

Writings on Body and Soul

AELRED OF RIEVAULX

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY BRUCE L. VENARDE

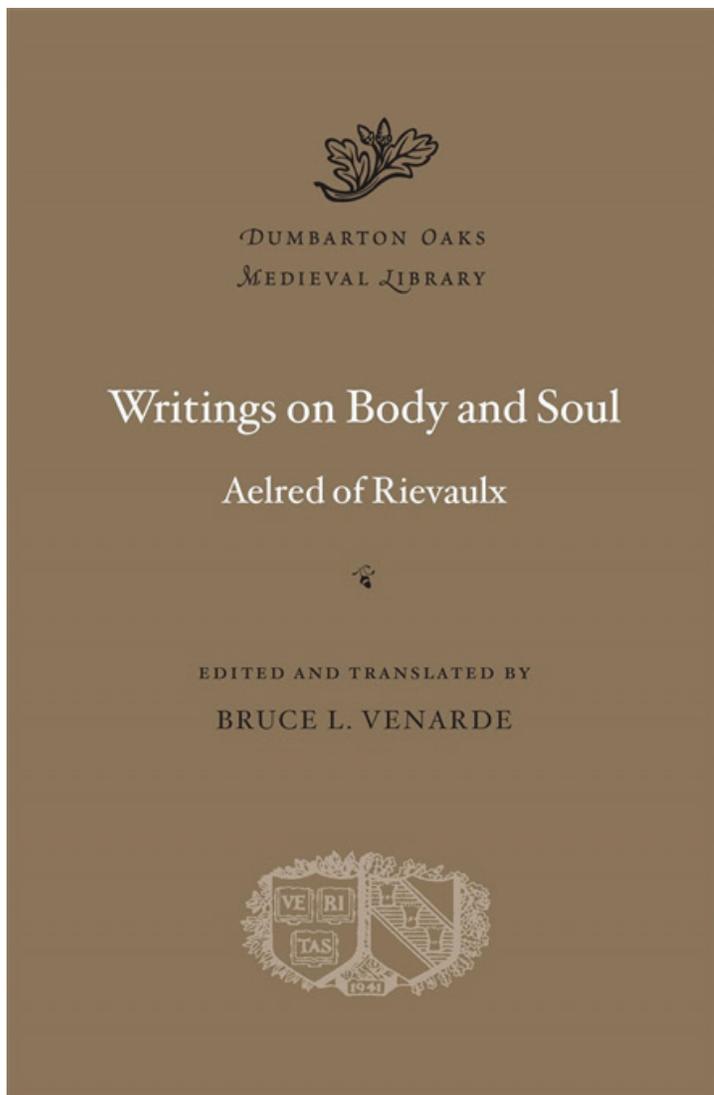
Aelred (1110–1167), abbot of Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire, has always been a controversial figure. He was beloved by his monks and widely admired, but also sharply criticized for his frankness about his own sinfulness and what some considered his favoritism and excessive leniency.

Writings on Body and Soul includes a selection of the prolific abbot's theological, historical, and devotional works. Each contains autobiographical elements, showing Aelred at turns confident and fearful, tormented and serene. In *A Pastoral Prayer*, he asserts his unworthiness and pleads for divine aid in leading his monks wisely and compassionately. *Spiritual Friendship* adapts Cicero's dialogue on friendship for Christian purposes. *A Certain Marvelous Miracle* offers a riveting account of a pregnant teenage nun, the bloody vengeance wreaked on her seducer, and the miracle of her release from her fetters. Finally, *Teachings for Recluses*, addressed to Aelred's sister, is a guide for women pursuing solitary religious perfection.

Freshly revised editions of the Latin texts appear here alongside new English translations.

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AELRED OF RIEVAULX



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BRUCE L. VENARDE

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MEDIEVAL LIBRARY

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A PASTORAL PRAYER

INCIPIT ORATIO PASTORALIS.

O bone pastor Iesu, pastor bone, pastor clemens, pastor pie: ad te clamat miser et miserabilis quidam pastor, etsi infirmus, etsi imperitus, etsi inutilis, ovium tamen tuarum qualiscumque pastor. Ad te, inquam, clamat, O bone pastor, iste non bonus pastor ad te clamat, anxius pro se, anxius pro ovibus tuis.

2. Recogitans enim pristinos annos meos in amaritudine animae meae, pavesco et contremisco ad nomen pastoris, cui me indignissimum si non sentio, certe desipio. Sed etsi misericordia tua sancta est super me ut erueres de inferno inferiori miseram animam meam, qui misereris cui volueris et misericordiam praestas in quem tibi placuerit, ita peccata condonans ut nec damnes ulciscendo, nec confundas improperando, nec minus diligas imputando, nihilominus tamen confundor et conturbor, memor quidem bonitatis tuae sed non immemor ingratitude meae. Ecce enim, ecce est ante te confessio cordis mei, confessio innumerabilium criminum meorum, a quorum dominatu sicut placuit misericordiae tuae liberasti infelicem animam meam. Pro quibus omnibus, quantum conari possunt, grates et laudes exsolvent tibi omnia viscera mea.

2 Sed non minus debitor tibi sum etiam et pro illis malis quaecumque non feci, quoniam certe quidquid mali non feci, te utique gubernante non feci, cum vel subtraheres facultatem, vel voluntatem corrigeres, vel resistendi dares virtutem.

3 Sed quid faciam, Domine Deus meus, et pro his quibus adhuc iusto iudicio tuo aut fatigari aut prosterni pateris

HERE BEGINS A PASTORAL PRAYER.

O good shepherd Jesus, good, gentle, loving shepherd: a poor and wretched shepherd cries out to you—however weak, unpracticed, and useless, but for what he is worth still a shepherd of your sheep. He cries out to you, I say, O good shepherd, this shepherd who is not good cries out to you, worried about himself, worried about your sheep.

2. For as I ponder my early years in my soul's bitterness, I fear and tremble at the title of shepherd. If I do not realize I am most unworthy of it, I am surely a fool. But although your holy mercy is upon me to rescue my poor soul from the depths of hell—you who are merciful to whomever you want and take pity on whomever you please, pardoning sins so as not to condemn in vengeance, nor to shame in reproach, nor to love less in accusation—nonetheless I am ashamed and disturbed, mindful as I am of your goodness but not unmindful of my ingratitude. For here, here before you is my heart's confession, a confession of the countless sins from whose domination you have freed my unhappy soul as it pleased your mercy. My whole being, to the best of its ability, in return offers thanks and praise for all of this.

But I am likewise no less in your debt also concerning those evils I did not do, since surely any evil I left undone was according to your guidance: either you removed the capacity for evil, or corrected my will, or gave me the strength to resist.

3 But what in addition should I do, my Lord God, about those evils with which you, in your just judgment, still allow

servum tuum, filium ancillae tuae? Innumerabilia enim sunt, Domine, pro quibus sollicita est in oculis tuis peccatrix anima mea, quamvis non ea contritione, nec tanta cautione, quantam exigeret necessitas mea vel affectaret voluntas mea.

3. Confiteor itaque tibi, Iesus meus, salvator meus, spes mea, consolatio mea. Tibi confiteor, Deus meus, me nec pro praeteritis esse adeo contritum vel timidum ut deberem, nec pro praesentibus adeo sollicitum ut oporteret. Et tu, dulcis Domine, talem—talem!—constituisti super familiam tuam, super oves pascuae tuae, et qui parum sollicitus sum pro meipso, iubes ut sollicitus sim pro illis, et qui pro meis peccatis, orare nequaquam sufficio, iubes me orare pro illis, et qui meipsum parum docui, iubes ut doceam illos. Miser ego, quid feci, quid praesumpsi, quid consensi? Immo tu, dulcis Domine: quid de hoc misero consensisti? Obsecro, dulcis Domine: nonne haec est familia tua, populus tuus peculiaris, quem secundo eduxisti de Aegypto, quem creasti, quem redemisti? Denique de regionibus congregasti eos et habitare facis unius moris in domo.

2 Cur ego, fons misericordiae, tales tali, tam caros tibi tam proiecto ab oculis tuis commendare voluisti? An ut responderes affectionibus meis et traderes me desideriis meis, essemque quem artius accusares, districtius damnares, nec pro meis tantum peccatis sed etiam pro alienis punires? Itane, O piissime, ut esset causa manifestior cur unus peccator acrius puniretur, dignum fuit ut tot et tales periculo exponerentur? Quod enim maius periculum subditis quam stultus praelatus et peccator?

your servant and your handmaid's son to be worn down and debased? For there are countless things in your sight, Lord, that trouble my sinful soul, although it lacks the measure of contrition and vigilance my need demands and my will desires.

3. And so I confess to you, my Jesus, my savior, my hope, my consolation. I confess to you, my God, that I am not as contrite or fearful about my past actions as I should be, nor suitably concerned about present ones. And you, sweet Lord, have placed such a one—such a one!—over your household, over the sheep of your pasture. You command me, troubled too little about myself, to be troubled about them. You command me, not in any way adequate to pray for my own sins, to pray for them. And you command me, who have taught myself little, to teach them. Woe is me: what have I done, what have I dared, to what have I agreed? And you, sweet Lord: to what did you agree regarding this wretch? I implore you, sweet Lord: is this not your household, your own people whom you led out of Egypt a second time, whom you created, whom you redeemed? At last you have gathered them together from various places and made them live in common under one roof.

Why then, source of mercy, did you want to entrust such 2
people to such a man, those so dear to you to one banished from your sight? Was it to respond to my feelings and surrender me to my desires, to be the one you reproach more sharply and condemn more harshly, to punish me not only for my own sins but also for the sins of others? Truly, most loving one, was it fitting that so many such people be exposed to danger in order to make it quite clear why one sinner should be punished more harshly? What greater danger is there for those under him than a foolish, sinful superior?

3 An—quod de tanta bonitate dignius creditur, suavius experitur—ideo talem constituisti super familiam tuam, ut manifesta fieret misericordia tua et notam faceres sapientiam tuam, ut sublimitas sit virtutis tuae, non ex homine, ut si forte placuerit benignitati tuae per talem bene regere familiam tuam, *non gloriatur sapiens in sapientia sua*, nec iustus in iustitia sua, *nec fortis in fortitudine sua*, quoniam cum bene regunt populum tuum illi, tu potius regis quam illi? Sic, sic: *Non nobis, Domine, non nobis sed nomini tuo da gloriam.*

4. Verum qualicumque iudicio me indignum et peccatorem in hoc officio posuisti (vel poni permisisti), quamdiu tamen pateris me praeesse illis, iubes me sollicitum esse pro illis et attentius orare pro illis. Ergo, Domine, non in iustificationibus meis prosterno preces ante faciem tuam, sed in miserationibus tuis multis, et ubi tacet meritum, clamat officium.

2 Sint igitur oculi tui super me et aures tuae ad preces meas. Sed quoniam, ut sanxit lex divina, officium sacerdotis est pro se primo, deinde pro populo sacrificium offerre, qualecumque hoc orationis sacrificium pro peccatis meis primum tuae immolo maiestati.

5. Ecce vulnera animae meae, Domine: omnia videt oculus tuus vivus et efficax, *et pertingens usque ad divisionem animae et spiritus*. Vides certe, Domine mi, vides in anima mea et praeteritorum peccatorum meorum vestigia et praesentium pericula, causas etiam et materias futurorum. Vides haec, Domine, et sic volo ut videas. Tu enim scis, O inspector cordis mei, quia nihil est in anima mea quod vellem latere oculos tuos, etiam si eorum possem cavere conspectum.

Or perhaps—something more worthily believed, more 3 sweetly experienced—you chose to place such a man at the head of your household so that your mercy might be made clear and your wisdom known, that the excellence of your virtue might not derive from man, and so that if it happens to please your kindness to rule your household well through the likes of me, *a wise man might not boast of his wisdom*, nor a just man of his justice, *nor a strong man of his strength*. For when they rule your people well, is it not really you who rule rather than they? Yes, yes: *Give glory not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name.*

4. But by whatever judgment you placed this unworthy sinner in this office (or permitted me to be placed), as long as you allow me to lead them, you command me to be concerned about them and pray more attentively for them. Therefore, Lord, I do not lay my prayers before you in my own righteousness, but according to your many mercies, and where merit is silent, duty cries out.

So let your eyes be upon me and your ears open to my 2 prayers. But because divine law has ordained that it is a priest's duty first to offer sacrifice for himself, then for his people, I first offer your majesty this sacrifice of prayer, whatever it is worth, for my sins.

5. Lord, behold my soul's wounds. Your keen, living eye sees all *and reaches all the way to the division of soul and spirit*. Surely you see, my Lord, you see in my soul both the traces of my past sins and the dangers of present ones and even the causes and substance of those to come. You see them, Lord, and so I want you to see them. For you, in your scrutiny of my heart, know there is nothing in my soul I want hidden from your eyes, even if I could avoid your gaze.

2 Vae illis quorum voluntas est ut abscondantur a te. Non enim efficiunt ut non videantur a te, sed potius ut non sanentur et puniantur a te. Vide me, dulcis Domine, vide me. Spero enim in pietate tua, O misericordissime, quia aut pius medicus videbis ut sanes, aut benignissimus magister ut corrigas, aut indulgentissimus pater ut ignoscas.

3 Hoc est igitur quod rogo, O fons pietatis, confidens de illa omnipotentissima misericordia tua et misericordissima omnipotentia tua, ut in virtute suavissimi nominis tui et mysterii sacrosanctae humanitatis tuae, dimittas mihi peccata mea et sanes languores animae meae, memor bonitatis tuae, immemor ingratitude meae. Et contra vitia et passiones malas quae adhuc impugnant eam—sive ex antiqua consuetudine mea pessima, sive ex cottidianis et infinitis negligentis meis, sive ex infirmitate corruptae et vitatae naturae meae, sive ex occulta malignorum spirituum tentatione—virtutem et fortitudinem administret mihi dulcis gratia tua, ut non consentiam neque regnent in meo mortali corpore, neque praebeam eis membra mea arma iniquitatis, donec perfecte sanes infirmitates meas et cures vulnera mea et deformia mea formes.

4 Descendat spiritus tuus bonus et dulcis in cor meum, et praeparet in eo habitaculum sibi, mundans illud *ab omni inquinamento carnis et spiritus* et infundens ei fidei, spei, et caritatis augmentum, compunctionis, pietatis et humanitatis affectum; aestus concupiscentiarum rore suae benedictionis extinguat, libidinosas commotiones et carnales affectiones sua virtute mortificet; praestet mihi in laboribus, in vigiliis, in abstinentia fervorem et discretionem ad te amandum, laudandum, orandum, meditandum, et omnem secundum te

Woe to those who desire to be hidden from you! They cannot make themselves invisible to you but rather cause themselves not to be healed but to be punished by you. Look at me, sweet Lord, look at me. My hope is in your love, O most merciful one, for you will see to it that you heal like a loving physician, correct like the kindest teacher, and forgive like the most tender father.

3 So this is what I ask, O source of love, confident in your most omnipotent mercy and your most merciful omnipotence: by the power of your sweetest name and the mystery of your most hallowed humanity, forgive my sins and heal the sickness of my soul, remembering your goodness and forgetting my ingratitude. Let your sweet grace guide me in virtue and strength to combat the vices and wicked passions that still assail my soul—whether they arise from my worst, longstanding habits, from my infinite, daily carelessness, from the weakness of my broken and corrupted nature, or from the hidden temptation of evil spirits—so that I do not give in to them, nor that they rule my mortal body, nor that I offer them my limbs as weapons of wickedness until you completely heal my weaknesses, tend to my wounds, and remedy my deformities.

4 Let your good, sweet spirit come down into my heart and prepare a home there, cleansing the heart *of all filth of flesh and spirit* and filling it with the increase of faith, hope, and love and the inclination to compunction, loving-kindness, and humane compassion. Let that spirit extinguish the fire of my desires with the dew of blessing. Let it kill lustful agitation and carnal urges with its power. Let it provide me, in my labors, vigils, and fasting, with the fervor and discretion to love, praise, supplicate, and contemplate you, all the

actum et cogitatum, devotionem et efficaciam, et in his omnibus usque ad finem vitae meae perseverantiam.

6. Et haec quidem necessaria mihi sunt propter me, O spes mea. Sunt alia quibus indigeo non solum propter me, sed et pro illis quibus me iubet prodesse magis quam praesesse. Postulavit aliquando quidem antiquorum sapientiam dari sibi ut sciret regere populum tuum; rex enim erat et placuit sermo in oculis tuis et exaudisti vocem eius et necdum in cruce obieras, necdum illam miram caritatem ostenderas populo tuo.

2 Ecce, dulcis Domine, ecce in conspectu tuo populus tuus peculiaris ante quorum oculos crux tua et signa passionis tuae in eis. Hos regendos commisisti huic peccatori servulo tuo. Deus meus, *tu scis insipientiam meam* et infirmitas mea *a te non est abscondita*. Peto itaque, dulcis Domine, non aurum, non argentum, non lapides pretiosos dari mihi, sed sapientiam ut sciam regere populum tuum. Emitte eam, O fons sapientiae, *de sede magnitudinis tuae ut mecum sit, mecum laboret*, mecum operetur, in me loquatur, disponat cogitationes, sermones, et omnia opera mea et consilia mea secundum beneplacitum tuum, ad honorem nominis tui, ad eorum profectum et meam salutem.

7. Tu scis, Domine, cor meum, quia quidquid dederis servo tuo, voluntas mea est ut totum impendatur illis et totum expendatur pro illis, insuper et ipse libenter impendar pro illis. Sic fiat, Domine mi, sic fiat. Sensus meus, sermo meus, otium meum et occupatio mea, actus meus et cogitatio mea, prosperitas mea et adversitas mea, mors mea et vita mea, sanitas et infirmitas mea, quidquid omnino sum, quod vivo, quod sentio, quod discerno—totum impendatur illis et

devotion and capacity to act and think in accordance with you, and perseverance in all these things until the end of my life.

6. And these things, O my hope, are surely necessary for my own sake. There are other things I need not only for me but also for the sake of those whom you command me to help rather than rule. One of the ancients once asked that he be allowed to know how to rule your people. He was a king, and his words were pleasing in your eyes and you listened to his voice when you had not yet died on the cross, not yet shown that wonderful love to your people.

Here, sweet Lord, here in your sight are your own people. 2 Before their eyes are your cross and the signs of your suffering are in them. You have committed them to be ruled by this sinner, your lowly servant. My God, *you know my foolishness* and my weakness is *not a secret from you*. Therefore, sweet Lord, I ask to be given not gold, silver, or precious stones, but the wisdom to know how to rule your people. Send wisdom, O font of wisdom, *from the throne of your greatness, to be with me, labor with me*, work with me, speak in me, and shape my thoughts, words, and all my actions and decisions according to your will, to the honor of your name, for their spiritual progress and my salvation.

7. Lord, you know my heart: it is my will that whatever you give to your servant be devoted entirely to them, spent entirely for them, and moreover that I myself should be devoted gladly to them. May it so happen, my Lord, may it so happen. My feelings, my speech, my rest and my work, my action and my thought, my success and my adversity, my death and my life, my health and my sickness, all that I am, what I live, what I feel, what I discern—let it all be paid out

totum expendatur pro illis pro quibus tu ipse non de-
dignaberis expendi.

2 Doce me itaque servum tuum, Domine, doce me, quaeso,
per spiritum sanctum tuum quomodo me impendam illis et
quomodo me expendam pro illis. Da mihi, Domine, per
ineffabilem gratiam tuam ut patienter sustineam infirmi-
tates eorum, pie compatiar, discrete subveniam. Discam
magisterio spiritus tui maestos consolari, pusillanimes robo-
rare, lapsos erigere, infirmari cum infirmis, uri cum scan-
dalizatis, omnibus omnia fieri, ut omnes lucrifaciam. Da ve-
rum sermonem et rectum et bene sonantem in os meum,
quo aedificentur in fide, spe, et caritate, in castitate et humi-
litate, in patientia et oboedientia, in spiritus fervore et men-
tis devotione.

3 Et quoniam tu dedisti illis hunc caecum ductorem, indoc-
tum doctorem, nescium rectorem, et—si non propter me,
propter illos—tamen doce quem doctorem posuisti, duc
quem alios ducere praecepisti, rege quem rectorem statuisti.
Doce me itaque, dulcis Domine, corripere inquietos, con-
solari pusillanimes, suscipere infirmos, et uniuersique pro
natura, pro moribus, pro affectione, pro capacitate, pro
simplicitate, pro loco et tempore, sicut tu videris expedire,
memetipsum conformare. Et quoniam, vel propter infirmi-
tatem carnis meae vel propter pusillanimitatem spiritus mei
vel propter vitium cordis mei, parum vel certe nihil aedifi-
cant eos labor aut vigiliae aut abstinentia mea, aedificet eos,
rogo, largiente misericordia tua, humilitas mea, caritas mea,
patientia mea, et misericordia mea. Aedificet illos sermo
meus et doctrina mea et prosit illis semper oratio mea.

entirely to them and spent entirely for them, for the good of
those for whom you yourself did not scorn to be spent.

2 Therefore, Lord, teach me your servant, teach me, I be-
seech you, through your holy spirit, how to devote myself to
them and how to spend myself for them. Grant me through
your indescribable grace the ability to endure their weak-
nesses patiently, to suffer with them lovingly, to help them
discerningly. Let me learn from your spirit's instruction how
to comfort the sorrowful, strengthen the fainthearted, raise
the fallen, be weak with the weak, share resentment with
the offended, become all things to all people so to gain them
all. Give me truthful and righteous words, eloquent on my
tongue, so that they may be built up in faith, hope, and love,
in chastity and humility, in patience and obedience, in fer-
vor of spirit and devotion of mind.

3 And because you have given them this blind leader, this
untaught teacher, this ignorant guide, teach one you have
made a teacher, lead him you have ordered to lead, rule him
you have appointed to rule—if not for my sake, then for
theirs. Teach me, therefore, sweet Lord, to rebuke the rest-
less, to comfort the fainthearted, to support the weak, and
to adapt my own self to each one according to his nature,
habits, disposition, capacity or simplicity, according to place
and time, just as you see fit. Owing to the weakness of my
flesh, the faintheartedness of my spirit, and the corruption
of my heart, my labor, vigils, and fasting can strengthen
them little or indeed not at all, so I beg that through the gift
of your mercy, my humility, my love, my patience, and my
mercy may do so. Let my words and my teaching strengthen
them and my prayer always be to their benefit.

Biblical and Pastoral Poetry

ALCIMUS AVITUS

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY MICHAEL ROBERTS

Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus, bishop of Vienne and a vigorous defender of Christian orthodoxy, was born into the senatorial aristocracy in southern Gaul in the mid-fifth century and lived until 518. The verse in *Biblical and Pastoral Poetry* was written in the late fifth or early sixth century.

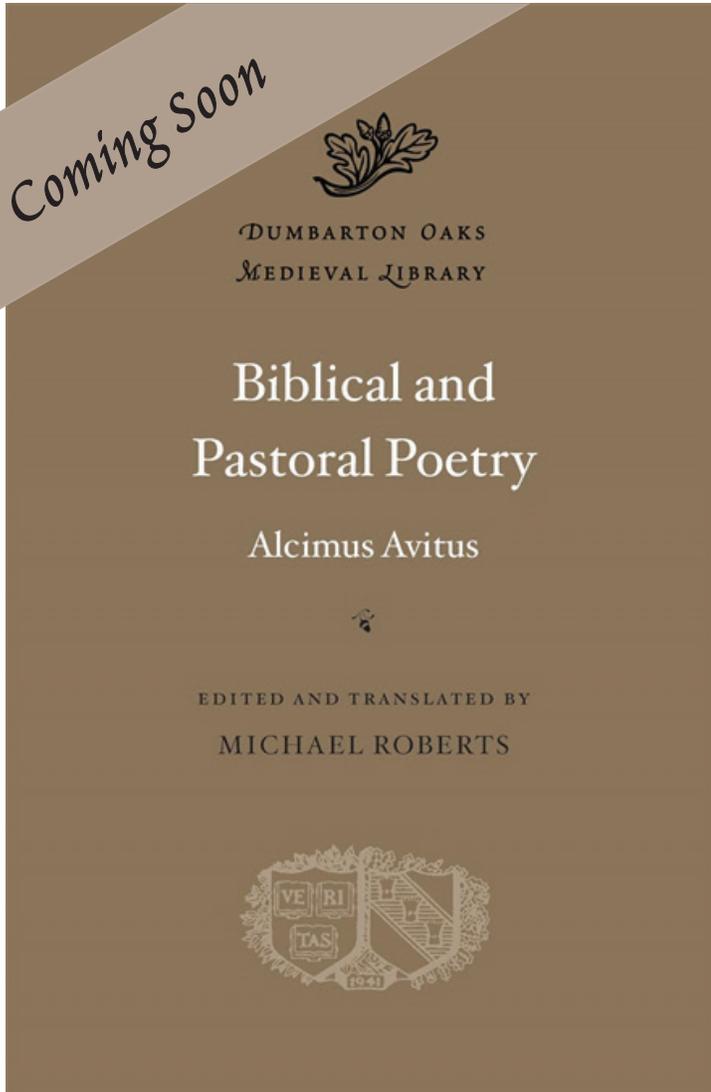
Avitus's most famous work, the *Spiritual History*, narrates the biblical stories of creation, the Fall and expulsion from paradise, the Flood, and the Israelites' escape from Egypt. He revitalizes Christian epic poetry, highlighting original sin and redemption and telling the history of Christian salvation with dramatic dialogue and rich description.

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With works ranging from *The Vulgate Bible* to *Beowulf*, and genres as diverse as travelogues, scientific treatises, and epic and lyric poetry, this series brings a vibrant medieval world populated with saints and sinners, monsters and angels, kings and slaves, poets and scholars, to a new generation of readers who will discover cultures and literatures both hauntingly familiar and wondrously alien.

