

our need for salvation today has been, for me, to highlight the importance for a Christian believer of language and the whole sphere of words and their power. Christianity is a religion of the Word; the proclamation of the gospel *is* the process of salvation. We are lucky to live in an age when Catholic theology is seeing a real renewal of the theology of the word. Preaching, in all its forms, is beginning to be returned to its rightful place; the Christian priesthood is once again seen as essentially prophetic.

In view of this emphasis it might be felt that the sacraments will lose their importance in the Christian life. But this surely need not be so. In the light of personalist and existential philosophy we are able to see what the scholastic philosophy of nature tended to obscure: the Christian sacraments as a communications-system in which all of life receives its Christian interpretation. In this perspective we are able to make more sense of St Augustine's description of a sacrament as 'verbum visibile', a visible word. The Christian sacrament is nothing other than the definitive, and therefore effective, proclamation of the Word. It is this word of judgment and promise which, because it is God's word and not man's, is the only answer to the need for salvation today.

Aelred of Rievaulx

by G. W. S. Barrow

Aelred, or Ailred, Eilaf's son, of Hexham, whom we know as Aelred of Rievaulx, was a wholly remarkable man for several quite distinct reasons. In the first place, he was English, or perhaps, to be more precise, Anglo-Scandinavian. The number of outstanding figures in the history of twelfth-century England who were English in this sense, 'of fine old English stock' as his disciple and biographer Walter Daniel put it, was so small as to be almost insignificant. The world which Aelred knew was one where lordship, both as ownership of land and as control of government and administration, was in the hands, almost exclusively, of Normans, Flemings, Bretons, Lorrainers, Frenchmen, of almost any save Englishmen, in fact, and a member of the governing order (such as Aelred was from 1143 till his death in 1167) who was also a thoroughly native Englishman was a prime rarity. Secondly, Aelred was a man of the north country, a Northumbrian born and bred in an age when it might be said that Northumbria had lost a culture and had failed to find a role. Thirdly, Aelred was a profoundly religious man in a

characteristically English fashion—essentially unacademic, un-intellectual, despite the great breadth of his reading and his undoubted facility for writing. Fourthly—but not lastly, by any means, for there were many sides to this complicated man—he seems perfectly to epitomize, in his career, his interests and his influence, the age through which he lived.

A deeply-felt inner pride is not incompatible with outward signs of lack of confidence, even of inferiority. Aelred moved among the great but in his relations with them he seems a little unsure of himself. He never quite took their measure or became one of them. In an almost naïvely idealistic way he expected too much of them. The self-consciously Norman ruling class among whom Aelred had to make his way would have regarded his Englishness as a liability, not an asset; he belonged to a race which they tended, even if affectionately, to despise. The self-consciously 'Gregorian' ecclesiastical establishment in which Aelred attained to an assured and honoured place had set its face firmly against the background from which he came, the remote and rustic background of married, indeed 'hereditary' priests, devotion to the relics of obscure saints with uncouth names, intellectual parochialism or stagnation.

And yet, while this seems true at first sight or on the surface, it is not the whole truth, and there must have been currents flowing, forces at work, of which we can know little, at least directly. For one thing, the advance of twelfth-century Europe did not consist of a single 'civilized' centre reconquering 'barbarian' outliers. Much of western Europe was made up of small communities which were in varying degrees illiterate, barbaric or primitive. For another, advance and expansion were 'in the air' everywhere. The young Aelred, a third son, must have been a lad of parts, and his father, hereditary teacher as well as hereditary priest, evidently (like a later Northumbrian) appreciated his boy's 'capabilities' and determined to give him a good start. For his part, David, Malcolm's son, newly set upon the uneasy throne of Scotland, must have correctly appraised the youngster's eager talents and perhaps even the direction in which they would ultimately lead him. At least in the eyes of David and his queen neither Anglian ancestry nor a religious bent would disqualify Aelred for a place in their severely puritan household, dominated by memories of the saintly Queen Margaret.

However paradoxically, it was in the valleys of Tweed and Teviot that Aelred first made his acquaintance with the 'great world'; not in those days depopulated, but full of bustle and activity, the building of abbeys and burghs and castles, merchants travelling from the Low Countries and beyond, clergy setting off for continental councils, messengers and letters passing between Scotland and St Denys, Chartres, Cîteaux, the Anglo-Norman court and the papal *curia*. Aelred might have lived out his days at the Scottish

court, serving in *capella* or *camera*, eventually rewarded with a remote bishopric. Or he might, like a number of fellow-Englishmen (or part-Englishmen) have become a busy observer and chronicler, on the edge of great events but never taking any part in their direction. Such were his earlier contemporaries, Eadmer, Orderic Vitalis, William of Malmesbury, all monks in a century when there were especially cogent reasons for Englishmen to retire a little from the world. But there was both less and much more to Aelred than this. He never became an historian (although modern students of the twelfth century readily acknowledge a debt to his historical writing). A natural leader, denied by birth a share in feudal leadership, Aelred was aware that his own creative power lay in the building of living communities, not literary monuments. He had the gift, whose lack is our obsession today, of personal communication; and what he knew he could communicate was his overwhelming sense of the reality, nearness and love of Jesus Christ. The historian should use the word 'inevitable' sparingly, but there was surely inevitability in Aelred's adoption of (and by) the Cistercian life of Northumbria. In every way it fitted him and he it; bringing together the old Anglo-Celtic asceticism of Cuthbert, membership of a fully 'European' Christendom, and an outlet for Aelred's capacity for ruling.

Father Squire has given us an attractive and convincing interpretation of this great Englishman.¹ His familiarity with the sources is profound and wide-ranging, but his learning never obtrudes or oppresses. The quiet style and relative shortness of the book are deceptive. An immense amount of solid information is packed into the 150 pages of text, yet the author's perceptive insights and his skill in creating a literary unity lift this 'study' much above the level of a work of reference or a merely popular exposition.

¹*Aelred of Rievaulx: A Study*, by Aelred Squire, O.P. S.P.C.K., London. 1969. xii + 177 pp. 42s. (£2.1).