

## Text-Study

### Friendship Across Religions

#### Christian Sources:

##### Source 1:

St John Chrysostom: In good truth, a friend is more to be longed for than the light.

##### Source 2:

Aelred of Rievaulx's dialogue *On Spiritual Friendship (De spiritali amicitia)*<sup>1</sup>

Aelred begins by adopting Cicero's definition: "Friendship is agreement in things human and divine, with good will and charity" (1.11, quoting Cicero, *De amicitia* 6.20). He then, like Aristotle, distinguishes between three types of friendship.<sup>2</sup> His categories, however, are expressed in a decidedly Christian vocabulary. The first, 'carnal' friendship, is "created by a conspiracy in vice." The second, 'worldly' friendship, is "enkindled by hope of gain." And the third, 'spiritual' friendship, is "cemented among the righteous by a likeness of lifestyles and interests" (1.38). Aelred also maintains a teleological view of friendship. True friendship, spiritual friendship, is "a step toward the love and knowledge of God" (2.18).

Aelred's Christianization of his classical sources is clear in the following remark: "What statement about friendship can be more sublime, more true, more valuable than this? It has been proved that friendship must begin in Christ, continue with Christ, and be perfected by Christ" (1.10).

##### Source 3:

"What interfaith friendships seem to offer is a way of allowing the faith of others ... to interact with our own faith commitment to draw out dimensions of our faith response that the shadow side of our tradition may have blocked. This is far from a simple 'complementarity' approach, wherein one tradition makes up what is lacking in the other. It rather represents a process

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<sup>1</sup> Available in English translation: Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, trans. Lawrence C. Braceland (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Aelred would not have known Aristotle's works directly, since he lived just before their reintroduction to the Latin West. His work, however, is marked by many features that we can recognize as influenced by a strain of thinking about friendship of which Aristotle is the exemplar.

whereby triangulating from another tradition—not abstractly but through friendships—allows us to activate the critical dimensions of our own tradition, so clarifying what we may have obscured in the revelation we have received.”<sup>3</sup>

### ***Questions on Christian sources:***

#### *Source 1:*

*Friends are compared with ‘light’. In what ways can friends be compared with light?*

#### *Source 2:*

- 1. Are all friendships based on perceived benefits for the friends or can there be friendships that are altruistic?*
- 2. Does having a ‘benefit’ from a friendship make it more or less ‘true’?*
- 3. If friendship is about ‘agreement’, can you have friends who are very different from yourself? Does this source suggest that Christians should only be friends with each other? Is that problematic for you? Why?*

#### *Source 3:*

*What is the author suggesting as the process by which an interfaith friendship strengthens a Christian’s faith in their own religion?*

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<sup>3</sup> David B. Burrell, “Interfaith Perspectives on Reconciliation,” in *The Politics of Past Evil: Religion, Reconciliation, and the Dilemmas of Transitional Justice*, ed. Daniel Philpott (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 123.