

“A rich and detailed study of the best-known of English Cistercians, from his childhood as the son of a married priest of Hexham, through his formative years at the Scottish court, to his conversion and entry into the Yorkshire Cistercian abbey of Rievaulx, and his subsequent monastic career as monk, novice-master, and abbot. This is far more than a narrative: Burton demonstrates how Aelred’s life before and after he became a monk, and his engagement with the world outside the cloister, were permeated by the importance of friendship and love, and by his search for harmony, reconciliation, and unity, through friendship, with God.”

—Janet Burton
Professor of Medieval History
University of Wales Trinity Saint David (Lampeter)

“In this beautiful and sensitive study, Pierre-André Burton gives readers a holistic examination of Aelred of Rievaulx’s personal biography and writings, arguing that the holistic approach is the key to understanding both Aelred the man and the rich theology, anthropology, and spirituality Aelred offers to readers. Using his profound familiarity with the entirety of Aelred’s written *oeuvre*—spiritual treatises, historical writings, sermons—as well as other medieval Cistercian writings, Burton produces a richly woven narrative whose separate threads provide striking insights in their own right and a unified image in their sum. This unique study, translated here into elegant English by Christopher Coski, is much more than the sum of its parts, which is precisely what it shows was the case with Aelred’s individual actions and writings as well.”

—Elizabeth Freeman
Senior Lecturer in Medieval European History
University of Tasmania

“Aelred was the son of a married priest at a time when that institution was fast disappearing. Aelred’s intellectual development at the court of the Scottish king, his conversion to monastic life in the new and flourishing Cistercian order, and his role as teacher, as monk, and as abbot have given rise to the intense scholarship displayed in this work. Burton builds his profound insight into Aelred’s spirituality on the framework supplied by his study of the stages in Aelred’s life. This work is both historically profound and theologically insightful. Burton’s work is a masterful study of a spiritual giant.”

—John R. Sommerfeldt
Professor Emeritus
University of Dallas

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Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167)

An Existential and Spiritual Biography

Pierre-André Burton, OCSO

Translated by Christopher Coski



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*In memory of Father Charles Dumont,
deceased on Christmas Eve 2009.*

*We learned of his passing into our Father's kingdom
as we completed this biography.*

It owes so much to him, and he would have so loved to read it.

Pierre-André Burton

Therefore will he give them up even till the time wherein she that travaileth shall bring forth: and the remnant of his brethren shall be converted to the children of Israel. And he shall stand, and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the height of the name of the Lord his God: and they shall be converted, for now shall he be magnified even to the ends of the earth. And this man shall be our peace.
(Mic 5:3-5)

L'homme, par son action morale, ne réalise et ne retrouve l'unité qu'en unifiant le monde dans un sens qui l'unifie lui-même. (Man, by his moral action, realizes and recovers wholeness only by unifying the world in a way that unifies himself.) (Éric Weil, Philosophie morale [Paris: Vrin, 1981], 33)

Contents

List of Abbreviations	xi
Translator's Note and Acknowledgments	xiii
General Introduction	1
Part I: Methodology	
Chapter One. Historiography, Methods, and Perspectives	15
Part II: The Time of Human and Spiritual Foundations: Aelred the Man (1110–1134)	
Introduction	48
Chapter Two. The Foundation of Rievaulx: The Context of Aelred's Life	49
Chapter Three. Aelred's Intellectual Development and Life at the Scottish Court	80
Chapter Four. Aelred's Conversion (1134)	109
Part III: Aelred's Instruction and First Responsibilities: Monk and Teacher of the Monastic Way of Life (1134–1143)	
Introduction	130
Chapter Five. Aelred's Monastic Instruction (1134–1143)	132

Chapter Six. Teacher of Humanity; the *Mirror of Charity* (1142–1143) 154

Part IV: The Time of Great Pastoral Responsibilities:
Abbot and Pastor (1143–1147, 1147–1154)

Introduction: Searching for Unity: Asceticism and Charity
by Way of Friendship 266

Chapter Seven. Key Events: Foundation of Revesby (1143)
and Election at Rievaulx (1147) 268

Chapter Eight. Aelred: A Master Architect Building
a Community 285

Part V: The Time of Spiritual Maturity: Aelred, the Moral
Conscience of His Time (1153/54–1167)

Introduction: From Babylon to Jerusalem 348

Chapter Nine. Aelred's Social and Political
Engagements 352

Chapter Ten. Toward a Mystical Theology of History,
or the Cosmic Mystery of the Cross of Christ 473

Chapter Eleven. General Conclusions. From Divided Man
to Unified Being in Christ: Configuring the Self
and the World in Christ; Aelred's Universal Mystical
Theology of History 533

Appendices

Appendix I. Chronological Chart 554

Appendix II. Aelred of Rievaulx's Works Categorized
by Seven Spiritual Paths 557

Appendix III. Foundations in the Filiation
of Rievaulx 559

Appendix IV. Genealogical Chart of Relations between
the Anglo-Saxon, Franco-Norman, and Scottish Royal
Families 560

Selected Bibliography 561

Indices

Index of Scriptural References 584

Index of Names 588

Index of References to the Works of Aelred
and of Walter Daniel 596

Abbreviations

Series and Journals

CCCM	Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis
CF	Cistercian Fathers series, Cistercian Publications
Cîteaux	<i>Cîteaux: Commentarii cistercienses</i>
Coll	<i>Collectanea Cisterciensia</i>
Cons	Constitutions of the Order of the Cistercians of the Strict Observance
CS	Cistercian Studies series, Cistercian Publications
CSQ	<i>Cistercian Studies Quarterly</i>
PL	Patrologia Latina. Ed. J.-P. Migne
RAM	<i>Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique</i>
RB	<i>RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict</i> . Ed. and trans. Timothy Fry. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981.
RBen	<i>Revue Benedictine</i>
SBOp	Sancti Bernardi Opera. Ed. Jean Leclercq, Henri Roche, and C. H. Talbot. Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957–1977.

Aelred's Works

Anima	<i>De Anima; Dialogue on the Soul</i>
Bello	<i>Relatio de Bello Standardii; The Battle of the Standard</i>
Epil	Epilogue, <i>De quodam miraculum mirabili; A Certain Wonderful Miracle</i>

Gen angl	<i>Genealogia Regum Anglorum; Genealogy of the Kings of the English</i>
Iesu	<i>De Iesu puero duodenni; On Jesus at the Age of Twelve</i>
Inst incl	<i>De institutione inclusarum; The Formation of Recluses</i>
Lam D	<i>Lamentatio Davidis, regis Scotorum; Lament for David, King of the Scots</i>
Mira	<i>De quodam miraculum mirabili; A Certain Wonderful Miracle</i>
Oner	<i>Homiliae de Oneribus Prophetis Isaias; Homilies on the Prophetic Burdens of Isaiah</i>
Orat	<i>Oratio Pastoralis; The Pastoral Prayer</i>
Pref B	Prefatory letter to Bernard in <i>De Speculum caritatis</i> (CF 17:73–75)
Pref H	Prefatory letter to King Henry in <i>Genealogy of the Kings of the English</i>
Spec car	<i>De Speculum caritatis; Mirror of Charity</i>
Spir	<i>De spiritali amicitia; On Spiritual Friendship</i>
Hexham	<i>De sanctis ecclesiae Hagulstadensis; The Saints of the Church of Hexham and their Miracles</i>
Vita E	<i>Vita Sancti Edwardi, Regis et Confessoris; The Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor</i>
Vita N	<i>Vita Sancti Niniani; The Life of Saint Ninian</i>

Bernard's Works

Apo	<i>Apologia ad Guillelmum</i>
Pref Ep	Prefatory letter to Aelred's <i>Speculum caritatis</i> , CF 17:69–72

Walter Daniel's Works

Lament	Walter Daniel, <i>Lament for Aelred</i>
Letter	Walter Daniel, <i>Letter to Maurice</i>
VA	Walter Daniel, <i>Vita Ailredi / Vita Aelredi</i>

Translator's Note and Acknowledgments

Wherever possible, I replaced non-English quotations in Burton's work with quotations from English-language versions of the same texts. Chapter and paragraph numbers in Aelred's works come from the English versions, even when they differ from those in the Latin editions. Where English versions of quotations did not already exist, I have translated them into English. In all cases, unless otherwise noted, Latin annotations, biblical references, and emphasis in quotations are Burton's, not those of the quotations' original authors or editors. The Latin annotations are drawn from Burton's source texts, such as PL, CCCM, and SBOp. All biblical verses cited in English are taken from the English Vulgate, except where Aelred himself quotes the Bible.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to several individuals whose generous contributions were vital in completing this work: first, to Lewis White, who allowed the use of excerpts from his (at the time) in-progress translation of Aelred's *Homilies on the Prophetic Burdens of Isaiah*; second to my colleagues and friends, Molly Morrison and Neil Bernstein, who assisted in translating quotations from Italian and Latin, respectively; and finally to Emily Stuckey, who compiled the indices. I could not have completed this project without their help. Above all, I'd like to thank Marsha Dutton, who offered me the opportunity to translate this work in the first place and who worked tirelessly to polish the final product.

General Introduction

1066–1167

*From a Battlefield to the Chapter House of Rievaulx, or
One Century of English History*

On January 12, 1167, at the age of 57, Aelred was laid to rest in Christ's peace, loved by God and man. He lived thirty-three years of monastic life, including twenty years of abbacy at the Cistercian monastery of Rievaulx. Blessed be his memory forever!

Such could have been the obituary drafted by Walter Daniel, personal secretary and posthumous biographer of the abbot of Rievaulx, to announce the death of the man he tended through many long years of illness, whom we, in turn, memorialize by retracing his life.

Aelred was born in 1110 in Hexham, a small Northumberland town on the banks of the Tyne near Hadrian's Wall, that miniature rampart whose construction the Romans began in 122 to mark the frontier between the Empire and the barbarian populations of what would one day become Scotland. In 1114, when Aelred was four years old, a painful event occurred that would profoundly trouble his early family life. The bishops of the diocese of York—first Thomas, and subsequently his successor Thurstan—applied canonical norms laid down by the Gregorian Reforms and decided to replace married clergy with monks or priests who had taken vows of celibacy. Aelred's father, Eilaf, was hit hard by this decision as he, following in

his forebears' footsteps, exercised a parochial appointment as guardian of the sacred relics kept in the church of Hexham, a future Augustinian priory. At this time or shortly thereafter—the exact date is unknown—Aelred was sent to be educated in the cathedral school at Durham, a highly reputable religious and intellectual center where the memory of the Venerable Bede was cherished.

In 1124, Aelred's father benefited from the accession of King David to the Scottish throne to gain entrance for his eldest son into the royal court. Aelred was to spend ten years there, years rich and fruitful in every regard. However, in 1134, to the surprise of many and after at least two years of intense spiritual struggle, Aelred decided to renounce what promised to be a brilliant career and instead entered a recently founded monastery, Rievaulx. Rievaulx belonged to an entirely new religious order, the Cistercians, then in rapid growth thanks to the prodigious influence of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and his monastic doctrine of humanistic spiritualism and Christocentric theological anthropology, founded on the search for union with God through the affective power generated by, and through, charity.

Thirteen years later, in 1147, after a brief period of pastoral responsibility related to the founding of Rievaulx's daughter house of Revesby in 1144, Aelred was elected head of his own monastery and became the abbot of Rievaulx, a position he would hold for twenty years.

Another span of twenty years passed between Aelred's entry into the monastery and what could be considered his entry into politics. Starting in 1153–1154, when the Anarchy ended and Henry Plantagenet was recognized as Stephen of Blois' legitimate successor, Aelred became one of the most visible English ecclesiastical figures of his time. This consequence occurred primarily because of Aelred's treatises on national history, by which he became directly involved in the social and political affairs of the kingdom, directing their course as far as his abilities and rank allowed.

After more than ten years of painful illness that forced Aelred to relax his Cistercian austerity, he died in the night of January 12, 1167, roughly one hundred years after the downfall of the previously unbroken Anglo-Saxon dynasty. That dynasty had ended with the last legitimate Anglo-Saxon king, Edward the Confessor, who had died on January 5, 1066, with no direct heir. The subsequent Norman invasion was led by William the Conqueror with the blessing of Pope Alexander II. William's victory at Hastings on October 14, 1066, had made the end of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty definitive.

Aelred, the third abbot of Rievaulx, was buried on January 14, 1167, in the monastery's chapter house, beside his predecessor, the venerable William, Saint Bernard's former secretary, whom Bernard had sent to be Rievaulx's founder and first abbot.

From 1066 to 1167, between the Norman conquest and Aelred's death, a century of English history unfolded. Some may find it strange to frame Aelred's life between these two chronological reference points. The second is certainly justified: it marks the ending of the terrestrial pilgrimage of him who has been called the Doctor of Spiritual Friendship. As for the first reference point, which places the start of Aelred's life forty-four years before his birth, we have ample opportunity to demonstrate the date's pertinence. The national psychological trauma suffered by England in 1066 affected all aspects of the country's history deeply and for a very long time, even well after Aelred's death one century later. We will see, however, that many aspects of his life—the political responsibilities he took on, the self-awareness he acquired, the role he felt called to play in society, and even the "theology of history" that he gradually formulated—were in large part determined by the far-reaching consequences of the new dynasty's establishment on the English throne, a dynasty at first exclusively Franco-Norman and then, through gradual assimilation, Anglo-Norman. We will also see how, as abbot of a cenobitic monastery, Aelred sought to transpose the ecclesiastical model that had served as a foundation for the edification of his own

monastic community to the context of his country's political life. Or, to put it another way, using a symbolism borrowed from Saint Augustine and omnipresent in Aelred's own thought, he attempted to transform the worldly City of Man, remodeling it in the image of the City of God.

Aelred in fact had but a single desire. It was constant throughout the diverse stages of his existence, and its trace is noticeable in the manner in which he assumed the multiple responsibilities assigned to him over time, even before he entered Rievaulx. In short, Aelred's great aspiration was to anticipate the *Heavenly Jerusalem* (the "Vision of Peace") in the *Babylon of this world* (the "City of Confusion"). To this end, he unceasingly strove to bring down the walls of hatred and rivalry, which—much like Hadrian's wall, whose vestiges lingered in Hexham and on whose ruins he may well have played with his childhood friends—divided the people of his time and caused much of the disaster and devastation he witnessed through the greater part of his life, especially before 1153–1154.

Henry Plantagenet's designation as Stephen of Blois' legitimate heir, after almost twenty years of civil war, changed the atmosphere and opened up to Aelred avenues of action he could never otherwise have hoped for. His manner and station permitted him henceforth to contribute to peace-building in his country by establishing himself as both the counselor of princes and the edifier of a national consciousness federated of all the hope and good will of a people bled white by long, painful years of civil war.

On this subject we attempt to answer at least two principal and related questions. First is the question of how Aelred came to take such an active part in the social and political life of his time. Some might argue that engagement in the affairs of his era contradicted his identity as a monk who, by his own sense of vocation, had chosen to withdraw into the silence of the cloister and devote himself as wholly as possible to an ascetic life of solitude and prayer. The second question regards the manner in which, and the theological and spiritual basis on

which, Aelred so firmly engaged himself in the building of a society ultimately to be established on solid principles of peace and justice.

Two theses, then, need to be demonstrated. The first is that Aelred's social and political engagement as abbot of Rievaulx, as well as the manner in which he conceived of his pastoral responsibility toward the community confided to his care, found their source not only in his abbacy's inherent obligations but, even more important, were rooted in the depths of his personal and foundational life experiences. We will emphasize how, because of the singular circumstances of his personal narrative and its historical context, Aelred found himself thrust between the primary lines of fracture in his era's civil and religious society. We will emphasize how as he was particularly sensitized to the schisms forming in their wake he spared no effort in every personal, interpersonal, communal, ecclesiastical, social, or political context to navigate toward unity, harmony, conciliation, and reconciliation. Among the divisional lines we will take into account, the following ones derive from the chronological reference points highlighted earlier.

First, consider 1114: the fracture was simultaneously social, familial, and emotional. The decision on the part of Bishop Thomas and his successor Thurstan to replace married with unmarried clergy suddenly cast Aelred's family into an uncertain future and a relatively precarious socio-economic situation. Eilaf, Aelred's father and Hexham's priest, suddenly risked finding himself homeless and without an income with which to provide for his family. The shock was brutal. Whether it was then or slightly later that Aelred was sent to Durham is unclear. Either way, the social fracture was soon compounded by Aelred's sooner-than-planned departure from his early childhood environment. Furthermore, the brutality and suddenness with which these events succeeded each other would certainly have shaken the young child and thrown off his internal compass. Given the profound traces this departure appears to have left in his heart, there is every reason to think

that this separation was deeply painful to Aelred, and that it resulted in a new fracture, emotional this time, whose exact depth we cannot measure.

In that same year we also see a socio-religious fracture. Although Aelred was too young at the time to understand the full importance of all the issues involved, he later discovered that the same episcopal decision that had upset the equilibrium of his family life was going to force two antagonistic ecclesiastical models to violently collide. The first, Celtic and Saxon, soon destined to disappear, raised no particular objection to the existence of married clergy. The second, newer and imported from the continent, met savage resistance. This model aimed to impose the canonical norms of a church reformed according to the Roman Gregorian model, so called after Gregory VII, the eleventh-century pope who was the principal artisan of a reform initiated years earlier by Pope Leo IX.

A second important date in the chronology is 1124. This time, the fracture was primarily socio-cultural. First, Aelred quit the predominantly and essentially religious environment in which he had spent the first fourteen years of his life in order to enter a universe that was socially very different, even if piety was certainly not absent from it. This new social milieu was the Scottish court. Additionally, Aelred's entry into the Scottish court marked a second, equally important split of a cultural and intellectual nature. In leaving Durham to enter into the service of King David, Aelred had to acquire the use of a third language. In addition to his native English and the Latin he had mastered while studying at Hexham and Durham, Aelred now had to learn French, held in esteem by the king of the Scots, who himself had learned it in the royal English court where he was in part educated.

But more than simply marking the passage from one language or one culture to another, this date above all effected a radical change in Aelred's mindset. At that time, Durham was an intellectual center of high repute, focused on theological study and scholarly historical research reminiscent of the Ven-

erable Bede's work. Aelred never forgot the time of his study at Durham. Indeed, he appears to have retained throughout his life a pronounced and permanent penchant for the study of history in general and of his country in particular. At the same time, he obtained a particularly valuable intellectual advantage from his arrival at the Scottish court, with its cultural openness to Europe, and his acquaintance with King David, who like his mother, Saint Margaret, wished to Christianize his country and modernize its outdated institutions. From all of this he obtained a broader worldview, one that focused not nostalgically on the past, whatever its prestige, but instead encompassed the future and its promises.

A third vital moment in the chronology occurs in 1134–1135. Rievaulx was a monastery belonging to the comparatively new Cistercian Order, a community of French origin and the only order at the time with an openly transnational character. By choosing to enter Rievaulx, Aelred left behind what Aelred Squire has rightly called the "Hexham-Durham-York triangle."¹ Until that time, Aelred had lived most of his life in that triangle. His departure thus consummated a rupture with, but not a rejection of, the Anglo-Saxon environment of his birth and his native Celtic religious culture. This choice ratified and brought to an end the journey he had begun ten years earlier on entering the Scottish court. Paradoxically, at the very moment that he made this choice, opening himself to a form of universality transcending national and cultural differences, he became the saddened and powerless eyewitness to a twenty-year civil war, which did not end until 1153–1154.

Thus Aelred found himself confronted with two new fractures in 1134, both institutional in nature. The first of these affected vowed religious life, at the time in full transition and moving toward a renewed and more radically evangelical expression in its institutional forms. Bernard himself brought

1. Aelred Squire, "Historical Factors in the Formation of Aelred of Rievaulx," *Coll* 22 (1960): 262–82.

Aelred into this high-stakes debate. The second institutional fracture affected the feudal structures of medieval civil and political society. The interplay of political alliances and allegiances, as well as that of private interests, led many who had formerly considered themselves kin or friends to engage in a pitiless and merciless war to the devastation of the civil population, innocent victims of princely rivalries.

Finally, a last major reference point is 1153–1154, which saw the accession of Henry II to the English throne. This was a year of hope and the beginning of a new era that would be marked by a possible reconciliation among the peoples and cultures that made up post-conquest England. Sensing the promise and hope of a national sacred union, Aelred would have felt no further risk of fracture if he had not seen the gathering of threatening clouds and heard the first thunderous rumblings of a coming storm—one that would take shape in the open conflict that from 1163 on opposed King Henry II and Thomas Becket, his former chancellor become archbishop of Canterbury. Aelred would know neither of the conflict's fatal conclusion in Becket's assassination on December 29, 1170, nor of its tragic consummation in the nearly irreparable rupture this murder would create between medieval society's "Two Swords," between ecclesiastical hierarchy and political authority, between the church and the state. This ignorance is no doubt for the better, for had he lived to see it, he would have been faced with the collapse of his ardent socio-political dream of an ecclesiastical-political collaboration.

Later we examine each of these fractures, as they all, taken either individually or together according to the close connections between them, represented for Aelred either a challenge that he had to confront personally or a social debate in which he was sure to engage. From the outset, however—and this is the second thesis we set forth—it is notable that the manner in which Aelred deals with these personal challenges and fuels reflection on these social debates was remarkably constant throughout his life. Naturally sustained by what Aelred Squire

calls a fundamentally “conciliatory temper,”² the future abbot of Rievaulx did not see these fractures as lines of demarcation for erecting divisive walls, but rather as providential opportunities offered to build a new society, unified and harmonious, prefiguring the City of God.

However, Aelred proceeded speculatively, aided by the progressive elaboration of a spiritual doctrine based on the transposition to a wider scope of something he considered a fundamental and primary human experience: friendship. We will show that the doctrine of spiritual friendship furnishes the common and binding thread of Aelred’s existence and thought. It is a thread seen in his existence even from his earliest childhood and adolescence, continuing through his years of abbatial responsibility, and extending into his final public and political engagements. Similarly, the thread runs through his thought, beginning with a humanism of friendship, based on a Ciceronian model. It then passes through the construction of a brotherly monastic community constituting an ecclesiastical model based on the exemplar offered by the early community of the apostles. Eventually the thread passes through the construction of a civil society founded on social justice and the close collaboration between political and religious powers, representing a feudal societal model informed by Aelred’s moderate interpretation of the “Two Swords Theory.” Finally the thread evolves into a cosmic theology of universal friendship, based on a theological model that is both trinitarian in its communication of idioms and Christocentric in its focus on Christ as head of the church and the cornerstone in whom all things are recapitulated.

The foregoing should suffice to make clear that our approach to Aelred’s life is multidimensional—inextricably anthropological and ethical, existential and spiritual, historical and doctrinal. We follow the course of Aelred’s life and

2. Squire, “Historical Factors,” 265.

discover the full breadth and depth of the man Aelred was throughout his existence. We highlight the obstacles that blocked his way and the challenges he had to overcome in his lifetime. Examining these obstacles and challenges, we take into account the historical circumstances—familial and cultural, social and political, or religious and ecclesiastical—external to his life proper, and show how he was shaped by the world around him. We also show how, by his personal choices, he shaped himself and contributed to shaping the world and the various environments in which he himself evolved. We will thus be in a position to verify how tightly entwined were Aelred’s existence and doctrine. Or, to put it another way, we will see how in his itinerary from man, to monk, to abbot, to moral conscience of his society, the progressive unification of his whole being (body, soul, heart, and mind) and the gradual elaboration of his doctrinal synthesis (monastic anthropology and ethics, spiritual theology, and mystic life) cooperated. The latter was framed and constructed through the experiences of the former, and the former was firmly seated and supported on the foundation of the latter.

Our biography begins with an introductory section, a single chapter explaining our methods. In chapter 1 we draw up a brief survey of the existing historical literature surrounding the figure of Aelred. We consider its origins (namely Walter Daniel’s *Life of Aelred*), the first attempts at “dehagiographization” to which historians such as Maurice Powicke devoted themselves at the start of the twentieth century, and finally contemporary studies by Charles Dumont, Aelred Squire, Anselm Hoste, Gaetano Raciti, Marsha Dutton, Brian McGuire, Elizabeth Freeman, and John Sommerfeldt, to cite only the best known. Following this, we outline our own methodology, as well as the specific focus we hope to give the present inquiry. The reader who is eager to begin the narrative of Aelred’s life immediately can skip this first part if he so wishes.

Subsequently our narrative proper is broken into four principal stages, each corresponding to the four periods just outlined.

Part II addresses Aelred as a man, concentrating on his pre-monastic period from 1110 to 1134, and is divided into three chapters. Chapter 2 is devoted to the cultural and political context of Aelred's life, chapter 3 to the human and intellectual development he underwent before entering Rievaulx, and chapter 4 to his conversion in 1134.

Part III presents Aelred as a monk, emphasizing the initial period of his monastic instruction during the years 1134 to 1143, and consists of two chapters. Chapter 5 focuses on the early years of his monastic life at Rievaulx until 1141. Chapter 6 examines the composition of *The Mirror of Charity* (1142–1143) and the corresponding role Aelred took on in his community as instructor in the ways of monastic life.

Part IV deals with Aelred as abbot and pastor, concentrating on Aelred's "Time of Great Pastoral Responsibility" during the years 1143 to 1153. This part focuses on Aelred's monastic ministry, first practiced at Revesby (1143–1147) and then at Rievaulx (1147–1153). This part also consists of two chapters. Chapter 7 is primarily event-based, examining the external circumstances leading Aelred to take on these two charges. Inversely, chapter 8 is almost exclusively doctrine-based, studying Aelred's role as "Master Architect Building a Community."

Finally, part V accounts for the last fourteen years of Aelred's life, or "The Time of Spiritual Maturity," from 1153 until Aelred's death in 1167. Chapter 9 examines Aelred's political engagements in England's social and civil life. Analyzing his seven historical treatises, we demonstrate Aelred's claim to the title "moral conscience of his time." We see in those writings the progressive development of a theology of history that is the subject of chapter 10, in which we bring out what can be considered Aelred's cosmic mysticism of history.

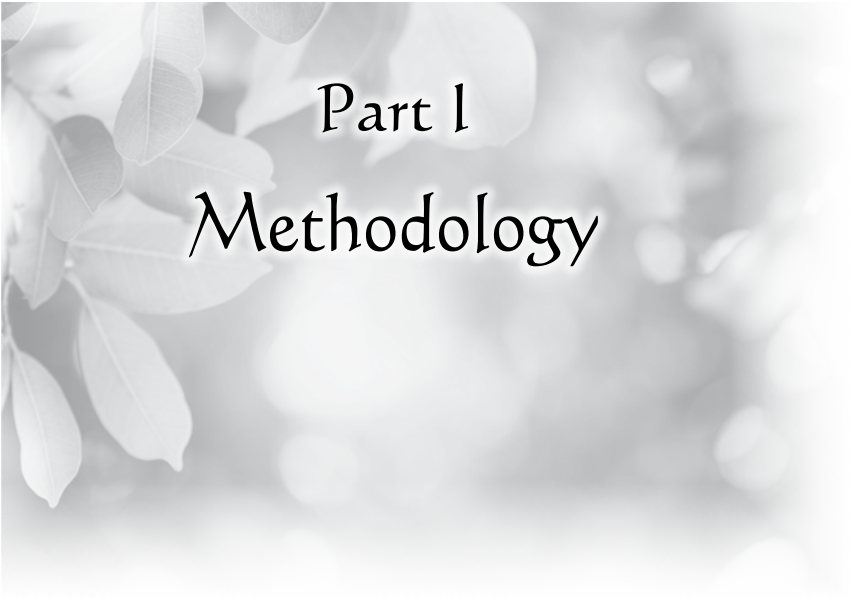
This four-stage narrative is followed by chapter 11, a general conclusion, in which we synthesize certain fundamental points that our research has brought to light.

To close this introduction, we would like to express one hope, one wish, and several thanks.

It is our hope to do honor to the project outlined in the present introduction.

It is our wish that—in addition to discovering Aelred’s endearing but vigorous spiritual physiognomy—the reader will find as much pleasure in reading this biography as we had in writing it. Our labors will be all the more worthwhile if they can awaken in the reader the fervent desire to learn more for himself.

Finally we offer our thanks. These are first addressed to Father Charles Dumont, who instilled our earliest desire to study the Fathers of Cîteaux, and who taught us to appreciate two of its most illustrious representatives: Aelred of Rievaulx, to whom the present biography is devoted, and his master, Saint Bernard. For some twenty-five years they have been faithful companions in our journey. We also wish to thank Father Paul Christophe of Les Éditions du Cerf. His obstinate persistence in requesting this biography finally succeeded—and not without difficulty, as he will certainly attest—in overcoming our own obstinate resistance to undertaking such a task. Our thanks are addressed finally to all those who, during the nearly two years required to complete this book, supported our efforts with their constant encouragement.



Part 1

Methodology

Chapter One

Historiography, Methods, and Perspectives

In this chapter, we offer a brief summary sketch of historical methodology and research relating to Aelred's life and works. This rapid survey delineates the principal stages of Aelred's rediscovery from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. We thus contextualize from a historical, methodological, and doctrinal standpoint the unique perspectives of the present biography.

Many worthy works before this study have already traced a biographical portrait of Aelred, who, after serving as *dispensator* of the Scottish King David I, became abbot of the English Cistercian monastery at Rievaulx (founded in 1132 by Bernard of Clairvaux) and helped make the monastery famous. In this chapter, we comment on historians and scholars whose work has preceded our own and without which we could never have imagined its undertaking. Such a commentary permits us to pay the immense debt we owe to them, and simultaneously to outline, in context, the methodology and perspective adopted in our work. This survey consists of three parts. We begin with a presentation of Walter Daniel's *Life of Aelred*, a source text composed by a privileged eyewitness to Aelred's life. We then briefly present various nineteenth- and twentieth-century efforts to "dehagiographize" Aelred's life. Finally, we sketch our own process, clarifying the goals and principles

guiding our research. This leads to our contention that Aelred's conception of spiritual friendship can be considered the hermeneutical key *par excellence* that unlocks access simultaneously to his spiritual doctrine, his personality, his life, and his multiple human engagements.

A Pioneering Testament: Walter Daniel's *Life of Aelred*

The premier historian to examine Aelred's life, both chronologically and through his eyewitness account, is Aelred's contemporary, Walter Daniel. Walter entered Rievaulx at the age of twenty-five, probably around 1150. He was Aelred's secretary and, during Aelred's final illness, an exceedingly (perhaps even excessively) devoted caregiver. The clearly expressed purpose of his *Life*, composed shortly after Aelred's death on January 12, 1167, was to defend Aelred's unjustly trampled-upon memory. Two chapters bear witness to this goal and report certain accusations brought against Aelred. The first of these concerns was the suspicion raised by detractors during Aelred's lifetime that personal ambition alone led to his abbacy (VA 26). The second is more insidious. It concerns not only the quality of Aelred's monastic life, but also the nature of his abbatial ministry. Some critics tried to frame him as a self-indulgent monk of loose discipline. They called him a "glutton and a wine-bibber"¹ and, perhaps even more gravely, accused him of excessive tolerance toward the moral weaknesses of others during his abbacy, describing him as "a friend of publicans" (VA 26, 27, 29, etc.).

Oriented as it is toward the defense and illustration of Aelred's monastic piety, the *Life* fails to avoid the pitfalls of ancient and medieval hagiography: an inflation of the facts, a rhetorical exaggeration, and above all a taste for the fantastic. Nonetheless, as biased as it may seem today, we mine this vital

1. VA 26, 27 (Walter Daniel, *The Life of Aelred of Rievaulx*, trans. F. M. Powicke, CF 57 [Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1994], 115).

source of information, as have so many of our predecessors, appreciating its pertinence as a faithful reflection of what we know of Aelred through his own writings.

It should not be forgotten—however concerned Walter may have been with establishing the historical truth of the Aelred’s life, or with reestablishing it wherever it seemed to him to be trod upon—that the *Life* was above all written as an act of filial piety.² Composing it was a way of honoring and defending the memory of the man he had viewed as a father from the time that Aelred, as Walter recalls, “begot me to the Life of Saint Benedict” (VA 1). In other words, we should not expect from this disciple’s homage to his master the same rigor or historical reliability that we demand from a historian educated in proper methods of historical criticism. Walter’s purpose, in fact, is rather to offer his reader a mirror in which truth can be seen—not simply historical truth but, more important, spiritual and ethical truth. In the final analysis, Walter offers his readers a model of monastic and abbatial life that deserves to be both contemplated and imitated (VA 1).

Between the life Aelred lived (or history proper) and the inevitably interpreted life written on paper (the *Life* as a hagiographical work), Walter places a railway switch to change the reader’s trajectory. By means of this switch, he shunts readers off the track of the external appearances of Aelred’s life and its purely historical eventfulness and sets them rolling down a track leading to the hidden mystery of Aelred’s being and his spiritual physiognomy, which defies, at least in part, any objective and scientifically verifiable observation.

Such intent and perspective allow us to explain with a certain degree of plausibility an apparently curious aspect of the *Life*’s literary composition. A rapid reading of the work shows that in composing his narrative, Walter mostly followed the

2. On this point, see the introduction to the French translation of Walter Daniel, *La Vie d’Aelred*, trans. Pierre-André Burton (Oka, Canada: Abbaye Notre-Dame-du-Lac, 2004), 18.

chronological order of Aelred's life. He divides it into four distinct and neatly identified periods: from Aelred's youth at the Scottish court until his conversion in 1134, his initial monastic instruction and his first responsibilities at Rievaulx from 1134 to 1143, his abbacy at Revesby from 1143 to 1147, and finally his abbacy at Rievaulx from 1147 to 1167. But after this initial chronological approach to the text, a detailed analysis brings to light a flagrant disproportion. While Walter devotes a little less than half of the *Life* (twenty-seven chapters out of sixty) to the thirty-seven-year stretch of the first three periods in Aelred's life, he reserves more than half (the last thirty-three chapters) to Aelred's twenty years of abbacy at Rievaulx.

At first glance this disproportion may not seem inordinate. Aelred's abbacy at Rievaulx is no doubt the most important period of his lifetime, as it coincides with the time of his human and spiritual maturity and the apogee of his influence. On the other hand, the disproportion becomes obvious as soon as one notes that twenty of the *Life's* last thirty-three chapters (chapters 40–60, exactly one-third of the narrative) are exclusively devoted to the four final years of Aelred's life, from 1163 to 1167. It is even more surprising to find that of these twenty chapters, the last thirteen take into consideration only the last year, and even more specifically only the final week, of Aelred's life. Obviously, then, Walter's narrative provides an extremely focused look at an essentially old and sickly Aelred.

We might be saddened by this hagiographic choice, which obscured broad segments of Aelred's life. Among these we might cite everything related to Aelred's temporal administration of his monastery, his role in Rievaulx's four daughter houses, over which he exercised canonical paternity, and his engagement in the social, political, and ecclesiastical affairs of his time.³ There are simply too many aspects of Aelred's life that to our modern eyes are insufficiently explored in the *Life*.

3. For a map of England showing the location of Rievaulx's daughter houses, see Peter Fergusson and Stuart Harrison, *Rievaulx Abbey: Community, Architecture, and Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 43.

It would, however, be unbecoming and unfair to hold all this against Walter. On numerous occasions in the course of his narrative, he explains the intentions that guided him and influenced his authorial choices. The passage that most clearly shows this purpose is found at the beginning of chapter 40. In this chapter, which opens the long section of the *Life* devoted to Aelred's four final years, Walter stresses his deliberate choice to narrow his work's scope and focus solely on the spiritual dimension of his abbot's life. His wish, he adds, is to show that Aelred never ceased to devote himself body and soul to the spiritual edification of his entire being, thanks to a rigorous religious asceticism (VA 40, 41) and a growing intensity in his life of prayer and intimacy with Christ (VA 42, 48), despite an increasingly pitiable state of health: "God willing, I shall briefly describe how in those four years, like a second Noah, he compacted the ark of his life within the breadth of a single cubit and, keeping the fabric of the pure temple, his body, in good repair, renewed and perfected it, and polished all the stones of the spotless sanctuary, his breast, and made them all square, and with the plummet of exact living built them into a house of perfection" (VA 40).

We shall not linger too long on this text, which has already been the object of detailed study. Here we simply note that Walter anchored his proposed project in the metaphor of Aelred as a "new Noah." This image is completed by two others converging with the first to furnish a narrative thread that stretches throughout the *Life*, and especially its final part. The first of these two images is introduced in chapter 41 and parallels the conflation of Aelred and Noah. Walter underlines the ascetic hue of this comparison by affirming that Aelred subjected his life to "a second circumcision" (VA 41), mercilessly cutting out from his life all superfluity and limiting himself to strict necessities, as befitted an adherence to the Cistercian reform and the ideal of Saint Bernard.

The second image is that of Aelred as a "new Moses" (see VA 43, 47, and 58). Contiguous to the first comparison, it demonstrates the way the asceticism to which Aelred unceasingly

gave himself up over the years progressively led to a complete transformation of his being and literally transfigured his countenance, which was irradiated by and radiating with divine light. From this set of images emerges the idea that Walter wished above all to alleviate the suspicions that weighed upon Aelred's character during his lifetime and after his death, and to leave the dual portrait of a monk who was not only a veritable ascetic (a "new Noah") but also an authentic mystic (a "new Moses").

One can hypothesize that it is at least in part because of the twofold image of Aelred Walter wished to leave that he largely neglected exposition of Aelred's public stature and his role in the social, political, and ecclesiastical life of his time. But we should not overstate this point. That Walter insufficiently stressed the public dimension of Aelred's life does not mean that he ignored it entirely, as is most eloquently evidenced by the frequency with which he describes Aelred as *peacemaker*.⁴ However unfamiliar one might be with the mindset of the medieval West, so overflowing with biblical thought and culture, the attentive reader of the *Life* cannot help but remark, by way of a subtle allusion to Hebrew etymology, that this simple qualification of Aelred as peacemaker allows Walter implicitly to present Aelred as a new Solomon. At a single stroke, the allusion suggests at least two other complementary ideas. First, in the manner of Solomon, Aelred becomes the model political administrator, exercising in the management of temporal wealth and authority the same prudence and wisdom as this biblical king. Second, in line with the etymology of the name *Solomon* ("king of peace"), Aelred is shown to be an ardent promoter of peace in his society.

"New Noah," "new Moses," "new Solomon": such are the three main aspects of Aelred's character Walter underscores in the course of his narrative. However, of these three roles—ascetic, mystic, and peacemaker—only the last seems, in our view,

4. E.g., Walter, VA 125.

to lack real substance. Preoccupied with Aelred's posthumous defense by presenting Aelred's monastic life as exemplary, Walter seems to have intentionally avoided framing Aelred in the context of his socio-cultural environment and relationships. Walter had little desire to expound Aelred's political engagements, even though these were well documented by Aelred's own historical works and other texts. From this dual limitation resulting from authorial intent, it follows that the *Life* is unable to shine a light on Aelred's full historical impact, an impact that led his contemporaries to say "almost the equal of Bernard is our Aelred [*Bernardo prope, par Aelredus noster*]." ⁵

In fact, it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that this shortcoming in the presentation of Aelred's rich personality was overcome. In particular the unearthing of various archival and library collections, putting a number of medieval primary sources from Aelred's era into the hands of historians, allowed scholars to give a more substantive historical foundation to Aelred's life. It is to this renewal of Aelredian studies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that we now turn our attention.

The Renewal of Historical Research and Aelredian Studies

A Pioneer: F. M. Powicke

Among the historians who contributed to the renewal of Aelredian studies, the greatest pioneer is no doubt twentieth-century scholar Ferdinand Maurice Powicke. We are especially indebted to him for two publications that marked a turning point in Aelredian historiography. These works offer the first true historical research on Aelred and largely paved the way for all subsequent studies.

5. D. B. Tissier, citing Nicholas of Rievaulx, *Ac imprimis, Notitia altera*; PL 195:208. Pierre-André Burton, "An Illiterate, or a True Master of Spiritual Teaching?" in *A Companion to Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167)*, ed. Marsha L. Dutton (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 218.



Part III

Aelred's Instruction and
First Responsibilities

Monk and Teacher of the
Monastic Way of Life (1134–1143)

Introduction

In 1134, after three or four years as King David's *dispensator*, Aelred underwent a major existential crisis, leading, in Lytta Basset's words, to a "privileged moment."¹ In that moment, faced with the apparent ruin of his own existence, the future abbot of Rievaulx discovered God as "the mysterious foundation of all things."² This discovery of the foundation of all things in God and the meaninglessness of a life not focused on him as its center of gravity led Aelred to knock unexpectedly on the door of Rievaulx. Saint Bernard's white monks had founded the monastery on the banks of the Rye barely two years previously to implant there the Cistercian way of life, probably at the request of Thurstan, the local bishop.

Aelred's action was animated by a desire for inner liberation, unification, and pacification. Hoping to recover the inner peace that his "lax and loose" life at the Scottish court seems to have cost him, he sought to unify his emotional life and, in so doing, free himself from the chains of bad habits and the weight of guilty passions. Thus began a period of seclusion for Aelred, and a time of spiritual and monastic instruction lasting six or seven years, until 1139 or 1140. The period was marked by immense ascetic efforts, followed by immense intellectual labors. It also led him to compose his master work, *The Mirror of Charity* (1141–1142), and prepared him to assume his

1. Lytta Basset, *Le Pardon originel* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1995), 261.

2. Basset, *Pardon*, 261.

first responsibilities. Inside the monastery from 1142 to 1143 he served as novice master, to whom the instruction of candidates to monastic life was entrusted, and outside the monastery he carried out a role as an agent, executing delicate and difficult missions assigned by Abbot William. These experiences readied him to lead a group of brothers from Rievaulx who, for the third time in Rievaulx's history, founded a new monastery, this time in Lincolnshire: the abbey of St. Laurence of Revesby, in 1143. Then began a new period in Aelred's life when he served as abbot, first at Revesby until 1147, then at Rievaulx from that date until his death.

For now, having considered Aelred's time of personal and spiritual development, let us pass to the second phase of his existence, as a monk in the service of his monastic community. We proceed in two stages, considering first Aelred's period of monastic instruction up to 1142 (chapter 5), and then the time of Aelred's first responsibilities, from 1142 to 1143 (chapter 6).

Chapter Five

Aelred's Monastic Instruction (1134–1143)

The *Letter to Maurice*, today read as a preface to the *Life of Aelred*,¹ was originally composed to deflect criticism the *Life* received when it entered circulation. In it Walter compiled a cycle of four miracles attributed to Aelred.² These miracle narratives were intended to supplement those previously related in the *Life*, meant to exhibit Aelred's thaumaturgical powers. The extent of these powers is shown both in chronological terms corresponding to the stages of Aelred's life³ and in terms of the elementary matter constituting the nature of things.⁴

1. On the question of textual relations between the *Letter to Maurice* and the *Life of Aelred*, see Pierre-André Burton, "Walter Daniel, un biographe injustement critiqué? À propos de la réception de la Vita Aelredi. Entre vérité historique et vérité mythique," *Cîteaux* 53 (2002): 223–67. For a briefer discussion, see Pierre-André Burton, "Introduction," in Walter Daniel, *La Vie d'Aelred*, trans. P.-A. Burton (Oka, Canada: Abbaye Notre-Dame-du-Lac, 2004), 26–30.

2. Walter Daniel, "The Letter to Maurice" [1]–[4], in *The Life of Aelred of Rievaulx*, ed. and trans. F. M. Powicke, CF 57 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1994), 151–54.

3. One miracle per stage of Aelred's life, according to typical "stages" of the time—early childhood (*infantia*), childhood (*pueritia*), youth (*adulescentula*), and old age (*senectus*).

4. In this case, one miracle for each of the four elements of ancient physics: air, earth, fire, and water.

We have already spoken of the second of these miracles, which occurred during Aelred's childhood when the child Aelred announced the death of Thomas II, the archbishop of York, the man responsible for forcing Eilaf, Aelred's father, to resign his position in the Hexham church. Here it is the third story that interests us. Walter states that it occurred while Aelred was still a postulant residing in the monastery guest house. According to Walter, a great fire had erupted and was destroying the novice wing when Aelred extinguished it by merely tossing upon it "a tankard filled with native English drink."⁵

Even if, as Walter pretends, there is more than one trustworthy eyewitness to confirm this story, the question of its factual truth and authenticity are not so important. What does merit attention is the scope and the symbolism here regarding Aelred's stage of life on the eve of his admission into the novitiate. The fire Aelred would henceforth have to extinguish would not be the one devastating the woodwork and carpentry of a building but, as he suggests elsewhere—allusively in *Mirror*, or explicitly in *The Formation of Recluses*—the burning of the carnal pleasures consuming his rebellious flesh, depriving him of an inner peace to which he aspired with all his heart. Thus, as Aelred states, he hoped to "overcome the inflammation of lust"⁶ and master the guilty passions devouring him

5. Walter refers to an English alcoholic drink. [Translator's note: Burton's original text surmises beer or whiskey; Powicke's English translation of the *Letter* specifies "cider" further on in the passage. I have retained the ambiguity of the first reference from the start of Powicke's paragraph (Walter, "Letter to Maurice" [3]; CF 57:153).]

6. Inst incl 18 (Aelred, *A Rule of Life for a Recluse* 18, trans. Mary Paul Macpherson, in Aelred of Rievaulx, *Treatises; Pastoral Prayer*, CF 2 [Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1971], 67). [Translator's note: Burton discusses the title of this work on pp. 207–8 below, calling attention to the Latin title *De institutione inclusarum*, or *The Formation of Recluses*, but in his text refers to the work with the title of the French translation *La Vie de Recluse* (*The Life of a Recluse*); the title of the English translation is *Rule of Life for a Recluse* (CF 2). In this book I follow Burton's translation of the Latin title.]

at the start of his monastic life by plunging himself wholly into a radical, rigorous, and indiscreet asceticism.

Several textual examples bear witness to the initial unenlightened fervor that marked Aelred's first steps in monastic life. But Aelred soon recognized that such practices could only lead him to an impasse.

A Novitiate Marked with Great Ascetic Effort

We saw that asceticism occupied an important role in Aelred's monastic life as among the reasons that Aelred chose to join the Cistercian Order. Among the characteristic Cistercian traits that Aelred mentioned and praised was what he called, in his novice's words, the "apostolic dictum," in particular the recommendation of Saint Paul, who enjoined the Colossians to "put to death, then, the parts of you that are earthly" and urged them to avoid "immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry."⁷ Although Aelred does not cite the second part of the verse, he must certainly have had it in mind.

The fundamentally ascetic motivation for Aelred's vocational calling and the moral preoccupation that accompanies it—the mastery over guilty passions—are consonant with what Aelred says of himself when, regarding his conversion, he evokes the nature of the inner torments he was then suffering. We also find confirmation of these two traits elsewhere in Aelred's writings as well as in Walter's *Life of Aelred*.

Aelred's account in *Formation* 18 is as explicit as it can be. As a mature abbot recollecting in his later years (after the age of fifty) the first days of his monastic life, Aelred recounts the early difficulties and in particular the inflamed zeal with which he "declared war on himself" to be free of "the promptings of nature" that tormented him. He writes, "I know a monk who at the beginning of his monastic life was afraid of threats to his

7. Col 3:5.

chastity from the promptings of nature, from the force of habit and from the suggestions of the wily tempter, and so declared war on himself, was filled with savage hatred for his own flesh, and sought nothing more than what would afflict it."⁸

Among all these "afflictions of the body" intended to suppress even "its simplest movements," Aelred mentions food deprivation: "he weakened his body by fasting," starving it "by depriving it of its lawful due." But as that did not suffice—no more than did tears, prayers, and supplications—he added baths of cold water and, following Saint Benedict's example, "rubbed his body with nettles."⁹

Walter confirms these assertions in his own narrative. He devotes chapters 8–13 of the *Life* to Aelred's initial monastic instruction: reading, meditation, and prayer in chapters 10–11, and then, in chapter 12, manual labor. In the latter Walter underlines the way, despite a delicate physical constitution little adapted to grueling agricultural work, Aelred never spared energy. He put such ardor into his tasks, Walter says, that not only was he able to complete "the labors of stronger and strenuous men," but, further, "His masters" had to exercise vigilance to temper his efforts and "tighten the reins of this most valiant beast of burden of our Savior Christ."¹⁰

Additionally, the passage in *Formation* where Aelred speaks of the monk who took cold baths is reinforced in the *Life*, which describes the small tank that Aelred built and in which, in his free time and sheltered from others' eyes, he used to "immerse his whole body in the icy cold water" in order to "quench the heat in himself of every vice."¹¹ The question is whether or not Aelred's efforts succeeded.

For Walter, too preoccupied with showing his abbot's holiness to realize the human and spiritual issues underlying the personal problems Aelred faced, success seems a given. The

8. Aelred, *Inst incl* 18 (CF 2:66–67).

9. Aelred, *Inst incl* 18 (CF 2:66–67).

10. Walter, *VA* 12 (CF 57:105–6).

11. Walter, *VA* 16 (CF 57:108).

intended goal—the pacification of the passions—immediately becomes an established reality in Walter's mind. Whether it was true for Aelred is another issue. More lucid than his biographer, and also more critical of himself, Aelred offers a more mitigated assessment.

The Impasse of Ascetic Excess

If the novice Aelred gave himself over to ascetic excess it was no doubt in good faith, as he was convinced that the various corporeal exercises meant to master his passions—unrelenting physical labor, fasts, and ice-cold baths—would bring him the inner tranquility he desired. But he would soon have to admit that the more he submitted himself to such exercises, the more the peace he sought was aleatory and fleeting, always escaping him in the end. It might be said that Aelred found himself at an impasse, since, as he admits to his sequestered sister, because of such useless and desperate excess he at last found himself in such a state of physical exhaustion that he was forced to moderate his efforts—which then only aggravated his situation: “But when he was forced by weakness to allow himself more, the flesh came to life again and upset the tranquility which he thought he had acquired.”¹²

In fact, by the pain of this bitter failure, resulting from a purely voluntary asceticism, Aelred learned to his cost the truth of a severe warning Bernard had addressed to his Cistercian brothers some ten years earlier, around 1124, in his *Apologia*.¹³ This warning came at the height of the debate over who most piously observed

12. Aelred, *Inst* incl 18 (CF 2:67).

13. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apo* 12, 13; Bernard of Clairvaux, “Cistercians and Cluniacs: St Bernard's *Apologia* to Abbot William,” trans. Michael Casey, *CF* 1 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1970), 46–50. The dating of the *Apologia*, like the question of its addressees, remains a subject of discussion for historians. But it is largely acknowledged today that Bernard composed the treatise around 1124 at the request of his friend William of Saint-Thierry, to calm tensions in the conflict opposing White Monks and Black Monks on the question of the legitimacy of diverse interpretations of the Rule of Saint Benedict.

the Rule of Saint Benedict: the black monks, who lived “more reasonably [*discretius*],” or the white monks, who observed “more strictly [*districtius*]” and became “more exhausted [*fatigatior*].”¹⁴ The latter were tempted to believe that only a monastic life defined by greater corporeal austerity (in other words, their own) could infallibly guarantee salvation. What illusion and pretense! “How wrong! [*magna abusio*],”¹⁵ Saint Bernard reminds them, for these thoughts are evidence of unbridled pride, and such pretense itself is contrary to the teachings of the apostle of nations. Did he not assure Timothy that only devotion holds a “promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come,” while “bodily exercise is profitable to little [1 Tim 4:8]”? In other words, for Bernard, what counts most in the observance of the Rule of Saint Benedict is less the intensity of exterior austerity (more or less corporeal asceticism) than the inner quality of one’s life (living in humility and with charity)—*discretius* versus *districtius*. Addressing himself to his Cistercian brothers, Bernard writes,

By detracting from your brothers, you lose humility in that you exalt yourself; in that you deprecate others, you lose love. These are the better gifts. You wear down your body with many excessive labors and mortify that which is earthly in you with regular severities. Well done. But what if the man whom you condemn for not working may have only a small degree of that which is useful to a small degree [1 Tim 4:8], namely physical work? He may have more than you of that which is of value in every way, that is, piety [1 Tim 4:8]. Who, I ask, follows your Rule better? Isn’t it the one who is better? And who is better, the more humble man [*humilior*] or the more exhausted man [*fatigatior*]? Isn’t it the one who has learned from the Lord to be gentle and humble at heart [Matt 11:29], and the one who with Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from him?¹⁶

14. Bernard, Apo 14 (CF 1:51).

15. Bernard, Apo 13 (CF 1:50).

16. Luke 10:41; Bernard, Apo 13 (CF 1:50).

The lesson may seem harsh, but it is worthy for its clarity. In any case, the lesson would bear abundant fruit in Aelred's life.

The Fruits Of Experience

The path of generous but unmeasured corporeal asceticism led Aelred to a bitter and inevitable impasse. He discovered that asceticism in itself could not truly free him of his demons and passions and bring him peace without the accompaniment of an inner process. In other words, he discovered that an outer focus, attempting somehow to exert mastery over the disordered impulses of his body, was insufficient and that it was necessary to dig down to the roots of these impulses to reach them at their source in the emotional depths of his heart. This fundamental discovery was a positive force in Aelred's life, obliging him to make a personal and intellectual paradigm shift whose terms were closely tied to each other. This discovery had repercussions on a pastoral level as well.

First, on a personal level, Aelred's realization of how little peace asceticism really offered him shifted the focus of his struggle from the level of bodily passions to a deeper struggle on the level of his emotional relationships. In fact, he writes once again in *Formation* 18 that in the wake of asceticism and prayers addressed to God, "he was granted some temporary relief but refused lasting tranquility. For while the irregular movements of the flesh died down for a little, his heart was beset with forbidden affections."¹⁷

This personal paradigm shift in Aelred's private struggle—from an exclusively corporeal view of the question to a more deeply emotional one—pushed him to completely revise his perception of asceticism in spiritual life and integrate into it more relational and emotional aspects. The latter are elements of asceticism that Aelred had up to that point if not totally ignored, at least partially underestimated. By virtue of this

17. Aelred, *Inst* incl 18 (CF 2:67).

revision, Aelred's asceticism would not only aim to master the passions (a purpose to which asceticism is all too often reduced), but also more broadly to establish correct relationships with himself, with others, and with God.

Accepting Saint Bernard's invitation to seek piety ("which is of value in every way") over ascetic exploits (which "may have only a small degree of that which is useful"),¹⁸ Aelred was led to a profound reflection on asceticism insofar as its purpose must be to help every man and woman "live soberly and justly and godly" (Titus 2:12) in the world and thus support them as they go "looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and might cleanse to himself a people" (Titus 2:13-14).

Thus concurrently with the personal paradigm shift in his struggle, Aelred was led to undertake an intense intellectual labor focused on integrating the lessons of his experience into the framework of a vast doctrinal synthesis. More precisely, he worked to justify theologically the value of the Cistercian reform from the standpoint of what makes it unique—as a "school of charity" where one learns to order all one's affections according to the "certain measure" that is Christ.¹⁹ The fruit of this intellectual effort is found first in *Mirror*, which we examine fully in the next chapter. Its traces are also found in numerous liturgical sermons, where it appears to have been at the heart of Aelred's experience and struggle in the early days of his monastic life.

We see this, for example, in sermons where Aelred compares entrance into monastic life to a way out of Sheba, that is, a path to inner freedom: that same "three days' journey"²⁰ that allowed the Hebrews to leave Egypt and escape the slavery and captivity in which Pharaoh had held them. It is an exit from

18. Bernard, Apo 13 (CF 1:50).

19. Aelred, Spec car 3.31.74 (CF 17:272).

20. Aelred of Rievaulx, S 6.17, in *The Liturgical Sermons: The First Clairvaux Collection*, trans. Theodore Berkeley and M. Basil Pennington, CF 58 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2001), 134.

the world, or more exactly from that place of captivity (doubtless echoing Aelred's life at the Scottish court as he describes it in *Mirror*²¹) where "captives to our vices . . . bound with the chains of the worst habits . . . we were blind and paralyzed, lying prostrate in the desires of the flesh as on a cot, dissipated and sick and incapable of any good work and ignorant of the way which leads to life."²²

Monastic life is thus delivery from a place of captivity, as well as from a place of scourging grace. These places are the crucible of a painful conscience (see S 6.7), where the voice of God began to be heard, of him who "by the grace of his visitation . . . stirred us to indignation at our sins" and "inspired an attachment to worthy emulation,"²³ making us, Aelred says, rise up and take the "most direct way of our Father [Saint Benedict]."²⁴ Passing "through Christ to Christ,"²⁵ he goes on, we were led to follow the path that the Rule and all its observances indicate, which under the guidance of Saint Benedict teach us "to offer God spiritual sacrifices, to celebrate the Sabbath spiritually, to build in our hearts a spiritual tabernacle for Christ" in order to become with him "heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven."²⁶

Monastic Asceticism and Christian Life: The Monk as Votary of the Cross

These latter statements offer an extraordinary summary of what was, from the time of his novitiate until his dying breath, the most intimate of Aelred's convictions regarding the highly spiritual value of the Rule as a Christian way of life. Intimately

21. Aelred, *Spec car* 1.28.79 (CF 17:134).

22. Aelred, S 4.29–30 (CF 58:115–16). [Translator's note: The first ellipsis is Burton's; the second is mine to fit the English quotation to Burton's phrasing.]

23. Aelred, S 4.30 (CF 58:116). [Translator's note: My ellipsis to fit the English quotation to Burton's phrasing.]

24. Aelred, S 7.6 (CF 58:143).

25. Aelred, S 7.5 (CF 58:143).

26. Aelred, S 6.10 (CF 58:132).



Part V

The Time of
Spiritual Maturity

Aelred, the Moral Conscience of
His Time (1153/54–1167)

Introduction: From Babylon to Jerusalem

Among the multiple facets in Aelred's portrait, historians have until recently highlighted those relating to his personality as a man, his vocation as a monk, and his twofold pedagogical and pastoral mission—both as a novice master educating individuals and as an abbot serving as the guide and shepherd of monastic communities. At the same time, considerable effort is being made in translations and critical editions of Aelred's works to make them more accessible. This effort has principally involved his ascetic and mystical treatises¹ and his immense homiletic production.² The body of the latter, currently consist-

1. Assembled in 1971 in a single volume (CCCM 1).

2. These can be broken down as follows: the "First Clairvaux Collection," twenty-eight sermons included in PL 195, and the "Second Clairvaux Collection," eighteen sermons discovered by Raciti in 1982, making a total of forty-six sermons, numbered 1 to 46 in Raciti's critical edition published in CCCM 2A; the "Durham Collection," thirty-two sermons edited in part by C. H. Talbot in 1952 and completed by Raciti, numbered 47 to 78 in the critical edition in CCCM 2B; a single sermon also discovered by Raciti, from a compilation of works gathered by Matthew of Rievaulx, numbered 79 in CCCM 2B; the "Lincoln Collection," five sermons, again discovered by Raciti, numbered 80 to 84 in CCCM 2B; and finally the "Reading-Cluny Collection," ninety-eight sermons also discovered by Raciti, in CCCM 2C. One more sermon, in the fifteenth-century "Peterborough Manuscript" (Central Library, unnumbered) and discovered in 2005 by Peter Jackson, which preserves the text of Aelred's sermon at the transfer of Saint Edward the Confessor's relics to Westminster on October 13, 1163, can also be added to the list (Peter Jack-

ing of 182 or 183 sermons, has grown considerably since 1982 thanks to Father Gaetano Raciti's discoveries in various libraries.³

Taking advantage of this valuable translation and editing work, numerous scholars, mainly Anglo-American and Franco-Belgian but also recently Italian and to a lesser extent Spanish, have explored diverse facets of Aelred's rich spiritual doctrine. These scholars have established in more detail its connection to what we know of Aelred's life and personality and to his historical context.

We have followed this existential and doctrinal path in the first three parts of the present study, tracking it across the span of Aelred's life and responsibilities. Illuminated by his spiritual doctrine, we have shown three larger and larger concentric circles, each one corresponding to a principal period of his life. The first, the "circle of the man," extends from Aelred's birth in 1110 to his monastic conversion in 1134 and includes a presentation of the twelfth-century's socio-cultural and politico-religious context (part II, chapters 2–4). The second, "the circle of the monk," extends from 1134 to 1143 and covers the period of Aelred's initial monastic instruction and his first responsibilities within the monastic community, especially as an educator (part III, chapters 5–6). The third, "the circle of the abbot," covers the final twenty-five years of Aelred's life from 1143 to 1167. Within this circle we survey the events that led to Aelred's abbacy and examine Aelred's doctrine regarding his conception of his abbatial charge, wholly devoted to building a fraternal community (part IV, chapters 7–8).

son, "In translacione sancti Edwardi Confessoris: The Lost Sermon by Aelred of Rievaulx Found?" CSQ 40, no. 1 [2005]: 45–83).

3. See Gaetano Raciti, "Deux collections de sermons de saint Aelred—une certaine d'inédits—découvertes dans les fonds de Cluny et Clairvaux," Coll 45 (1983): 165–84. See also Gaetano Raciti, "Une allocution familière de S. Aelred conservée dans les mélanges de Matthieu de Rievaulx," Coll 47 (1985): 267–80.

To successively navigate each circle, we intertwined general anthropology and spiritual theology into something resembling Ariadne's thread. An anthropological perspective shows that across the three circles Aelred moves from the individual in search of inner unity (the circle of the self as object or "me") to the individual unified both humanly and affectively through personal friendships (the circle of the self as subject or "I"), and then from the individual to the community (the circle of the self joined with others or "we"). In the latter circle we saw how, following the Augustinian principle *singula omnium, omnia singulorum*, Aelred invited his brothers to weave interpersonal relationships into a network of sharing and exchange, a network that allowed them to build a place of increasingly extensive communion and reciprocity to serve as a precursor to eternal life. Similarly, from the perspective of theology and Aelred's own life experiences, all three circles are connected by the doctrine of friendship. Aelred conceived the human experience of friendship as an authentic spiritual path to personal affective unification and community edification by means of charity and in the person of Christ, the cornerstone. In the process, Aelred demonstrates the theological roots of his idea of monastic life as an ethical space in the individual and an ecclesiological space in the community for the formation of Christ.

In favoring this doctrinal and existential approach we have largely, and intentionally, left aside Aelred's public face. Walter, Aelred's earliest biographer, has been unfairly criticized by contemporary (primarily English and American) historians for doing that. Modern scholarship, however, is only beginning to shed light on Aelred's active efforts, from 1153 onward, to influence public affairs and the course of history by engaging personally in social and political matters in the wake of his country's civil war.

We now turn our attention to the political dimension of Aelred's personality, so entering the fourth circle of Aelred's theological and spiritual synthesis. Moving beyond the cloister,

Aelred passes from building a monastic community as a model for all communal life to the construction of a civil society that is a Jerusalem-like city of peace rather than a Babylon-styled city of confusion. Aelred's historiographic and hagiographic works gradually exhibit a more unified vision of history and the world, oriented toward their ultimate ends in the person of Christ. Aelred progressively develops a mystic and cosmic theology of history through his last great work, the thirty-one *Homilies on the Prophetic Burdens of Isaiah*.

We proceed in two phases. First, chapter 9 considers Aelred's social and political engagements as glimpsed through Walter's *Life of Aelred* and Aelred's own historiographical works. In so doing, we reflect on issues relating to Aelred's historiographical practice. These reflections permit us in chapter 10 to broaden our study and lay the foundations of what can be called a "cosmic mysticism of history" based on the *Homilies on the Prophetic Burdens of Isaiah* and related texts.

Chapter Nine

Aelred's Social and Political Engagements

The Iconic Value of The Life of Aelred

Testimony relating to Aelred's social and political engagements is relatively sparse, and contemporary historians have often reproached Walter, his first biographer, of having almost completely ignored this part of Aelred's life. True though that may be, the accusation is unfair and only partially valid. It is unfair because it does not adequately take into account Walter's intended compositional and editorial goals, which were to invite the reader "to move beyond appearances"¹ and "to have him pass, as through a mirror, from the *historical truth* of Aelred's life to his *spiritual and ethical truth*, from the *description* (of events) to the *icon*, from the *visible* to the *invisible*."²

In other words, Walter is less interested in events than in their meaning. They reveal the deepest parts of Aelred's personality and offer a model monk and abbot. Even if the histo-

1. Pierre-André Burton, "Introduction," in Walter Daniel, *La Vie d'Aelred*, trans. Pierre-André Burton (Oka, Canada: Abbaye Notre-Dame-du-Lac, 2004), 25.

2. Burton, Introduction, 30. See also Pierre-André Burton, "Walter Daniel, un biographe injustement critiqué? À propos de la réception de la *Vita Aelredi*. Entre vérité historique et vérité mythique," *Cîteaux* 53 (2002): 223–67. Additionally, see chap. 1 of this book.

ricity of events themselves retains its importance—for Walter is fully aware that the believability of his narrative and of his portrait of Aelred depends on historical precision—it is nevertheless true that Walter does not seek to offer a historically critical biography. Rather, he invites the reader to contemplate an icon, a window opening on the invisible. He strives to create an account that is representational rather than exhaustive. It is easy to understand that in the historical thread of Aelred's life, Walter proceeded selectively, retaining only those *gesta* most representative of the aspects of Aelred's personality that he wished to bring into relief. With this approach, the historical facts related play more or less the same iconic role as certain objects depicted in a painting, whose presence in the portrait suffices to suggest the identity of the portrait's subject.

This general principle guiding the composition of an iconic tableau or a hagiographic narrative such as *The Life of Aelred* obviously applies to Aelred as a public figure and the role he played in the society of his time, which was no doubt more important than it appears at first glance. Instead of sketching that public life as fully as we might have liked, Walter selected and related events that he thought evoked Aelred's public face and role. Thus, to reproach Walter for mostly passing over the public and political dimension of Aelred's life is not only unfair to him, but a conclusion drawn from a superficial reading. Such a reading is incomplete in its failure to account adequately for the work's genre. Although that genre's pretensions to combine event-related historicity and exhaustivity are not entirely absent from the work, Walter treats them as secondary to his primary intention: to offer a life model worthy of imitation (VA 1).

*Walter's Portrait of Aelred as the "Peaceful" and
the "Peace-Maker"*

In one of the rare chapters of the *Life* devoted to the ten-year period Aelred spent at the Scottish court, Walter underlines King David's contribution to the personal and moral development

of the man who was to become Rievaulx's most prestigious abbot. Indeed, Walter states that it is under David's influence and guidance, and sharing in David's temporal responsibilities, that Aelred learned "the royal virtues which later he was to describe in writing for the consolation of the faithful," and that Aelred "himself found profit in the reading of this consolation, and so did not merely make others bear fruit but he himself bore fruit of sweet savour."³ Among these "royal virtues," Walter emphasizes one in particular: Aelred's sharp sense of moderation and justice in the management of temporal affairs in order to guarantee peace and the common good: "Everything done at court was in his keeping, yet he did whatever he did with such mildness that under his just and affable management of affairs there was no unrest, no disturbance among the people. He set the foot of justice and walked in the paths of peace where truth could suffer no violence."⁴

Here, perhaps inspired by Psalms 85:11-14 and 34:14-15, Walter links three key words: *justice* and *truth* leading to *peace*. These three concepts furnished Aelred with an ethical foundation for all his actions in administrative practice. Aelred's superiors, and Abbot William in particular, saw when Aelred arrived at Rievaulx that he already possessed in abundance the virtues of justice and truth and a great motivation to see peace reign over all; they probably soon came to him for counsel on varied and often confidential issues. In 1142 they even entrusted him, along with several Cistercian abbots, with a diplomatic mission to Rome to settle the question of succession to the episcopal see of York.⁵ However, only once Aelred became abbot was he finally able fully to demonstrate his diplomatic abilities and show that his political and social engagements had the single source of justice and truth, and the single goal of peace, as Walter underlines on two occasions

3. Walter Daniel, *The Life of Aelred of Rievaulx*, trans. F. M. Powicke, CF 57 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1994), 91, chap. 2.

4. Walter, VA 2 (CF 57:91).

5. Walter, VA 14 (CF 57:107). For details, see chap. 5 of this book.

in the *Life*, recounting Aelred's peacemaking works among the people surrounding Cistercian monasteries.

The Founding of Revesby

The first of these two narratives concerns the 1143 founding of Revesby in Lincolnshire, entrusted to Aelred by his peers. Walter relates that beginning with this date Aelred's reputation began to spread beyond the narrow horizon of monastic and ecclesiastical circles, stretching out into civil and political arenas of the kingdom of England. The local bishop, Alexander of Lincoln—one of the nephews of Roger, bishop of Salisbury, who had previously been the influential chancellor of King Henry I and King Stephen of Blois⁶—invited Aelred to participate in diocesan synods and requested that he participate in the instruction of secular clergy: "To preach to the clergy . . . to bring priests to a better way of life."⁷ What lies behind these words is Alexander's intention that Aelred represent a religious movement fully informed by the ideas of Gregorian reform, instituting or even imposing them in his own diocese.

6. Of unknown origin (perhaps from Caen or Avranches) and no doubt of low birth, Roger was noticed by the future Henry I, who took him into service first as a chaplain, then probably as seneschal. Shortly after becoming king in 1100, Henry named Roger chancellor of England in 1101 and entrusted the reign to him while Henry was in Normandy from 1123 to 1126. Roger became bishop of Lincoln on August 11, 1107. On Henry's death in 1135, Roger played a major role in rallying the barons and clergy of the kingdom to the cause of Stephen of Blois against the Empress Matilda, daughter of Henry I, whom in 1126 Henry had designated to succeed him. Roger's actions gained him Stephen's gratitude and allowed Roger to bring two of his nephews into the government: Nigel, bishop of Ely from 1133 to 1169, and Alexander, bishop of Lincoln from 1123 to 1148. In 1138 all three earned the jealousy of several barons of the kingdom, who accused them of plotting against the king and rallying to Matilda's cause. They escaped royal justice thanks only to a vehement protest from Henry of Blois, the bishop of Winchester and brother of King Stephen, who demanded their reinstatement.

7. Walter, VA 20 (CF 57:111). [Translator's note: My ellipsis, to fit the English quotation to Burton's phrasing.]

Walter also states that during this period Aelred increasingly gained the affection and veneration of civil and military authorities—the counts and barons of the region—as well as of the local population of Lincolnshire (VA 20).

Where did this influence originate? According to Walter, it came from Aelred's miracles, which made him famous. But above all, Aelred's influence came from his efforts to make peace through what might be called a "strategy of ecclesiastical geography" or a "policy of monastic estate expansion." To our secularized, twenty-first-century eyes, these concepts may seem curious, even scandalous. But for his part, Aelred, apparently counseled by his bishop, who ardently encouraged him, seems to have had no qualms at employing such policies. He was firmly convinced that by pursuing such policies more than any other means he was adding to the common and individual well-being of all concerned, thereby contributing to the salvation of local potentates, to the material security of the monasteries, to the social and political stability of the region, and to the general economic prosperity of the country as a whole, as Walter explains:

The bishop orders him . . . to accept grants of land from knights in generous free-alms, and he obeys, since he had realized that in this unsettled time such gifts profited knights and monks alike, for in those days it was hard for any to lead the good life unless they were monks or members of some religious order, so disturbed and chaotic was the land, reduced almost to a desert by the malice, slaughters and harrings of evil men. And so he desired that that land for which almost all men were fighting to the death should pass into the hands of the monks for their good, and he knew that to give what they had helped the possessors of goods to their salvation and that, if they did not give, they might well lose both life and goods without any payment in return.⁸

8. Walter, VA 20 (CF 57:111).

Considering these beneficial political and social consequences of Revesby's founding, it is easy to understand why immediately after this passage Walter notes that Aelred was "greatly beloved"⁹ by the king of England. Although Walter does not establish a direct link between Aelred and Stephen, it nevertheless seems probable that Stephen's affection for Aelred¹⁰ was linked to Aelred's efforts to calm the social upheavals draining the country, bringing much-needed aid to the king. This aid was all the more valuable given that from the moment of his accession to the English throne after Henry I's death in 1135, Stephen had been hard pressed to establish his own political legitimacy, which was widely contested because he had seized power against the express will of the late King Henry. As a result, the supporters of the Empress Matilda, Henry's designated heir, and in particular her uncle, King David of Scotland, and his allies, considered Stephen a usurper, to be ousted at all costs.

In this context of high political tensions and civil war, Stephen needed whatever support he could find, and Aelred's help, however limited, was of inestimable value, if only because of its substantial symbolic impact. Stephen must have been well aware of the affection that bound Aelred to the Scottish royal family. Though it may have cost him greatly, Aelred did not hesitate to cut these ties. A much greater good was at stake, one worth any sacrifice, even if it meant renouncing affections that were dear to him. The greater good in question was the political stability and the civil peace of the kingdom.

9. Walter, VA 20 (CF 57:111).

10. In the introduction to the re-edition of the English translation of the *Life*, Marsha Dutton proposes the alternate hypothesis that Aelred's biographer is guilty of a chronological error in this case, and that he jumps the gun, placing royal affection for Aelred in Stephen's reign, when in reality this royal favor exists only after 1153–1154, during the reign of Henry II. This is obviously possible, but it detracts nothing from the remarks that follow regarding Aelred's peace-making political engagements (Marsha L. Dutton, Introduction, in Walter Daniel, *The Life of Aelred of Rievaulx*, trans. F. M. Powicke, CF 57 [Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1994], 34).

Several years later, around 1153, when Aelred wrote his own account of the Battle of the Standard,¹¹ he had the opportunity to express his recognition of Stephen's political legitimacy and to explain this choice, which went against his natural and heartfelt affections. He did so not theoretically, in a treatise of political theology argued on the basis of what should constitute a just war. Rather he did it narratively, in the form of a drama placing the historical participants on a stage and placing words in their mouths. As Marsha Dutton has shown, Aelred did this not with the goal of offering a precise relation of events as they took place or reporting the participants' words as they truly were spoken, but instead with the purpose of spotlighting human, social, and ethical issues,¹² as well as what Marie Anne Mayeski has identified as spiritual and theological issues.¹³

This question is essential to understanding the theology of history of Aelred's historiographical works. For the moment it suffices to note three elements that explain why, in the context of Revesby's founding and later events, Aelred made the rational choice contributing to the general welfare and social peace rather than the affection-based choice promoting his personal interests by cultivating the ties binding him to the Scottish royal family. The first element relates to Aelred's bitter memory of the terrible depredations committed by the Scottish troops¹⁴ during the campaign leading up to the Battle of the

11. On the historical events of the battle, see chap. 2, in "Contested Succession and Civil War (1135–1153/1154)."

12. Marsha Dutton, "Introduction," in *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*, trans. Jane Patricia Freeland, CF 56 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 26.

13. Marie Anne Mayeski, "Secundum naturam: The Inheritance of Virtue in Aelred's *Genealogy of the English Kings*," CSQ 37 (2002): 221–28. Mayeski notes that the narrative and historical texts of the Middle Ages, including hagiography among other genres, should be considered as spaces allowing doctrinal and theological reflections.

14. For a vivid description of these depredations, see the French translation of *La Bataille de l'Étendard*: Pierre-André Burton, "Le récit *La bataille de l'Étendard* par Aelred de Rievaulx: présentation et traduction," Cîteaux 58 (2007): 29–30.

Standard, for which he was never able to forgive King David. Even if the latter had not directly ordered these actions, he had tolerated them. So Aelred committed himself to preventing such atrocities in the future, even while relegating his own friendships to a level of secondary importance.

The second element inclining Aelred to support King Stephen rather than the Scots united around Matilda is that in Aelred's mind, Stephen had justice and right on his side in taking up arms in self-defense and in order to protect the English people against the cruelty of enemy troops. His cause was right because his legitimacy was, if not uncontested, at least uncontestable, as Aelred affirms clearly and forcefully in his narrative account of the Battle of the Standard through the discourse he places on the lips of Walter Espec, Stephen's lieutenant and commander in chief of the king's army in the battle:

Do we distrust the cause? But we are not undertaking an unjust war on behalf of our king, who has not invaded a kingdom not rightfully his, as enemies falsely claim, but has accepted it as an offering, he whom the people sought, the clergy chose, the pope anointed, and apostolic authority confirmed in his kingdom.

But to be silent concerning the king for a moment, no one surely will deny that we are right to take up arms for our country, that we fight for our wives, for our children, and for our churches, warding off an impending danger.¹⁵

The third element explaining Aelred's decision relates to King David himself, the head of a Scottish coalition defending the cause of the Empress Matilda. According to Aelred, David's decision to take up his niece's cause and raise troops—unscrupulous barbarians at that—to fight against Stephen, the legitimately established king, was not only contrary to the principles

15. Bello 3; Aelred of Rievaulx, "The Battle of the Standard," in *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*, trans. Jane Patricia Freeland, CF 56 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 254.

of right and justice, but went against the interest of his own kingdom and the general course of history. In fact this decision presents itself as the unjustified disavowal of an alliance with the Anglo-Norman court, from which David had greatly benefited, as he owed his own power to it. Aelred reminds him of this fact through the words of Robert de Brus, David's childhood friend and Stephen's vassal, sent to David on an unsuccessful diplomatic mission to dissuade him from engaging in battle:

Against whom are you raising arms today and leading this immense army? Surely against the English and the Normans! O King, have you not always found their counsel useful, their aid ready, and their allegiance welcome? Therefore I ask you, my lord, have you found such fidelity in the Scots that you can safely dismiss the counsel of the English for yourself and your people and deprive yourself of the aid of the Normans, as if the Scots alone sufficed even against the Scots?

This reliance on the Galwegians is new to you. Today you are attacking with arms those through whom you have until now ruled, beloved by the Scots and terrible to the Galwegians. Do you think then, O King, that the heavenly Majesty will with equanimity see that you are intent on destroying those through whom you procured the kingdom for yourself and your people and security for your kingdom? With what troops and what auxiliaries did your brother Duncan crush the army of Donald and recover the kingdom that the tyrant had usurped? Who restored Edgar your brother, indeed more than a brother, to his kingdom if not . . .¹⁶ our army? You yourself, O King, when you sought from your brother Alexander the part of the kingdom that your brother Edgar left you at

16. [Translator's note: My ellipsis. The English translation includes the word "to" here, which appears to be a typographical error. Robert is arguing that it was the English army ("our army") that restored Edgar to the Scottish throne, not that Edgar was restored "to" the English army.]

his death, obtained what you wanted without bloodshed through men's fear of us.

Remember last year, when you earnestly sought the help of the English against Malcolm, the heir of his father's hatred and persecution? How happy, how swift, and how prompt to help, how willing to face danger were Walter Espec and many of the other English barons when they hastened to you at Carlisle! Recall how many ships they fitted out, what arms they brought, what young men they provided. Recall how the enemy terrified all your men until they took Malcolm himself, once he was betrayed, bound him once taken, and handed him over once bound.¹⁷

These wise words inviting David to agree to terms would come to naught, smothered by the open opposition of William Fitzduncan, one of King David's nephews and the primary instigator in the war against Stephen. But Robert's words reveal Aelred's constant primary concern: to preserve peace and understanding among nations at all costs, for the good of the civil populations.

Dundrennan: "Aelred the Peace-maker," or a New Solomon

In 1143, Rievaulx founded the abbey of Dundrennan in Galloway, under the patronage of King David. At one point—Walter places the event sometime between 1157 and 1163¹⁸—Aelred was asked to go to Dundrennan because the community was endangered by fratricidal rivalries of "the petty king of that land [who was] incensed against his sons, and the sons

17. Aelred, Bello 6 (CF 56:261–63).

18. As Maurice Powicke and Dutton indicate, Walter seems to confuse Aelred's three known trips to Scotland, which occurred in 1159, in 1164–1165, and in 1166. The Dundrennan episode related in VA 38 corresponds to the first of these journeys (see note below). See Maurice Powicke, "Introduction," in Walter Daniel, *The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx*, trans. F. M. Powicke (Oxford: Clarendon: 1950, 1978), xciv, 45, n.1; Dutton, "Introduction," CF 57:81.

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1. Translator's note: With some exceptions, Burton's bibliography lists works and articles in French, citing works in other languages only in footnotes. I have added sources from footnotes as well as Aelredian editions, translations, and studies that have appeared in or since 2010.

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Indices

Index of Scriptural References

Scriptural references are cited by page number.

Genesis		2 Chronicles	
2:15	338	9:23	414n
27:27-28	196n	Job	
29:15-30	278	41:25	482
37:3	333, 334	Psalms	
Exodus		6	450
8:21-23	466	13:3	482
28:39-42	294	15:2	482
35:20-29	196n, 324	20:4	478
Leviticus		31	450
10:7	294, 295	34:10	278
Numbers		34:14-15	354
2:3-31	467	36:10	521n, 522
35:11-15	327	37	450
1 Samuel		44:3	227n, 389
15:17	64	44:8	295
2 Samuel		48:13	491
4:4	63, 64	49:12	482
5:8	64	50	450
9:13	63, 64, 321	67:36	437, 443
1 Kings		68:6	296
3:4-14	296	84:5	278n
1 Chronicles		85:11-14	354
19:15	302	88:3	482
		100:1	482
		101	450

102:4	295	15:16	488
115:12	383	16:11	504
122:4	322	28:21	319n
129	450	Ezekiel	
132:1	262n, 315n	34:4	298
139:16	303n	Wisdom	
140:5	295	7:30–8:1	247
142	450	8:1	29n, 544
144:9	295	8:7	221
146:11	451, 452	9:10	296
Proverbs		Sirach	
12:28	482	32:1	298n, 299n
31:13	196n	45:1	93n
Ecclesiastes		45:24	273
2:14	203	Matthew	
11:5	337n	1:1-17	464
Song of Songs		5:1-10	466
1:1	259	5:7	294
2:9-10	227n	5:45	247, 249n, 513n
2:10	438	6:22	166
2:11-12	226	7:13	482
2:12	226	7:14	483
2:16	215n, 227n	11:19	181, 280
3:4	227n	11:28-30	177n
4:7	226	11:29	137
4:11	194	11:30	166
5:1	204	15:14	298
Isaiah		15:26	492
1:7	383	16:19	451, 454
10:26	482	23:12	253
10:27	482	23:37	293
11:2-3	221	25:8-9	295
11:6	343n	26:41	239
13–24	481	Luke	
13:1-22	488	2:34	502
13:2	502	2:41-52	207
14:1	502	2:52	217
14:28-32	488		

4:37	276	8:3	310
9:57	288n	8:18-25	413
10:29-37	292	8:29-39	550
10:41	137n	8:38-39	470
11:38-42	196n	9:3	229
15:11-32	190, 529	10:2	449, 453
17:10	115	12:4-5	324n
22:33	288n	12:5	331n
John		12:15	293
3:29	438	13:12-14	334
10:11-14	237n	15:4	467n
10:11	291	1 Corinthians	
13:23	420n	1:17-25	490
14:6	220n, 222, 548	1:17	176n
14:12	438	1:20-31	482
15:12-14	255	1:23	502
15:13	229, 237, 292n,	1:31	86n
	311	3:1-2	293
15:14-15	438	3:2	309
19:23	333, 469	3:17	324n
21:17	291	4:4	304
Acts		4:21	294
2:42	319	5:1	294
3:2	63, 290n, 312n,	6:17	204n, 254n
	313, 321	6:20	336
3:3	321	7:7	324
3:6-7	321	8:11	302
3:6	239, 311, 312	9:16	86, 491
3:7	321	9:19-22	229
3:8	321	9:19	238, 292
4:32-35	319	9:22	238, 292n
4:32	40n, 331n	10:11	467n
10:15	451, 454	12:7-27	486n
17:28	511	12:26	293
Romans		13:4-5	519
1:14	86, 293n	15:24-28	500, 521
1:18-23	489	15:26	273
3:4-14	312	15:28	30n, 42n, 263,
			392n, 423, 501, 514

2 Corinthians		2:15	482
1:12	304	3:5	113n, 134n
3:6	467n	3:12	334n
3:18	206n	1 Thessalonians	
4:16	514	5:14	298
5:16	525	1 Timothy	
7:2	503	1:5	519
8:9	311	4:8	137
11:29	238, 293n, 297, 438	6:16	526
12:15	237, 292n, 297	2 Timothy	
Galatians		4:2	297
4:4	43	Titus	
4:19	205n, 293	2:12	139, 221, 381, 406, 437n
6:1	321	2:13-14	139
Ephesians		Philemon	
1:22-23	263	20	258
2:14-22	409, 423	Hebrews	
2:14	409	2:17	310n
2:15	542	5:8	310n
2:17	410	5:12-13	308
2:20	409	12:14	302
4:5	503	1 John	
4:12	504	3:2	158n
4:13	220	3:16	292
Philippians		3:17	180
1:8	308, 308n	4:1	526
1:23	510	4:8	214
2:6	222	4:16	214, 245
2:7	311	5:21	467
2:8-10	42	Jude	
4:15	260	16	321
Colossians		Revelation	
1:12-20	549	7:4-8	470
1:15	222		
2:3	438		
2:9	222		

Index of Names

Names are cited by page number.

- Acca, Saint 63, 440
Adeliza of Louvain 75
Aethelwulf 384, 385
Alberic, Saint 155
Alchmund, Saint 63, 440
Alexander II, pope 3, 396
Alexander III, pope 401, 416,
417, 477, 479, 556
Alexander, bishop of
Lincoln 355, 365, 448
Alexander, king of
Scotland 66, 84, 360, 473
Alfred, king of England 388,
390
Alfred, great-grandfather of
Aelred 366
Alice of Schaerbeek 526
Ambrose, Saint 255, 257
Anastasius IV, pope 152, 363
Anselm of Bec, Saint,
archbishop of
Canterbury 209, 415
Aristotle 214
Arnold of Bonneval 330
Aschatil 61
Aubé, Pierre 108, 150, 269
Augustine, Saint 4, 102, 119,
120, 155, 156, 171, 178, 184,
203, 209, 239, 252, 311, 328,
483, 507, 510, 547
Azzimonti, Alessandro 155
Barlow, Frank 399
Basset, Lytta 125, 130
Beatrice of Nazareth 526
Becket, Thomas 8, 108, 363,
390, 416, 421, 425, 479, 480,
556
Bede, the Venerable 2, 7, 24,
241, 274, 366, 367, 429, 430,
432, 435, 536
Bell, David N. 212, 213, 215,
503
Benedict XII, Pope 164
Benedict, Saint 17, 89, 135,
140, 165, 175, 189, 196, 206,
222, 261, 287–89, 300, 310,
322, 324, 325, 327, 331, 436,
466, 500, 510, 520
Rule of 45, 55, 136, 137, 140–
42, 155, 165, 166, 175, 179,
199, 200, 208, 213, 222,

- 242, 264, 287, 288, 295,
297, 298, 328, 332, 466, 529
- Bequette, John 410–15
- Bernard of Clairvaux, Saint 2,
3, 7, 12, 15, 19, 21, 29, 37, 40,
48–52, 54, 56–59, 67, 68, 71,
85–87, 90, 91, 105–7, 130,
136, 137, 139, 143, 150–52,
154, 156–72, 175, 182–84,
186, 197, 203, 214, 215, 228,
268–69, 282, 285, 309, 310,
313, 330, 332–35, 339, 341,
343, 346, 363, 377, 381, 392,
426, 481, 495, 496, 508, 510,
528, 539, 540, 544, 547, 555
- Biffi, Inos 224
- Bloch, Marc 400
- Blyton, Rowland, last abbot of
Rievaulx 532
- Boquet, Damien 156, 208, 399,
506, 508, 509
- Boswell, John 26
- Bouthillier, Denise 166
- Bouyer, Louis 102
- Bredero, Adriaan H. 163
- Brooke, Christopher 67, 68
- Burton, Janet 24, 52, 72, 73,
270, 275, 277, 283, 418
- Bynum, Caroline 309
- Callerot, Françoise 166, 167
- Callixtus II, Pope 163, 390, 554
- Canute the Great, king of
England 398
- Cassian, John 142, 155, 214,
242, 466
- Chenu, Marie-Dominique 459,
460
- Christian, bishop of
Whithorn 362
- Christophe, Paul 12
- Cicero 9, 83, 100–102, 110, 120,
127, 157, 232, 241, 254, 342
- Clark, Robert 158
- Constantine, emperor 389,
390, 498
- Coune, Michel 521
- Courcelle, Pierre 118
- Cristina, sister of Edgar
Aetheling 473
- Crouch, David 369
- Daichman, G. S. 447
- Daniel, Walter 1, 10, 15–22, 28,
34, 37–45, 59, 61, 63–69, 78,
82–84, 87–89, 91, 93–95,
105–8, 111, 112, 114–17, 121–
24, 126, 127, 132–36, 142–44,
149, 150, 152–53, 155, 159,
181, 187–95, 205, 211–12,
216–17, 230, 234, 239, 241,
259, 262, 269–84, 286, 287,
299–308, 311–12, 314–16,
321–22, 344, 350–57, 361–63,
378, 381, 402, 429, 454, 474,
476, 500, 507, 514–24,
527–35
- David I, king of Scotland 2, 6,
7, 15, 66, 67, 71, 75–78, 81,
82, 84, 85, 91–97, 99, 104–12,
114, 116, 117, 123, 127, 130,
142, 147–51, 241, 271, 272,
281, 303, 346, 353, 354, 357,
359–62, 364, 368, 370–72,
375, 377–80, 382–87, 393,
395, 422, 424, 426, 428–33,
473–75, 478, 523, 537, 541,
554, 555
- David, grandson of David of
Scotland 393

- David, king of Israel 213, 502
- De Briey, Gaetane 98, 198, 259, 267
- De Chergé, Christian 187, 260, 545
- De Connick, Léon 220
- De la Iglesia, Roberto 40, 267, 345
- Delhayé, Philippe 101
- De Wilde, Deodatus 334
- Dietz, Elias 142, 466
- Donald III, king of Scotland 360
- Dugdale, William 55, 56
- Dumont, Charles v, 10, 12, 22, 23, 112–16, 143, 146, 156, 157, 162, 166, 167, 197, 208, 209, 216, 218, 220, 229, 230, 234, 241, 245, 249, 252, 254–56, 261, 263, 305, 306, 317, 320, 326, 328, 339, 340, 521, 550
- Duncan II, king of Scotland 360
- Dunstan, Saint 391, 417, 418
- Dupeux, Cécile 528
- Dutton, Marsha L. 10, 21–26, 61, 63, 75, 77, 85, 106, 116, 123, 126, 147, 157, 161, 210, 211, 223, 234–37, 310, 357, 358, 361, 365–67, 371, 372, 376, 379, 383, 403, 407, 417–20, 427, 428, 437–40, 447, 450, 455, 456, 459, 460, 550
- Ealdgyth, daughter of Emperor Henry II of Germany 96
- Eata, Saint 63, 440
- Edgar Aetheling 402, 473
- Edgar, king of Scotland 360, 473
- Edgar the Peaceful, king of England 373, 388, 389, 391, 411, 414, 418
- Edith of Wessex, queen of Edward the Confessor 396, 397, 399
- Edith (Matilda of Scotland) (Maud), queen of Henry I 75, 92, 96, 148, 407, 473, 474
- Edmund Ironside, king of England 96, 388, 407, 473
- Edward Aetheling 96, 407
- Edward the Confessor, Saint, king of England 3, 299, 348, 384, 385, 388, 396–410, 412–15, 417–22, 473, 478, 480, 554, 556
- Edward the Exile 473
- Egbert, king of England 385
- Eilaf, Aelred's father 1, 5, 60–63, 65, 66, 80, 82–85, 91, 109, 133, 146, 290, 314, 440, 555
- Eilaf, Aelred's grandfather 366
- Émery, Pierre-Yves 506, 509, 510
- Espec, Walter 51, 67–73, 76, 112, 114, 117, 150, 216, 271, 281, 346, 359, 361, 370–72, 374, 375, 377, 541, 555
- Eugene III, pope 151, 152, 282, 346, 363, 377, 426, 555
- Eustace of Burgundy, son of King Stephen 369
- Evagrius 466
- Fein, Suzanna Greer 309, 310
- Fergus of Galloway 362, 382, 428

- Fergusson, Peter 18, 270, 284, 305, 532
- Fitzduncan, William 361
- Fitzherbert, William 151, 152, 363, 555
- Foliot, Gilbert 476–80, 488, 491, 501
- Foliot, Robert 478
- Forbes, Alexander
Penrose 428
- Francis, Saint 156
- Frederick I (Barbarossa),
emperor 390, 401, 416
- Frederick II, emperor 390
- Freeland, Jane Patricia 24, 53, 61, 77, 147, 148, 211, 299, 301, 358, 359, 377, 381, 406, 427, 428, 440, 446, 474, 525, 529
- Freeman, Elizabeth 10, 22–25, 74, 371, 374, 375, 389, 391, 394, 447, 459, 462, 463, 550
- Frithbert (Frithubeorht),
Saint 63, 440
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg 101
- Geoffrey V of Anjou
(Plantagenet) 75, 368
- Geoffrey of Ainali 270
- Geoffrey of Auxerre 330
- Geoffrey, abbot of Saint Mary's
of York 52, 54, 55, 57
- Gertrude the Great of Helfta,
Saint 457, 526
- Gervase, subprior of St. Mary's
York 54
- Ghislain, Gabriel 306
- Gilbert de Gant 272–73
- Gilbert of Hoyland 204, 303, 304
- Gilbert of Sempringham 365, 448–50, 457, 524, 525
- Gilbert, son of Fergus of
Galloway 362
- Gilbert Foliot, see Foliot, Gilbert
- Gille Aldan, bishop of
Whithorn 430, 431
- Gobry, Ivan 269
- Godric, Saint 241
- Godwin, count of Wessex 396, 398
- Godwinson, Harold, see Harold
Godwinson, king of
England
- Golding, Brian 448
- Gourevitch, Aron 340
- Gratian 247, 315, 318
- Gregory I (the Great), pope,
Saint 89, 178, 179, 189, 242, 466, 500, 510, 520
- Gregory VII, pope 6, 554
- Groń, Ryszard 123, 242
- Guerric d'Igny 37, 205, 332, 334–39, 481, 544
- Hallier, Amédée 37, 146, 197
- Harding, Stephen 163
- Harold Godwinson, king of
England 66, 72, 396, 397, 407, 473, 554
- Harrison, Stuart 18, 270, 284, 532
- Henry, prince of Scotland, son of
David I 77, 81, 82, 84, 91, 98, 99, 103, 148, 241, 281, 346, 370, 371, 377, 382, 393, 555
- Henry I, king of England
(Beauclerc) 49, 51, 67, 69–73, 75, 92, 96, 147, 148, 355, 357, 401, 407, 415, 473, 555

- Henry II, king of England
(Henry Plantagenet) 2, 4,
8, 25, 35, 75, 76, 92, 108, 147,
148, 264, 281, 283, 299, 346,
357, 363–69, 371, 372, 375,
377, 378, 382, 384–88, 390,
391, 393–397, 401, 403, 406–
10, 414–19, 421–24, 426, 479,
507, 536, 542, 555, 556
- Henry II, emperor 96
- Henry V, Holy Roman
Emperor 75, 148, 390, 554
- Henry VIII, king of
England 532
- Henry of Blois, bishop of
Winchester 75, 355
- Henry Murdac, see Murdac,
Henry
- Heurre, Denis 205–6, 337
- Hildegarde of Bingen 457, 526
- Hoste, Anselm 10, 75, 105,
208, 216–19, 230, 234, 235,
240, 242, 371, 506, 550
- Hugh of Saint-Victor 505
- Hugh, prior of Rievaulx 160,
539
- Ida of Léau 526
- Ida of Louvain 526
- Ida of Nivelles 526
- Ignatius of Loyola 156, 209
- Innocent II, pope 67, 111, 400
- Innocent IV, pope 473
- Isaac of Stella, abbot 506
- Ivo of Wardon 39, 173, 198,
216, 218, 221, 229–31, 233,
245, 246, 249, 251, 259
- Jackson, Peter 348, 402
- Jamroziak, Emilia 24, 270, 418
- Jarrett, Bede 241
- Jerome, Saint 242, 483, 485,
488, 489, 493
- Jocelin of Furness 81, 83–85,
87, 89, 91, 99, 112, 303
- John, Saint 203, 237, 239, 245,
255, 292, 311, 418–20, 425,
435
- John, bishop of Glasgow 111
- John of Forde, abbot 503
- John, a monk 506, 507
- John Paul II, pope 35
- King, Edmund 369
- Knowles, David 60
- Lawrence of Durham 105, 401,
402, 430
- Lazzari, Francesco 145
- Le Bail, Anselm 218
- Leclercq, Jean 150, 160, 164,
166, 168
- Le Goff, Jacques 341
- Lemoine, Matthias 398, 399,
402, 403, 405, 410, 416, 421
- Leo IX, pope 6
- Louf, André 528
- Lubac, Henri de 172, 464
- Ludolph of Saxony 156
- Lutgardis of Aywières,
Saint 526
- Maiorino, Anna 157
- Malcolm, son of King
Alexander I of
Scotland 361
- Malcolm III, king of
Scotland 92, 96, 473
- Malcolm IV, king of
Scotland 362, 382, 393

- Margaret of Scotland, queen,
 Saint 7, 95, 96, 388, 407,
 473, 474
- Martin, Saint 433, 436
- Matilda, the Empress 75–77,
 99, 147, 148, 151, 271, 273,
 281, 355, 357, 359, 365, 368–
 71, 385, 387, 401, 407, 479,
 536, 541
- Matilda of Scotland, queen, see
 Edith
- Matilda of Senlis 97, 99, 148,
 151, 272
- Matthew of Rievaulx 239, 240,
 348
- Matthew, 13th-century
 precentor of Rievaulx 270
- Maud, queen, see Edith
- Maurice, addressee of the *Letter
 to Maurice* 121, 519
- Maurice of Durham, second
 abbot of Rievaulx 34, 273–
 75, 278, 283, 284, 536, 555,
 556
- Mayeski, Marie Anne 203,
 358, 368, 395, 433–35, 439,
 444, 455
- McGuire, Brian Patrick 10, 22,
 25, 26, 60, 84, 108, 122, 123,
 126, 416, 429–31
- Mechtilde of Hackeborn 526
- Metcalfe, W. M. 379, 428
- Migne, Jacques-Paul 379, 446,
 447
- Mikkers, Edmond 208
- Mitterre, Paul 150
- Morris, Colin 340
- Murdac, Henry, archbishop of
 York 151, 152, 268, 274,
 275, 363, 449, 450, 455, 457
- Nigel, bishop of Ely 355
- Ninian, Saint 364, 428, 430–39
- Noblesse-Rocher, Annie 205,
 334, 335
- Norton, Christopher 52, 54,
 68, 270
- Nouzille, Philippe 215, 222–
 24, 258, 461, 462, 472
- Orderic Vitalis (Vital) 271
- Osbert of Clare 400, 401, 403–
 5, 408
- Ouaknin, Marc-Alain 394, 495
- Palladius 242
- Paul, Saint 42, 117, 134, 176,
 203, 205, 221, 222, 229, 258,
 289, 292–94, 296, 297, 324,
 381, 406, 409, 467, 491, 503,
 510, 519, 549
- Peter, Saint 56, 63, 289, 291,
 292, 294, 312, 313, 389, 419,
 420, 451
- Peter the Venerable 58, 165
- Pezzini, Domenico 93, 209–11,
 216, 218, 226, 234, 235, 379,
 397–401, 403–6, 410, 427, 502
- Pfeifer, Michaela 37
- Philip de Kyme 272
- Pinkerton, Johannes
 (John) 379, 428
- Polek, Wincenty 37, 38, 44,
 413, 420
- Posset, Franz 528
- Powicke, F. M. (Maurice) 10,
 16, 21–23, 59, 61, 65, 66, 83,
 84, 88, 105, 106, 111, 112,
 132, 133, 150, 154, 155, 270,
 272, 287, 354, 357, 361, 440,
 474, 516, 529, 550

- Raciti, Gaetano 10, 35, 98, 101, 102, 114, 250, 267, 306, 307, 310, 311, 319, 320, 327, 328, 333, 344, 348, 349, 476, 480, 493, 550
- Radcliffe, Timothy 339
- Raine, James 60, 439
- Reginald of Durham 241
- Regnard, Joël 182
- Renna, Thomas 493, 496, 497
- Richard, prior of Saint Mary's of York; abbot of Fountains 54, 151
- Richard, prior of Hexham 61, 440
- Robert II de Beaumont 99, 148, 363
- Robert de Brus (the Bruce) 147, 360, 361, 372
- Robert of Molesme 57, 155
- Robert Foliot, *see* Foliot, Robert
- Robert Wace, *see* Wace, Robert
- Roger de Pont-l'Évêque, archbishop of York 363
- Roger, abbot of Rievaulx 532
- Roger, bishop of Salisbury 355
- Rudolph, Conrad 163
- Rule of Saint Benedict, *see* Benedict, Saint, Rule of
- Salenson, Christian 187, 260
- Sallust 254
- Scannerini, Guglielmo 500, 525
- Severus, Sulpicius, *see* Sulpicius Severus
- Simon, a monk of Rievaulx 257, 381
- Simon, son of Simon de Senlis 98, 99, 148, 241, 370
- Simon de Senlis 96, 99, 151
- Simon, novice master of Rievaulx 216, 244, 271, 539
- Sommerfeldt, John R. 10, 28, 29, 37, 223
- Squire, Aelred 7, 8–10, 22, 23, 52, 63, 65, 82, 83, 104, 113, 118, 240–43, 367, 370, 387, 427, 430, 431, 433, 440, 441, 446, 447, 503, 533–36, 550
- Stacpoole, Alberic 267
- Stiegman, Emero 85
- Stephen of Blois, king of England 2, 4, 75, 76, 99, 147, 148, 151, 271, 273, 281, 346, 355, 357–61, 364–66, 369–72, 375, 384, 386, 400, 401, 407, 415, 431, 479, 536, 541, 542, 555, 556
- Stephen Harding, Saint 155, 163
- Suger 457
- Sulpicius Severus 518
- Sylvanus, abbot of Rievaulx 532
- Talbot, C. H. 344, 348, 506, 507, 550
- Tepas, K. M. 123; *see also* Yohe, Katherine
- Theobald of Bec 363, 479
- Thomas II, archbishop of York 1, 5, 61, 62, 64, 65, 80, 133, 146
- Thomas Becket, *see* Becket, Thomas
- Thorald, abbot of Fountains 275
- Thurstan, archbishop of York 1, 5, 51–57, 60, 61, 64,

- 67, 80, 111, 114, 130, 146,
150, 363, 430, 537, 555
- Thévenot, Xavier 118
- Tilbeorht (Tilbert), Saint 63,
440
- Torrell, Jean-Pierre 166
- Tostig, son of Godwin 396
- Twysden, Roger 379, 446
- Uchtred, son of Fergus of
Galloway 362
- Ullman, Walter 340
- Vallery-Radot, Robert 150
- Victor IV, antipope 401, 477,
556
- Vital, Orderic, *see* Orderic
Vitalis (Vital)
- Von Balthasar, Hans Urs 462
- Wace, Robert 405
- Waddell, Chrysogonus 80,
155, 179, 269, 343
- Waldef 71, 81, 82, 91, 98, 99,
103, 112, 114, 117, 151, 241,
271, 272, 303, 432, 538, 555
- Walter Daniel, *see* Daniel,
Walter
- Walter Espec, *see* Espec, Walter
- Waltheof of Northumbria 96
- Warren, W. L. 480
- Weber, Edouard-Henri 340
- Weil, Éric 535
- White, Lewis xiii, 42, 64, 86,
239, 287, 466, 493, 495–98
- Wilfrid, Saint 444, 445
- William, abbot of
Dundrennan 428
- William, abbot of Rievaulx 3,
49, 131, 145, 146, 149–52,
154, 198, 244, 268–75, 279,
283, 285, 354, 448, 532, 536,
537, 539, 555
- William I, the Conqueror, king
of England 3, 66, 72, 75,
96, 147, 277, 396–98, 407,
417, 421, 473, 554
- William I, the Lion, king of
Scotland 362, 393
- William II, king of England 72,
407
- William Adelin, son of Henry
I 75
- William de Roumare, count of
Lincoln 271, 273, 275
- William of Corbeil, archbishop
of Canterbury 54, 55, 57
- William of Saint-Thierry 37,
57, 58, 136, 163, 164, 329,
330, 506
- William, son of Thole 522
- William Fitzduncan, *see*
Fitzduncan, William
- William Fitzherbert, *see*
Fitzherbert, William
- Williams, Daniel 24, 116
- Williams, David H. 271
- Wilmart, André 159, 208, 234,
240
- Woytyła, Karol, *see* John Paul II
- Wulfstan, Saint 420, 421
- Yohe, Katherine M. 403, 404;
see also Tepas, K. M.
- Zuanazzi, Giovanni 101

Index of References to the Works of Aelred and of Walter Daniel

References are grouped by author and cited by page number.

Aelred's Works

- The Battle of the Standard; Relatio Standardis* (Bello) 52, 53, 67, 70, 71, 73–78, 92, 147, 148, 281, 358–61, 364, 370–76, 379, 388, 409, 421, 422, 424, 442, 444, 536, 558
- A Certain Wonderful Miracle; De quodam miraculum mirabili* (Mira) 210, 211, 365, 427, 435, 446–58, 524, 525, 558
- The Formation of Anchoresses; De institutione inclusarum* (Inst incl) 117, 118, 120, 121, 124, 127, 133–36, 138, 197, 207–15, 219, 223–25, 227, 229, 230, 232, 233, 241, 309, 310, 404, 443, 458, 512, 513, 528, 537, 548, 557
- Genealogy of the Kings of the English; Genealogia Regum Anglorum* (Gen angl) 74, 77, 84, 92, 281, 364, 368, 370, 373, 377–79, 384–96, 402, 403, 406, 411, 414, 417–19, 421, 422–26, 444, 474, 536, 542, 558
- Homilies on the Prophetic Burdens of Isaiah; Homiliae de oneribus prophetis Isaiæ* (Oner) xiii, 35, 42, 43, 86, 217, 230, 343, 351, 390, 476–78, 480–506, 511, 514, 515, 521, 524–26, 528, 543, 557
- Lament for David, King of the Scots; Lamentatio David, regis Scotie* (Lam D) 76, 77, 92, 93, 95, 147, 281, 364, 370–72, 377–87, 393–95, 421, 422, 424, 426, 429, 444, 474, 536, 558
- The Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor; Vita Sancti Edwardi, Regi et Confessoris* (Vita E) 299, 364, 396–426, 437, 444, 480, 542, 558
- The Life of Saint Ninian; Vita Sancti Niniani* (Vita N) 364, 402, 427–39, 443, 445, 446, 558
- Mirror of Charity; De Speculum caritatis* (Spec car) 11, 23, 28–30, 43, 59, 85, 86, 90, 96, 97, 99, 103, 104, 106, 112, 113, 117–21, 124–27,

- 130, 133, 139–45, 152, 153, 158–79, 183–88, 197–204, 208, 214,
221, 225, 229–32, 244–46, 248–52, 254–58, 272, 286, 317, 322, 341,
363, 381, 420, 462, 484, 500, 501, 505, 510, 513, 514, 525, 537,
539–41, 546, 557
- On Jesus at the Age of Twelve; De Iesu Puero Duodenni* (Iesu) 197,
198, 207, 216–33, 237, 289, 502, 503, 557
- On the Soul; De Anima* (Anima) 212, 252, 488, 500, 506, 507, 509–
12, 520, 521, 543, 558
- On Spiritual Friendship; De spiritali amicitia* (Spir) 28, 30, 31, 39–42,
68, 83, 99–103, 117–20, 127, 143, 157, 174, 185, 198, 208, 229–32,
240, 241, 244–63, 306, 315, 318–20, 413, 501, 537, 557
- The Pastoral Prayer; Oratio Pastoralis* (Orat) 106, 234–38, 286, 296–
99, 312, 313, 328, 558
- The Saints of the Church of Hexham and their Miracles; De sanctis
ecclesiae Hagulstadensis* (SS Hag) 61–63, 66, 365, 427, 435, 439–
46, 451
- Sermons, Sermones (SS)
- 3 178, 181
- 4 140
- 6 139–40, 466
- 7 140, 222, 548
- 8 196, 261, 322–27, 331
- 9 223, 333
- 10 95–96, 141, 475
- 12 225, 319
- 17 295, 326
- 18 289
- 19 196
- 21 196
- 22 475
- 23 195
- 24 196, 222, 233, 237, 287–89, 464–65
- 26 195, 196, 223, 323, 325, 331
- 27 466–67
- 30 203
- 32 215
- 33 243
- 47 476
- 54 466

- 56 28–88, 291, 466
- 59 333, 334, 337–39, 343–45
- 63 290–92
- 64 86, 290, 294–95
- 68 238
- 70 63–64, 290, 312–13, 320–22
- 71 292–94
- 74 309
- 75 309, 466
- 76 467–70, 475
- 77 467, 470–71, 475
- 83 345
- 84 332
- 112 250

Walter Daniel's Works

Lament for Aelred; Lamentatio Aelredi (Lament) 301, 381, 515, 529

Letter to Maurice (Letter) 63–65, 121–22, 132–33, 188, 269–70, 362, 516–20, 522–24, 530

The Life of Aelred; Vita Aelredi (VA) 10, 15–22, 59, 67–69, 78, 81, 82, 87–89, 91, 93–95, 105–8, 111, 112, 114–16, 121–24, 126–27, 132, 134–36, 142–44, 149, 150, 152–53, 155, 188–95, 205, 216–17, 269–70, 272–84, 287, 300–17, 321–22, 344, 351, 353–57, 361–63, 454, 474, 476, 500, 507, 514–32, 533–35