4:17

42. It seems to me that even the very order in which the burdens are presented is not lacking in mystery. It is not without reason that the burden of Babylon is placed first, the burden of the Philistines second, and so on. For we know that cupidity is the burden of Babylon and *the root of all evil*.* If we do not first cast cupidity from our hearts, we will by no means be able to turn aside or conquer the other burdens, nor advance to the peak of the virtues. Cupidity is cast out either by those who completely renounce the world or by those who *use this world as though they did not use it*,* *as having nothing and possessing everything*.† After we have conquered or driven away cupidity, then *we do not struggle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the world of darkness, against spiritual evil in the*

*1 Tim 6:10

*1 Cor 7:31

†2 Cor 6:10

heavens.* But when he who does not allow us *to be tempted beyond* our ability but also provides *a way out with the temptation*, *so that* we *can* bear it,* either lightens or casts aside this burden, the needs of the flesh will burden us, whose limits, being difficult to know, are impossible to keep.

*Eph 6:12

*1 Cor 10:13

43. Once the fire has been lit, natural stings necessarily wear us out. Unless we resist bravely, they lead to all sorts of forbidden acts. If all of the preceding burdens are overcome—if the Philistines are restrained, if Moab's bodily needs are brought within limits and sobriety is restored, and if Damascus's burden, the stings of the flesh, grows quiet—then immediately, errors and blasphemy like the darkness of Egypt cloud the eyes of the heart. But then the darkness withdraws before the shining light of wisdom, and immediately the envy and ill-will of the desert of the sea, that is, of the perverse, take its place. After this has vanished, when everything appears quiet, the quiet itself cannot remain quiet from the spirit of *acedia,* Dumah's burden. After constant work, prayer, and reading have warded off *acedia*, the burden of Arabia, that is, the fear of death, presses upon us. But after this too is overcome by the virtue of a good conscience and faith, vanity will grow burdensome to the person close to perfection. If deep humility conquers this vanity, nothing remains except to be burdened by the needs of others as a beast of the south.

44. What we have said about these burdens should be enough for the moment. Christ takes some of these burdens from our shoulders during this time of grace. He moderates others, others he diminishes, and others he arranges. *He does all this according* to the abundance of this mercy,* in whose presence, as though *in the presence of oil, the yoke* of the devil's rule rotted.† Whoever neglects the time of mercy should fear the time of Judgment, because he who redeemed us through

*1 Cor 12:11; Ps 50:3

†Isa 10:27

mercy will judge us through justice. Thus, brothers, *let us sing to the Lord of mercy and judgment*,* the mercy we experience and the Judgment we await. Let us embrace the former and fear the latter, that we may be found devout here, and free from care there, by the favor of our Lord.

*Ps 100:1; Exod 15:1, 21

Homily 1

1. God is the primary and efficient cause of everything that was, is, or will be; he is also the end of all things. For since he is, so to speak, being itself, all things have what they are from him. This is because it is only from being that they have what they are.* Humans and angels certainly exist. But being is one thing; being a human or an angel is another, since something can exist and not be a human or an angel. Think, if you can, not of the existence of a human or an angel, but of being itself, apart from humans or angels. Existence pertains not only to humans or angels, but also to all things that are.

*Aelred, Anima 2.50; Ps-Dionysius, Cael Hier 4.1

2. Therefore God is without a doubt being itself. Being does not belong specifically to this or that thing, but commonly to all things that exist, or, to put it more clearly, to the essences of all things. But just as God is the being of all things that exist, so too he is the life of all the living, and the wisdom of all the wise. Rational creation was created according to this form, having not only being and life from him, but also the capacity to be wise and live wisely. But wretched humanity, removing and separating itself from this form, *was made like the foolish beasts*.* We began to be foolish and live foolishly. Yet we did not cease being and living. We can return to the original form when he who formed us reforms us.*

*Ps 48:13

*Aelred, Spec car 1.4.11; Aelred, S 67.14–15

3. That form is wisdom, and the way that leads back to it is instruction. All true instruction, by

which we are led back from this deformity to that form, is threefold: faith, hope, and love. Thus we will know what to believe, what to hope, and what to love. So knowing, we will be able in fact to believe, hope, and love. For this purpose, wisdom *communicates itself to holy souls and makes friends of God and prophets*.* Through them, it provides us with Holy Scripture, which is, as it were, the source of all instruction. Of course, the Spirit himself, who so prudently established Scripture, arranged it to be broad enough for countless meanings. He reveals some meanings to one person and others to another. Scripture is always fresh, thus training abilities and driving away boredom.* It always delights by a kind of renewal.

*Wis 7:27

*Augustine, Civ Dei 17.3.2

4. But so that we can discern human error or demonic suggestion by careful examination and the Holy Spirit's revelation, the rule of faith has been established, the promise of hope has been written, and the precepts of charity have been announced. You should always ascribe any meaning occurring to the mind that does not correspond to these three either to demonic deception or to human error. But you should not doubt that any meaning drawn fittingly from the sacred pages, if it instructs in faith, raises up in hope, or kindles in charity, was included by the Holy Spirit and revealed to you by him.

5. The meanings spoken or written once concerning Scripture are enough, and more than enough, for those who are hindered by the darkness of worldly affairs or are caught in the nets of necessary tasks. The bonds of their countless cares and troublesome concerns curb wandering, base mental digressions. Scripture's meaning is so unfamiliar to such people that it always seems new. But you, beloved brothers, have renounced this world's works. You are free of every worldly care and concern.* You have joined battle with unclean spirits and your own thoughts.† For you, there is

*Aelred, Spec car 2.19.59; Aelred, Inst incl 4

†RB 1.5

another reason for meditating on Scripture, as well as a different need.*

*Bernard, SC 1.1

6. Because many of you grow bored with the same sermon and the same reading repeated again and again, we need to renew what seems old and familiar, either by adding certain ideas or at least by changing the words.* In this way we can rouse the attentiveness that we seek and call the heart back from its useless and vain digressions to what is useful. So the mind that in its boredom had fled the familiar can, after being renewed by the sweetness of a reading or sermon, beneficially return to that from which it had been unconsciously distracted.

*Augustine, Civ Dei 10.20

7. With that, I will now take up the book of Isaiah to examine a small portion of it with you. Although you may be quite familiar with it from the commentaries of the saints, I think it is highly useful for us to repeat what they said, if not differently, at least in another fashion. Let us bring to light just as God provides what they passed over as obvious or insignificant, gathering seeds from their reasoning. Thus, whoever does not dare aspire to the solid bread of their perfect interpretations* can, though a dog, approach the crumbs that we will collect from under their table with the help of your prayers.* So in this way, beloved brothers, let us redeem the time, or rather outwit the time, *because the days are evil.** Let us, by means of saving words and holy meditations, defend our mouths from idle talk and our hearts from empty thoughts.*

*Heb 5:14

*Mark 7:28; John 6:12

*Eph 5:16

*Aelred, Spec car 3.40.113; Aelred, Inst incl 20

8. This holy prophet is so deep in meaning, so lofty in mysteries, so clear sighted in foretelling future events, so delightful in moral instruction, that at times it seems as though he were carried to heaven itself to lay bare the secrets of divine wisdom. At other times he is sent down in swift flight to the lower regions of the firmament to make known heavenly mysteries. Then he flies lightly down to us to stroll in the moral

fields. At times it is as though he were taken up *to Paradise*, returning to us again to relate ineffable *words that no human being may speak*.* *2 Cor 12:4

9. He reveals so plainly in prophecy all these things about Christ and the church's mysteries* that he seems not so much to have foretold future things as to have narrated the past. All this is pleasing and delicious enough on its own, yet the wonderful charm of his eloquence renders it even more pleasing and sweeter. But by your leave we are bypassing the rest for a moment, putting forth for your instruction whatever the Holy Spirit supplies concerning the eleven burdens,* which the prophet treated by means of the same Spirit's dictation. *sacramenta*; Eph 5:32 *1 Cor 14:3; Eph 4:29

10. I recognize my obligation to your progress in all respects,* because of my office, of course, but mostly because of my affection for you. But *necessity* also *compels me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel*,* especially since I do not doubt that whatever progress I make in spiritual teaching or in understanding of the Scriptures is not so much for me as it is for you, given through me. Nothing should be attributed to my merits, since I am a sinner, nor to scholarly training, since, as you know, I am mostly uneducated;* nor to my zeal or diligence, since I am rarely at leisure and frequently busy. Everything, therefore, is from God, entrusted to me and passed on to you, *so that all who boast should boast in the Lord*.* *Rom 1:14 *1 Cor 9:16 *Aelred, Spec car, Prol. 2; Aelred, SS 64.1; 79.1 *1 Cor 1:31

11. Be present, then, good Jesus, and pour forth the grace of your blessing on the bread that we have offered,* that the *poor* may *eat and have their fill*,† and say with the prophet, *How sweet in my throat is your eloquence, sweeter than honey in my mouth*.§ Behold, I apply my hand, lend your assistance, because *without* you I *can do nothing*.* You who inspired holy Isaiah to write, inspire me too, I beg, to understand what he wrote. You have already inspired me to believe, for unless we believe, we do not understand.* *Matt 14:19 and parallels †Ps 21:27 §Ps 118:103 *John 15:5 *Isa 7:9 LXX

12. What, then, do we take this *burden* to mean? There is a burden that weighs down, and a burden that crushes. Sickness weighs down; iniquity crushes. Temptation weighs down; damnation crushes. The first burden considered is Babylon,* after which follow the burden of the Philistines,* the burden of Moab,† and the burden of Damascus.§ The burden of Egypt comes next,‡ and then the burden of the desert of the sea.# Then follow the burden of Dumah,~ the burden of Arabia,◊ then the burden of the valley of vision∞ and the burden of Tyre,° and finally the burden of the beasts of the south.Δ

*Isa 13:1
*Isa 14:28
†Isa 15:1
§Isa 17:1
‡Isa 19:1
#Isa 21:1
≈Isa 21:11
◊Isa 21:13
∞Isa 22:1
°Isa 23:1
ΔIsa 30:6

13. Holy Isaiah shows a sinking down of certain cities or peoples, or rather of those represented by these cities and peoples. Nor is he silent regarding the extent, causes, and nature of the sinking itself. He also includes a word concerning the happiness of those whom this sinking burdens not for ruin, but for salvation. And everywhere it is clear that the power is God's, and yours, Lord, mercy; *because you render to all according to their works*,* dividing *day from night, light from darkness*.* Thus the darkness appears even thicker when compared to the light, and the light shines more abundantly by the gathering darkness.

*Ps 61:12-13
*Gen 1:14, 4

14. And who judges and divides them if not he who says, *The Father does not judge anyone, but has given all judgment to the Son?** And again, *I came to the world in judgment, so that those not seeing might see, and those seeing might be blinded*.* Therefore, the coming of our Lord and Savior brought about this dividing of good from evil, with the sinking of some and the deliverance of others. It is well known that the prophet's main subject throughout the whole book is the coming of the Lord. Saint Simeon says of this, *Behold, here is one placed for the fall and resurrection of many in Israel, and as a sign that will be contradicted*.* What Isaiah calls a *burden*, Simeon calls a *fall*.

*John 5:22
*John 9:39
*Luke 2:34

15. He describes these burdens so as to make clear that God weighs down some but does not crush them; he crushes others but does not weigh them down; others he both weighs down and crushes. He weighs down those whom he afflicts; he crushes those whom he abandons. He therefore afflicts some but does not abandon them, as it was written, *The Lord scourges every child whom he accepts.** This is why the psalmist says, *I will punish their iniquities with the rod and their sins with blows; but I will not scatter my mercy from him.** He abandons but does not afflict those of whom the prophet says, *They have no part in human work, and they will not be scourged with others.** And again, *I left them to the desires of their heart.** Another prophet says, *I will not punish their daughters when they fornicate, nor their wives when they commit adultery.** There are still others whom he afflicts and abandons, about whom he himself speaks through the prophet: *I wore them away, and they refused to accept instruction.*†

*Heb 12:6

*Ps 88:33-34; Oner 19.17; 21.9

*Ps 72:5

*Ps 80:13

*Hos 4:14; Aelred, Spec car 1.26.75; Oner Adv 23 = Aelred S 47.23; Oner 6.5; 21.11

†Jer 5:3

16. Of course, when we begin discussing the burdens themselves, God willing, it will become clear how or in what ways this affliction or abandonment comes to pass. But the burden of Babylon, or of the Philistines, or of Moab, can be understood as the burden with which they weigh down others, or as the burden by which they themselves are weighed down. This also applies to the other prophecies. Now, with your leave, let us look at the title of the following narrative.

17. *The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah, son of Amos, saw.** As you well know, beloved, the name *Babylon*, which means *confusion*, represents the world.* The world is surely the place where all things are confused. Here the good live with the wicked, the chosen with the condemned. Here the grain is with the chaff, the oil with the dregs, and the wine with the seed. Here, insofar as temporal things are concerned, the righteous

*Isa 13:1

*Jerome, In Isa 6.2

and the ungodly are alike. Here a person has no advantage over the beasts, since here neither do those who live as rational human beings get a reward, nor are those who become beasts through carnal vices punished according to their deeds.*

*Ps 48:13, 21; Luke 23:41

18. We usually understand Babylon as only being the city of the wicked with their king, to which city none of the chosen belong and from which none of the condemned is excluded. We can divide the condemned into three groups. The first still share in the fellowship and works of the chosen. The second are separated from these works and from the communion. The third, having been stripped of their bodies, are handed over to eternal punishment. Thus, all these together, each of these groups and the individual persons of each group, are rightly regarded to belong to the name *Babylon*.

19. It is clear that the chosen, too, can be divided into three classes. For some have not yet been called, such as Jews or pagans. Others are called but not justified, such as Christian sinners. Others are justified but not yet glorified, such as the saints still subject to the miseries of this life.* Thus the chosen who have not yet been called still carry the name of Babylon. Although predestination will separate them from Babylon, Babylon's errors still blind them. So too for those whose hateful works distinguish them from the chosen. Although both calling and predestination join them to the chosen, the disgrace of the Babylonian name overpowers them.

*Rom 8:30

20. And so Babylon applies to all humanity, in which the same errors and vices entangle both the chosen and the condemned. *The twisted and unsearchable heart* is also Babylon,* because it is confused with vices and passions. That society of the condemned for whom eternal confusion is prepared is also called Babylon. But there is also a burden of Babylon that destroys the confused mass of people, separating one from another.

*Jer 17:9

It is also the burden of Babylon that constantly inflicts temporal evils upon this crowd of people. It is the burden of Babylon that knocks down the edifices of faults and wicked passions in the city of confusion of each person's heart. The burden of Babylon is also that which will burden the city of confusion alone with eternal punishments from above after this life. And this is *the burden of Babylon which Isaiah, son of Amos, saw.** *Isa 13:1

21. How did he see it? Ah, brothers! Those whom we now call *prophets* were once called *seers* for their superior and more godly kind of vision, if I may phrase it so.* But the time is short, and the tasks at hand do not permit us to speak of this vision now. Let us reserve this reflection for another sermon. Meanwhile, pray that, following the Spirit's wisdom, we may describe these burdens in such a way that we can more bravely sustain those that weigh us down, that we can be careful of those that would crush us, and that we can escape those that would condemn us, by the help of him who wanted to be burdened by our burdens for us,* our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns as God forever and ever. Amen.

*1 Sam 9:9; Jerome, In Isa 1.2

*Isa 53:4; Matt 8:17; 11:28