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Hank Voss

Taylor University, hank_voss@taylor.edu

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**Poor Pastors with Rich Friends:
Retrieving the Great Tradition's Wealth to Serve the Poor**

Muncie Theology Institute, Muncie, IN

Rev. Dr. Hank Voss

“Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. . . and Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself.”

I Samuel 18:1-3 (c. 1000 BC)

“You and I are here, and I hope that Christ is between us as a third.”

Aelred (c. 1167 AD)

INTRODUCTION

Two weeks ago my friend Benjamin Hoskins drove eight hours from Detroit to visit my family for the weekend. My first memory of Benjamin is from the Spring of 1995 when we were both undergraduates at Taylor University. Benjamin was the only African American among the forty young men who lived on my floor. One day as I passed his room, I looked at him and said, “Ben, I am glad we are friends.” He responded with words I have never forgotten, “Hank, we are not friends. You know my name, but you know nothing about me. To be a friend means much more to me than simply living two dorm rooms down the hall. Look, I am not saying we can’t be friends, I am simply saying we are not yet friends by my definition of friendship.”

Over the last twenty years, Benjamin has taught me many lessons on friendship, and I am glad to say we are now friends according to both of our definitions of the word. This paper is not the time to discuss the many lessons I have learned from Benjamin relating to friendship. I will simply acknowledge that the interaction described above is the first time I remember seriously questioning the meaning of “friend.” This paper’s thesis is simple: Congregational leaders among the poor will never thrive in ministry without developing skill in choosing, testing, trusting, and enjoying friends. This claim will be illustrated through one of the greatest friends in the history of the church, the twelfth-century pastor and theologian, Aelred of Rievaulx (d. 1167).

The teaching has three parts. First, a number of preliminary presuppositions related to the paper’s subtitle, “retrieving the wealth of the Great Tradition in service to the evangelical poor” are addressed. Second, Pastor Aelred’s use of reason, Scripture, tradition, and experience in his book *Spiritual Friendship*, is presented as an exemplar for evangelical pastor-theologians. Finally, the relevance of Aelred’s nine-hundred year old text for contemporary pastor-theologians working among the poor is illustrated in four areas of concern to pastors working among the poor in a North American context. May this paper contribute to each of us in this room growing in our understanding of Christian friendship, particularly may we understand with Aelred that all spiritual friendships “must begin in Christ, continue with Christ, and be perfected by Christ” (SF, 1:10). Amen.

C. Retrieval of Spiritual Classics Provides a Way Forward for Congregational Leaders Working Among the Poor

1. Historically, leaders like John Wesley (d. 1791), Elizabeth Fry (d. 1845), C.S. Lewis, and A.W. Tozer have used spiritual classics as a way to address both unique contextual issues and perennial pastoral problems.
2. Jim Houston provides a contemporary example. He uses Julianne of Norwich as a resource relating to God's Love when working with victims of sexual abuse. This semester I have found this text helpful in that regard as well.
3. Aelred provides an example of both a pastor theologian who used spiritual classics and of a spiritual classic which can be used today to help Christian leaders understand spiritual friendship.

II. AELRED AS MODEL FOR PASTOR-THEOLOGIANS AMONG THE POOR

Aelred's spiritual classic, *Spiritual Friendship*, has helped thousands of pastors over dozens of cultures and across many centuries to thrive in Christian leadership while serving in challenging ministry settings. One reason for the fruitfulness of Aelred's work over the centuries is that it is a well-balanced text addressing four areas: reason, Scripture, Christian tradition, and personal experience.

A. Wisdom from Creation: Reason and Cicero

1. Cicero's work on Friendship represents some of the best thinking on Friendship that human reason can deduce. It displays the common grace found in Creation. Aelred begins his text with serious engagement with this creation wisdom.
2. He discusses Cicero's definition of friendship at four different places in *SF*, the threefold structure of the book echoes Cicero's structure, and he cites Cicero some 96 times in a relatively short text.

B. Wisdom from Scripture

1. Scripture is Aelred's "Mirror." It is the source and measure of all understandings of true friendship.
2. Aelred cites 34 biblical books in his work, and constantly makes uses of biblical narratives, the life and teaching of Jesus, deep meditations on the text.

C. Wisdom from Tradition: Teaching and Practice of the Church

1. Aelred builds his teaching on friendship from the foundations he finds in Ambrose (Cited 46 times); Bernard (a contemporary and friend, 30x), Augustine (24x); Jerome (10x), and Cassian (7x).
2. He also builds on the apocrypha (11x)

5. **A Pastor Must Love Everyone in His Congregation, but Must a Pastor Like Everyone in His Congregation?**

- Aelred teach us that we must understand the difference between Christ's command to love (*agape*) everyone, even our enemies, and the way Christ entrusted his innermost soul to a select few—namely John, the three, the twelve, and his inner circle of disciples (including women).
- He would teach us that we must love everyone, but choose very wisely and carefully our friends.

B. Imagining a Christian Vision for Same-Sex Friendships

1. Covenant Same Sex Friendships

David and Jonathan provide a case study of what covenant same-sex friendships among Christian Leaders can look like.

2. Faithful Christian Friendships Between Same-Sex Attracted Friends

Christian leaders desperately need a positive vision of same-sex friendships when they or those they pastor experience same-sex attraction.

A resource here is Wesley Hill's text *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Brazos, 2015) and the group that blogs with Hill at the website of the same name.

C. Imagining a Christian Vision for Cross-Sex Friendships

1. Christian Marriage as Covenant Friendship

Aelred cites both Adam and Eve and Ruth and Boaz as examples of spiritual friendship. The description of spiritual friendship is a model relevant to all Christian marriages and an antidote to the cultural poison much of the North American church has imbibed in relation to Christian Marriage. One contemporary writer who develops this theme is Paul Stevens in his *Marriage Spirituality* (Regent University Press).

2. Faithful Christian Friendship Between the Sexes as Evidence of God's Kingdom Come on Earth

Aelred cites an example from the Maiden of Antioch and a Roman soldier as an example of spiritual friendship between the sexes (1.29). See page 42).

Aelred provides a more robust vision of the relationship between Christian brothers and sisters than is found in the Billy Graham Rule. Indeed his