Aelred of Rievaulx’s Doctrine on The Mirror of Charity
Concealed as Spiritual Teachings in his Liturgical Sermons
(The First Clairvaux Collection): A Synthetic Analysis

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Love is always problematic. Further, to communicate in a foreign language aside from your mother tongue is always a risk because the speaker and the listener are each susceptible to misunderstanding. Misconception is also a risk in expressing love, specifically the Christian love which Christianity has always been trying to spread. Apparently “God’s love” or “Christian love” remains to be a foreign word or phrase in spite of the accomplishments of globalization and the advancement of technologies. Strangely enough, Christian love is now proclaimed not only in the pulpit but also globally and digitally. Still, many continue to be aloof or ignorant of what it really means. In fact, it is always misunderstood and “the most tragic theological error of our day is the belief that love is the chief attribute of God ... God who is love is maligned in this century by representing Him as loving without any regard for righteousness.”

Three years ago Pope Benedict XVI wrote his first encyclical Deus Caritas Est of which he discussed the true human interpretation of Christian love. This subject of God’s charity is the topic of this paper. However, it is presented from the perspective of a medieval author known as Abbot Aelred of Rievaulx. This is also the first and major theological discourse written by this little known Cistercian abbot at the beginning of his abbacy. Very curious, indeed, that two authors from different periods and ecclesiastical positions have written about the same vital issue that has always been intensely scrutinized in the Christian world. But other than that, the comparison between these two prominent religious figures have to end here since this research will explicitly deal with God’s love according to Aelred’s treatise called De Speculo Caritatis (The Mirror of Charity). So what can we expect from this monk and abbot of medieval times?

Aelred of Rievaulx is actually one of the important medieval spiritual authors. Some of his spiritual writings are, in fact, read during the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours (Office of Readings). But credit should also be given specially to his work called Spiritual Friendship. He was recently re-discovered by contemporary readers because in this particular writing he adapted the concept God is love” into “God is friendship.” Immediately, it finds its niche in the realm of popular

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1 W. E. Best, God is Love (Texas, USA: W.E. Best Book Missionary Trust, 1986). Cf. also http://www.webbmt.org/EngHTML2/God%20is%20Love.htm
2 Latin for “God is love.” First encyclical letter of the pope, given on December 25, 2005.
psychology especially on human friendship. Now, readers recognize him as the guru of “spiritual friendship.”

But unknown to many, it was Aelred’s treatise on The Mirror of Charity which shows him to be “besides the monastic theologian, a philosopher who could rival the Scholastics, and a monk speaking to God in sublime prayers and meditations.”¹⁵ Unlike the other medieval spiritual authors such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux or William of St.Thierry, what distinguishes Aelred from them is he never attended the schools.⁶ Yet he left a rich literary heritage such as his treatises on The Mirror of Charity and Spiritual Friendship, historical writings, and collections of sermons. Alas, these literary works did not accord him the same recognition as Bernard of Clairvaux. They did, however, earn him the name “Bernard of the North.”

Curiously, it was only in the early 1930’s that interest for an in depth study of his writings began.⁷ Among the current and influential contributors to Aelredian studies were A. Squire, J. R. Sommerfeldt, F. M. Powicke, Louis Bouyer, C. H. Talbot, E. Connor, M. L. Dutton, and C. Dumont to name a few. In their respective investigations, analyses and translations of Aelred’s works, C. H. Talbot noticed “that Aelred’s ideas had changed comparatively little with the passage of the years. The thoughts expressed in previous works re-appear in a new setting, more fully developed, perhaps, and more clearly expounded. But his fundamental outlook remained the same.”⁸ It means that during the process of translating Aelred’s last work the Dialogue on the Soul,⁹ Talbot observed that Aelred had consistently infused the same thoughts or principle even from his earlier writings. Apparently, C. Dumont also shares the same opinion saying, “Aelred never put aside this fundamental teaching [Mirror of Charity] ... Even his treatise on Spiritual Friendship and his Dialogue on the Soul are simply more fully developed chapters of this synthesis.”¹⁰ These documents suggest that Aelred’s theological doctrine stated in The Mirror of Charity influenced his subsequent spiritual writings. How far and how deep he implanted his doctrine on his other writings remains to be seen and studied.

C. H. Talbot and C. Dumont’s observations strongly caught my attention and interest about Aelred. Thus, following their lead, I wrote this paper to investigate Aelred’s doctrine on charity, how he utilized it, and to what extent and profundity he infused it particularly in his Liturgical Sermons (The First Clairvaux Collection). To pursue this endeavor, I studied and produced a synthesis of Aelred doctrine from his Mirror of Charity. Then, I employed a synthetic analysis to identify the theological themes embedded in his sermons that bear the character of his teachings on charity. Also I provided a

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⁹ Ibid.

chronological account on Aelred’s life and works to understand the context, the development, and the elements of his concept on charity (synchronic analysis) and how he applied them in his Liturgical Sermons (diachronic assessment).

My research, therefore, will introduce the readers to Aelred’s life as a monk, what he had written, and understand his teachings on charity. The First Chapter provides a chronological overview of Aelred’s life and works. They highlight the crucial events that have shaped his thoughts as a person, as a monk, and as an author (that is, as monastic theologian and spiritual guide). Then, the Second Chapter presents the basic doctrine of Aelred’s Mirror of Charity in systematic and analytical form. In addition, the three books that comprise his treatise are dealt with in its entirety to establish their crucial relationships and be able to see the progressions of Aelred’s thoughts. In that way, one will have a grasp of both the theoretical and practical aspects of charity, and its final objective. The Third Chapter, conversely, gathers the empirical evidence (literary devices, terminologies, contextual meanings of words, phrases and idioms) which establishes not only the presence of Aelred’s fundamental doctrine in his Liturgical Sermons but also indicates whether he deliberately infused it or subtly and sophisticatedly concealed it. In the process, a system or structure was configured thus facilitated the verifications of proofs and evidences. As a result, it unveiled the concealed doctrine, which served as a matrix of Aelred’s spiritual teachings.

For the purpose of literary analysis, I referred primarily to the critical editions in Latin texts of The Mirror of Charity and Liturgical Sermons. But in writing this paper I cited the English texts translations with annotations by E. Connor on Despeculo caritatis (The Mirror of Charity) and by T. Berkeley and M. B.Pennington respectively on the first part of Sermones I-XLVI: Collectio Claraevallensis prima et secunda (The Liturgical Sermons: The First Clairvaux Collection), since they have followed the same technical paragraphing and numbering of the critical edition in Latin. These then are supplemented by C. Dumont in his introduction to E.Connor’s English translation The Mirror of Charity. As for the English translation of The First Clairvaux Collection, M. B. Pennington is not only one of the translators but also he provided an introduction to it. In addition, I also consulted D. Pezzini’s Italian translation Lo Specchio della Carità with his introduction.

Aelred as literary author or spiritual writer, in fact, have priceless wisdom and knowledge to offer specially on Christian spirituality and love. His first treatise on The Mirror of Charity already explained the concept of God’s love or Christian charity which the current Pope is trying to explain. He already dealt with the perennial problem of understanding Christian love during his time rationally, sensibly, and in a language that even the ordinary people could understand. He wrote analytically and explained his thoughts not only as a theologian but also as a wise pedagogue. That he, in fact, persistently instilled his principal doctrine (God is love) in his writings especially in his sermons demonstrates his consistency, stability, and conviction which characterized a person of deep spirituality and wisdom.

In my research, I have read and encountered several works of contemporary scholars and religious authors who have already used and made an in depth study of his works. It is a good sign that indeed Aelred, the medieval theologian and spiritual guide, could provide the answer to the spiritual dilemma (misunderstanding of Christian love) that perennially afflicts our present time.
A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE AND WORKS OF AELRED OF RIEVAULX

1. A CHRONOLOGY OF AELRED’S LIFE

Aelred was born around 1110 at Hexham, Northumbria, during the early period of the Gregorian reform when clerical celibacy was not yet fully enforced. His ancestors were married priests and caretakers of St. Cuthbert whose relic has been carried from Lindisfarne to Chester-le-Street before it was finally settled at Durham around 995. His great-grandfather Alfred had been known as larwa (a teacher) of music and letters at the boys’ school at Durham. His grandfather Eilaf inherited the living of Hexham and proceeded to pass it on to his own son, also named Eilaf, the father of Aelred. During those days the career of a married priest, particularly before Aelred, did not carry a social stigma.

As the Gregorian reform was being implemented Aelred’s father decided to leave his prebend at St. Cuthbert’s shrine in Durham and retired at Hexham around 1083. Nevertheless, he continued his ministration simply as a curate and lived on the prebend granted to Hexham by the first Norman Archbishop Thomas of York. However, by 1113 the second Archbishop Thomas II, who was appointed in 1108, put Hexham under the cares of canons thus leaving Eilaf just enough revenue to meet his needs. Then in 1138 Eilaf made his deathbed profession as a monk of St Cuthbert, witnessed by Aelred with his brothers Samuel and Ethelwold. By this time Aelred was already a monk for some years while nothing can be said further regarding his two brothers.

Certainly Aelred’s ancestry has influenced his character as a child and has been fairly exposed to the ecclesiastical affairs of his father. As such he was aware that he could not be a married priest like his father, grandfather and great-father.

On the positive side his family had provided him a good educational foundation, cultural background, and Christian upbringing. Under such circumstances it may have been his father or his uncle Aldred, a highly regarded scripture teacher at Durham, who taught him the love for learning. It is likely also that his family’s social connections led him to the Scottish royal court in 1124 when he was about fourteen.

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13 Cf. Ibid. p. 6.
Under the care of King David I (1124-1153), Aelred spent his adolescent years with the company of Henry, the king’s son, and Simon and Waldef, the king’s stepsons who became his friends and models.\(^\text{18}\) Growing up with the royal household became his natural environment where he learned and absorbed the courtly values and formation. “There he had the opportunities to develop those emotional and profound friendships … with the most important and civilized people in the kingdom.”\(^\text{19}\) It was also at this time that his innate knack for organization and public relations was recognized. His biographer, Walter Daniel, underlined his courtly post as dapifer summus\(^\text{20}\) which A. Squire interpreted as a function that entails tact and gentleness.\(^\text{21}\) In other words, he was assigned as royal steward because of his remarkable ability for looking after the well-being of others.

When Aelred was about twenty-four (1134) he was sent by King David to York concerning a dispute between Archbishop Thurstan and the bishop of Glasgow.\(^\text{22}\) This mission changed the course of his life from being a royal servant to spiritual pastor and author. After he accomplished his official business at York, he spent the night at the castle of Walter Espec, at Helmsley, then visited the “white monks” of Rievaulx the following day and was deeply attracted by what he saw. But only the day after his first visit he “abruptly decided not to return to the king’s court, but to stay with the monks.”\(^\text{23}\) From that moment he commenced to live his life as a Cistercian monk and renounced his promising career at the royal court.

For the next eight years Aelred immersed himself with a life of prayer, monastic education and discipline of Cistercian life. Undoubtedly, he had experienced the severe and rough labor of monastic community as opposed to his delicate lifestyle at the royal court. But in the midst of these challenges he developed a deep spiritual understanding and theology of the cross of Christ from the viewpoint of Cistercian tradition. During these formative years, A. Squire insightfully depicted Aelred’s steady assimilation of Cistercian monastic values.

Aelred found, as he had at court, the prospect of his fellows wholly absorbing and instructive, whether he had the occasion to speak to them or merely observed them moving in silence about their duties in house or choir. They served him for landscape, and not only did he make new friendships among them, but from them, especially from Abbot William and the founder members of the community, he absorbed that extraordinary homogeneity of outlook which must have made the Rievaulx Aelred knew so manifestly a daughter of Clairvaux.\(^\text{24}\)

Such spiritual adeptness and remarkable zeal for monastic life Aelred manifested before his community did not go unnoticed. Abbot William, from whom he received his formation, recognized his illustrious bearing and administrative astuteness. He was therefore given a diplomatic charge to Rome

\(^{18}\) Cf. Roby, Ibid. p. 5.
\(^{19}\) Ibid. p. 6.
\(^{22}\) Cf. Ibid. p. 19.
\(^{24}\) A. Squire, Aelred: A Study, p. 20
around 1142 to represent the Cistercians abbeys of Yorkshire on the question of the disputed election at York. By lucky chance, however, he took this opportunity to pass by Clairvaux conceivably not only to get the letter of Bernard for the Pope Innocent II but certainly to meet him as well. “There he was entrusted with some letters Saint Bernard had written to the pope. Bernard’s Letter 347 presents to the pope some viri simplices, among whom we can recognize Aelred and the other monks delegated by their superior.”

Chances are Aelred and Bernard must have met each other during this visit.

The journey to Rome afforded Aelred a visit not only to Citeaux but also Clairvaux where he must have taken the chance to meet Bernard personally. The encounter must have left such a deep impression on Bernard that he sent a letter to Aelred encouraging him to write what will become his treatise on The Mirror of Charity. Curiously the trip to Rome only made a little impression on Aelred for he never mentioned it in his works. When he returned from Rome, he was appointed a novice master. Within this period, Aelred must have started to organize his notes which he could have possibly given as short conferences for his novices. In fact, C. Dumont has observed that perhaps the dialogue with the novice found in Book Two of The Mirror of Charity could refer to this period.

The following year (1143) he became the Abbot of the new monastic foundation at Revesby, in Lincolnshire.

However, Aelred’s abbacy at Revesby lasted only for four years because he was summoned back at Rievaulx in 1147. Its former abbot Maurice resigned and Aelred was elected to replace him as the third Abbot of Rievaulx. During his term for almost 20 years, the community members had multiplied to hundreds. J. R. Sommerfeldt noted that Aelred “saw the growth of his community from some three hundred monks to perhaps more than six hundred. In addition to his responsibility for all things spiritual and material at Rievaulx, Aelred was obliged to attend the General Chapter, the annual meeting of all Cistercians abbots at Citeaux, and to conduct an annual visitation of each of Rievaulx’s five daughters’ houses.” Furthermore, C. H. Talbot positively commented, “Though this extraordinary expansion might have been fraught with great danger under any ordinary government, under Aelred the original discipline and fervor of the Order were maintained.”

Despite Aelred’s deteriorating health caused by arthritis and kidney stones, he continued to write with the aid of his ever-faithful biographer Walter Daniel. In January 12, 1167 Aelred’s sickly body expired in the infirmary surrounded by his monks.

2. THE WRITINGS OF AELRED OF RIEVAULX

The upbringing, instructions and experiences of Aelred served as the matrix of what he authored. It took at least eight years of monastic training (a life of prayer, work and study) before he formally

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26 Cf. M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons, p. 11.
writes what would be his first theological treatise. He could have already been jotting down his notes (spiritual and theological reflections) before his trip to Rome and when he met Bernard he had confided them to him. When he returned from his mission and was appointed a novice master he received a letter\textsuperscript{32} from Bernard where it was stated: “I command you … not to put off jotting [something] down on the excellence of charity, its fruit and its proper ordering.”\textsuperscript{33} As a result, a formal written work called The Mirror of Charity was born. Its final redaction could be dated between 1142-1143.

Already in his treatise on charity Aelred have indicated his desire to write something on friendship. He wrote, “But what is more tranquil … than to love and be loved? If this is in God and for God I do not disapprove; on the contrary I entirely approve …. Of course, we shall write elsewhere about that endearment which exists between good persons.”\textsuperscript{34} These words certainly brings to mind the prologue on Spiritual Friendship where he said, “When I was still just a lad at school, … I gave my whole soul to affection and devoted myself to love amid the ways and vices with which that age is wont to be threatened, so that nothing seemed to me more sweet, nothing more agreeable, nothing more practical, than to love.”\textsuperscript{35} His general concept on spiritual friendship in fact was already laid out in Book Three of The Mirror of Charity where he said:

It is no mean consolation in this life to have someone with whom you can be united by an intimate attachment and the embrace of very holy love, to have someone in whom your spirit may rest, to whom you can pour out your soul;

… you may speak with him alone … you alone may repose with him alone in the embrace of charity, the kiss of unity, with the sweetness of the Holy Spirit flowing between you. Still more, you may be so united to him and approach him so closely and so mingle you spirit with his, that the two become one.\textsuperscript{36}

It suggests that while writing and gathering his notes on The Mirror of Charity Aelred is already looking forward to compose his doctrine on spiritual friendship. It could be that during those two years as a novice master he have already started writing about it and taught it to his novices. However, when he became abbot of Revesby (1143-1147) and, then, at Rievaulx (1147-1167) he set aside his plan of expounding it and was able to resume working on it probably by 1164. It would be safe, therefore, to say that the “Spiritual Friendship” finally took its final form between 1164-1167.

Aelred’s spiritual and pastoral duties as abbot did not constrict him to serve only his community and the Cistercian order. On the contrary, his position made him a prominent figure both in the ecclesiastical and political affairs. His “influence with King Henry of England (1154-1189) was … one

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. Roby, Ibid. p. 9.
\textsuperscript{33} A Letter of Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, to Abbot Aelred. The letter appears in English as part of E. Connor’s Translation of The Mirror of Charity, CFS 17 (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1990), p. 71.
\textsuperscript{34} Aelred of Rievaulx, The Mirror of Charity, Trans. by E. Connor, CFS 17 (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1990), p. 128. Henceforth, be cited as Mirror of Charity Bk 1.25.71 followed by the page on E. Connor’s translation.
\textsuperscript{36} Mirror of Charity Bk 3.39.109, pp. 296-298.
of the major factors in the king’s decision to support Pope Alexander III against the anti-pope Victor IV in the schism of 1159. ... The political tension that plague the border lands between England and Scotland also saw Aelred playing the role of peacemaker.\(^{37}\)

Consequently, his involvement with these matters formed the basis for his historical writings. But he did not write history for the sake of it but rather to the honor the kings of England and also to chronicle the English saints. M. L. Dutton aptly describes the seven historical works of Aelred in the following words:

They seek to explore the past as a guide for the present and assurance of the future. All the seven works – Lament for David, Kings of the Scots (1153), The Genealogy of the Kings of the English (1153-1154), The Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor (1162-1163), The Battle of the Standard (?1153-1154), The Life of Ninian (?1115-1160), The Book of the Saints of the Church of Hexham and their Miracles (?1154-1155), and A Certain Wonderful Miracle (1158-1165) – concern people and events in the past and present of Britain, mostly in Scotland and the North of England.\(^{38}\)

These historical works moreover were embedded with spiritual teachings by highlighting the virtuous conduct and faith of both the kings and the saints. Clearly the historical account of the Kings was aimed to inspire the kings’ successors. The hagiographical accounts on the lives of the English saints, on the other hand, were meant to edify both the Scots and English in their Christian faith.

Other spiritual writings of Aelred are: “On Jesus at the Age of Twelve” (1153-1157), dedicated to Ivo of Warden. On this little book he made an exposition on Luke’s gospel account on the finding of the Lord Jesus in the temple. Its literal and allegorical interpretation is meant to lead the reader to a life of prayer. He also wrote the “Life of Recluses” (1158-1160) for his older sister, who requested a rule for her chosen life as a recluse nun. His last work is the “Dialogue of the Soul” (1163-1166), which according to his biographer Walter Daniel was left unfinished.\(^{39}\) However C. H. Talbot’s examination on the concluding paragraphs suggests that Aelred had actually completed his task.\(^{40}\) In this book he made a study on the nature of the soul and its relation to the body and to God.

In addition to Aelred’s spiritual and historical writings, he also spent considerable time writing letters and composing sermons. During his twenty-year term as Abbot of Rievaulx he had preached many times not only in his community but also in other monasteries and significant ecclesial gatherings. Walter Daniel mentioned that there were around two hundreds of them\(^{41}\) but since they were not compiled therefore many were lost. Presently a critical edition of the abbot of Rievaulx’s sermons is now published. In 1989, Gaetano Raciti published the first part of the first volume, which includes, in fact, two collections of Aelred’s sermons: the First and Second Collection of Clairvaux.\(^{42}\)

\(^{39}\) Cf. Walter Daniel. Life of Aelred of Rievaulx, p. 121.
\(^{42}\) Cf. M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons, p. 13.
THE MIRROR OF CHARITY BY AELRED OF RIEVAULX

1. OVERTURE OF THE TREATISE

1.1. The Origin and Circumstances

The basis of Aelred’s treatise on The Mirror of Charity is both fascinating and enriching especially when the events and the circumstances surrounding its beginning are explored. The life of Aelred unquestionably provided us some clue to the “how” and “why” his first literary work dealt with the theme of charity. However, historical data should not only be the source to understand his motive. Rather a logical deduction on the events of his life and on the treatise itself, which is also autobiographical in some sense, should also be taken into account. For instance, in The Mirror of Charity on Book One chapter 28, he gave a testimonial account of his conversion and inner struggle that point to the motive of his becoming a monk.

I have wandered the world and [perused] those things in the world ... In these I sought rest for my unhappy soul ... So I interrogated myself: who am I, where am I, what kind of person am I? I shuddered, my Lord, and trembled at my own effigy. I was terrified at the loathsome image of my unhappy soul ... Observing certain things about me, but ignorant of what was going on inside me, people kept saying: ‘O how well things are going for him! Yes, how well!’ They had no idea that things were going badly for me there, where alone they could go well. Very deep within me was my wound, crucifying, terrifying, and corrupting everything within me with an intolerable stench. Had you not quickly stretched out you hand to me, O Lord, unable to endure myself I might perhaps have resorted to the worst remedy of despair.43

What Aelred described above, in a poetic and prayerful style, was probably written before he was sent to Rome in 1142. Notably at this stage of his life he already demonstrated his gift for writing that betrays the exaggerated plea he wrote to Bernard when in his letter he said that he was not only inexperienced in writing but tongue-tied as well.44 This is understandable since he wanted to elicit a sense of modesty and humility before a prominent person who is noneother than his Abbot immediate. In doing so he underplayed his capacity to write while at the same time had managed to exercise humility for being a monk. He may not be like his predecessors such as Bernard or Anselm, but certainly he was a lettered man.

A book was dedicated to him in which the author, Laurence, a Durham monk who had known his father Eilaf, declares he is aware that Aelred is “accustomed to have a care for letters.” The truth of this is verified by Aelred’s own admission that it was in his youth that he came to know and admire Cicero’s dialogue On Friendship, not a kind of book that a genuinely illiterate man would be able even to read, much less to enjoy.45

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43 Mirror of Charity Bk 1.28.79, pp. 133-135.
It was noted already that Aelred was educated by his family and in the court of King David when he entered Rievaulx in 1134. His instruction did not cease when he served as steward for the royal court. The king “adopted Aelred into the royal household and had him brought up with his son Henry, and his two stepsons, Simon and Waldef.”46 Aside from the fact that he had the guardianship of the king he also benefited from the education of the king’s three sons who eventually became his friends. These experiences, trainings and education he had at the royal court without a doubt became apparent in his bearing and attitudes. Thus, when he joined the community at Rievaulx, “his quick grasps of affairs, his administrative ability and his consummate prudence gained the confidence of his Abbot.”47 Consequently he was sent to Rome in 1142 and “to all intent and purposes, Aelred’s mission was successful.”48 It was at this journey that Aelred will be initiated as an author. Although his theological and spiritual writings were rooted in his monastic formation and experience, he had dealt with universal themes that have surpassed its intended audience.

When Aelred encountered Bernard at that fateful occasion a mutual admiration could have transpired for the latter encouraged the former to continue with his writing. Bernard must have recognized the talent of Aelred because he immediately took the opportunity and asked him “to write … something … in reply to the complaints of certain [monks] who are struggling from more remiss to stricter ways.”49 At the time of the foundation of Rievaulx there was a constant influx of candidates to Cistercian monastic life in England. “But the invasion of black monks and Canons Regular soon provoked difficulties … The monks and canons who had been formed in a less rigorous discipline than that of Citeaux … objected that the Cistercian observance was physically too hard. According to them, excessive austerity was an obstacle to the free flowering of a life of charity and contemplation.”50 Bernard was aware of this criticism so he asked Aelred to write a treatise to clear the issue of their objection.51

Bernard’s letter to Aelred was not simply an order but more of a command with urgency. “It is generally assumed that this task was given to Aelred when he stopped at Clairvaux on his way to Rome.”52 In the letter the theme that Aelred should talk about was already outlined including the suggested title.

I command you … not to put off jotting [something] down on the excellence of charity, its fruit and its proper ordering. Thus in this work of yours let us be able to see as in a mirror what charity is, how much sweetness there is in its possession … and … what kind of discretion should be shown in its practice.

46 Ibid. p. 12.
48 M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons, p. 10.
Yet to spare your modesty, let this letter be placed at the beginning of the work, so that whatever in the Mirror of Charity (for we are giving the book this title) may displease the reader may be attributed not to you … but to me, who obliged you against your will.53

Out of obedience Aelred came up with a treatise called The Mirror of Charity. In it he logically expressed his thoughts on charity and developed it based on what he experienced, understood, and lived as a Cistercian monk. His discourse primarily addressed the criticism of his brother monks who were protesting against the harshness of the Cistercian observance. He acknowledged their grievances but at the same time corrected their misconception especially that of charity, which they accused to have already been spoilt by the severity of their life. Here he sagaciously dealt the issue by not only shedding light on the reason and nature of their difficulties but also, as a result, justified the ascetical practices of the Order. Here he came up with a synthesis of his theology on charity that had influenced his later works.

The universal character, literary ingenuity and theological profundity that characterized Aelred’s treatise eventually earned him the title “Bernard of the North.” Indeed the Mirror of Charity “shows us, besides a monastic theologian, a philosopher who could rival the Scholastics, and a monk speaking to God in sublime prayers and meditation.”54 In the final analysis, it is his consuming desire to express his thoughts in simple yet sophisticated genre that obliged him to integrate his personal issues into theology and life.

1.2. The Structure and Literary Style

The Mirror of Charity is divided into three books. Book One has 34 chapters, Book Two has only 26 while Book Three is comprised of 40 chapters. These three divisions could be summarized in three general topics that correspond to each book respectively: the nature of charity, the monastic discipline and charity, and the completion of peace in the practice of charity. Under these three headings, Aelred constructed his treatise to explain what charity is from the scriptural and analytical perspective particularly on the first book. His treatment on the second book however is very apologetic and existential. Then he sounds more pastoral and psychological in the third book where eschatology is in the foreground. He reminds the reader that perfection of charity is in and with God. Of this C. Dumont remarked, “If we wish to transpose this twelfth-century monastic into contemporary words, we have the best chance of recapturing its movement, method, and results in the terminology of existential phenomenology.”55

The progression from the theological concept of charity (Book One) to its application in the monastic life (Book Two) and thence to a new interpretation of charity that leads to its realization and perfection (Book Three) is the logic that holdstogther the three books as a single literary piece. As a medieval writer, Aelred’s discourses were certainly confined within his time but the method he employed rendered his work timeless and contemporaneous. Thus, going beyond the controversy he was

55 Ibid. pp. 34-35.
commanded to provide enlightenment, he instead produced “a solid theology of the Cistercian life, very finely conceived and skillfully put together in spite of the fact that it was made up from variously inserted notes.”\footnote{56} Indeed he himself acknowledged that this treatise also consisted of the compilation from his notes. In the preface of the treatise he said, “With the goal of undertaking the present work, I have selected material intended for it, some from my own meditations, some as if mine, yet even more mine, because I dictated them from time to time … Then, inserting these different notes where they seemed to fit in best, I divided the whole work into three parts.”\footnote{57} It shows therefore that The Mirror of Charity was not written only at the time he had received Bernard’s letter.\footnote{58} Rather, he has already conceived of it then developed it further at Bernard’s command.

Aelred’s treatise on charity was his initial literary work prompted evidently by his obedience to the great abbot of Clairvaux. He nevertheless accepted the challenge, utilizing all the resources of his education and experience. He then summoned to the fore that literary prowess which he thought he had never possessed. A. Squire identified the literary devices that Aelred applied, “Here are his first experiments in the dialogue form, in the rhetoric of the prayer, the lament, and the soliloquy, and in quiet succinct argument and exposition. Here, above all, he presents us with a complete vision of life.”\footnote{59} Surprisingly the work as a whole was solid and unified because the arguments were effectively and meticulously articulated with coherence and style. In other words, “Aelred put into it his whole experience of conversion, his knowledge of Saint Augustine, and everything he had learned from his brothers, who were direct-line disciples of Bernard of Clairvaux.”\footnote{60}

Faithful to his patristic origin, Aelred methodically used the scripture either by direct citation or explicit allusion on his entire treatise. Unsurprisingly he opened his discourse in Book One in reference to Psalm 103 (104)\footnote{61} verses 2, 3 & 21 to underline the necessity of the scripture for the sustenance of the soul in order to live in the love and/or charity of God. His words also were metaphorically employed particularly in the case of speculum (mirror). He used the word mirror to signify the evaluation one has made of his (inner) life and intentions against the gospels’ teachings or the scripture. In the last chapter of Book Two Aelred wrote, “If, in all these things, anyone looks attentively on the countenance of his soul as if in a mirror, he will find … not only whatever\footnote{61} deformity there is in him, but in the light of truth he will also recognize the causes for this deformity.”\footnote{62} Here he used the mirror to draw a parallel scrutiny between one’s life and the scripture.

The Mirror of Charity is definitely a literary masterpiece and apparently the only theological treatise of his time that successfully integrated both the human and spiritual aspects of life in the economy of salvation. As C. Dumont notes:

\footnote{56} Ibid. p. 32.
\footnote{59} A. Squire, Aelred: A Study, p. 28.
\footnote{60} C. Dumont, “Aelred of Rievaulx: His Life and Works,” p. 33.
\footnote{61} Psalms are cited by the Vulgate enumeration with Hebrew variant in parentheses.
\footnote{62} Mirror of Charity Bk 2.26.78, p. 218.
The spiritual doctrine of the school of charity was already widespread in the claravallian filiation. The principles of this spirituality had been developed in a masterful synthesis by Saint Bernard, but it was Aelred … who was to emphasize them and give them a new attractiveness by the pedagogical and even systematic application, particularly in the practice of meditation on the Gospel.63

Aelred’s spiritual teaching on charity, unlike his predecessors, embraced the importance of affectus (attachment of the soul) not only to experience God’s love but also as a vital element in the realization of one’s salvation. Charity, in other words, is a blessing that is a way to a personal encounter with God. Hence, “charity [God’s love] is at once both the goal and the principle which gives order and form to the virtues and which triumphs over the passions.”64 Here he did not see human sentiments as a hindrance to spiritual progress but rather an integral part of our humanity in search of true love and salvation. Thus by incorporating human sensation, where charity is actualized, with theology he effectively arrived at the holistic approach to human’s redemption.

Finally, “we must be careful when we read Aelred’s philosophical terms, which appear already to be those of pre-scholastic philosophy (in Book Three of the Mirror, for example). We should not read a thomistic meaning into them. This is particularly true when Aelred is dealing with such fundamental notions as the relationship of the created being with its Creator.”65 Therefore, The Mirror of Charity should be studied and understood in the context of his life and social condition in order to see its relevance to the theology of the present.

2. THE THEOLOGICAL DOCTRINE OF THE MIRROR OF CHARITY

2.1. The Nature of Charity

Aelred thought it best to establish first the fundamental concept on charity since its the underlying issue of the criticism against the rigorous discipline of monastic life. So in the first book of the treatise he rationally treated the nature of charity, its dynamics, effects and destiny in the realm of human existence. In doing so, he wrestled victoriously against the “what” of philosophy, that is, the purpose of human existence; and, the “how” of theology, that is, charity could bring together the finite (man) and infinite (God) beings in harmony. He made use of the scripture as the basis for his arguments and an analysis of his life’s experience to further illustrate concretely the very essence of charity. In this manner, his work sounded more pedagogical than theoretical which appropriately accommodated his intended audience, the monks who criticized the severe observance of the Cistercian life.

The reality of creation became the starting point of Aelred’s discourse to expound his theology of charity. He declared that God, the creator, has given all beings three qualities that are common to all. These are nature (natura), form (species) and usefulness (usus). He borrowed these three words from Augustine except the meaning of usus that was derived from Hilary of Poitiers.66 Thus Aelred

64 Ibid. p. 16.
65 Ibid. p. 45.
66 Cf. E. Connor’s footnote on the word “usefulness” in her translation on The Mirror of Charity, p. 160.
explained, “A nature by which all are good, a form by which all are beautiful, and usefulness by which all in good order may serve some purpose.”⁶⁷ It simply means that all created beings or things follow their proper order in the universe. As long as all creatures abide in their respective position in God’s design harmony in creation prevails. For “in as far as each thing in the universe keeps it proper place, time and measure, all are in excellent order. Thus everything has a fitting place in which to exist.”⁶⁸ By itself then the universe is perfect because he who created it is perfect.

But among the created beings, humans were distinguished from the rest of the creatures since they were made in God’s image. This finite image of God, which is embedded in man, makes him unique and has established his natural affinity with God. At this Aelred asserted, “God gave man not only being … but in addition he granted that he be happy … Made in the image of its Creator, this creature is fitted to cling to him whose image it is, because this is the rational creature’s sole good.”⁶⁹ This is the underlying principle in man’s constant quest for the meaning of his existence, which could be grasped only in faith and be realized through spiritual activities. In this regard E. Connor made this qualification, “The image is ontological, essential to the human person’s spiritual nature and consequently cannot be destroyed.”⁷⁰ For this reason man’s spiritual side leads him to abide in God, his infinite image.

When God created man in his image, Aelred explained, it means God equipped man with three things: memory, understanding, and love or will.⁷¹ These are the faculties that constitute man’s soul, in which also enables man to participate in the Divine Trinity. To elaborate them in Aelred’s words, “Memory is capable [of sharing] his Eternity, understanding his Wisdom, and love his Sweetness. By these three, man was fashioned in the image of the Trinity; his memory held fast to God without forgetfulness, his understanding recognized him without error, and his love embraced him without the self-centered desire for anything else. And so man was happy.”⁷² Thus man’s participation in God’s eternity is not simply a privilege but actually the very source of his happiness.

Aelred also underlined that man’s association in the Divine Trinity did not curtail his freedom to exercise his will or exert his power to make a choice. He stated that, “our first parents was endowed with free will and aided by God’s grace.”⁷³

Unfortunately, man abused his free choice by withdrawing himself from God. He thought that his power alone could bring him happiness and self-fulfillment. Alas, “blinded by his own self-centeredness, he directed his love to what was inferior … and by perversely loving himself he lost

⁶⁷ Mirror of Charity Bk 1.2.4, p. 89.
⁶⁸ Ibid. Bk 1.2.5, p. 90.
⁶⁹ Ibid. Bk 1.3.8-9, p. 91.
⁷¹ Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 1.3.9, p. 91.
⁷² Ibid. Bk 1.3.9, p. 92.
⁷³ Ibid. Bk 1.3.11, p. 92.
both himself and God.” As a result, man did not only disassociate himself from the Divine Trinity but also lost his privilege to be eternally happy.

Man’s egotism alienated him from his creator. He not only lost his state of perpetual happiness but also spoiled the faculties that tie him to God. God’s image was marred, but providentially it was not obliterated in human being. In Aelred’s words it means “the image of God became disfigured in man without becoming wholly destroyed. Consequently man has memory but it is subject to forgetfulness, understanding but it is open to error and, none the less, love but it is prone to self-centeredness.” Therefore, what he used to remember he fails to recognize, what he used to understand becomes incoherent, and what he used to adore does not give him any more satisfaction. He finds neither satisfaction nor happiness on what he does, what he has, and who he is. He becomes restless and experiences not only alienation from God but also within himself as well as with others.

But despite the degradation of man from the Triune God, “in this trinity within the rational soul there still persists an imprint, however faint, of the Blessed Trinity. It was stamped on the very substance of the soul, for the soul remembers itself, knows itself, and loves itself ... The soul then mirrors the Unity in its substance, and the Trinity in the three words,” that is, memory, understanding, and love or will. Since the rational soul of man remembers itself, he is inclined to seek God and be reconciled with him. The dissatisfaction and restlessness he experienced in life compelled him to seek his true happiness and, eventually, his true identity in God’s image. “This experience of exile in a region of essential unlikeness is the starting point for the whole itinerary of return to God.” But, on his own, man is powerless to restore the damaged image of God he has done upon himself.

God, by his perfect charity, offered once more his friendship to rebuild the broken relationship severed by self-centeredness. God’s charity through Jesus Christ accorded man the privilege of being an adopted child of God, therefore, co-heirs. “We are God’s offspring, because the rational soul, created to God’s image, is known to be able to share in God’s wisdom and happiness. Therefore, charity raises our soul up to that for which it was created; but self-centeredness degrades it to what it was sinking towards of its own accord.” Through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, “memory is restored by the sacred text of sacred Scripture, understanding by the mystery of faith, and love by the daily increase of charity.” The restoration of the broken image of God in man is therefore realized because of God’s charity in Christ.

Charity, therefore, is exemplified in the life, works, and the teachings of Christ which encompasses the whole of scripture. Under the guidance of the scripture man should practice charity so that his soul will be restored to its original state. C. Dumont explained, “Since charity is the very

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74 Ibid. Bk 1.3.12, p. 93.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
79 Ibid. Bk 1.5.14, p. 94.
life of God, its object is the spiritual life: life in the Spirit.”⁸⁰ It is imperative therefore that man should exercise charity in all its forms so that he will grow in spirit and love that is diminished by self-desire: amorem cupiditas conagusta [self-centeredness].⁸¹ And as he grows in spirit of charity he participates once more in the community of the Divine Trinity. Following Christ, keeping his words, and living life under the guidance of his teachings are man’s means and true expression of his affection and love for Jesus Christ.

Aelred demonstratively expressed his affection and love for Christ in a prayer form. He said, “Loving the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my strength, I may seek always not my interests but those of Jesus Christ, and loving my neighbor as myself, I may seek what is useful not for myself but for another … O word of charity, word of love, word of endearment, word of total inner perfection!”⁸² C. Dumont further added, “Conformity with Christ’s heart unites us with him ontologically, but an affection attentive to his human deeds and actions will most effectively help us imitate him interiorly.”⁸³ This is what it means to seek God and to live in the monastery. For Aelred to seek God and to grasp him is love. Love “is the place capable [of receiving] you, great as you are. Someone who loves you grasps you. The more one loves the more one grasps, because you yourself are love.”⁸⁴ And love is concretized in the brotherly love showed and expressed towards others.

To reinforce further his teaching to practice charity, Aelred quoted St. Paul (Eph 4:24), “Be renewed in your heart, and put on the new man created according to God.” He interpreted this passage as the renewal of the precept of charity, that is, the commandment to love. He further explained:

If the mind puts on this charity perfectly, charity will straightaway reform the other two, namely, memory and knowledge, which we said were equally disfigured. A summary of this one precept, then, is presented to us in a very salutary way; it contains the divesting of the old man, the renewal of his mind and the reforming of the divine image.⁸⁵

Renewal of one’s self, therefore, is charity. A person who shows his love to others does not only fulfill the commandment to love but also restores the image of God in himself. As a matter of fact, a charity shown to others is also a charity given to the self.

Even though man’s friendship with God has already been restored through the charity of the cross of Christ, he remains free to decide or to make a choice. He retains his full autonomy to love and to accept love. But “since only that power of the soul which is more usually called love is capable both of charity and of self-centeredness, this love is obviously divided against itself.”⁸⁶

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⁸¹ Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 1.4.13, p. 94.
⁸² Ibid. Bk 1.16.49, p. 114.
⁸⁴ Mirror of Charity Bk 1.1.2, p. 88.
⁸⁵ Ibid. Bk 1.8.24, p. 100.
Therefore, man finds himself in conflict whether to follow his selfish will or choose to follow the precept of charity. What makes a man a man is his capacity to choose. And what he decides constitutes his freedom.

When man exercises his will to choose, grace takes effect, for grace works only in free choice. Further it is grace that helps him make the right judgment. For Aelred, the grace of God “prunes sensual pleasure, extinguishes lust, holds gluttony in check, restrains anger, completely overturns and vanquishes pride, the parent of all vices.” It guides him to find himself (God’s image) and directs him to grow in his in spirit and love. Where there is freedom grace abounds to help man transcend his weaknesses (self-centeredness). As man keeps grace at bay and depends solely in his freedom due to self-centeredness his pursuit for true happiness appears illusive.

Indeed the grace of God through the saving mystery of Christ restored man’s participation in the Divine Trinity. But the full restoration of memory, understanding and love can be realized only in the life to come.

The restoration of the image will be complete if no forgetfulness falsifies memory, if no error clouds our knowledge, and no self-centeredness claims our love. But where will that be and when? This peace, this tranquility, this felicity may be hoped for in our fatherland, where there is no opportunity for forgetfulness among those living in eternity, nor creeping in of error among those enjoying the truth, nor any impulse of self-centeredness among those absorbed in divine charity.

Therefore man’s pursuit of perfect happiness continues until his deformed faculties (memory, understanding and love) are fully restored through the practice of charity. But the restoration could be achieved only with the aid of God’s grace to combat self-centeredness. Only then that man could practice true charity to himself, with others and to God. Henceforth, man should continuously battle against his own concupiscence (self-centeredness) in order to renew his commitment to love, which is the way to his happiness.

### 2.2. The Monastic Discipline and Charity

In the preceding book Aelred systematically explained the fundamental concept of charity, its nature, its attributes and its significance to human existence. At this point he found it opportune to address the real issue that obliged him to come up with this treatise. In this book Aelred confronted the criticism of the “neophyte” monks on monastic discipline and their misconception of charity warped by their physical hardships to live a strict life. He already bemoaned in Book One their accusation with these words “They are wrong, O Lord … wrong and deceived who … complain about the harshness of your yoke and the weight of your burden.” His poignant plea was provoked by his

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88 Ibid. Bk 1.5.14, p. 94.
89 Ibid. Bk 1.29.83, p. 136.
interpretation on Matthew’s gospel (Mt 11:28-29) that the yoke of Christ is charity and the burden is brotherly love.90

For this reason at the beginning of Book Two Aelred reiterated, “charity is that easy yoke and light burden to which the Savior’s clemency invites us.”91 He was resolute to insist that one should daily increase in charity92 because it fulfills both the Law and the gospel, it purifies the interior and exterior person, and it is the true Sabbath or rest of the mind.93 He also added that “in charity true tranquility and true gentleness exist because [charity] is the Lord’s yoke, and if we bear this at the Lord’s invitation we shall find rest for our souls.”94 To follow and obey the teachings of the scripture, therefore, refers to the yoke of Christ and also the way to exercise charity.

In Aelred’s analysis, what provoked the bitterness towards the rigorous discipline of monastic life is the lack of charity. However, behind the lack of willingness to observe the discipline is man’s tendency to seek only his own comfort and personal interest. This was manifested in the conduct of the monks and canons regular who joined the order and encountered difficulties and, then, objected to the harshness of community life.95 Because they were not accustomed to physical labor they criticized instead the rigor of the Cistercian life and ideals. Aelred thus declared, “the more stuffed one is with self-centeredness, the more empty one is of truth and hence more miserable.”96 He said this to underline the supreme joy affected by charity that entails self-renunciation to defy one’s self-centeredness that seeks to satisfy only the personal self. Aelred continued, “By abandoning yourself and passing wholly to God, you may know how to live and die not for yourself but only for him who died and rose again for you.”97 He reminded the monks of their fundamental motive in entering the monastery.

Thus admonishing those who felt burdened by the monastic discipline (Gospel’s yoke) Aelred said, “Let us … who profess the cross of Christ … unlock the key of our breast and … let us discern the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. Without any wheedling flattery, let us scrutinize what lies deeply hidden in the inner recesses of our soul, and try harder to tear out the diseased roots themselves.”98 In these words he called for a deep examination of one’s self to recognize the source of one’s suffering. Here Aelred reminded the monks on their commitment (profession) to seek and follow Christ in the context of the monastery according to the Rule of Benedict.

Self-centeredness is the culprit of man’s sufferings and misery. Aelred used the authority of the letter of John (1 Jn 2:16) to describe self-centeredness as “the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and pride of life.”99 It refers to man’s desires to gain the world and all its

90 Cf. Ibid. Bk 1.27.78, p. 133.
91 Ibid. Bk 2.1.2, p. 163.
92 Cf. Ibid. Bk 1.5.14, p. 94.
93 Cf. Ibid. Bk 2.1.1, p. 163.
94 Ibid. Bk 1.31.88, p. 140.
96 Mirror of Charity Bk 1.16.48, p. 113.
97 Ibid. Bk 1.16.48, p. 114.
99 Ibid. Bk 2.1.2, p. 163.
glory, to judge goodness according to what pleases him, and to boast his human achievements as power. Self-centeredness with its threefold concupiscence did not only distort the true meaning of the Lord’s yoke (charity) but also induce toil and cause the affliction of man.\(^{100}\) Hence, whatever difficulties and labors man experiences are simply consequences of his self-centeredness. Man always ended up discontented because his egotism never teaches him to appreciate what he has, to understand and accept his limitations, and to love others the way he loves himself. Following St. Paul’s thought (1 Tim 6:10) Aelred added, “The root of all evil is self-centeredness, just as on other hand, the root of all virtues is charity.”\(^{101}\) Charity “gives birth to whatever tranquility, peace and joy … but … fatigue or lethargy … stems from the remnant of concupiscence.”\(^{102}\)

The vice of self-centeredness, therefore, be rooted out by charity so that one may experience the gentleness of the Lord’s yoke. So Aelred advised to “carefully seek out the causes and roots of our toil, not only by pruning what is outward with lukewarm attachment … but by penetrating with quite vehement desire to the very sources of our ills.”\(^{103}\) Since man is corrupted by concupiscence (self-centeredness) he attributes his outward toil to the Lord’s yoke (monastic discipline and gospel observance). Therefore, it is imperative to see the very source of one’s suffering so as not to confuse it with the Lord’s yoke that actually refreshes. However, this is not a simple task for its entails a great deal of faith, prayer and discipline. But with encouraging words Aelred said, “hold fast to charity, and none… will be missing. Omit charity, and none … will do any good.”\(^{104}\)

At this point Aelred’s presented his analysis on the correlation of corporal sufferings to the inner distress of the heart. He unabashedly used, as an example, what the adulterers and the thieves go through to achieve their goal.\(^{105}\) They neither concede nor yield to any form or obstacle or toil until they possess the object of their enjoyment. He concluded that “outward sufferings of the body do not produce inward toil, but the root remaining deep within makes everything exterior conform to its nature.”\(^{106}\) In other words, the heart’s desire or inward toil influences what happens to the body outwardly. Aelred said, “One’s man’s rest and another’s toil depend on the inward quality of their minds.”\(^{107}\) He means that the source of joy or suffering is actually found in the heart or mind. Unfortunately, man twisted the meaning of charity by putting “spiritual sweetness in a certain pleasantness of the flesh, asserting that affliction of the body is contrary to the spirit and that the sufferings of the outer man lessen the holiness of the inner.”\(^{108}\) This was an apt depiction of the mentality of the belligerent monk that Aelred wished to give enlightenment.

\(^{100}\) Cf. Ibid. Bk 2.4.7, pp. 167-168.
\(^{101}\) Ibid. Bk 2.1.2.3, p. 164.
\(^{102}\) Ibid. Bk 1.29.85, p. 138.
\(^{103}\) Ibid. Bk 2.3.6, p. 167.
\(^{104}\) Ibid. Bk 1.16.48, p. 114. Cf. also Augustine, Sermon 138.2; PL 38:764.
\(^{105}\) Cf. Ibid. Bk 2.2.4, p. 165.
\(^{106}\) Ibid. Bk 2.2.4, p. 166.
\(^{107}\) Ibid. Bk 2.3.6, p. 167.
\(^{108}\) Ibid. Bk 2.5.8, p. 169.
Correlating the inner and outer toil with charity, Aelred explained that the cross actually upsets concupiscence.\textsuperscript{109} Thus by taking the yoke of Christ, that is the cross, anyone who labors will find rest instead.\textsuperscript{110} At this instance, Aelred cited Paul’s testimony to underline the power of charity, which led him to prevail over tribulations (2 Col 1:3-4).\textsuperscript{111} Like Paul, as Aelred exemplified, charity or obedience to Jesus’ commandments\textsuperscript{112} is expressed in the ascetical discipline of the body, self-control and self-renunciation. He articulated this in the context of monastic life when he said:

To share in the sufferings of Christ, which means to submit to regular discipline, to mortify the flesh by abstinence, vigils, and toil, to submit one’s will to another’s judgment, to prefer nothing to obedience, and – to sum up many things in a few words – to follow the limit our profession which we have made according to the Rule of Saint Benedict. This is to share in the sufferings of Christ, as our Lawgiver bore witness when he said: ‘And so persevering in the monastery until the end, let us share in the sufferings of Christ by patience, that we may deserve to share in his kingdom.’\textsuperscript{113}

And so by means of monastic discipline man’s concupiscence could eventually be overcome with brotherly love, obedience and service in the community. In this case, those who criticized the monastic discipline in reality failed to see it as a participation in the cross of Christ. They resented the strictness of monastic life because self-centeredness prevailed in their thoughts and actions.

Instead Aelred teaches in this treatise to combat self-centeredness with charity “so that by abandoning yourself and passing wholly to God, you may know how to live and die not for yourself but only for him who died and rose again for you.”\textsuperscript{114} Subjecting oneself to the monastic discipline, obedience to the Rule of Saint Benedict (RB) and the scripture (gospel) signify dying and rising with Christ. Therefore by taking the yoke of Christ one will experience respite and peace. Aelred’s viewpoint was summed up by C. Dumont in the following words:

Having discovered in the Cross of Christ the expression of his love, the monk responds to it by taking the cross on his shoulders with love. This makes the burden light. The practice of monastic observance thus becomes the safeguard of this love, and the love he expresses in this way in his whole life gives the grace to be in the peace of the Truth which makes him free.\textsuperscript{115}

Aelred clarified and qualified the meaning, implications and effects on the practice of charity. Then, he earnestly urged the monks to be brave in taking the rough road that leads to life because the promise of consolation exceeds the great toils one puts up with for Christ.\textsuperscript{116} For Aelred, what enthuses the human spirit to endure physical difficulties is the anticipation of perpetual rest and bliss rather than the means to achieve them.\textsuperscript{117} In others words, the concerted human efforts done inspirit of

\textsuperscript{109}Cf. Ibid. Bk 2.5.9, p. 169.
\textsuperscript{110} Cf. Ibid. Bk 1.27.78, pp. 132-133.
\textsuperscript{111} Cf. Ibid. Bk 2.6.14, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{112} Cf. Ibid. Bk 1.8.24, p. 100. Cf. also Jn 13:34.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid. Bk 2.6.15, pp. 173-174. Cf. also RB Prologue.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid. Bk 1.16.48, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{116} Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 2.6.16, p. 175.
\textsuperscript{117} Cf. Ibid. Bk 2.2, pp. 165-166.
charity and in the context of community both psychologically and physically alleviate individual’s burden (cross).

Afterwards, Aelred went on to explain his thoughts on spiritual visitations that refer to the different levels of moral awakenings or compunctions. These are particular situations in one’s life when one is moved to repentance by his conscience due to inner conflicts or moral disturbances. Thus, a conscience-stricken person will resolve to make amends for his wrongdoings and may decide to change for the better (conversion). In other words, that which is intrinsically good in man (God’s grace) stirs the soul or disturbs the conscience before sins.

Just as divine Clemency urges those living tepidly or profligately on to salvation frequently by word, frequently by example, occasionally by reproach, and sometimes even by the whip, so too, by secret compunction either awakened by fear or begotten by attachment, it invites others to a better state of life. The cause for this visitation is therefore twofold: it is accorded to the elect for advancement, and to the reprobate for judgment.\textsuperscript{118}

In fact, the spiritual visitations are not always indicative to man’s holiness. Rather they happen for three reasons - - first, to awaken the sluggish; second, to refresh those in toil; and third, to support those making progress upward.\textsuperscript{119} Moreover, these visitations may happen and experience by all regardless of their condition.\textsuperscript{120} But to a certain extent the grace of compunction comes to certain person (the elect) for spiritual advancement instead of condemnation.\textsuperscript{121} If these visitations occur the person could see its fruits or effects in his life. “The fruit of the first visitation is true conversion to God. The fruit of the second, mortification of the self-will and all the passions. The fruit of the third is perfect happiness.”\textsuperscript{122} As a result, each visitation helps the person to evaluate his life and spiritual progress. They check one’s moral state to achieve spiritual purification that leads to inner peace and true charity.

However, in order to determine the cause and reason for the visitations, Aelred proposed an intensive evaluation and analysis of one’s life. He said, “Examine the quality of your life and habits, not according to your own fancy but according to the rules given in Scripture, the outlines of the heavenly precepts and the norm of your own profession.”\textsuperscript{123} Afterwards he cited a series of New Testament passages on how to conduct oneself which also served as a point of comparison for one’s actions and behaviors.\textsuperscript{124} Then, he concluded with this note: “Putting before yourselves these attestations of evangelical and apostolic teaching, and others likethem, like a spiritual mirror, contemplate your soul’s countenance quite carefully.”\textsuperscript{125} Here, Aelred finally concretized his concept of the Mirror of Charity by using not only scripture but also the norms by which one’s committed himself (in this

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid. Bk 2.8.21, p. 177.
\textsuperscript{119} Cf. Ibid. Bk 2.8.20, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{120} Cf. Ibid. Bk 2.9.22, p. 177.
\textsuperscript{121} Cf. Ibid. Bk 2.9.23, p. 178.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid. Bk 2.13.31, pp. 183-184.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid. Bk 2.14.33, pp. 185-186.
\textsuperscript{124} Cf. Ibid. Bk 2.14, pp. 186-188.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid. Bk 2.14.35, p. 188.
case, the Rule of Benedict for the monks) in order to compare one’s life or behavior like in a mirror, that is, a spiritual mirror.

Since spiritual visitations does not happen regularly, Aelred warned not to abusethis grace of compunction with continuous immoral conduct.\(^{126}\) The spiritual visitations do not in fact eliminate concupiscence but rather they happen to enableman to continually purge his self-centeredness.

While some consolations follow one another because of divine kindness, ... you still experience much toil because of your own concupiscence, you will, aftercountless struggles, rise to that ineffable kind of visitation to receive your reward. Aflame with the unsullied ardor of charity as soon as you enter the glory of God, you will be happily satisfied as if by the fruit of the promised land.\(^{127}\)

This is basically the whole point of Aelred regarding monastic life and discipline. Subjecting one’s self to obedience, monastic discipline (RB), prayer, study, and constant meditation on the scriptures help man to combat his self-centeredness.

As the will is subjected to discipline it will eventually correspond the gospel teachings by which obedience to Christ’s precepts is itself the sign of the presence of the Lord (cf. Jn 14:23). Aelred’s stressed the importance of uniting man’s will with God’s will in the following words:

To join one’s will to the will of God, so that the human will consents to whatever the divine will prescribes, and so that there is no other reason why it willsthis thing or another except that it realizes God’s will in it; this surely is to love God ... The will itself is nothing other than love ... The will of God is itself his love, which is nothing other than his Holy Spirit by whom charity is poured out into our hearts. It is an outpouring of divine charity and a coordination of the human will with ... the divine will.\(^{128}\)

He knew very well that harmonizing one’s will with God is not as simple as knowing and reading the scripture or the gospel precepts. This couldhowever be realized by the practice of charity through monastic life, discipline and especially obedience. So he said, “Now you must endure sufferings for Christ, you must exercise the virtue of patience, chastise the insolence of your flesh by frequent vigils and fasting, undergo temptations. You must turn your spirit away from all earthly preoccupations. But most particularly, you must mortify self-will by the virtue of obedience.”\(^{129}\) And at the end of the book he explained “If, in all these things, anyone looks attentively on the countenance of his soul as if in a mirror, ... in the light of truth he will also recognize the hidden causes for this deformity. And so he will blame it not on the harshness of the Lord’s yoke ... but on his own perversity.”\(^{130}\) To sum it up, man’s stubbornness held him back to see and understand rationally. Therefore, he needs to discipline himself and suffer at the same time to experience, exercise, and preserve charity, which enables him to join his will with God’s will (love).

\(^{126}\) Cf. Ibid. Bk 2.14.35, p. 188.

\(^{127}\) Ibid. Bk 2.15.39, pp. 191-192.

\(^{128}\) Ibid. Bk 2.18.53, pp. 200-201.

\(^{129}\) Ibid. Bk 2.19.59, p. 204.

\(^{130}\) Ibid. Bk 2.126.78, p. 218.
3. The Completion of Rest in the Practice of Charity

Finally, in Book Three Aelred discussed at length the reality of spiritual rest in the metaphor of the three Sabbaths based on the book of Leviticus\(^\text{131}\) -- the seventh day, the seventh year and the jubilee year, respectively. He resumed the subject on rest as spiritual Sabbath,\(^\text{132}\) which he previously mentioned in Book One. He also referred to it as the easy yoke of Christ in the form of charityconcretely expressed in the monastic asceticism and brotherly love. He then elaborated the ascetical expression of charity in Book Two to justify the monastic discipline.

According to Aelred, Sabbath allegorically signifies union, completion and perfection of all things in God.\(^\text{133}\) It means that spiritual rest (Sabbath) could be realized in the practice of charity that leads to participation in the divine action towards the completion and fullness of creation. All actions and works rooted in charity and love lead to an experience of true Sabbath. The monastic life, where charity is practiced and self-centeredness is pruned with brotherly love, is in reality a spiritual toil that leads to God and a participation in the yoke of Christ that brings peace. Therefore, man should endeavor to work and live out of love since it is an act of charity that enables him to connect with God. For “every good work [charity] is founded on faith in the one sole God and progresses by the seven-fold gift of the Holy Spirit to reach him who is truly one.”\(^\text{134}\) In other words, man could only find rest and consolation in his tribulations as long as he unites himself with God out of love, in his good works and through faith.

Aelred also logically linked the Lord’s commandment to love (Mt 22:37-39) with the three Sabbaths. He associated the first Sabbath to love of self, the second to love ofneighbor and, finally, the love of God to the Sabbath of Sabbaths, respectively.\(^\text{135}\) The question where to begin the act of loving is likewise anticipated and rightly explained. The love of the self is of utmost importanceand the key step to the practice of charity. This then will be extended to othersand intrinsically to God. However, it also should be taken into account that the progressions on each Sabbath were made not by their excellence but by precedence. In fact Aelred noted, “The love of neighbor precedes love of God. Likewise, love of self precedes love of neighbor. It precedes it, I say, not in excellence. It precedes that perfect love about which was said: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”\(^\text{136}\)

Aelred also qualified that love of God is by itself complete and it is where the two loves (of oneself and neighbor) are rooted. “Without it both of these are dead, and consequently, non-existent.”\(^\text{137}\) He apparently fixed his focus on the love of God but he made it accessible by the concrete expression of loving one’s self and others, which also are an expression of loving God. And

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\(^{131}\) Cf. Leviticus 23.3; 25.3-4,8,10. It mentioned that complete rest should be observed on the seventh after six days of work.

\(^{132}\) Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 1.18, 21, 27, pp. 115, 121, 132

\(^{133}\) Cf. Ibid. Bk 3.1.1, p. 221.

\(^{134}\) Ibid.

\(^{135}\) Cf. Ibid. Bk 3.2.3, p. 223.

\(^{136}\) Ibid. Bk 3.2.4, p. 223

\(^{137}\) Ibid. Bk 3.2.4, p. 224.
so by loving one’s self, one will have inner peace that enjoins him to love others as well as his enemy. Consequently, this will lead to tranquility not only with the self and others but also most especially with God. In other words, it is God’s love that animates both the love of one’s self and of neighbor. In numinous depiction Aelred illustrated the mutuality of these three loves as experienced in various levels and occasions:

These three loves are engendered by one another, and fanned into flame by one another. Then they are all brought to perfection together … It happens in a wondrous and ineffable way that although all three of these loves are possessed at the same time … still all three are not always sensed equally. At one moment that rest and joys are sensed in the purity of one’s own conscience. At another time, they are derived from the sweetness of brotherly love. At another they are more fully attained in the contemplation of God.\textsuperscript{138}

The dynamics of loving, in other words, does not follow a linear or predictable system. It qualitatively occurs in a divergent way either psychologically or mentally, emotionally or spiritually. Love in the form of charity (that is, the right use of love)\textsuperscript{139} can neither be contained, nor can remain within the self for it inherently conveys itself to others and to God. Therefore, the great commandment to love the Lord God with one’s heart, mind and soul is actually an invitation to take up the yoke of Christ so that one could participate in the Divine Trinity where perfect repose resides.

Charity operates in progression until it arrives at perfect rest in God, the true Sabbath.

The real character of Sabbath affected by charity becomes apparent when it is related with peace. Aelred typified the three levels of charity with the three degrees of peace: with oneself, with others, and with his divine Creator.\textsuperscript{140} Peace is that tranquility which the soul experiences from truly loving not only the self but also especially others and God. Although each level of love yields its own degree of spiritual rest they are perfected only in their reciprocity and unity. This is the reason why Aelred used the metaphor of Sabbath to underline the harmony that every person wishes to attain.

Sabbath expresses the progression not only of love but also the spiritual rest that comes with it. In a prayer Aelred declared, “Those who love you, rest in you. There is true rest, true tranquility, true peace, a true Sabbath for the mind.”\textsuperscript{141} He emphasized that the soul or mind will attain peace and rest when it chooses to love especially God.

Earlier Aelred explained that man could love God even though he is a mere mortal degraded by self-centeredness. Christ showed the way to charity by his redemptive act on the cross. In turn, man should follow this way of charity, observe it and share it with others. By order of nature, these then are the six kinds of persons on whom the spirit’s charity must be exercised: 1) Our love turns, first of all, in the order of nature to our blood relative. 2) Our love goes out to those who are linked to us by a bond of special friendship or bound to us by an exchange of services. 3) Our love may be extended to those who are subject to the same yoke of profession as we are. 4) We also are bound

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid. Bk 3.2.5, p. 224
\textsuperscript{139} Cf. Ibid. Bk 3.7.20-21, p. 234
\textsuperscript{140} C. Dumont, “Aelred of Rievaulx: His Life and Works,” p. 52.
\textsuperscript{141} Mirror of Charity Bk 1.18.52, p. 116
to our breast by the link of love, the pagan and Jews, 5) then, the heretics and schismatic. Finally, 6) the love of enemies (Mt 5:44-45) - that love which constitutes the summit of fraternal charity. In it, a person is made a Son of God; in it the likeness of divine goodness is more fully restored.\textsuperscript{142}

Aelred reiterated therefore his teaching that man is not only created in the image of God but also was given the privilege to be happy.\textsuperscript{143} “Created with the capacity for happiness, the rational is always eager for this happiness. But he is quite incapable of this happiness by himself ... Then, ... he chooses for his enjoyment what he supposes capable by its fruit of making him happy.”\textsuperscript{144} It shows that man is always motivated by his subjected perception to act and decide on the object of his desire which he thought could bring him happiness. “This choice ... is called love and is an act of the soul.”\textsuperscript{145} However, since man’s perception of happiness was corrupted by self-centeredness the sincerity of his choice or love will be determined by its fruit.

And so, if the mind selects for its enjoyment what it should, if it moves towards its object as it ought, and enjoys this object as is suitable, this salutary choice, this appropriate development, and this advantageous fruit rightfully deserve to be reckoned by the name charity. Charity is founded on this choice, it is extended by the development, and it attains perfection in the fruit.\textsuperscript{146}

Man should therefore examine his intentions and make the right choice to practice charity so that he can experience the real Sabbath. Since by nature he is inclined towards happiness, he expresses his love sometimes by attachment or sometimes by reason.\textsuperscript{147} “Attachment is a kind of spontaneous, pleasant inclination of the spirit toward someone. Moreover, attachment is either spiritual, rational, dutiful, natural, or, of course, physical.”\textsuperscript{148} Here Aelred defined the locus that encompasses all the different levels and degrees by which charity should be observed, tested, and perfected. These explain why man finds himself drawn to different persons in various psychological, emotional or spiritual levels of intensity.

Whenever man demonstrates his charity to others he becomes one with the One (God) - always one, always resting, and therefore observing a perpetual Sabbath.\textsuperscript{149} Evidently the way to arrive at true Sabbath, according to Aelred, is one’s perfect love for God. However, he did not simply echo Jesus’ commandment to love but re-interpreted it irrational and experiential approach based on his scriptural meditation and interpretation.

Aelred’s theological explanation of man’s progression towards the mystical union of his will (love) with the God of the Sabbath demonstrated the orthodoxy and Christo-centricity of his doctrine. In addition, he was able to show that charity (love) as a theological virtue is both humanly attainable and spiritually discernible. Thus his teaching to love the self first, then, one’s neighbor “represent a purification, a catharsis, of the heart by which it frees itself from tensions and divisions and recovers its
unity.”\textsuperscript{150} Peace with God is union with God. But union with God entails personal conversion and freedom from self-centeredness. Recognizing man’s nature and the cause of his unhappiness, Aelred encouragingly commanded, “Let the choice therefore be sound, the desire correspond to it, and the act be reasonable. In that way we will not overstep the bounds of charity. In this love it is very important how attached a person is, how discerning, and how strong.”\textsuperscript{151} By such approach, Aelred successfully integrated both the affective and rational love, which is the wholeness of true charity.

Then Aelred went on to illustrate the whole dynamic of charity when it takes place in every human relationship. “Charity consists in this: that the mind chooses what it ought for its own enjoyment, is moved as it should be, and uses [what it has chosen] appropriately.”\textsuperscript{152} He also noted that “charity can be shown to everyone by everyone in this life, as far as the choice and development in the action are concerned, but as far as enjoyment is concerned, it can be shown to everyone only by a few, or even by no one at all.”\textsuperscript{153} And finally, “charity in both choice and development is shown toward God himself by many persons to whom the enjoyment of love is not granted in this life, but is reserved for the ever blessed vision of him after this life. There are some, too, who in the light of contemplation and the sweetness of compunction experience a beginning of this sweet enjoyment.”\textsuperscript{154} He concluded with eschatological tone suggesting that the completeness of charity cannot be fully experienced in this life. Rather, only a few could actually experience or at least have a glimpse of it through contemplation and radical conversion.

Despite the fact that the experience of perfect love can be achieved only in God (that is, in eternal life) Aelred still managed to indicate the kind of human relationship where charity could be wholly enjoyed to its fullness and humane way. “In this present life we are able to enjoy those whom we love not only by reason but also by attachment. Among them, we especially take enjoyment in those who are linked to us more intimately and more closely by the pleasant bond of spiritual friendship.”\textsuperscript{155} Thus, he exhorts everyone to establish and enjoy a friendly relationship with others in the spirit of Christ. “Let anyone who finds it pleasant to enjoy his friend see to it that he enjoy him in the Lord, not in the world or in pleasure of the flesh, but in joyfulness of spirit ... For to find enjoyment in the Lord is to find enjoyment in wisdom, sanctification, and justice.”\textsuperscript{156} And so by putting Christ in the midst of every relationship charity is observed, peace is experienced and spiritual Sabbath is realized. In other words, the completion of rest is made possible because of Christ’s salvific works that enables man to participate in the Divine Trinity through the exercise of charity.

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\textsuperscript{150} C. Dumont, “Aelred of Rievaulx: His Life and Works,” p. 37
\textsuperscript{151} Mirror of Charity Bk 3.21.52, p. 255.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid. Bk 3.39.107, p. 296.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid. Bk 3.39.110, pp. 298-299.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid. Bk 3.40.111, p. 299.
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THE LITURGICAL SERMONS OF AELRED OF RIEVAULX

1. OVERTURE OF THE SERMONS (THE FIRST CLAIRVAUX COLLECTION)

1.1. The Origin and Circumstances

A closer examination on the events in the life of Aelred of Rievaulx show the major tasks he had assumed - - from being a steward and a royal ambassador at King David’s court to being an ecclesiastical diplomatic and a spiritual pastor of the Cistercian Order. These responsibilities did not only demonstrate his social adeptness but also highlighted his intellectual prowess, which lead him to establish contacts and the opportunities to exercise both his political and religious influence. It is no wonder then that as an abbot he cannot avoid but be exposed on matters beyond the confinement of his monastery. “Aelred’s sermon at the local synods did much to raise the standards both the of clergy and people, and as a resul this reputation was considerably enhanced.”¹⁵⁷ On these occasions he is not only credited for his valuable presence and effective interventions in resolving conflicts but also remembered for his eloquent and edifying sermons.

Although there are no extant record of sermons that could be attributed to Aelred when he was Abbot at Revesby it could be assumed that he “continued to work at the sermons and notes which seem to have been considered a vital part of the responsibilities of an abbot, charged with building up his monks as much as building a monastery.”¹⁵⁸ In the Cistercian tradition Abbots are obliged to give short spiritual conferences or commentaries on the Rule of Benedict on regular basis as well as to deliver sermons on liturgical festivities to the community. As explained by B. Pennington:

In those early days of the Cistercian Order, abbots were expected to speak to their monks in chapter every morning, commenting on the passage of Saint Benedict’s Rule for Monasteries that had just been read in the chapter house in which the monks assembled immediately after the celebration of the office of Prime in church. In addition, they were required to preach to the whole community, including the lay brothers, on fifteen principal days of the liturgical years as well as on the anniversary of the dedication of the monastery’s church.¹⁵⁹

In principle therefore all abbots should see to it that they fulfill their obligations as a teacher and spiritual pastor (RB 2). They are to take care not only of the material goods of the community but also cater to spiritual needs of their monks by their teaching and examples. “Abbatial teaching often takes the form of conferences given to the community. These conferences touch on the aspects of the spiritual and ascetic life that seem pertinent to the community at a given time. They are not expected to be particularly brilliant or original, but rather to call the monks to faithfulness to their vocation as monks.”¹⁶⁰ In other words, their being abbots presupposes an in-depth knowledge of the

¹⁵⁸ D. Roby, Intro. to Aelred of Rievaulx, Spiritual Friendship, pp. 9-10.
¹⁵⁹ M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons, p. 13.
scripts (RB 2.5) so that they could assist every monk under their care to advance in his search for God within the confinement of the monastery or the community.

This is the milieu in which Aelred delivered his liturgical sermons. He preached his commentaries on the scripture in view of the liturgical season as he sees them fit for his monks. Therefore, he used vocabularies that are within their intellectual capacities, sensibilities, limitations and experiences. Apparently, he is very much intouch with his listeners’ condition that he refrained from using technical words employed by his predecessors (the Fathers). His sermon For the Ascension of the Lord could attest to this fact when he said, “Yet those of you who are in the habit of reading the commentaries of the holy Fathers have no need to hear much about that, while our lay brothers, I think, would prefer to hear about something else.” Further, in great consideration of the brothers’ presence, he also underplayed his writing ability in his sermon For the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist with the following words:

Someone who speaks the word of God to others ought to aim not how he can vaunt his own knowledge but at how he can build up his hearers. With a motherly compassion for weaker intellects therefore he ought, I might say, prattle to them, descending to the use of baby talk. But my own intellectual limitations make it necessary for my hearers to stoop to the insignificance of my comments.

Such self-deprecating approach, in effect, drew the attention of his monks and kept them interested to listen to his sermons. Indeed when one traverseth the pages of Aelred’s liturgical sermons he will find himself drawn and captivated. They were straightforward yet interestingly powerful and venerable. They expressed in descriptive fashion Aelred’s analysis and interpretation on the scripture as if he physically experienced and sensed them. For instance in his sermon For the Assumption of Mary, he made use of a castle as an analogy to Mary’s body to illustrate the significance of the biblical passage “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Luke 11:27-28). He explained:

Therefore, brothers, let us make ready a spiritual castle and our Lord shall come to us. I dare say that if the Blessed Mary had not prepared this castle within herself, the Lord Jesus would not have entered her womb or her spirit, nor would this Gospel be read on her feast today. Let us then make ready this castle. Three things make a castle strong: a moat, a wall, and a tower. First the moat, then the wall rising above the moat, and finally the tower, which is stronger and more significant than the other two. The wall and the moat protect one another, since if the moat were not the way people would be able to devise a way of approaching the wall and undermining it. And if the wall did not rise above the moat they could approach the moat and fill it in. The tower, on the other hand, protects the whole because it is higher than all the other parts.

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161 Sermon 13.8, p. 218. Henceforth, Aelred’s Liturgical Sermons are cited by the sermon’s number and section and, then, followed by the page/s on the English translation by T. Berkeley and M. B. Pennington.


163 Ibid. 19.5, pp. 264-265
This type of analogy is what the monks of Aelred could grasp and understand. He explained allegorically the spiritual meaning of the scriptural texts assigned for the particular season using images and analogies tangible enough to see and understand their religious significance. By utilizing such method he effectively conveyed the message of the liturgical season and, in turn, made it relevant according to the context of his listeners.

Undoubtedly Aelred had written many sermons during his Abbacy not only for his monastery but also in other monasteries and important occasions like synods. W. Daniel writes, “Unless I am wrong, he preached about two hundred most eloquent sermons, worthy of all praise, in our chapters, in synods, and to the people.”164 His biographer may have exaggerated the number but the extant manuscripts actually come close to it.165 Indeed, it is quite a collection worthy to be recognized and studied like with the other church fathers of his time. B. Pennington described in details how The Liturgical Sermons of Aelred could be found:

The First Collection of Clairvaux … is found essentially in manuscript 910 of the Bibliothèque municipale of Troyes, on the first ninety-eight folios. It is followed by the writings of a Cardinal Drogo, the Opuscula sacra 1, 2, and 4 of Boethius, and a short, anonymous treatise on the canon of the Mass. This is the only manuscript that gives us this particular aelredean collection. It is also the only one that indicates the name of the author. The inscription for the first sermon reads: ‘Domni Aeraudi abbatis Rievallis sermo primus de Adventu Domini’. A later hand changed the Capitula in sermonibus domni Aeraudi Rievallis abbatis and in this instance the name has been corrected.166

A critical edition of the abbot of Rievaulx’s sermons was published in 1989 and the first part (the first collection) of the first volume, was published by Gaetano Raciti.167 It is this first volume of The Liturgical Sermons of Aelred of Rievaulx that will be utilized in this study. The collections thus include the following:168

The inauguration of the liturgical year on the first Sunday of Advent and the inauguration of Holy Week on Palm Sunday; five feasts of our Lord: Christmas, Epiphany, the Annunciation, Easter, and his Ascension; three feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary: her purification, Assumption, and Nativity; and the Feast of all Saints, as well as the feast of Saint Benedict of Nursia, of the nativity of Saint John the Baptist, and of Saints Peter and Paul

1.2. Textual Development

165 Ibid. p. 166. F. M. Powicke cited that Aelred wrote more than twenty works (opuscula) in addition to 100 sermons, the 33 homilies on the burdens in Isaiah, and 300 letters.
166 M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons. pp. 19-21
168 M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons, pp. 14.
Gaetano Raciti already published two volumes of the critical edition on the sermons of Aelred of Rievaulx. The first volume was published in 1989\textsuperscript{169} and it contains 46 sermons that were divided into two parts called The Liturgical Sermons: First and Second Clairvaux Collections. The second volume, on the other hand, has an additional 38 sermons and was published in 2001.\textsuperscript{170} That same year T. Berkeley and M. B. Pennington also published the English translation of the first half of the first volume of Raciti’s work entitled Aelred’s Liturgical Sermons: the First Clairvaux Collection (Advent-All Saints).\textsuperscript{171} They settled to follow Raciti’s version that differs structurally from the earlier editions of Tissier\textsuperscript{172} and Migne\textsuperscript{173} that were published in 1662 and 1860 respectively. These earlier publications and perhaps attempts to propagate Aelred’s writings did not find importance until the 1930’s when studied were initiated and researchers have gained interest in his works.\textsuperscript{174}

Back to Aelred’s sermons, different redactions were made because he himself never took the initiative to organize or compile them unlike his predecessors such as Bernard of Clairvaux. Various scenarios could be attributed to the proliferation of the sermon’s varied editions. Historically it could have undergone several revisions as it was transmitted from one monastery to monastery. For example, Aelred’s sermons could be found in the monastery of Durham and at Westminster Abbey. During his visits within the Order and around England Aelred could have some of his sermons with him and perhaps reused them or simply copied a part of a certain sermon. To illustrate one of these actual facts, paragraphs 47-58 of Sermon One For the Coming of the Lord, save for the syntactic adjustment, also appeared in paragraphs 31-42 of Sermon Two For the Coming of the Lord. There are other instances where more than a part of the sermon was carried over to a particular sermon in the other collections.\textsuperscript{175} With these considerations, “the editors of the critical edition of the sermons of Aelred prepared for publication in the Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis [CCCM] have decided to keep each of the known collections intact.”\textsuperscript{176}

Hence, we have at present several editions of Aelred’s sermons that are actually collections of collections. On the positive side, however, the consequent bafflement did not impoverish Aelred’s inestimable spiritual legacy but rather secure its remarkable worth and likewise honor the author’s inspiring wisdom. This could have motivated Raciti to come up with a critical edition of Aelred’s sermons to perpetuate the abbot’s remarkable spiritual teachings. He based his redaction on histheory of pré-écrit and post-orałe scheme. The former were complete written text of the sermons but were

\textsuperscript{169} Aelredi Rievallensis, Opera omnia, Sermones I-XLVI: Collectio Claraevallensis prima et secunda, Ed. G. Raciti. CCCM IIA (Turnholti: Brepols, 1989).

\textsuperscript{170} Aelredi Rievallensis, Opera omnia, Sermones XLVII-LXXXIV: Collectio Dunelmensis, Sermo a Matthaeo Rievalliensi servatus, Sermons Lincolnensienses, Ed. G. Raciti. CCCM IIB (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001).


\textsuperscript{172} Bibliotheca Patrum Cisterciensium, Vol. 5, Ed. B. Tissier (Bono-Fonte, 1662).


\textsuperscript{174} Cf. J. R. Sommerfeldt, Aelred of Rievaulx: Pursuing Perfect Happiness, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{175} Cf. M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons, p. 17-18.

modified during the actual delivery to adjust his thought on the intended audience. This category applies to the Reading-Cluny Collection, Oxford Trinity College and the manuscript 19. The latter, on the other hand, were what the scriptorium had copied during the actual sermons and could have probably been correct by Aelred himself. Raciti concluded that The First and Second Collections of Clairvaux belong to the post-oral group. As a result from this investigative work he came up with the publication of Aelred’s Liturgical Sermons: First and Second Clairvaux Collections.

Readers should be aware of these variants especially when referring to certain sermon/s since they differ in numbering or physical arrangement according to the redactors. Tissier and Migne simply followed the original manuscripts where one of the advent sermons was inserted after Palm Sunday (see table below). Sommerfeldt noted, however, the effort made by Raciti to restore their proper liturgical order. He said, “These sermons were edited by Gaetano Raciti and numbered by him according to their places in the various manuscript collections that served as the basis for his edition. Thus, the reader should be aware that a reference to, for example, Nat 29 does not signal a quotation from Aelred’s twenty-ninth Christmas sermon.”

Following the edition published by G. Raciti, we find 28 sermons in the first Clairvaux collection. For visual purposes and comparison, the table below will show the difference between Raciti and Tissier-Migne’s edition (PL 95).

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177 Cf. M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons, p. 19.
179 M. B. Pennington, Concordance to The Liturgical Sermons, pp. 51-52
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The first Clairvaux Collection therefore has a total of 28 liturgical sermons by Aelred of Rievaulx. We find that there are two sermons For the Coming of the Lord (for Advent), three are dedicated For the Feast of Saint Benedict, two sermons For the Feast of Easter, four are preached For the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, three versions are prepared For the Assumption of Saint Mary, another three are devoted For the Nativity of Holy Mary and, finally, three more are written For the Feast of All Saints. Curiously, sermon 28 is included although it is addressed To the Clerics at the Synod. B. Pennington provided a probable historical reason for this irregularity:

There is also a sermon that Aelred preached to the clergy gathered in synod at Troyes. During the whole time Aelred was abbot, the bishop of Troyes was Henry of Carinthia, who had been a monk of Morimond and then its abbot. Henry probably took advantage of the famous abbot’s presence in France for a General Chapter to invite him to speak to his clergy. The inclusion of this sermon was made for the monks of Clairvaux (which was situated in the diocese of Troyes), an outside copyist connected with the diocesan chancery may have executed the collection. This might perhaps make the curious inversions mentioned above more understandable.\(^{180}\)

This peculiarity, though outside the proper liturgical season, does not affect in any way the essential teachings of Aelred since what he preached was liturgically proper for the occasion.

\(^{180}\) M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons, p. 15.
As a matter of fact, the sermon was delivered during the synodal liturgy and before the assembly of the diocesan clergy who were celebrating the dignity of their priesthood. Preaching as an Abbot, in fatherly tone and pastoral authority, he eloquently described the nobility and significance of their priestly ministry.

For what then were you chosen? To be invested with the glory of the royal priesthood. Behold the dignity of the Christian people ... Not by one blessing only but by two have we been prepared in advance: the kingly and priestly ... You ... should regard yourselves as being more properly denoted as a royal priesthood because you rule the people of God and handle divine mysteries ... Acknowledge therefore the honor that is yours and honor your ministry.\(^{181}\)

1.3. The Structure and Literary Style

Despite this little incongruity, when the first collection of Aelred’s liturgical sermons is read and considered in its entirety, it reveals an Aelredian Spirituality cleverly concealed behind the discourses of the season’s theme and, actually, it is waiting to be identified, gathered, and organized as an indispensable blueprint to guide the soul. The spiritual subjects that were integrated in the sermons and, the fact that, they were routinely mentioned along the arguments could provide a schema that embodies the essential elements of Aelred’s spiritual teachings. Thus, a meditative reading and perceptive analysis of the liturgical sermons could link together those spiritual messages in which Aelred intends to underline: 1) Man’s interior life that is directed and justified by Christ’s love  2) could be achieved in the corporeal discipline and a radical change in one’s lifestyle 3) as manifested in the virtuous lives of the Saints and of Mary which were realized by their observance of charity by imitating the Christ in the gospel. These are the three general aspects that could be inferred from the sermons, which crucially constitute the spiritual teachings of Aelred. They are dynamic and progressive yet discreet because they manage to lead the reader (his brother monks) to a life of spiritual fervor -- through scriptural analysis, metaphorical examples and endearing words Aelred addressed to his brother monks.

Noticeably, Aelred did not employ in these sermons any autobiographical devices, which could be found in his other literary works. Instead he used biblical characters or the saints as analogy to illustrate his point and, importantly, to edify his hearers (RB 38.12). In his sermon For the Feast of Saint Benedict he used Moses to typify Benedict as the new giver of the law (RB). Therefore, Aelred explained that Benedict wrote a rule for his monks as guide to re-build the corrupted temple (soul) of those who drifted through the sloth of disobedience.\(^{182}\)

[Benedict] was filled not only with the spirit of Moses; he was also somehow, as someone said, filled with the spirit of all the just. He built a spiritual tabernacle from the offerings of the children of Israel. In his Rule sparkles the gold of Blessed Augustine, the silver of Jerome, the double-dyed purple of Gregory, not to mention the jewel-like sayings of the holy Fathers; with all

\(^{181}\) Sermon 28.6.7.9,  pp. 382-382  
\(^{182}\) Cf. RB Prologue 2 and Sermon 8.7.
these this heavenly edifice is embellished. You, brothers, are the tabernacle of God; you [are] the temple of God.\textsuperscript{183}

It should be taken into account that Aelred addressed these sermons to his community of monks as their Abbot. As a matter of fact, M. B. Pennington noted, “It’s cloistered origin is evident not only by the days to which the sermons pertains but also by the style of the sermons themselves. They have a certain simplicity about them much in accord with the monastic way of life.”\textsuperscript{184} Naturally, Aelred used languages proper to monastic terminology, figures of speech that pertain to religious practices and custom, and allegorical interpretations that are within the experience and capacity of his community. In one instance, he showed sensibility by his remark on his duty as an Abbot to edify his monks via conferences or sermons according to Cistercian traditions.

You realize full well, my brothers, that is the custom, according to the statutes of the Order, that on this feast, as on a number of others, we should hear something that will edify us. As people in secular society usually add somethingto their menu on feast days over and above what they have at other times, so in the same way it is laid down for us that for our well-being on feast days we should add to what we do at other times so that we may be edified by someone’s comments.\textsuperscript{185}

Obviously, Aelred wrote his sermons not to flaunt his mental strength but instead used his literary competency to spiritually edify his monks with his sensible scriptural commentaries. He expressed in simple words his analysis and reflection ofthe liturgical season or feast without sounding too academic or theoretical. It should be considered also that “for biblical citations, Aelred used the Vulgate text of the Bible.”\textsuperscript{186} And to interpret the texts of a particular feast or liturgical season, he used the Patristic method on the four senses of the scripture. In his sermon For the Coming of the Lord he referred to them as the faces of the Holy Scripture. He said: “Its firstface is history, the second morality, the third allegory, the fourth anagogy – that is, a sense of what is above.”\textsuperscript{187} In other words, Aelred utilized the process of biblical interpretation of his time and successfully applied it to guide and enhance his brothers in their knowledge of the scripture. The Patristic influences in Aelred’s writings were certainly evident but A. Squire underscored his clever adaptation. He described why Aelred made such modifications:

If these early Cistercian writers can all effect this style, it is because imaginatively they seem to live in the world of the authorities they cite and to feel them as their contemporaries. Their sense of having the weight of authority behindtheir views is strengthened by a direct and living contact with their sources. Thus Aelred contrasts the excesses he condemns with the teaching of Augustine, Ambrose, and Gregory, and the example of Anthony and Macarius (ii, 23-4), and he obviously has documented arguments for doing so.\textsuperscript{188}

\textsuperscript{183} Sermons 8.3, p. 148.
\textsuperscript{184} M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons, pp. 20-21
\textsuperscript{185} Sermon 15.1, p. 227.
\textsuperscript{186} J. R. Sommerfeldt, Aelred of Rievaulx: Pursuing Perfect Happiness, p. xviii.
\textsuperscript{187} Sermon 2.2, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{188} A. Squire, Aelred: A Study, p. 31.
Another literary style that could not escape one’s discerning eye is Aelred’s habit of giving threefold meaning to certain theme. He never runs out of words to come up with triple connotations to qualify three levels of understanding the same concept. Nobody would dare to disagree with M. B. Pennington’s observation that Aelred “likes to use the triplicate, sometimes for emphasis, sometimes for bringing out various aspects of the reality under discussion.”

This brings back Aelred’s interest of finding suitable expressions that would associate the Triune God, which he already developed in the Mirror of Charity. Aelred’s sermon on The Feast of All Saints perfectly demonstrate this manner:

... because he knew that our memory was impaired by forgetfulness, our understanding by error and our attentiveness by covetousness ... so that ... there may always be fresh in our memory the wonderful loving-kindness, the wonderful gentleness, the wonderful charity that he showed towards us ... He endured death for us, at present he gives us forgiveness of sins, after this life he promises eternal happiness. We should recall to memory, dearest brothers, this our liberation, this our hope, this our happiness.

Aelred also effectively exploited the use of endearing words in his sermon. He never hesitated to insert the expression “dearest brothers”, “my brothers”, or simply “my dear” to proceed with his discussion or explain another point. As a consequence, he established a personal rapport, a sense of oneness and equality with his brothers. He certainly knew very well his audience both personally and characteristically. And finally, to end or close his sermon he never fails to invoke the Triune God or use the Trinitarian formula.

2. THE SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS OF AELRED IN HIS LITURGICAL SERMONS

2.1. Man’s Interior Life in Christ’s Charity

Aelred’s spiritual teaching is fundamentally rooted on his devotion to the humanity of Jesus Christ. He took this as the point of departure to analyze the human condition and to underline the importance of man’s interior life in Christ. His meditation on the human aspect of Christ produced a scripturally based and theologically sound spirituality, which progressively unfolded in the pages of his liturgical sermons. On this A. Vauchez commented, “The God-man extolled in the spirituality of the time was in fact the Christ of the Gospels ... The central place held by Christ in the piety of the twelfth-century Christians was expressed, on the level of spirituality, by the greater value afforded the New Testament.”

In fact, Aelred was among those medieval writers who inaugurated the devotion to the person of Christ in the Gospels. His treatise On Jesus at twelve years old is an imaginative reconstruction

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189 M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons. p. 24.

190 Sermon 26.2.3.4, pp. 354-355. Cf. also Mirror of Charity Bk 1.4.12, page 93


192 It is worth noting that Aelred already expressed his devotion to Christ’s humanity on his sermon For the Assumption of Saint Mary even before Saint Francis of Assisi. Cf. A. Vauchez, The Spirituality of the Medieval West, p. 143.
of the earthly life of Jesus and what could have taken place at the finding of the Lord in the temple based on Luke’s account. In his sermon For the Assumption of Saint Mary Aelred emphasized to his brother monks the importance of approaching Christ in his humanity. He said, “Certainly, brothers, it is great good and a great joy to know our Lord Jesus Christ in his humanity, in his humanity to love him and to reflect on him and, as it were, to see in one’s heart his birth, his passion, his wounds, his death, and his resurrection.”\textsuperscript{193} Undeniably, it shows Aelred’s intense devotion to Christ’s humanity which he always reiterated in his writings to be imitated in one’s spiritual life. This also affirmed his position regarding his teaching about sharing in the suffering of Christ in The Mirror of Charity as interpreted in the discipline of the Rule of Benedict (RB).\textsuperscript{194} In fact, Aelred expounded at length this lesson on participation in Christ’s suffering to counteract the complaints of some monks who defied the rigid interpretation of the RB.

The idea of modeling one’s life to the Christ of the Gospel made it humanly conceivable the reality of a human-divine relationship and vice versa while at the same time reinforced the relevance of man’s interior life in Christ. Aelred found in the Lord Jesus the human expression of divine charity as the key to unlock the mystery of human bliss. He recognized that unless man learns to love in the spirit of Christ he would remain in his human misery and sin. Although man by nature is inclined towards good he is also weak and by human effort alone he could hardly arrive at true happiness and live in Christ’s charity. In his sermon on The Purification of Mary, Aelred identified the sins that thwart man’s initiative to follow Christ. There are many kinds of uncleanness. One uncleanness springs from nature, another from the will, another from weakness. From nature comes the uncleanness with which we are born. That is why holy Job says: No one is clean from sin, not even infant one day old. David, too, says: Behold, in iniquity was I conceived and in sin did my mother conceive me … But who is there who of his own free will has not added to his uncleanness? Of this uncleanness Scripture says: There is not a just person on earth who does good and does not sin… There is yet another uncleanness which springs from weakness. Of this the Apostles says: I perceive that is in my bodily members another law fighting against the law of my mind and leading me captive under the law of sin.\textsuperscript{195}

Such is the human condition of man whose innate goodness tends towards failure because he is bound to his weaknesses and sins. Paradoxically he is constrained by his own vices and wantonness to love God and to do what is right or good. Despite his conscious effort to avoid sin he always falls back to the same mistakes because of habit. His self-centeredness or concupiscence pushed him into the vicious cycle of human misery no matter how much he defies it and resist it. He constantly finds himself captive by his human desires but likewise willing to relinquish it when his good nature is roused by God’s charity. This dreadful reality of man’s entrapment to sins is described in the sermon on The Epiphany of the Lord.

\textsuperscript{193} Sermon 20.4, p. 276.

\textsuperscript{194} Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 2.6.15, p. 173

\textsuperscript{195} Sermon 5.13.15-16, pp. 123-124
We were captives to our vices, to our sins, to the power of the devil, 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 andincapable of any good work and ignorant of the way which leads to life, each and every one of us had to be told: Rise up, so that we might walk; enlightened, so that we might recognize the right way. It was when -- through the grace of his visitation -- God stirred us to indignation at our sins that he said: Rise up. It was when he inspired an attachment to worthy emulation that he said: Be enlightened.\textsuperscript{196}

Even though man is enslaved by his vices due to self-centeredness, Aelred saw the door of hope via the presence of God’s grace, which enables man to transcend his human limitations and sins. Sins do not only enslave man but also bring turmoil in his heart. But God’s grace\textsuperscript{197} rouses man’s conscience to a sense of compunction, and then leads him to an act of love (reconciliation or confession) with God. “Sincere repentance therefore should be followed by concrete actions (that is, sacrifice) to attest the soul’s liberated condition. Thus, Aelred counseled to “offer sacrifices ... to God. Put to death within yourself those things which the world loves. Love to be insignificant to Christ, to bepaupers for Christ, to be rejected for Christ. This our blessed Father Benedict teaches us.”\textsuperscript{198} He used the authority of the Rule of Benedict to exercise charity in the life of poverty and humility as an act of self-sacrifice in the context of community.

Therefore, man has to make the inevitable sacrifice (that is, renouncing himself) to preserve and, at the same time, to be able to exercise charity. Man needs to offer sacrifice in order to love Christ and to dwell in his love. But to receive Christ’s love and his forgiveness man also has to observe charity because it is the kind of human sacrifice that God accepts. In the realm of faith and in the context of man, love and sacrifice are paradoxically synonymous. Aelred added, “If you withdraw from love of the world and begin to love God, you then draw near to God. So we draw near to God when we grow in his love. He draws near us when he deigns to have mercy on us.”\textsuperscript{199}

To observe charity or to love for that reason is in reality God’s call to self-renunciation, dying to one’s sins and withdrawal from human or worldly desires (concupiscence).

Charity or love eliminates sins and self-centeredness.\textsuperscript{200} It reconciles man to God and also restores the friendship that has been severed by man’s concupiscence. Through it man restores his true image and becomes more like Christ and so enables him to abide in God. Because of charity man aligns himself not only to God but also especially to Christ’s teachings. In other words, “… conformity to God in Christ, pertains to the moral order certainly more than to the intellectual

\textsuperscript{196} Ibid. 4.29-30, pp. 115-116
\textsuperscript{197} Mirror of Charity Bk 1.11.31 “Any good God accomplishes through us or by us without our will is God’s alone and not ours. But anything he accomplishes along with our will is both his and ours ... Therefore, that work God accomplishes in or through us may also belong to us, he sways our will to give consent, and thus thanks to his grace the reward become ours. If I do the deed willingly, I receive a reward. But that I may be willing to do a good work, it is God who causes even my willing. Then arousing the will itself to seek, to ask, to knock, he gives grace upon grace to complete what the good will chooses.”
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid. 6.35, p. 140
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid. 2.10, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{200} Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 1.8, pp. 100-101.
order.” 201 Therefore, in charity man’s whole being (his thoughts, words and actions) will be transformed to Christ and by the observance of charity he becomes at peace with himself and with God. “If we wish to have this peace at the Lord’s second coming, let us welcome his first coming with faith and love. Let us persevere in those tasks which he showed us and taught us.” 202 Here Aelred is quick to acknowledge that this was made possible because of Christ’s perfect charity. He said during his sermon on The Feast of Easter:

We are mortal and sinners; he is immortal and just. How are we to come together? He saw this, he who is caring and merciful saw this. Because we could not ascend to him, he came down to us. He took upon himself one part of our leavening and so adapted himself to our weakness he did not take to himself the whole leaven that was in us, but a certain part of it. If he had taken on the whole of it he would be as we are and he would not be able to help us... We have said that there was a twofold leavening in us: mortality and iniquity. The one he took on and by it was made like us. The other he avoided so that he could profit us. 203

This spiritual truth of God’s charity was revealed in the person of Christ and is affected by his redemptive works that culminated in his suffering and deateth the cross. Therefore, those who follow Christ and live according to his teachings are bestowed with the grace of faith at baptism. As a result, faith and love of Christ emancipated man from sins that cause his inner conflicts. Aelred underlined this spiritual reality in his sermon on The Coming of the Lord in the following words:

The Lord came the first time to free us from our sins, but at his second coming he will heal all our infirmities. So it is that the person who bids his soul bless the Lord also gives his reason: Who forgive all your iniquities, he says, who heals your infirmities. The one refers to the Lord’s first coming; the other to his second. For by his first coming he eradicated our sins, but we still suffer great infirmities in punishment for those sins.

By his first coming our Lord raised us up only in the soul; by his second coming he will raise us up in body, too. As we now serve God with both – the body and soul – so then in both shall we enjoy perfect happiness with God. At this first coming he gave us faith that enables us to believe him. At his second coming he will endow us with the capacity to see him, not as the wicked will see him on the day of judgment ... but we shall see him as those who are pure of heart will be able to see him. 204

The reality of Christ’s (second) coming is the reason why Aelred underscored the importance of man’s interior life, that is, the condition of his soul before Christ. It is not enough for man to renounce the world so that Christ could abide in him but also he must see to it that deep within his heart he has disowned himself and his human desires. “Without any wheedling flattery, let us scrutinize what lies deeply hidden in the inner recesses of our souls, and try harder to tear outthe

202 Sermon 1.58, p. 76
204 Ibid. 1.9,11, p. 60.
diseased roots themselves.”

Unfortunately, this reality of human redemption is not always fully grasped because man’s sins impede him to see the truth.

Recognizing this human limitation Aelred stressed Christ’s initiative to help man understand and recognize God’s will. For without doubt the human mind was so shrouded in and blinded by the darkness of sin that it was quite incapable of concentrating the interior eye on that divine light. So he -- that is, mercy himself -- acted mercifully and tempered the brightness of his divinity for us with a sort of a cloud. That, brothers, is the [Lord’s] most holy flesh which today he assumed from the Virgin’s flesh; that is called a ‘cloud’ because by it the divinity was overshadowed. It is called ‘light’ because no wrongdoing weigh sit down.

Indeed it is only with the eyes of faith (interior eye) that Christ’s charity on the cross could be understood to have restored man’s capacity to overcome his miserable condition and confront his self-centeredness. At the same time, as man exercise his free will and make the effort to live his life according to the scripture, God’s grace becomes an agent to help him care for his soul, keep a clean heart and a guiltless interior life. These are the spiritual duties that he needs to accomplish daily in charity, through others and in the context where he finds himself. Moreover he should persevere in his human toils and struggles against his own weaknesses. Aelred exhorted, on his sermon on The Purification of Mary, “Therefore, dearest brothers, if, after the purification of baptism or confession, we wish to probe into heavenly things with a clean heart and to visit God’s temple, we must endure the forty days’ purification -- that is, we must patiently bear with the labors and temptations of this present life.”

Here he mentioned metaphorically the process of purification that man has to undergo. He explained, “This number -- that is, forty -- signifies the toils and temptation which we ought patiently to endure so long as we are in this life.”

Sin and self-centeredness predispose man to fall again to his old habits and weakness. He should therefore conform his life totally to Christ to effect the essential transformation and gain necessary strength to transcend his human limitations. C. Dumont explained, “Conformity with Christ’s heart unites us with him ontologically, but an affection attentive to his human deeds and actions will most effectively help us imitate him interiorly.” This suggests that we should conduct our lives the way he taught us, that is, to live in charity like the way Christ had loved us. Indeed, Christ already showed us how he lived as a man and also taught us with his words and the scripture.

“If our heart is not occupied by physical thoughts, if we listen gladly to God’s word and understand it, there will be kindled in us a fire that will not allow us to think of anything except

205 Mirror of Charity Bk 2.1.3, p. 164
207 Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 1.11, pp. 104-105.
208 Ibid. Bk 2.5, p. 94.
209 Ibid. Bk 5.22, p. 126.
210 Ibid. Bk 5.20, p. 125
what concerns the love of our Lord.”212 We should therefore love Christ sincerely through others under the guidance of the gospel.

Loving God is to love Christ. Loving Christ is to love others. Loving others is to love one’s self and intrinsically Christ in others.213 Love also entails first and foremost self-knowledge and self-acceptance -- one is constantly in touch with one’s self, one’s weaknesses and strengths, and one’s being. In other words, one should be in tune with his interior life: a clear conscience that judges rightly what is good, a healthy mind that perceives only the truth and a clean heart that chastely love Christ and others. These are the presupposed conditions of the soul in loving the Christ of the gospel. Furthermore, this inner life also requires constant vigilance to protect it against human corruption and deception.

It is the essence of the soul to require a vigilant attention so as not to digress from its attachment to Christ and from his love. In his sermon on the Nativity of the Lord, Aelred used the image of a flock to represent man’s interior-self manifested in one’s words, thoughts and actions.

Our flock is our good attachments and our good thoughts … To watch over one’s flock is to keep a solicitous guard over all one’s thoughts, words, and deeds so that they will not incur fault in any way whatever. It is likewise to keep guard over the senses – that is, sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch – so that that wicked thief will not steal them or drag them off. He steals sight when through inattention we sin by heedless looking; he drags it off when by force of pleasure he compels us to sin.214

Thus by disciplining one’s senses and keeping guard over one’s conduct,215 one could truly observe charity and love Christ in innocent delight. Keeping a pristine inner-self to love is indeed a great challenge but certainly yields inestimable joy, which can only be achieved in and through Christ’s charity. So Aelred encourages us in these words, “Let us, therefore, love confidently him who is eternal and who is eternally good in the same way and always delightful in the same way. Let us love him so much now, brothers, that when we see him coming … we may have no fear… but … with great longing, run to him as to a cherished friend.”216 It is an invitation to love Christ with joyful hope and expectation like the way one receives a long lost friend. Aelred thus affectionately added, “Therefore, dearest brothers, if we want to arrive at that happiness, it behooves us not only to follow our Lord … but also both follow him and go ahead of him in the same way as those who escorted him into Jerusalem … .”217 It means that the apostles and the saints could also be one’s example to follow and imitate the charity of Christ.

Aelred understands very well this human longing to be happy which could be experienced only in the fidelity of Christ’s love. Therefore he took advantage of the liturgical celebrations as an

212 Sermon 1.21, p. 64.
213 Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 3.2, pp. 222-224
214 Sermon 3.18-19, p. 97.
215 Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 2.14.35, p. 188.
216 Sermon 1.13, p. 61.
217 Ibid. 1.45, p. 72.
occasion to nourish the faith of his brothers (and the readers) via his sermons. Fully aware on the significance of the liturgy and its power to make the presence of Christ perceptible and his saving mysteries comprehensible, he took the occasion to emphasize the value of a life centered on Christ.

Because it was expedient for us always to be mindful of his benefits which he bestowed on us through his physical presence and because he knew that our memory is impaired by forgetfulness, our intellect by error, our attentiveness by cravings, he kindly provided for us that not only would the Scriptures recounts his benefits tous, but these benefits would also be re-presented to us by specific spiritual actions. Thus, when he gave over his disciples the sacrament of his Body and Blood he told them: Do this in memory of me.

For this reason, brothers, these feasts have been established by the Church. Because we represent now his birth, now his passion, resurrection, and ascension, that wondrous loving kindness, that wondrous gentleness, that wondrous charity which he showed for us in all these, will always be fresh in our memory. By means of these [feasts] our faith should develop whenever we hear with our ears and almost see beneath our eyes what Christ suffered for us, and what he gives us in this life and what he promises us after this life. He suffered death for us, nowadays he forgives our sins, he promises us eternal happiness after this life.

Liturgy, according to Aelred, is the specific spiritual actions (sacraments) instituted by Christ that are carried out and celebrated by the Church to restore the image of God in man’s soul disfigured by self-centeredness. Hence man needs to celebrate as often as necessary these sacraments of Christ’s love to nourish his soul until he arrives at the full restoration of God’s image in his life or self. In the celebration of the liturgy of the Eucharist, Christ is not only made present but also his charity is manifested in the unity and love among the faithful. Anyone who receives Christ in charity abides in him and, consequently, is united in the Divine Trinity. Even though man is already justified from sin through baptism, in this life man still needs to patiently bear with his weaknesses and constantly renew his faith from weariness and temptations. Christ thus instituted his sacraments of love so that man will grow in faith, overcome his weaknesses in God’s grace, and nourishes his soul through works of charity. In the liturgy and the sacraments Christ makes himself present, reconciles man with God the Father and purifies man’s soul by his charity.

In his sermon on the Purification of Saint Mary, Aelred understood this human desire to be filled with Christ’s love. He recognized his brothers’ spiritual hunger and desire to be refreshed with God’s words of charity. Thus his sermon goes:

I see you gathered, brothers, to refresh yourselves with the food that abides, the nourishment of God’s saving word … You are asking for this bread like children of the Lord Jesus, of whom he himself says: Allow the children to come to me, for to such as these belongs the kingdom of heaven. But so that you do not grow faint along the way, you come and ask to be refreshed, and refreshed with the bread which fills the mind rather than the stomach … The bread for your

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218 Ibid. 9.1-2, pp. 155-156.
pilgrimage is the mystery of Christ’s incarnation, the truth of his teaching and the example of his humility and that of his faithful. The bread of your homeland ... is the face of God, participation in his divinity and possession of that joy which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the human heart.219

Evidently, for Aelred, the celebration of liturgy enables us to participate in the Divine Trinity for it actualizes Christ’s charity that restores the deformed image of God in us. Therefore, liturgy is a personal encounter with God where Christ’s love is signified in the sacramental signs and actions performed by the faithful (the church). Moreover, God’s love is especially proclaimed and also made present in the liturgy of the Word. Again in his sermon For the Feast of Easter, Aelred invites us to encounter Christ during the liturgy, too seek him in faith and come to know him in the readings of sacred word.

Let us go to the tomb of the Scriptures. Let us go with the aromatic oils of dutiful devotion. Let us seek our Lord here. Let us seek him with faith, with devotion, with charity. For these are the ointments we have to bring to this tomb if we want to find Jesus. But who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb – that is, the covering of this passage of Scripture – so that we may be able to find what we are looking for? May his angel, his grace, come to our assistance.220

Obviously, Aelred teaches that God’s gift of grace will not work unless this is paired by one’s initiative to combat sloth with the “aromatic oils” of one’s interest to learn God’s word. Thus, by engaging one’s self with lectio (meditative reading of the scripture) that sin of slothfulness is buried and, therefore, one could meet Jesus in the sacred texts. Likewise Aelred accentuated the role of God’s grace for he knew that unlocking the mystery of Christ’s redemptive work could not be done without divine intervention or inspiration. And so by God’s grace of inspiration man comes to see and understand Christ’s love from the reading, from the studying, and in the proclamation of the scripture.

In Aelred’s introduction to his sermon For the Assumption of Saint Mary he beautifully and powerfully captured God’s initiative to sustain man’s enthusiasm to ward off acedia221 (that is, spiritual lukewarmness). God could actually be experienced not only in the sacred words but even in the daily events that happen in one’s life. These are instances that kept men from thirsting and encouraged them to seek and to know God who is ever present in their lives.

Our Lord does not will to put up with our having spiritual boredom. Consequently, he visits us sometimes by sacred Scriptures, sometimes through our sermons in which we express aloud something about him, sometimes even by the sweetness of good things which happen to us through

219Ibid. 5.1-2, pp. 119-120
220Ibid. 11.28, pp. 190-191
him, sometimes by what happens to us through his followers. These are our dishes with which he feeds our soul so that we neither suffer hunger nor in eating have to put up with boredom.\textsuperscript{222}

What Aelred described, in fact, is his fundamental idea of spiritual visitations\textsuperscript{223} in his Mirror of Charity. Because man cannot sustain on his own the initial fervor caused by the emotional outburst of regrets he experience in life, God’s grace encourages and uplifts man’s soul to continue in his path towards renewal and sanctity. God’s visitation then serves to wake people up, to console them, and to reward them.\textsuperscript{224} Oftentimes, this happens during prayer (personal and common), self-introspection, quiet meditation of God’s words and spontaneous realization of one’s error or blunder.

Indeed, Christ’s charity is fully expressed and manifested especially in the celebration of the liturgy (sacraments) within and through the Church (others). As Christ’s charity is celebrated in the liturgy it affects peace in man’s soul, rest in the Lord’s love, and harmony in relating with others. This sacramental experience echoes Aelred’s discourse on Sabbath rest wherein he said, “Embracing the whole human race in the one love of his mind, he is not troubled by any injury from anyone … A person possessing this virtue should be said to celebrate this Sabbath especially when he enters into his heart and applies his spirit to the sweetness of brotherly love.”\textsuperscript{225} Therefore, human soul is already led to experience here and now that divine rest which is intensified by mere longing and hopeful expectation of the coming of Christ. This is the significance of one’s interior life that is lived in the charity and the healing presence of Christ in one’s self.

2.2. Asceticism and Moral Conversion in Charity

Aelred of Rievaulx is absolutely a man of his time whose life was shaped by medieval customs, politics, education and religious fervor. But in the midst of this atmosphere he produced priceless literary works, which testify to his profound faith as a Christian and particularly as a Cistercian monk. His written works betrayed his intellectual prowess because they bear universal characters that transcend his own time. And being a man and a monk of his era he lived and expressed his spirituality based on the prevailing norm on how life and faith should be conducted and manifested.

Spirituality (spiritualitas) in Medieval time merely refers to the doctrine and disciplina implemented and observed within Christendom,\textsuperscript{226} but Aelred did not only uphold it but also enriched it by his existential analysis and rational harmonization of human and divine realities. His life’s situation coupled by his integrated comprehension aligned him not only to his religious background but also distinguished him as a master of contemporary spirituality. Therefore, how he articulated his religious devotion and lived his faith could identify him to the modern definition of (Christian) spirituality as “a dynamic unity between the content of faith and the way in which it is lived by

\textsuperscript{222} Sermon 20.1, p. 275.
\textsuperscript{223} Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 2.8-13, pp. 176-185
\textsuperscript{224} Cf. Ibid. Bk 3.8.20, p. 176
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid. Bk 3.4.11-12, p. 229.
historically determined human beings.” In other words, his judicious adaptation of the tested traditions and practices taught by his predecessors transformed him as a progressive teacher and pastor of the soul.

Aelred’s entry to monastic life crucially determined his manner of relating to Christ and living the gospel’s demands. He withdrew from the world, during the height of his career at King David’s court, to realize that intense attraction he had felt on that momentous visit at Rievaulx. Such drastic decision in the milieu where he was could be considered an act of religious sacrifice not uncommon to histime. Immediately he embraced the Cistercian life and discipline, faced the challenges of its demands and physical difficulties, learned and lived the gospel in the light of the Rule of Benedict. In fact, via an autobiographical account in his treatise on The Mirror of Charity, he suggested his motive in becoming a monk and that he never felt oppressed in the midst of physical difficulties:

I have wandered the world and [perused] those things in the world ... So I interrogated myself ... The chain of my worst habits bound me, love of my kinsmen conquered me, the fetters of gracious company pressed upon me tightly ... The specter of death was terrifying, because after death inevitable punishment awaited such a soul ... I often felt worthless and sometimes wept with bitter contrition of soul. Anything I gazed at turned worthless to me, but habits of sensual pleasure oppressed [me]. But you who hear the groans of the prisoners and free the children of the slain, broke my chains asunder ... See, under your yoke I breathe easily, and under your burden I am at rest, because your yoke is easy and your burden light.

This account concisely described Aelred’s vision of death and judgment, his conversion from being a court’s steward to being a monk as his means to rise above his weaknesses so that he could live the gospel and, therefore, follow Christ. Evidently, he is fully in touch with his human condition for heen humbly confessed that he is weary of temptations that might lead him to betray his vocation as a monk. Thus, reminding himself and his brothers, he declared, “Every person than that of those who are in the world should try, by the goodness of his upright way of life, to attain such a conscience that, rather than fearing punishment on that day, he will long for the glory and the joy which the just will have on that day.” He strongly emphasized a faithful observance of the monastic ideals in order to reform one’s self and, consequently, arrive at a clear conscience to joyfully meet the Lord. Guided by the same charity he learned from his personal experience, Aelred advised his monks to offer a sacrifice of prayer, that is, a deep self-examination of one’s self to purge concupiscence from one’s heart. In his sermon For Palm Sunday he preached the cross of Christ as the measure to combat man’s weaknesses (self-centeredness).

Let the cross of Christ itself be, as it were, the mirror of the Christian. In [thelight of] the cross of Christ let each person examine his life, whether the way he lives conforms to the cross of

227 Ibid. p. 9.
228 Cf. A. Squire, Aelred: A Study. p. 19
Christ. And to the extent to which anyoneshares Christ’s cross, let him count on sharing Christ’s glory … Our order is Christ’s cross. Therefore, brothers, hold fast to these two things: that you do not depart from the cross of Christ; that when you are placed on the cross, you do nothing against the cross of Christ. To speak more plainly, this means: persevere in your order and, persevering in the order, do not knowingly do anything contrary to that order. In this way you will beyond any doubt follow Christ to the place where he went from his cross.232

For Aelred, therefore, to keep one’s soul worthy of Christ’s love it is imperative that one has to renounce the world and conform his actions to the scriptures, that is, the teachings of Christ. Further he has to commit himself daily to self-renunciation and should persevere in his suffering (cross) out of love for Christ. It entails an attitude of willingness to forgo human honors and worldly riches because they hinder and discourage one’s will to take the cross of Christ. Such are the kinds of fervor that Aelred demands to anyone who aspire to be at peace with Christ and to taste that sweetness of the Lord’s “yoke” of charity. For Aelred the Lord’s yoke or the cross of Christ “is easy and his burden is light; therefore you will find rest for your soul … This yoke is charity. This burden is brotherly love.”233 To persevere in the order means to assist one another in charity to lighten the burdens of monastic discipline.

The asceticism that Aelred actually teaches throughout his sermons is the practice of humility, charity and conversion of one’s life. “Do you not see men, nobles in the world, experiencing conversion [to monastic life], laying down their spears and swords and earning their food by manual labor like peasants? But this is better, more obviously and more fully understood as being fulfilled in aspiritual way among every class, poor as well as rich, clerical as well as lay.”234 This preaching of conversion to monastic life by Aelred definitely meant to encourage his brother monks to remain in their vocation. Such religious attitude congruously put Aelred in his context. In connection to this Vauchez noted, “The will to model oneself on the Christ of the Gospels was expressed first of all by the added demands in the field of poverty. By stressing communal ownership, the vita apostolica abolished the distinction between rich and poor. It was practiced by monks and regular canons, who gave up individual ownership on entering religious life.”235 Beyond this, Aelred demonstrated his adeptness and progressive position to spiritual life.

“Aelred tells us that when he read the Scriptures he jotted down on wax tablets the thoughts which came,” A. Squire declared.236 This imply that Aelred kept his notes during his lectio as he constantly meditated on Christ’s love thus keeping always in mind his motive of following Christ in his life as a Cistercian. Aelred reflected, “By the dreadful gnawing of the passions it tears and bloodies the soul, allowing it no peace or rest. So let this yoke rot in the presence of oil; that is to

233 Mirror of Charity Bk 1.27.78, p. 133.
234 Sermon 3.10-11, p. 94.
say, the yoke of self-centeredness in the presence of charity." 237 This was also echoed in his sermon For The Feast of Easter where he explained the cause of man’s sufferings and why they inflict man.

We ought to know that our iniquity is the cause of our mortality. And therefore when we are fully purged of iniquity we will doubtless also be purged of mortality. We ought to realize that our iniquity is twofold. It comes from nature in which we were born and from the evil will which we later brought to it. From both of these the Lord purges us … Therefore, what we suffer now from the corruption of our nature is no longer iniquity but infirmity. From the corruption of our nature come the impulses of concupiscence which we suffer unwillingly. 238

Desires for worldly pleasures, indifference to sins and human weaknesses are the realities inherent to man due to self-centeredness. Unfortunately they obscured the other essential part of human being, the human soul, which for Aelred has to be resurfaced. And this could be done by charity and ascetical practices in order to restore that indistinguishable image of God in man. Thus, Aelred warned, “The devil was holding you captive through love of the world, through love of kinsfolk. You were bound by your own cravings. Brothers, when would he have let you go, if the Lord had not struck him down?” 239 He recognized the burdens which man have to endure but, at the same time, also underlined Christ’s charity that reinforces him to persevere in his toils.

Aelred teaches that God’s charity (love) through Christ’s redemptive works have equipped man with the capacity to overcome his corrupted condition. 240 With this in mind, he showed his sensibility and wisdom by recognizing man’s condition and often frustrated effort to change himself for the better. Consequently he explained that, “We know people who have formed good intention, firmly promised to leave the world and almost did … They began to wish to live as quasi-monastics in the world, but they were deceived. For they fell back into their former vices and added hypocrisy on top of them!” 241 Indeed Aelred knew very well man’s Achilles’ heel that he gave the following guidance:

We must go three days journey into solitude to be able to offer to the Lord our God in sacrifice that which is abominable … The first day’s journey is leaving the world. The second is leaving our vices and sins and turning ourselves to better ways of living. The third is leaving our own will. Anyone who has made this three days’ journey will be able to sacrifice to the Lord what is abominable. 242

Obviously Aelred offered a practical advice -- to know, first of all, one’s self. How? Spend some time or a day in reflection (that is, a journey) and see if one 1) has already detached one’s self from the world, 2) has turned away from sins or vices, and 3) have given one’s self to obedience. These are the fundamental requisites for moral conversion. It is a dynamic process that follows a progression of one’s moral conversion or journey towards union with Christ. Only then that

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237 Mirror of Charity Bk 2.3.6, p. 167.
238 Sermon 12.9-10, pp. 196-197.
239 Ibid. 6.13-14, p. 133.
240 Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 5, p. 94.
241 Sermon 6.15-16, pp. 133-134.
242 Ibid. 6.17, p. 134
one can embrace and understand that the “yoke of Christ” as translated to self-discipline and the of observance ascetical practices - - is actually light and easy. Hence to accept and see one’s sufferings as participation in the cross of Christ with the eyes of faith is indeed an Epiphany by itself.

Aelred confidently spelled out this theological truth with the authority of the scripture:

The Apostles also points out the way that leads to Christ: it is, he says, through many tribulations that we must enter the kingdom of God. Again, the Lord tells us in the Gospel: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. This is the way by which Jesus walked and by which we shall come to him: the renunciation of our own will, the imitation of Christ’s passion, the hardships of the present life, and voluntary poverty. This is the way which sacred Scripture shows us.243

As always the case Aelred used the scripture to justify his teachings. Finally, in his sermon For the Purification of Mary he presented a perfect analogy in man’s need to purge his carnal pleasure by his interpretation on the commandment of circumcision in the Old Testament. He made a graphic allusion to circumcision to sever man’s penchant for sensual gratification so as to arrive at spiritual purification.244 Thus, his recurrent arguments to combat the carnal desire, which practically attract man to sin, has found its justification in the following explanation:

Although there were many holy persons who did not come from the loins of Abraham – as, for example, holy Job, yet it was to the descendants of Abraham in particular that the commandment of circumcision was given. That fact that the men of Abraham’s race cut away one part of that member by which men beget and are begotten in carnal corruption and pleasure signifies that the Lord Jesus would be born of his lineage but without any fleshly corruption or pleasure. And as those descendants of Abraham cut away that part of their flesh in which lustful pleasure is experienced most keenly, so we, the spiritual progeny of Abraham, ought to cut away all fleshly pleasure.245

For Aelred, to live as a monk according to the Rule of Benedict means to practice some form of asceticism. He recognized that man should continuously battle within himself and made every effort to resuscitate that image of God in him. He knew that man’s weaknesses and concupiscence (self-centeredness) could be overcome by fasting and ascetical practices. Therefore, he preached to his brothers:

What then is to be done? Even if we cannot wholly expel them [our sensuality and carnality] we should cover them over as much as possible. For blessed are they whose wrongdoings have been forgiven, whose sins have been covered over. Let us with vigils, <labor> [sic], fasting and assiduous prayer cover over whatever failures may be ours through this instability of mind, these wandering thoughts, and memories of this sort. And since charity covers a multitude of sins let us work at it with our full attention.246

243 Ibid. 4.34, p. 117.
244 Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 1.17.50, pp. 114-115.
245 Sermon 5.6, p. 121
246 Ibid. 9.37, p. 168.
This is basically the reason why Aelred kept emphasizing the charity of Christ because it purifies man’s soul, that is, his memory, understanding and will (love). Humility, self-renunciation, asceticism and other virtues that derive from these human actions are but the fruits of charity. A. Squire made a clear illustration how Aelred of Rievaulx faithfully applied this teaching in the context of his life as a Cistercian monk. In the following words he explained:

St. Benedict had declared in the prologue to his Rule that in his monastery he was seeking to establish “a school of the Lord’s service, in which we hope to ordain nothing that is harsh or a burden. But if, for some good reason, anything be a little strictly arranged for the correction of vices and the preservation of charity, do not on that account run away in dismay from the way of salvation, which cannot fail to be a narrow at the beginning.” Quoting these words, without the modifying adjective that applies to the strictness, Aelred insists that the distinctive feature of the Rule is the small quantity of ordinary food and drink, the roughness of the clothing, the trial of the fasts and vigils, the back-breaking daily work, and other observances which the Rule lays down. He cannot agree that it can or should be characterized by virtues like patience and humility, which ought to be features of Christian life anywhere. If, as the protagonists of a more mitigated observance contend, the essence of monastic life consists in virtues which mark a genuine conversion of life, then, he argues, it must at least be agreed that it consists in virtues and observances taken together.

Clearly, Aelred showed his strong devotion to the humanity of Christ as common in his time. He meditated the gospel and interpreted it in a manner where he can identify his own humanity to Jesus the man who saved the world on the Cross. He derived his spirituality and theological understanding on what Jesus had said and done to live his Christian vocation as close as possible. Again Squire explained the reason for such piety which Aelred applied:

In our devotion to the flesh of our Savior we can, as it were, find an outlet for our feelings and emotions which actually restores their innocence. Entering into the scenes of his life as vividly as if we were present at them, we can spontaneously react with our whole being to him who became man that we might, as St. John insists, see and touch him, and hence express our affection for him in an ordinary human way. This is a complete ascesis in itself. As Aelred says, “that a man may not succumb to carnal concupiscence, let him turn his whole affection to the attractions of the Lord’s flesh.

Thus, by imitating the person of Christ Aelred had showed that self-mortification, asceticism and a change of one’s of life in accordance with the gospel are not burden but rather greater expression of one’s love for God. God initiated to love man by becoming himself a man in Jesus. “The Father’s purpose in revealing the Son was to make himself known to us all and so to welcome into eternal rest those who believe in him, establishing them in justice, preserving them from death. To believe in him means to do his will.” As a result man could participate in the divine intimacy by

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247 Cf. Mirror of Charity Bk 1.16, pp. 113-114. See page 38.
248 A. Squire, Aelred: A Study, p. 28.
249 Ibid. p. 47. Cf. also Mirror of Charity Bk 3.5.16, p. 232
250 From a treatise against Heresies by Saint Irenaeus, Bishop, (Lib. 4, 6, 3.5.7: SC 100, 442. 446. 448-454)
imitating Jesus and following the examples he had shown and done. Aelred’s sermon For the Feast of Easter beautifully expressed this divine charity that enables man to arrive at his true happiness that is in God.

That in these days [Easter Season] you have tasted how sweet the Lord is credible, especially you who have seen those arms outstretched as if to embrace you, you who have contemplated those sweet breast laid bare, as if to refresh you. All this, brothers, though it happened once and for all – for, as the Apostle says, Christ was offered once and take away the sins of multitude – yet you have seen it all far better and more clearly with the eyes of your heart than many saw it with their physical eyes then, when it happened. In all these things you have tasted how sweet the Lord is. Sweet, humble, meek, merciful, gentle, and caring.251

Therefore, Aelred teaches that anyone who perseveres in charity and consistently observes the rigors of monastic life will be rewarded with the glory of Easter resurrection. Definitely, he accentuates corporal discipline in a strong, zealous, and demanding way. But the dilemma with such approach, however, is well explicated in the following words:

Whatever the dangers of monastic pharisaiism inherent in such a position, the argument Aelred presents here is the essence of the primitive Cistercian case, and the kind of idealism it inspired is suggested by the fervent novice who, in a dialogue in the second part of the Mirror of Charity, describes to Aelred how the life to which he has come at Rievaulx appears to him.252

After all, conversion of life and asceticism are two paradoxical faces of charity. They are expressions of love to combat self-centeredness but also burdens to be endured if they are not seen with the eyes of faith and accepted in the attitude of charity. In the final analysis, Aelred teaches what he himself lived as a monk and how he understood the teachings of the scripture. For this he preached:

By his [Jesus] fasting he commended to us the value of the physical affliction which we ought to endure in this life. By his physical presence which he revealed to his own after his resurrection, we are able to understand the consolation of his utterly sweet presence which we will experience after our own resurrection. Both were commended to us over the same length of time because it is in the measure to which we bear affliction for Christ in this life that we shall receive consolation in the [life] to come.253

This is unquestionably a rational and existential interpretation of Christ’s redemptive works where Christians could understand the meaning of their faith. Aelred strongly provided a scriptural foundation for the reason and meaning of man’s suffering in the light of Christ’s humanity with eschatological underpinning to every human endeavor motivated and done in the spirit of charity.

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251 Sermon 11.2, pp. 182-183.
253 Sermon 13.6, p. 207.
At this point, Aelred have reasonably shown the meaning of ascetical practices, its value to effect a radical change on oneself, and its vital role to practice charity and vice versa. However, he did not simply explicate these things but rather teaches them to be observed and expects that one will persevere by its demand. Therefore he counseled to “examine yourself more carefully ... Now you must endure sufferings for Christ, you exercise the virtue of patience, chastise the insolence of your flesh by frequent vigils and fasting, undergo temptation. You must turn your spirit away from all earthly preoccupations. Butmost particularly, you must mortify self-will by the virtue of obedience.”

2.3. Christ’s Charity in the Virtuous Lives of the Saints and of Mary

Aelred consistently refers to the humanity of Christ, that is, to Jesus’ examples and teachings, to demonstrate God’s perfect charity that fundamentally endowed man to achieve happiness even in this life. He never fails to underline God’s initiative in restoring the friendship (severed by man’s concupiscence) he used to have with his creatures. This awesome reality of God’s love is what Aelred wished to impart and instill in consciousness of his brothermonks. In his sermon For the Coming of the Lord he implores, “If we wish to have this peace at the Lord’s second coming, let us welcome his first coming with faith and love. Let us persevere in those tasks which he showed us and taught us, nourishing within us his love and the genuine desire by which we may run out to meet him as perfected humans.” He challenges them to carry on with their life as monks until they reach the height of holiness (perfected humans) to be with God.

Yet at the height of such idealism, Aelred never forgets to bring down himself to the reality of the human condition. He reminds us that though man had already been spiritually redeemed by Christ’s charity “through our negligence, we have contaminated ourselves after that purifying.” As a result, we experience the inner conflict to decide and to choose between what is objectively good and what we perceive to be good (for ourselves). “Since only that power of the soul which is more usually called love is capable both of charity and of self-centeredness, this love is obviously divided against itself, as if by opposing appetites caused by the new infusion of charity and the remnants of a decrepit self-centeredness.” Truly, we have the power or the will (love) to choose but we are in reality caught in the vicious cycle deciding erroneously and choosing selfishly.

Acutely aware of this human condition, Aelred saw in the humanity of Christ not only the key to break away from the vicious cycle of falling back to sin but also the true path to human perfection or holiness. He intensely teaches to adhere to Jesus’ examples since such adherence facilitates our efforts to withstand our human weaknesses and counter our selfishness. Identifying ourselves with the human Christ leads us to understand and appreciate the wisdom behind our sufferings. And so Aelred preaches:

\[\text{Mirror of Charity Bk 2.19,58-59, pp. 203-204. See page 43.}\]

\[\text{Sermon 2.42, p. 90}\]

\[\text{Ibid. 12.32, p. 204.}\]

\[\text{Mirror of Charity Bk 1.9.27, p. 101.}\]
Our Lord has taught us [to purge ourselves of sin]. In the same way as he himself rid himself of the leavening which he had taken upon himself for our sake we must rid ourselves of the leavening [sin] which corrupts us. It was by way of insults, reviling, scourging, the cross and death that he came to the resurrection. At his resurrection he was rid of the leavening and now the flesh which he offers us is pure, immortal … Can we come to resurrection by any way other than that which he followed?  

This anthropological description of Christ portrayed the second person of the Trinity humanly approachable and imitable. In fact, Aelred visibly stressed the heroic acts that Jesus had accomplished by his voluntary submission to humiliation and death. Noting this human capacity in Jesus, he audaciously preaches, “Let us flee again to Christ’s blood; that is, let us imitate his passion so that we may be able to share his resurrection here in soul and on the day of judgment in both body and soul. Because this cannot be brought about by our own efforts.” Here Aelred reiterated his doctrine on Jesus’ cross (that is, his death and resurrection), which reconciled us to God the Father. Jesus’ cross restores memory through knowledge of the Scripture, understanding through faith, and love (will) by the practice of charity. He also recognized that by himself or alone man is not capable to make things right except through Christ’s charity.

Taking into account the above religious fervor Aelred preached to his brother monks, he is definitely speaking from experience and obviously implying that a piety without charity and self-denial is destined to failure. In relation to this, his biographer recounted an event where Aelred saved an unstable monk from his vocational crisis. Moreover, the period where Aelred lived was characterized by the specialization of the religious life and proliferation of every kind of religious houses that contributed to moral and religious decadence. It is logical, therefore, that in his sermon For the Feast of Saint Benedict he declared:

Notice, brothers, there are many who have given up the riches and honors of the world and have withdrawn themselves … from the world. But because they do not yet choose to give up their evil habits, but are as proud as before, as wanton as before, as grasping as before, as angry as before, … they are not fit to sacrifice to God.”

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259 Ibid. 12.32, p. 204.
260 Mirror of Charity Bk 1.5.14, p. 94.
261 Cf. Walter Daniel. Life of Aelred of Rievaulx. pp. 112-113. “This time the same brother … was again caught in the fire of his former instability, and wished to leave the monastery … He made this application in these terms: ‘Lord, Everything here and in my nature are opposed to each other. I cannot endure the daily task … More than this, my will … longs for the delight of the world … ’ The most pious father pours out lamentations for his son … Meanwhile the fugitive comes to the gate … but at the open doors he felt the empty air as though it were a wall of iron … Then all who were there execrate the fellow’s ingratitude to God and magnify the love of Father Aelred who, … has shut the air against him and would not allow him to fall into the pit of iniquity.”
263 Sermon 6.18, pp. 134-135
This declaration of man’s failure to follow Christ and live his Christian faith was not meant to discourage his hearers. Rather, it is a straightforward revelation of individual’s effort and setbacks to follow the gospel’s call. But importantly, it also serves to provoke the psyche of Aelred’s community so that they could examine their motives and conducts in living the gospel.

Therefore, it is crucial to underline Aelred’s devotion to the humanity of Christ and link it to his spiritual teaching. It is in the person of Jesus as savior that he developed the authentic human attachment of the soul to a divine being, God. This intense affection to Jesus as savior actually inspired him to confess his theological conviction in his sermon For the Feast of Easter: “Many are the works of the our Lord ... the work of mercy is especially his work. It is his own work, his proper work, in which there appears to the utmost his goodness, his charity, and his kindness ... Therefore the work of our salvation is the work of his mercy ... What is the property of the Saviour – that is, Jesus – if not to save?”264 With such conviction he said, “Let us strive to love our Lord greatly ... Let us therefore, love confidently him who is eternal and who is eternally good in the same way and always delightful in the same way.”265 For Aelred, without Jesus’ charity and examples man is utterly helpless and incapable.

Likewise, Aelred used as models the lives of Saints Benedict, John the Baptist, Paul the Apostle, Peter and Mary in his liturgical sermons to instruct and edify his brother monks to arrive at the same fervor that the saints have demonstrated in following Christ. Behind these holy testimonies, however, he still put into consideration his monks’ individual capacity. He made this clear in his sermon:

For the Feast of Saint Benedict saying:

Each one of us has his unique gift from God, one this but another that. One person can make an offering of more work; another, more vigils; another, more fasting; another, more prayer; and another, more lectio or meditation ... No one therefore should boast on his own about any grace given by God as if it were exclusively his own ... Whatever he has, he should consider the property of all his brothers, and whatever his brother has, he should never doubt is also his. Or that Almighty God can immediately bring to perfection anyone he pleases and bestow all the virtues on any one person. But in his caring way dealing with us he cause each person to need the other and to have in the other what one does not possess in oneself. Thus humility is preserved, charity increased and unity recognized. Therefore, each belongs to all and all belong to each. Thus each has the benefit of the virtues while preserving humility by the consciousness of individual weakness.266

Aelred underlined the uniqueness, individuality, and abilities or gifts of his monks. In doing so, he also encouraged them the help each other grow in holiness through humility, charity, and unity. Likewise, he also showed that community life is an integral part of the individual’s growth and a ground for deeply rooted spirituality. The individual, on the other hand, finds his true identity within

264 Ibid. 12,14,15,18, pp. 198-199.
265 Ibid. 1.13,14, p. 61.
266 Ibid. 8.9-10, pp. 149-150.
the community that recognizes both the potentials and gifts of its members. In other words, an individual could meet his needs in the community for someone to imitate a virtue or a guide to align himself and directs his soul to true holiness. In his sermon For the Coming of the Lord he paternally tells:

Let us see how all the saints who lived before his first coming longed for him[Jesus] and let us follow their example, not the example of those who love the world. For Scriptures says: The world will perish and so will it’s unruly appetites… To know how much the Fathers longed to see our Lord, let us listen to what the Lord himself says in the Gospel: Amen I say to you, many kings and just persons have longed to see what you now see and did not see it.267

Such a summons is perfectly in consonant with Aelred’s pedagogical method. He used personages, life examples, metaphors and descriptions to concretely convey his spiritual teachings. He used the power of the senses to stimulate the mind and explain spiritual matters in perceptible or discernable way. Thus, by honoring and highlighting the saints’ virtues he led his monks not only to get acquainted with persons who have lived a holy life but also to instill in them the ideal spiritual attachment. In his Mirror of Charity Aelred teaches, “Spiritual attachment can be understood in two ways. The soul is stirred by spiritual attachment when, touched by a hidden and -- we might say – unforeseen visitation of the Holy Spirit, it is opened either to the sweetness of divine love or to the pleasantness of fraternal charity.”268 It simply means that man inclines to admire or to become attracted to person with good characters (virtues), either to emulate or to find inspiration.

As a monk who was religiously educated in the Benedictine tradition and had lived the monastic life in the Cistercian discipline, Aelred naturally preached to his community the virtues of St. Benedict that testify to the saint’s ideal love for Christ. He sees in Benedict the perfect example of a man who had truly renounced the world, had successfully battled with temptations, and had become a wise teacher through experience and perseverance. Therefore, in his sermon For the Feast of Saint Benedict he did not only praise Benedict’s holiness and manner of living the gospel but, rather, unabashedly underscored that his example was indeed the best way to imitate Christ.

The most direct way of our Father was the very best way of life. The way of life was his holiness. For, as Saint Gregory has said, this present life is nothing more than a kind of pathway … Father Benedict … held fast to [the way] of which it is said: The way of the just is straight. Although narrow, it leads to life.

Blessed Benedict also found the way narrow at the beginning of his conversion … Wasn’t the way narrow for him when, as we read in his Life, he threw himself naked into a thorn bush to avoid consenting to lust? But when he found the way narrow, what did he do? Did he ever depart from it? Instead, he kept to it and manfully stood his ground. First he did what later he taught, so

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267 Ibid. 1.15, pp. 61-62.
268 Mirror of Charity Bk 3.11.31, p. 241.
he could teach us, his followers, what he himself had done. For as Pope Gregory said of him: Just as he lived, so he taught. He could not teach other than helived.  

Here, Aelred effectively depicted Benedict as a man who also struggled with carnal temptations but have heroically confronted and purged it. Therefore, it is only proper for every monk not only to listen to the teachings of Benedict (RB) but should also to be inspired by his examples to become righteous. As a matter of fact, Aelred showed that even a holy person like Benedict also had to pass the rugged way to holiness. In another sermon For the Feast of Saint Benedict Aelred made an analogy of Benedict as the new Moses, wherein he described Benedict to have passed over the vices and sins (Egypt) through fear of the Lord, mortification, and obedience.  

First of all, just as he once left behind him the riches of the world in an exterior way, so daily, constantly, he rejects them from the depths of his heart. He always stands from all cupidity and ambition, saying with blessed Peter: Behold, we have left all things. And then, correcting his way of life, he manfully resists those vices which dominated him in the world. Finally, he mortifies his own willfulness and depends on the counsel of his spiritual father for whatever he ought to do.

In addition to Benedict, Aelred also honored in his sermon John the Baptist as another person worthy of emulation particularly in the aspect of self-discipline and asceticism. He already emphasized his stance on the importance of bodily mortification through fasting, vigils, and prayer as concrete expressions of self-denial and charity. For him ascetical observances are methods to acquire virtues that express and preserve the real nature of charity. Hence, Aelred exemplified John the Baptist as the epitome of humility and simplicity because he lived an austere life in the wilderness. And although his people recognized him as a prophet and a living saint, he humbly acknowledged his unworthiness and led the people instead to Jesus and not to himself.

What is intriguing with John the Baptist was Aelred’s interpretation on the prophet’s life as doing violence to heaven’s purity. It is actually Aelred’s reiteration and the scriptural foundation of his teaching on interior life that is purified (violated) by the works of charity and in Christ’s charity. It implies a spiritual renunciation of the world manifested in one’s actions that reflect deep inner convictions of mind and heart. In Aelred’s words, it is called spiritual circumcision because “it dismembers the vices, destroys the body of sin, strips off the hairy skins of our first parents and scourcs all the filth and corruption of ancient times.” Further in his sermon, Aelred explained why the idea of violence was originated from John.

The kingdom of heaven can also be taken to mean purity of heart, to which we can attain only by subjecting ourselves to some violence. Of this kingdom the Lord says: The kingdom of God

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269 Sermon 7.6.8.10, pp. 143-145.
270 Cf. RB Prol. 48; 5.11.
272 Ibid. 6.21, pp. 135-136.
273 Cf. Mt 3:3-4.
275 Cf. M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons, p. 48.
276 Mirror of Charity Bk 1.17.50, p. 115.
is within you … The first to teach this violence in the Gospel was John, first by the example of his way of life and then by the word of preaching, saying: Produce fruits worthy of repentance … We produce fruits worthy of repentance if, renouncing the works of the flesh by which the devil reigns in men and women, we tear open the earth of our heart with the plough of compunction, so that the fruits of the Spirit – charity, joy, peace, and the others listed by the Apostles – spring up in it.277

This simply means that, as a prophet, John calls the people to repentance and welcome God in their heart with clean conscience. He lived what he preached thus the people welcomed him and followed his preaching of repentance. That is why Aelred recognized in John the Baptist a person who was protected from the vice of pride because he lived in simplicity, faith, and purity of heart. His way of life spared him from world’s pretension, vainglory, and vanity.

Besides John whose sanctity was already determined from conception, Aelred also is fully aware that God’s grace is neither limited to persons who are already endowed with virtues from birth nor who are naturally inclined towards righteousness. On the contrary Aelred is keen with the reality that God works sometimes in strange way that contradicts even the human logic or expectation. In his sermon for The Clerics at the Synod he demonstrated that indeed Christ’s mysterious works is manifested in particular or is effected to certain person. “Sometimes wicked persons are chosen from the midst of the wicked, so that they may become good; sometimes good persons are chosen from the midst of the wicked, so that they may become better still; sometimes good person are chosen from the midst of the good, so that they may reach the summit of perfection.”278 This was said to underline the intrinsic grace and the sacred value of priestly ordination despite the unworthiness of a person ordained into the priesthood.

In consonance to what Aelred said in his sermon To the Clerics at the Synod he recounted the conversion of St. Paul in his sermon For the Coming of the Lord as analogy to that privilege or grace conferred upon the priest at his ordination. In this particular case, he invites his brothers to ponder and “think of how Paul raged like a wolf, how he seized Christians, Christ’s sheep, stripped them, stoned them. Reflect on how suddenly he was changed and became a sheep: how pleasantly, how gently, how kindly, he lived afterwards with Christ’s other sheep. Not only did he abstain from attacking them but gave himself up to death for Christ’s sheep.”279 Here Aelred drew attention to Paul’s radical conversion to tell his monks that they too, no matter how weak or sinful the think they are, can also change with God’s charity especially if they cooperate with God’s grace like Paul did.

Aelred teaches that loving God may not happen like “falling out of love” as often the case may be. In fact, it is an attraction that gradually develops in strange way and may even start out of detestation like the case of the apostle Paul. In his sermon For the Feast of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul Aelred recounted to his brother monks initial hate relationship Paul has for Jesus:

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278 Ibid. 28.4, p. 381.
279 Ibid. 1.37, p. 69.
Previously there was no name he hated so much as the name of Jesus Christ; afterwards nothing seemed so sweet to him as that name. He loved Christ so much that he was unwilling any longer to bear the name which he bore at the time he was persecuting Christ. It was as if he hated that name because by that name he was a persecutor of Christ. It was when Christ began to be more fully his delight that he despised his very name and all that he had been previously begun to be something ... Previously he rejoiced when he could put any of the Lord's disciples in bonds or cast them into prison or stone them; now when he suffers all these things, he glories all the more! And therefore he says: I find happiness in my infirmities, in insults, in hardships suffered for Christ. 280

Undoubtedly, Paul's conversion happened at the moment when he chose to accept and reciprocate God's charity during his first encounter with or vision of Christ. 281 Certainly Aelred intends to show that Paul's love for Christ did not come immediately but, rather, it happened by way of enlightenment from God's charity. In fact, it was Christ who took the initiative to reveal himself, and only after Paul's admission that he is the Lord 282 that he, a persecutor, turned into a lover. This strong attachment to Christ led him to renounce himself (from Saul to Paul) 283 and began to testify his love for Jesus, proclaimed his faith by his works of charity and missionary activities, 284 and have suffered humiliation 285 all because of Christ.

This instance of Paul's attachment to Christ in the spirit is further accentuated by Aelred's description on Peter's affection to Christ humanity. Peter's rebuke, 286 in Aelred's view, is actually terms of endearment at the time Jesus foretold his death. In the sermon, he also highlighted Peter's aggressive reaction 287 against the Jews to defend Jesus. Obviously, Aelred saw in Peter's spontaneous response an occasion to teach his monks the value of human affection and attachment as essential elements to approach and get close to Christ. Thus, Aelred extolled the apostle's virtue in these words:

Now in the love by which Peter loved the Lord there is commended to us a certain amiable affection which we should feel for Christ's humanity. It was this fervor and love — of which we spoke a little while ago — that Peter had for Christ's humanity, as we can show from the Gospels. Once, when he spoke to his disciples about his passion and said that he was to be betrayed and killed, Peter loved him so tenderly and found his physical presence so sweet that he said: Be kinder to yourself, Lord; let this not happen. Again when the time came at which he willed to suffer and the Jews came with the betrayer to arrest him, an excited Peter snatched up a sword, wanting to prevent

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280 Ibid. 15.20.21, pp. 233-234.
283 Cf. Acts 13:4-12
285 Cf. Rom 12:9-21; 2 Cor 10; 2 Cor 11:16-33
286 Cf. Mat 16:22.
from happening what the Lord himself wanted to happen. This is to be sure he did out of the very strong attachment of love he had toward Christ’s humanity.\(^{288}\)

The above exposition of Peter’s love for Christ enfleshed Aelred’s doctrine on the attachment of charity. When man humbly approach God by the attachment of his spirit\(^ {289}\) he unites himself with Christ’s charity through his cross that restored the image of God in man. For Aelred, such kind of attachment is what Peter demonstrated towards Christ when he tried to prevent the Jews to hurt his friend, the Lord Jesus. In Book Three of his Mirror of Charity, he explicated how this spiritual attachment embraces charity.

It is, however, for love to choose what it wants for its enjoyment. This choice, in turn, is called and is an act of the soul ... If the mind selects for its enjoyment what it should, if it moves towards its object as it ought, and enjoys this object as suitable, this salutary choice, this appropriate development, and this advantageous fruit rightfully deserve to be reckoned by the name charity. Charity is founded on this choice.\(^ {290}\)

Aelred did not only clarify the significance of the spiritual attachment but, furthermore, also provide a parallel example in the humanity of Christ. He stated that even the Lord had showed the same human attachment like that of Peter during his agony on his cross. Even so, he stressed that in the midst of physical anguish the Lord Jesus surrendered his will to the Father. For that reason, Christ himself showed us the right kind of attachment to love God that enables us to participate in the unity of the Trinity. And so Aelred explained:

Even our Savior, when – because of the natural attachment by which no one has ever hated his own flesh – he cried out; Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me, he subjected it by right reason to the spiritual [attachment] by which he forever clung to his Father. Still, he said, not as I will, but as you will. In this attachment, therefore, this rationale must be kept: that the one by whom our spirit is urged towards God is to be put before all others. Next, rational [attachment] is to be put before dutiful, dutiful before natural, and natural before physical.\(^ {291}\)

Aelred effectively illustrated this marvelous reality of spiritual attachment in Christ’s humanity. In addition, he acutely observed in the lives of the saints this form of attachment and then enthusiastically mentioned them to his brother monks as other models to be imitated. That’s why, in his sermon For the Feast of all Saints he preached:

Let us ponder and delight in the true loveliness in which the saints live free of corruption; in those spiritual ornaments that the saints possess in righteousness and holiness: in the hymns and praises with which they praise God without weariness; and in that light which they see in the face of God ... Let us reflect on their glory and exaltation.\(^ {292}\)

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\(^{288}\) Sermon 15.35-36, pp. 238-239.
\(^{289}\) Mirror of Charity Bk 1.8.24, p.100.
\(^{290}\) Ibid. Bk 3.8.22,23,24, p. 236.
\(^{291}\) Mirror of Charity Bk 3.29.72, p. 270.
\(^{292}\) Sermon 25.6, p. 348.
These are the underlying reasons why Aelred highlighted the virtues and charity of the saints, so that, not only with Jesus can we model ourselves but also with righteous persons who already succeeded, in their own unique ways, in following Christ. Indeed these saints faithfully and unceasingly chanted songs of praises from scriptures (psalms) both in their personal meditations and community worships. They saw and experienced God’s love and abiding presence in their daily prayer.

Among these saints whose feasts are liturgically celebrated, Aelred devoted seven sermons for Mary. M. B. Pennington accurately described Aelred’s immense admiration to Mary with these words, “Aelred readily joined the ‘world-wide’ chorus that honors all the saints, and first among them ‘the blessed Mother of God, Mary.”293 Indeed, for Aelred, she is a role model of purity of heart and humility. And among the righteous person to be followed, Mary is the “virgin purer than all other virgins, holier that all women, stronger than all men, fairer than the sun, more intense than fire.”294 Certainly, the metaphor of fire refers to Mary’s unceasing fervor and deep love to Jesus even in the midst of doubt295 and sufferings.296 So in his sermon For the Assumption of Saint Mary he invited his monks to reflect and pay attention on the perfect and unceasing love of Mary to Christ:

Holy Gabriel sought her, found her, knew her, greeted her, and invited her into the embrace of the true David. She alone it was in whose bosom the true David could rest quite intimately. Her embrace would quietly gently warm him. With her he would sleep quietly in his bed. This is Our Lady, Saint Mary, in whose sacred breast the flame of love had not died down. She loved him more than anyone else did, so she yearned for him more than anyone else did, and therefore sought him more persistently. But him whom until now her flesh loved, now her soul loves.297

In other words, Mary managed to keep her interior life (conscience) clean, pure, and modest. As a result God dwelt in her and filled her with his charity. Then Aelred went on to say “Concentrate for a little on this perfection which shone in the most blessed Mary. Her humble response to the angel bears witness that she was not at all puffed up with pride about the grace given to her: Behold the handmaid of the Lord.”298 He emphasized the humility of Mary because it is the best example and form of self-renunciation to love and welcome God in her life.

In fact, Mary’s act of humility represents the human courage and will to counteract self-centeredness.

Again, in his sermon For the Annunciation of the Lord Aelred explained further to his brother monks why Mary stands out among the saints, “What thoroughly imbued the blessed Mary was indeed true chastity of the mind ... Reflect in all this on her wonderful humility.”299 It simply

293 M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermon, p. 39.
294 Cf. Lk 1:34
295 Cf. Lk 2:34-35.
297 Ibid. 21.27, pp. 297-298.
298 Ibid. 9.24-25, pp. 163-164.
means that humility is a necessary step to arrive at purity of heart and of mind. A chaste mind caused by an act of humility conserve the heart from vanity, malice, and selfishness. In this case, the humble Mary demonstrated that, as a person, she has the power (a free choice) to shatter the curse of pride that separated man from God.

The commendations that Aelred had generously given to Mary are actually embedded almost throughout his sermons. “Mary is Rebecca and Rachel (9.17ff). She is Mary the sister of Moses (22.14), and the virgin Abisag in the bosom of David (20.26). She is the sheep and a fleece (9.12), a cloud and a light (9.34). She is a castle, a village (19.5), and the eastern gate into it (19.6).”\(^{300}\) The typologies and parallelism ascribed to Mary from the Old Testament figures do not only betray Aelred’s familiarity with the scriptures but also show his profound understanding of these characters in the economy of salvation. He recognized that Mary is the culmination of the Isaiah’s prophecy\(^{301}\) where God’s love is finally incarnated. The sheep and fleece instead were allegorical representations of Mary’s virginity that “obtained dew which came from heaven but could feel no carnal pleasure.”\(^{302}\) Mary was paralleled to the cloud and light in which God came to Egypt (world)\(^{303}\) just as Jesus came through her womb. The castle instead is a metaphor Aelred used to Mary’s interior disposition (spiritual castle) where the Lord dwells both physically and spiritually.

These are the images, to name a few, that Aelred attributed to Mary to call attention to her importance and her examples in living one’s faith, to follow Christ, and to love God. But it should be noted most of all that these saints and Mary, who is foremost among them, were actual persons who lived in their respective time and culture yet succeeded to live in Christ’s teaching to love. They became saints because they observed charity, lived in charity and, therefore, as persons of holiness they participated in God’s charity. Thus Aelred declared:

In charity, chastity is perfect and so there is no lust for temperance to fight. In charity, knowledge is perfect and there is no error for prudence to fight. In charity, there is true happiness and so no adversity exists for fortitude to conquer. In charity, everything is at peace and so there is no inequity against which justice must remain vigilant. But faith is not a virtue, if it does not act through love, nor hope a virtue, if what is hoped for is not loved … Charity, then, begins in faith, is exercised in the other virtues, and is perfected in itself.\(^{304}\)

Since these persons consistently lived their lives according to charity, they were sanctified and honored as saints because they persevered and have kept God’s commandment to love. Therefore, the saints were blessed persons, blissful holy men and women, because charity had become their guide from error, their strength from temptations and human weaknesses, and their peace from human sufferings

\(^{300}\) M. B. Pennington, Intro. to The Liturgical Sermons. p. 39.
\(^{301}\) Cf. Is 7:14
\(^{302}\) Sermon 9.-12-13, pp. 159-160.
\(^{303}\) Cf. Is 19:1.
\(^{304}\) Mirror of Charity Bk 1.89, p. 141.
and discontentment, and the completions of their faith and hope in this earthly and temporary human life.

CONCLUSION

Aelred’s first and major treatise (The Mirror of Charity) established his fundamental theology whose principal thesis is to describe what love is and that indeed God is love. He explained this thesis from an anthropological and existential perspective inspired by his devotion to the humanity of Christ. It is important to the understanding of this work to remember that its writing was triggered by the complaints of some monks who have difficulty reconciling the love (charity) of God in the form of the austere life they live as Cistercian monks. To correct their misinterpretation, Aelred explained that God, by his immense charity, became one of us (except sin) through Jesus to fulfill his promise of redemption and proclaim God’s love.

So Jesus, the man and savior, lived like us to show and teach us the way to the Father whom man offended because of his self-centeredness, which led him to sin and inevitably severed the divine ties. By losing this sacred bond between human and divine, man did not only lose himself (his true identity and the image of God in him) but also separated himself from the community of the triune God who is the very source of his happiness. In other words, God’s image in man was disfigured and retained only a faint recollection of God. Sin spoiled man’s soul, that is, his memory was prone to forgetfulness, his understanding to error, and his will or love to selfishness.

In order to restore the severed ties that unites man to the source of his true happiness (that is, the Triune God) Jesus Christ made the ultimate sacrifice. His redemptive works (that is, suffering, death and resurrection) salvaged the soul of man – man’s memory enables him to share in God’s eternity through faith, his understanding learns God’s love through the scriptures, and his will (love) unites him with God through self-sacrifice (self-denial) in the spirit of charity. Christ’s sacrifice on the cross did not only serve as expiation to reconcile humanity back to God, but the very act of self-sacrifice became a concrete expression of God’s love (charity) and, at the same time, a paradoxical paradigm for man to return and be with God.

God’s first coming through Christ’s charity on the cross has redeemed the soul (memory, understanding and love or will) of man. Despite of it, man remains free and has the power to decide or accept this gift of love (grace). God’s love (sacrifice on the cross) was given out of his perfect charity for humanity and is perfectly free of any obligation. Thus, while still on earth, man has to constantly battle against himself in making the right decision through the practice of charity so that he can abide in God and God in him. But when man exercise his freedom, that is, when he wills or asserts his power to choose, the grace of God aids man’s initiative to be able to make the right choice.

Now in my analysis and synthetic investigation, I discovered that Aelred’s ontological arguments on God’s charity were neither articulated as sheer intellectual validation on the truthfulness of his thought nor to present a theological dogma. Rather, it is an applied theology of love whose perceptible elements were expounded in his writings particularly in the Liturgical Sermons. These
tangible elements of charity in reality comprised Aelred’s spirituality, that is, a human expression of Christian faith grounded within the context, education, and religious fervor of his time.

Faithful to his Patristic origin Aelred utilized terminologies, literary devices, and examples that vividly and even graphically transmit his thoughts spontaneously. He adapted Augustine’s terminologies to represent man’s soul (memory, understanding, will or love) to affiliate it with the Trinity. A separate study on Aelred’s sources and literary influence would be of great help to someone who intends to learn more about his works. With regard to the soul’s three faculties,

Aelred cleverly used them again in his sermon For the Annunciation of the Lord to stress how they are restored by Christ through his cross and are now commemorated through the sacraments. His frequent emphasis on corporal mortification is actually an expression of his devotion to Christ’s humanity and he refers to the cross (suffering of Christ) to combat human vices. In fact, terms such as charity, concupiscence, toil, infirmity, vice, flesh, obedience, pride, humility, heart, mind, etc., are all spread throughout both the Mirror of Charity and the Liturgical Sermons. Yet he treated them with gravity and importance so as to evoke spiritual edification rather than dread or trepidation. Discerning as a pastor and clever as a pedagogue, Aelred heightens the knowledge of the simple-minded and uplifts the spirit of the educated without sacrificing the elegance of his literary style.

Therefore, both his monks and modern readers recognize the spiritual teachings and guidance of Abbot Aelred. His constant reiteration on those aspects of human life that were conserved and nourished by charity only affirmed his spiritual teachings. As a result, they substantiated the soundness of his theological doctrine on charity as both means and ends to human happiness. Whoever follows his sermons and meditatively reflects on them will eventually see the intricate connection between his theology on The Mirror of Charity and his spiritual teachings in the Liturgical Sermons.

From my research, it is clear that Aelred consistently used the same terms and meanings to expound and reinforce his point of view on the theme of a particular liturgical feast or season. These become evident after discerning the basic structures that could rationally and synthetically hold together those thoughts that represent Aelred’s spiritual teachings. The present conceptualization of the three major elements is a unique contribution to Aelredian scholarship. Other authors have suggested that Aelred’s basic teachings could be presumed in his other works. But this present schema shows that his doctrine of charity is consistently enunciated into his sermons although it is subtly hidden and interwoven in his arguments. In fact, they form an integral part like veins that render his sermons with vitality and charm.

In summary, the following structures show how Aelred applied his doctrine of charity in his Liturgical Sermons. Firstly, man’s interior life is conserved and re-discovered in Christ’s charity. Secondly, asceticism and moral conversion in charity bring back man to himself or to his true self. And thirdly, Christ’s charity in the virtuous lives of the saints and of Mary shows that human sanctity is realized because of God’s grace and the practice of charity per se. Aelred’s concept of man’s interior life, of corporal discipline or asceticism, and of persons who lived a virtuous and righteous life were intrinsically integrated by God’s charity and the very observance of charity. These were
articulated and incorporated in his sermons as he explained the theme of each particular liturgical feast/season celebrated together by his community.

Clearly Aelred used his liturgical sermons to communicate his doctrine on charity. In fact, he effectively used as examples the lives of the saints (Benedict, John the Baptist, Paul the Apostle, Peter and Mary) to show that charity is hebest way to live righteously and extraordinarily out of the ordinariness and familiarity of our human conditions. Thus, Aelred’s spiritual teachings are not only theologically rooted and scripturally based but also existential, grounded on human experiences and situations. He masterfully crafted a literary device in his sermons to instill his theological doctrine while ministering his pastoral obligations as Abbot. Truly he is a wise theologian who speaks the truth of divine love and the mystery of redemption on a level that will benefit his hearers (readers) regardless of their mental capacity and experiential knowledge. His explanations on both human and spiritual realities are deep and insightful, his discourses and interpretations are analytic, his approaches to human situations are sensible, and his strategies to convey his spiritual teachings are intuitive.

The structures cited above are not only sound and logical but also dynamic because they show the progression of Aelred’s thought. The movement of his ideas is noticeable because it follows a coherent pattern that reinforces and affirms the reality of interior life (spiritual) manifested and expressed in the corporal discipline, and then demonstrated in the lives and virtues of the saints. Such approach demonstrates Aelred’s pedagogical methods that are pastoral, analytic and experiential. Certainly, a theology remains a theory unless it is applied and is seen in reality. God’s charity revealed from ontological discernments should be substantiated in reality. This is what Aelred of Rievaulx achieves in applying his theological discourses on charity through preaching his liturgical sermons. He validated a theological truth through scriptural interpretations and pastoral application of a divine reality (that is, God’s charity) in human terms that are simple yet still profound to ponder. Aelred’s teachings on spirituality are founded on a theology that is able to deepen a shallow piety and could help man to overcome his vices. Indeed, his sermons are the pastoral expression of his theological doctrine on charity that eventually emerged as a timeless spiritual guide for those who wish to be enlightened and to experience the reality of God’s love. Ultimately Aelred’s spiritual teachings epitomize the Monastic Theology that Jean Leclercq’s described, a theology specially conceived and composed for monastic audience but helpful and inspiring to a much more general audience.

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