

Mark F. WILLIAMS

**The De Spiritali Amicitia of Aelred of Rievaulx as Commentary on Ciceros De Amicitia**

Although the De Spiritali Amicitia of the Cistercian monk Aelred of Rievaulx (c. 1110-1167) is technically not a commentary on Ciceros better-known work on friendship but rather a thorough re-working of Cicero along Christian lines, Aelred quotes or paraphrases over 30% (according to one count) of the main ideas and themes of the De Amicitia. Aelreds treatise, written in dialogue form, thus provides a running commentary or paraphrase that seeks to do justice both to Cicero and to Aelreds more immediate Christian predecessors. As such, Aelreds work locates Ciceros ideas and ideals of friendship in a context in which 12th-century Cistercians could adopt the pagan Romans notions of amicitia and still be true to their own strict, reformed monastic discipline.

As a "commentary," then, Aelreds treatise has a specific and difficult rhetorical task: to persuade a strict, conservative monastic audience that the ideals of Ciceronian friendship can and ought to be Christianized, and further that these ideals pose no threat to their potential audience. Perhaps the best illustration of Aelreds technique is his handling of Ciceros famous definition of friendship at De Am. 6.20 as agreement in important matters, combined with good will and esteem. Aelred discusses Ciceros definition twice, at De Spir. Am. I.11 f. and at III.8. In the first instance, Aelred initially appears to agree with Ciceros definition of friendship, but he actually finds it deficient in several ways insofar as it applies to relationships between Christians, and he both extends and expands the notion of virtuous friendships that was common in the ancient world. In his second treatment of Ciceros definition, Aelred eventually connects it with the Psalmists encomium on brotherly love (Ps. 133:1), where it becomes the foundation of a beatific vision of friends dwelling in unity before Christ.

This paper concludes with a brief analysis of the influence of Aelreds "revised Ciceronian" notions of amicitia.