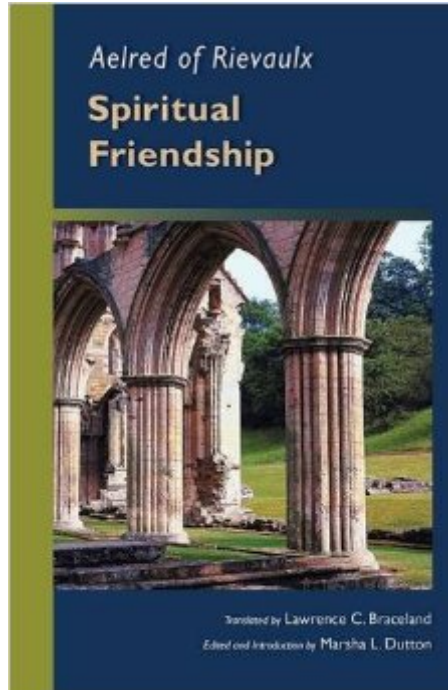


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# Aelred Of Rievaulx: Spiritual Friendship (Cistercian Studies Series)



## Synopsis

Spiritual Friendship is today the best known and perhaps most influential of the thirteen surviving works of Aelred, abbot of the great English Cistercian abbey of Rievaulx from 1147 '1167. During his abbacy he built Rievaulx into a place of spiritual welcome and physical prosperity, desiring to make it a mother of mercy" to those in need. In a three-book Ciceronian dialogue Aelred defines human friendship as sacramental, beginning in creation, as God sought to place his own love of society in all his creatures, linking friends to Christ in this life and culminating in friendship with God in beatitude. This fresh new translation makes the work crisply readable, allowing the intellectual and Christian insight of this great Cistercian teacher and writer to speak clearly to today's seekers of love, wisdom, and truth. Lawrence C. Braceland, was professor of classics and dean at Ignatius College, Guelph (Canada), until in 1963 becoming professor of classics and dean of arts and sciences at St. Paul's College, the University of Manitoba. After his retirement in 1-978, he devoted himself to Cistercian scholarship, publishing numerous articles and translating in four volumes all the works of the English Cistercian abbot Gilbert of Hoyland. Marshal. Dutton, professor of medieval literature and director of graduate studies in English at Ohio University, is a long time student of the works of Aelred of Rievaulx and of other twelfth-century Cistercian writers. She is associate editor of Cistercian Studies Quarterly. In addition to her many articles on Cistercian thought, Dutton has written the introduction to *Vita Aelredi* (CF 57) and edited Aelred's *The Historical Works and Lives of the Northern Saints* (CF 56, 71) as well as preparing a critical edition of Aelred's *Pastoral Prayer* (CF 73). She was one of the editors of *Truth as Gift: Studies in Cistercian History Honoring John R. Sommerfeldt* (CS 204)."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

St. Ælred of Rievaulx's Christianization of Cicero's "On Friendship" should be a minor Christian classic read by all who want to deepen friendships and faith. Immensely popular as the Abbot of Rievaulx, a medieval English Cistercian monastery, Ælred wrote this three part dialogue on christian friendship, a theological and practical handbook for Cistercian novices called *The Mirror of Charity*, histories of English saints and kings, poetry, dozens of sermons richly endowed with wisdom and other works, all well received not only by monastics but people throughout 12th century Christendom. *Spiritual Friendship* was written primarily to his monastic brothers in response to questions about the propriety of friendship within the enclosure. Ælred not only endorsed monastic friendship in *Spiritual Friendship*, the saint makes it a vital path on which monk and every Christian travel in learning fraternal charity. He outlines the differences between true and false friendships, gives examples of scriptural and classical friendships, highlights virtue as the goal of friendship, and even counsels how difficult friendships can heal or be ended without drama, if it comes to that. Ultimately, he reveals friendship as another *schola caritatis*--a school of love--in which as friends learn to love each other, learn to love all people, and ultimately to love God as He ought to be loved. In an age in which we "friend" people online with no more than a click of the mouse, St. Ælred's work on what makes true and lasting friendship the path of virtue and the path to God is a necessary clarion call not only to all Christians, but to all people who find themselves alone in a sea of so-called friends. But for the Christian soul, Ælred teaches us that the love between two friends will invariably involve a third person, the Son of God, and thus a friendship of two becomes a model and mirror of the Trinity and a true path on our way to imitate Christ and be perfect in charity as our heavenly Father is perfect.

As most know there are several kinds or aspects of love, and perhaps the most crucial is represented by the Greek word, *philia*, usually translated as "friendship". Unfortunately that word often is used to describe mere acquaintances or associates. Aelred of Rievaulx, a Twelfth Century Cistercian abbot who lived in the north of England, wrote "Spiritual Friendship" to explore the deeper meanings of this form of love particularly as it could and should exist among the monks of his order. He elevates it to a status it probably should have among us all. The topic apparently was very important to him because he returned to it several times, only completing the book shortly before his

death in 1167. The treatise is written in the form of a dialogue between an abbot and several monks and it takes place as three different conversations. The conversations may be fictionalized but the personae in them probably were based on monks Aelred knew. He drew on existing sources who wrote on the topic, including especially Cicero, Ambrose, and Augustine, and he also refers to scripture frequently. His own passion for the topic is evident and his writing, considering that it is medieval, is human and warm even over nine hundred years later. The dialogue partners even engage in some teasing and humor. Lawrence Braceland's translation is among the most recent and readable. Aelred discusses the importance of friendship among monks but in a way that shows its significance in the fullness and maturity of any human life. Discussions include how friendship begins, how it comes to maturity, and the qualities needed to keep it strong and mutually supportive. The book is valuable in itself as an historical and church artifact, but it might be just as valuable today to promote thinking about what friendship could and should mean for people far removed from the Middle Ages but not from similar human needs.

Aelred of Rievaulx work on Spiritual Friendship presents the most noble presentation of friendship I have ever read. In fact it is so noble, incredible and rare that one could say that he refers to intimacies between persons so great that contemporary culture would be inclined to describe such relations as being soul mates or kindred spirits. He repeats this maxim with great frequency, that true friendship is for two persons to have *Ã¢Âone heart and one soul, wishing and not wishing for the same things*Ã¢Â. The work itself is only 76 pages, there is a 50 page scholarly introduction put on to the start of the book. I grew tired of reading it after 25 pages in and skipped the rest of it. The work itself is divided up into three smaller books and all are written in the form of a conversation between monks. Aelred makes constant references to holy scripture to both elaborate on friendship, produce examples of great friends (Jonathan and Davids friendship is central to the overall work) and the type of people to not make friends with. He also cites with great frequency the writings of St Ambrose and Ciceros classic treatise on friendship. The book is full of solid wisdom for example: "Divine authority commands that many more be received to the clasp of charity than to the embrace of friendship. By the law of charity we are ordered to welcome to the bosom of love not only our friends but also our enemies. But we call friends only those to whom we have no qualm about entrusting our heart and all its contents, while these friends are bound to us in turn by the same inviolable law of loyalty and trustworthiness."Ã¢Â Book 1 While I did find the introduction a bit tiresome, I was grateful for the academic and thorough bibliography, appendix, index of scriptural citations and allusions, index of classical, patristic and medieval works, and general index. Which

will make referencing and using this book easy in the future. If a person had to ask me what is the best book on friendship, I would not hesitate to point to this work. I will be keeping my copy, and will use it as a guide to become a worthy friend.

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