

the world? For it may be so, and if it is, then indeed it shows that there is something very wrong. But it need not be so: and if you find on the contrary that through it your work is enriched, your family life made more gay and tender, your prayers deepened, your work for men more wise and sympathetic and gentle, then indeed you have nothing to do but to thank God: there is nothing more to be said.

Or rather, there is one thing more; and it appears very clearly in these letters. When God brings a human love to a soul who before loved only himself it is not a rejection of her love but the exact contrary: he is giving her more to love him with. He may well be asking something harder, more complicated, of her: he certainly is not asking something smaller. Every love you have—of nature, of art, of men, of wisdom—is an added way of loving and worshipping him, an additional gift to offer him. But that means, in the last resort, a gift to give back to him. For every love is a new joy, but implies also a new sorrow, until that ‘strong city’ is reached on which the hearts of Jordan and Diana were set. ‘Naked I came, said he, when I left my mother’s womb, and whence I came, naked I must go.’ What prudence demands of us, and seldom has the lesson been more beautifully taught than in these letters, is that we should make our own those other words of Job, to be constantly with us: The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord.



## ON HUMAN FRIENDSHIP

ST AELRED OF RIEVAULX<sup>1</sup>

**PROLOGUE:** While I was yet a boy at school and took great delight in the company of my fellows, in the midst of the habits and vices with which that period of life is usually beset, my energy was wholly given to affection and devoted to love; so that nothing seemed to me more pleasing, nothing more joyful, nothing more useful, than to be loved and to love. So, fluctuating between diverse loves and friendships, my mind was dragged hither and

<sup>1</sup> A new translation by Bernard Delfendahl.

thither, and being ignorant of the law of true friendship, was often deceived by its mere image. At length there came into my hands Cicero's book on friendship, which immediately presented itself to me as useful by the sanity of its opinions and as enjoyable by its perfection of style. And although I did not see myself fit for such friendship, I rejoiced at having found some rule of friendship to which I could conform the course of my loves and affections. Then, when it pleased the good Lord to make straight the crooked, to lift up the bruised, to cleanse the leper with his healing touch, I left my worldly ambitions and entered a monastery. Immediately I gave myself to the reading of holy writings, since before, my eyes could not bear even a superficial reading of them, being diseased, and used only to the darkness of material things. Therefore, as my taste for holy Scripture increased and that for the knowledge which the world had given me correspondingly decreased, those things came to mind which I had read of friendship; and now I was astonished that they no longer held their accustomed savour. For now indeed, nothing which was not sweetened with the sweetness of most dear Jesus, nothing which was not salted with the salt of the Scriptures could call forth from me the fullness of affection; and turning them over again and again in my mind I sought to see if they could be supported by the authority of the Scriptures. Since I read many things concerning friendship in the writings of the saints and wished to love in a spiritual way and was not able, I began to write of spiritual friendship and to prescribe for myself the rules of a chaste and holy love. . . . If anyone benefits from reading this, let him give thanks to God and ask Christ's mercy for my sins. If anyone thinks what we have written superfluous or useless, may he pardon my wretchedness which led me to restrain by this work the rush of my thoughts in these reflections.

### THE ORIGIN OF FRIENDSHIP

**ÆLRED:** Here we are—you and I together—may Christ be a third among us. There is none now to interrupt, none to prevent our intimate conversation and no ass's braying or

rumpus can penetrate this solitude. Go ahead then, dear friend, open your heart and pour into the ears of a friend whatever pleases you; and not ungratefully will we grant the place, time and attention. For, a little while ago, as I sat in the midst of a gathering of the brethren, they were arguing vigorously all around me, enquiring of one thing and disputing of another. This one raised questions concerning the Scriptures, that one about customs, one about vices, another virtues; you alone were silent. Then, lifting your head, you prepared to enter the conversation; but as if your voice were killed on your lips, you again dropped your head and were silent; then, going a little way from us and coming back again, you wore a sad expression. Among all these, only to me was it given to see that it was for the sake of some interior preoccupation that you withdrew from the crowd and desired solitude.

Ivo: That is just how it is; and it pleases me greatly to know that you take such care of your son, whose mind and intention was open to you only through a spirit of affection. And will you be kind enough even to allow me, as often as you visit your sons here, to have you at least once to myself when the others are gone, so that I can pour out the fire of my heart without fear?

AELRED: I shall most certainly do so, and willingly. I am very happy that I do not see you prone to this idle and frivolous talk, but that you always speak of something useful, and necessary to your advancement in perfection. So then, speak with confidence and share all your cares and thoughts with a friend; so that you may either learn something or teach something, give and receive, pour in and draw out.

Ivo: Indeed, I am prepared not to teach or to give, but to receive, not to pour in but to draw out; for to act thus becomes my youth, is required by my inexperience, and is recommended by my rule. But lest with this talk I foolishly take up time which is necessary for other things, I would like you to teach me something of spiritual friendship, viz: what it is and of what use; how it arises and how fulfilled; whether it can exist between all men, and if not between all, then between whom; also, how it can be

preserved unbroken, and brought holily to a close without the hastiness of a quarrel.

**ÆLRED:** I am amazed that you should choose to ask me of these things when they are all more than sufficiently treated by the greatest teachers of the past; and especially, since as your boyhood was filled with studies of this kind, you must have read Cicero's book *On Friendship*, where he treats most fully, in a pleasing style, of all things concerning it and describes, as I say, certain of its laws and precepts.

**Ivo:** Indeed the book is not unfamiliar to me, and I have at times taken great pleasure in it. But from the time when the Holy Scriptures began to bring forth for me something of the richness of their treasure, the most rich name of Christ took charge of my affections; whatever I read or listened to, even though it were ingeniously and eloquently presented, was without taste or enlightenment for me if it lacked the salt of the divine writings and the flavouring of that most rich name. Wherefore, also those things which are said here, provided they are according to reason, I wish to be confirmed by the authority of scripture; and I wish it to be clearly shown how that friendship itself which should exist among us, may be begun in Christ, and its results and utility referred to Christ. For it is evident that Cicero was ignorant of the nature of true friendship, since he was entirely ignorant of its beginning and end—Christ.

**ÆLRED:** I have found my better, I confess, and so cannot teach you, as though I did not know myself or the measure of my powers, but will rather confer with you. For you yourself have opened the way to us both and lit that most brilliant light on entering our enquiry, which will not allow us to stray, but will lead us by a sure path to a sure conclusion of our proposed discussion. What indeed more sublime can be said of friendship, what can prove more true or more useful than that it should be begun in Christ, should be exercised in accord with Christ and be perfected by Christ? Proceed then, and say what seems to be the first thing which should be determined about friendship.

Ivo: I think that we should first discuss what friendship is, lest our picture should seem painted by an artless fellow if we do not know about what should be the course and quality of our debate.

AELRED: Aren't Cicero's words sufficient for you here: Friendship is the sharing together of human and divine experiences in a spirit of goodwill and love?

Ivo: If this definition is sufficient for you, I will take it as sufficient for me.

AELRED: So then we will say that whoever shares the same sentiments and intentions concerning human and divine experiences, in a spirit of goodwill and love, has reached the perfection of friendship.

Ivo: How could it be otherwise? But I do not see what Cicero, a pagan, would have wished to signify by the word 'love' or 'goodwill'.

AELRED: Perhaps by the word 'love' he means affection of mind and by 'goodwill' the effect of action. For the sharing together of human and divine experiences itself should be lovable in the minds of both, i.e. should give pleasure and be much prized: and also there should be in external things an exercise of actions showing goodwill and joy.

Ivo: I agree, this definition pleases me well enough, except that I think it can be applied to pagans, Jews, or even unworthy Christians. For I am persuaded that true friendship cannot exist among those who are without Christ.

AELRED: As we proceed it will become clear enough to us whether the definition is lacking, or excessive in something; so that we may either reject it, or else accept it as full enough but yet as not containing too much. But even if this definition seems imperfect to you, you will be able to understand from it something of what friendship is.

Ivo: Please do not let me tire you; if these things are not sufficient, merely explain to me the meaning of the word friendship.

AELRED: If you will, then, pardon my ignorance, I will proceed in such a way that you may not force me to teach what I do not know. It is from 'Freon' (the Anglo-Saxon verb 'to love') it seems that the word 'friend' comes,

and from the word 'friend' 'friendship'. And love is a certain affection of the soul, because of which it strives for something with desire, and wishes to enjoy it; and by which it also does enjoy it with a certain interior pleasure, and embraces and retains it. But we have explained the affections and movements of love as clearly and diligently as we were able in our *Speculum*, which work you know well enough. Thus the friend is said to be, as it were, the guardian of love, or as some prefer, of the soul itself. For my friend should be the guardian of our mutual love or of my very soul, so that he guards its secrets with a faithful silence. Anything bad in it he will see, and will look to heal it and will tolerate it on behalf of what is good. He will be joyful when it is joyful, sorrowful when it is sorrowful, and everything of his friend's he will feel as his own.

Friendship, then, is the virtue itself, by which the souls themselves are bound together in a pact of such affection and richness, and from being many are made one. Wherefore, even by secular philosophers, friendship is not listed among the things subject to chance and decay, but among the virtues themselves, which are eternal. And in the Book of Proverbs Solomon seems to agree with them, saying: 'He who is a friend loves for all time' (Prov. 17), clearly declaring that friendship is eternal, if it is real. If, however, it ceases to be, then it was not real even when it seemed to exist.

IVO: How is it then that we read that between the greatest friends the greatest enmities arose?

ÆLFRED: If God wills, we will discuss this more fully in its proper place. Meanwhile I want you to believe this: He was never a friend, who has been able to injure him whom he has once received in friendship; but also, he has never tasted the delights of real friendship who, being injured, loses his affection for him whom he has once loved. He who is a friend loves for all time; although accused, although injured, although given to the flames, although fixed to a cross, he who is a friend loves for all time. And as our Jerome says, 'Friendship which can cease to be, never truly had come to be'.

Ivo: Since in real friendship there is so great a perfection, it is not to be wondered at that in antiquity there were so few who were praised as true friends. For, as Cicero says, in the many ages which had gone before, the fame was celebrated of scarcely more than three or four pairs of friends. But in our times, that is in Christian times, the rarity of friends is so great, it seems to me that I am uselessly tiring myself in seeking this virtue, which I already nearly despair of attaining, being terrified by its amazing sublimity.

AELRED: Someone has said, 'For great things the effort is great'. Wherefore, it is for the virtuous mind to consider what is sublime and difficult, so that he may either obtain them, once desired, or may more clearly understand and learn that they are to be desired; since he is to be believed to have advanced no little way who has gained in the knowledge of virtue, no matter how far he may be from virtue itself. However, a Christian is not to despair of attaining any virtue whatsoever, for daily, through the Gospel, he hears God say, 'Ask and you shall receive . . .'. Nor is it to be wondered at if among the pagans the followers of true virtue were so few, for they did not know the Lord, the free giver of virtues, of whom it is written, 'The Lord of virtues, he is the King of glory'. Of friends who had faith in him, I can give you, not three or four pairs, but a thousand; and of them is true what was said or thought such a great miracle in Pylades and Orestes,—they were prepared to die for each other. Were they not strong in the virtue of true friendship, according to Cicero's definition, of whom it is written: 'In the multitude of the faithful there was one mind and one heart; nor did anyone call anything his own, but they held all things in common'. How could there not have been among them the most complete sharing together of human and divine experiences, in a spirit of love and goodwill, in whom there was one heart and one mind? How many martyrs have laid down their lives for their brothers! How many have cared for neither expense nor labour, nor the torture of the body itself! I believe you have often read, and not without tears, how the girl Antiochena was

rescued from the brothels by the most beautiful ruse of a certain soldier, and afterwards had as companion in martyrdom him whom she had found as the guardian of her chastity in the brothel.

I could give you many such examples if their length did not prevent it or their richness indicate silence. For Jesus Christ announced it; he spoke and they were multiplied without number. 'Greater love than this no man hath that he lay down his life for his friends.'

Ivo: Should we hold then that there is no difference between friendship and love?

AELRED: Indeed there is a great difference; for divine authority sanctions that many more are to be received in the ambit of love than in the embrace of friendship. For, by the law of charity we are forced to give the warmth of love not only to friends, but also to enemies. But only those we call friends, to whom we do not fear to deliver our hearts and all that lies therein, those most dear to us, bound to us in the same law and security of the Faith. . . .



## ON LOVE FOR GOD

ST BASIL<sup>1</sup>

**L**OVE for God assuredly cannot be taught. We did not learn from others to rejoice in the light or to seek to live; no one taught us to love our parents or those who brought us up. In the same way, and indeed much more truly, the lesson of desiring God is nothing external to us. But as soon as the living creature was formed—I am speaking of man—a sort of seminal principle was implanted in him, having within it a native propensity to love. The school of God's commandments takes charge of this: the right place to cultivate it carefully, to rear it skilfully, and with God's grace bring it to perfection. We welcome your zeal, then, as indispensable for this end. By God's gift and with the help of your prayers, we will try, according to the power

<sup>1</sup> Translated from *The Longer Rules*, question 2, by John Higgins, monk of Quarr.