

## Prayer of the Month • August 2011

Move our hearts with the calm, smooth flow of your grace. Let the river of your love run through our souls. May my soul be carried by the current of your love, towards the wide infinite ocean of heaven. Stretch out my heart with your strength, as you stretch out the sky above the earth. Smooth out any wrinkles of hatred or resentment. Enlarge my soul that it may know more fully your truth.

Gilbert of Hoyland, 12th century



God's love flows freely, irresistably. Gilbert of Hoyland, a twelfth-century abbot, asks for that steady flow to be directed towards us and into us. To be immersed in God's love means to be carried beyond ourselves. Gilbert prays that we may not remain unaltered by this love, but be 'stretched out' – our hearts enlarged to take in more fully what God provides. Gilbert is clear that to experience more fully God's love is to know more fully God's truth.

Gilbert was a great admirer of Bernard of Clairvaux – he may have trained at Citeaux himself – and also a friend of Aelred of Rievaulx. He was appointed abbot of the monastery at Swineshead, in the Lincolnshire fens – known as 'hollandia' – perhaps to help the monastery to adapt to Cistercian usages, as in 1147, Swineshead, along with the other savigniac abbeys, had become incorporated into the Cistercian order. Sometime after Bernard died in 1153, Gilbert was asked to continue Bernard's incomplete series of sermons on the Song of Songs. Bernard had written 86 sermons on this; Gilbert wrote 47 before he died in 1172 (and then John of Ford wrote a further 120, so completing the series!). Gilbert seems likely to have died at the French Cistercian monastery of Larrivour. Fifteen other works by him are known to have survived.

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