

Homosexual!

Letters to Aelred

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These four letters to "Aelred" are enlightening and instructive. They present the problems of the homosexual person with understanding and sympathy. They are challenging to us all. Is our love truly Christian love, "always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes?" - THE EDITOR

Introduction

During some twenty years as editor of the Messenger of the Sacred Heart it was part of my task to counsel those who wrote to me for help or guidance. Much of this was done by printing the readers' letters and my replies in the columns of "The Editor's Chair".

Besides these "open" letters there was also a great amount of private correspondence concerning matters which were not suited to open counselling, or when it was necessary to guard secrecy and the anonymity of the inquirer.

Many of those who had to be answered privately were men and youths (or women) with a homosexual problem. It was through them that I learnt how many there were of such people who were desperate for help and understanding, and how hard it was for them to seek help in the ordinary way.

Even in the confessional some of them had received such unsympathetic hearing that they had been alienated from the sacraments. This was for them often a matter of great hurt because they are, in the main, more than ordinarily attracted to religious practices and they have greater need than most for the support of their religious counsellors.

Recalling these difficulties, when I was asked to write a pamphlet for the A.C.T.S. I decided to do so in the form of letters to an imaginary homosexual man (or it could be a woman).

Trying to think up a name for my imaginary correspondent, I was confronted with the fact that every name that occurred to me might have been a cause of embarrassment to someone. So I called him Aelred.

In the first place I have never known a man with this name, nor do I expect to. The other reason will be obvious to all who read these pages.

I

Dear Aelred,

So you have discovered that you are homosexual!

You are 23. It is perhaps a pity that you did not face this before. At one time such matters were so little discussed, so little known, so little understood, that surely many young men who were afflicted this way entered on a life of bewilderment and frustration without ever facing the truth about themselves.

Nowadays however, this and all other aspects of the sexual life are discussed as freely as farmers discuss the weather. It is scarcely possible for a young man to come to your age without knowing something about this condition which so intimately affects his own personality and life.

Aelred, I don't believe you! That is to say, I do not believe you when you say that you did not know until now that you are homosexual. That is why I used the word "discovered". You have only now discovered it.

It was there all the time, or most of the time, but covered up. At first it was covered up because our whole sexual consciousness is covered when we are very young. It emerges slowly as our body develops.

Just as the other instincts begin to make themselves known as they seek their proper activity - to eat - to move about - to talk - to express ourselves by drawing, etc. - so the sexual instinct when it is ripe begins to emerge and communicate its needs. At first, timidly and superficially, and eventually violently and seeking its fullest satisfaction. We are then fully aware of it. It is uncovered.

Sex is one of the instincts placed in the animal creation by God, and therefore in man as part of the animal world. In the earliest chapters of the Bible we are told of man's instincts to eat, to rule the lower creation, to offer sacrifice, and to "increase and multiply".

"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good." (Genesis 1:31)

So the sex instinct shows itself in us, but we have to look at it, recognize it, appraise it. We must deal with it in a rational manner because we are not merely animals; we are rational animals. We must come to terms with this instinct just as we must come to terms with all the other instincts. We cannot turn away and pretend it doesn't exist. We must discover it.

All man's instincts are God given, and good in themselves. Sex is good. More than that, along with all creation, it is "very good". Anyone who thinks of it as filthy, degrading, sinful in itself, is despising the works of God. And if we despise the works of God, we despise God.

There have been people in every age who follow some form of religious "dualism". That is to say they look on creation as having two sources; one a good source, God - the other an evil source. Sometimes they assert that this evil source is none other than the Devil. Often enough this "dualism" is not expressed or formulated in any way. It must be judged from their attitude towards, sex, alcohol, money; sometimes towards all material things; from the Manichees through the Waldensians and Puritan Protestantism and even into our own time.

This strange deformation of true religion arises frequently from the enemy of mankind transforming himself into an "angel of Light" as St. Paul warns us (2 Cor 11:14). This is one of his favourite ways of leading astray people who want to be good but who are lacking in prudence and do not seek proper guidance. Because sex, alcohol and so on so often lead to sin and evil states and unhappiness, they attribute evil to these creatures themselves rather than to the disordered use of them wherein lies the evil.

In short they say, "Sex is evil" - "Alcohol is the Devil's gift". If they do not put it into so many words their conduct shows that this is the way their minds are working.

In our recent past there were many who acted in this unnatural way. Some of them were parents or teachers and the effect of their influence on children was sometimes disastrous. In some it led to the very behaviour against which they were most anxious to protect them. (This has commonly been the result of dualism in religion.) In others it led to an unnaturally inhibited state which resulted in scrupulous fears, tormented consciences, restricted and marred married life. Often it prevented marriage altogether.

Those who suffered this kind of thing had a sense of shame concerning all sexual impulse in themselves. Sometimes it extended itself to the sex life of others.

This is to fight against the truth. And to fight against the truth is to fight against the light and the life. Anyone who fights against the truth, as he finds it in himself, sets his soul out as a battlefield and his whole life may be spent amidst unnecessary internal turmoil and strife.

You have been in this state for a long while now. That is why I say that I cannot believe you when you say that you were unaware of this deviation in your own personality. You have known it for a long time.

The knowledge broke on you slowly over the years. We often give reluctant admission to knowledge we would rather not have to accept. On the one hand you were not experiencing those normal attractions which your companions appeared to enjoy; on the other hand you found in yourself attractions which they did not seem to share.

You felt shame, inadequacy, isolation and inferiority; so you tried to behave as if the whole problem did not exist. You put it down to the fact that physically you were maturing more slowly (as you possibly were) or that the others were all exaggerating their affairs of the heart (and there could have been some truth in this too). At the same time you were not at all happy about this very important part of your life.

Now at the age of 23 you cannot pretend any longer without danger of risking your sanity. You have irrefutable evidence that you are homosexual. The realization which should have come to you slowly has come suddenly. Naturally enough you feel shock. All the welling-up shame, confusion, bitterness, has hit you at once. Not because the knowledge is new, but because you can no longer refuse to admit it.

You are discovered; and not only to yourself, but to another person. As well as the shame involved, you are experiencing a relief that what was for so long bottled up in you is released. You can talk about it to at least one other. At the same time you are embittered. You feel a little shattered. You are also bubbling over with questions: Why me? Is it curable? What is the Cause?

Cheer up! Not all is lost. God is in his heaven and watching over you. He knows your every thought and difficulty. He understands you better than I or anyone else can ever understand anything. He created you.

Moreover he has given you the grace to discover yourself to a spiritual guide; something which, if you had done it long ago would have saved you from much anguish, and perhaps from this recent sin.

Well, I do not despise you. What you tell me does not revolt me in the least. I accept it as one of the facts of life. In some ways an inevitable fact in the world in which we find ourselves. My first reaction is one of great compassion. My earnest wish is to help you as much as I can; and to hurt you as little as possible in the process.

With God's grace you have done the first thing necessary. You have come for help. That is the first step. No one can hope for a cure or treatment if he will not even go to the doctor. But just going to him is not enough. We must disclose all the symptoms and be honest with him.

It is no use asking the doctor to help if we conceal some of the important facts. If it is for some bodily illness we have consulted him, after he has taken the first necessary particulars he will ask us to strip off so that he may make an examination for himself and perhaps learn some facts we ourselves are unaware of or have not thought to be worth mentioning.

It is the same when we go to a "soul doctor". And you have done this. You have bared your soul in the self revealing letter you have sent me. It must have been very hard to write. Possibly when you watched the letter disappear into the post box you felt some panic and wished you could recall it. Post boxes are iron hearted things! You were committed. From then on there was no going back. It may be hard, but it is at the same time assuring to know that from now you can only go forward.

I do not promise you a soft sell. If surgery is absolutely necessary a good doctor is not going to let you down lightly with a few pills. That is only postponing the inevitable and making it worse to boot. Your condition is unfortunate. Most unfortunate. But it is not at all as bad as you think, and I hope I shall be able to show you this.

In the first place it will be a great relief to be able to discuss your problem freely. You mention the relief you experienced at being able to talk about it with your new found friend. But I detect anxiety that even he may not be trusted with your secret. Well you may rest assured that you can speak of your problem with the priest with the utmost confidence.

Yes, you may send me the specific questions you want answered.

II

Dear Aelred,

I hope that I shall be able to give you some helpful answers to the questions you have asked. A completely satisfactory answer to every question I do not think anyone could give.

1. Why am I homosexual?

I doubt if anyone can give a certain answer to that. I can say that some things are not the cause. For example it is not an inherited trait. I suppose that should be obvious! I can say with certainty too that it is not through any fault of your own or because you want to be.

There may be some extreme cases to the contrary, but for most ordinary homosexuals it is true to say that you are not physically different from any ordinary heterosexual person.

It would seem that there are various causes. Some homosexuals are almost certainly such because a mother has wanted to have a daughter instead of a son (or vice versa). She has by word and conduct, although unconsciously, deeply impressed this in the young child's mind and heart. The desire to please mother has been so great that he has from his earliest years tried to do his best. He

cannot ever be a daughter; but he will be as nearly one as possible. In these cases the boy generally develops into an effeminate type, in voice, gait, gesture, interests and various other mannerisms and reactions. It is important to note however, that many who are like this have no homosexual tendencies at all.

Another common cause is the absence of a father, or some substitute male figure such as grandfather, uncle, etc., in the early childhood years, either because of a death, broken marriage, war or some similar circumstance. We judge this from the frequency with which this sort of a background appears and especially its incidence with those from orphanages.

Unhappy marriages and homes sometimes give such an abhorrence of marriage that the ordinary sex direction is deviated.

However once again we must be warned that this fear of marriage does not always lead to homosexuality.

In some cases it is attributed to the condition of having a weak father and a domineering mother; but on the other hand it is said to arise sometimes as a result of having an over strict or bullying father who has driven his son too much into the company of his mother and her female friends.

It has sometimes been observed as the result of a mother (usually) setting the child's mind against marriage for a variety of reasons: she is possessive; she fears for marriage because of some disease she knows of or fears.

These are all to a great extent guesswork; and they do not explain why brothers with exactly the same background have developed differently.

Even if you knew what was the cause in your own case, I do not know that it would be very helpful. It could be a cause of bitter recrimination.

2. Can I be cured?

One thing is certain, it is a personality problem; a psychological psycho-genetic problem. Theoretically it should be curable. I have never heard of any true homosexual being cured of this condition. The best that can be hoped for is to be helped to live out one's life happily along with this disability.

Firstly, it is of the greatest importance to know yourself. Know if you are truly a homosexual; that is to say one for whom the idea of a sexual union with a woman is distasteful; even revolting.

If you were a boy I would warn you that some sort of a boyish "crush" for another boy or a teacher is not even an indication of homosexuality. This often happens in the lives of boys and girls without ever meaning anything like this.

There is no doubt that some people are more erotically inclined than others. Some are less than normally disturbed by sexual desires. Learn that whatever grade you might place yourself in, in this respect, it has nothing to do with your homosexuality as such. Sexual indulgence, of whatever kind it might be, at too young an age usually leads to greater difficulties in controlling sexual urges later on. Especially if it is frequently practised. Here no less than anywhere else it is true to say that the appetite grows on feeding. Many homosexuals who are very promiscuously inclined think it is a necessary condition of their homosexuality. This is not so.

Some homosexuals are more inclined towards other men in an aggressive, male manner; others are attracted to them as a woman might be. These are variations as it were within the species. To understand them, especially in so far as they affect your own condition, is part of knowing yourself. If you have a suitable counsellor invoke his help. Some of these things may be more easily discernible by another than by yourself.

However you arrive at the answers, these are some of the questions you must ask yourself. Having answered them as well as you can, you must learn to live with yourself. Remember that good advice that we must try to change whatever is wrong or evil in so far as it can be changed; learn to live with what cannot be changed; and learn to distinguish between the two.

A good psychiatrist or psychologist can help those who are seriously unable to adjust themselves. And remember, as with so many other problems - a sense of humour is of inestimable worth.

3. But why me?

One of the impediments to obtaining a healthy attitude and having a happy life is self pity.

Don't think that you are the only frustrated person in the world. There are many who are not homosexual, but very actively heterosexual, and who for one reason or another, cannot without sin, indulge their sexual appetite. There are many lonely people who for a variety of reasons are denied the companionship they so earnestly seek or desire.

There are many others who are deformed, deprived of sight or hearing, suffering great physical disabilities or illness, whose lot is much worse than yours. And in my experience, most of these are bravely happy people. So don't whinge. Don't start to blame your parents; or God. Don't blame yourself either. Learn to accept it as "just one of those things" which God allows some people to suffer and out of which, with his grace they can draw great profit.

4. What spiritual advice do you give me?

The old fundamentals: Prayer, penance and the sacraments. Pray, just as everyone else has to, for your special needs. I do not say to pray for a cure, though there is no harm in doing so any more than in praying to be relieved from any other affliction. But first accept the condition, lest your prayer grow into an expression rather of rebellion than be a true prayer.

Penance. Since the only way of life open to a pure homosexual is generally one of celibacy, this needs special support. It needs a greater degree of self-control, sexually, than the married state. Self-control is gained by controlling self. We control self by denying self. Constant self-control in little things helps us to that degree of self-control that is necessary in order to resist greater temptations.

Remember too, that "no temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Cor: 10:13.)

The sacraments are God's chief channels of grace. The Eucharist is the food of the soul and properly received must nourish us to strength. The sacrament of Penance, properly used is a great act of humility; it is a great assurance of good will; above all it is a sacrament, and God works in us most effectively through his sacraments. Perhaps a homosexual needs the consolation of the sacrament and compassionate spiritual direction more than most other people. Try to find a confessor who has real empathy and stay with him.

5. What about companionship?

The need for companionship is relative. Some are more dependent on it than others. Homosexuals, more than most people, feel loneliness. They live at first in a kind of solitary confinement. That is the state you had been living in until you found your present friend.

Unfortunately many spend their lives making understanding friends, and each friend is a new danger. In their desperation they begin to find homosexuals everywhere, even in the most heterosexual acquaintances. If anyone shows them the least sympathy they take it to be the sympathy of another homosexual. This can lead to very embarrassing situations.

The great thing is to learn to stand on your own feet and not be too dependent on human support. But the desire for like companionship is so great that not all can live out this life of isolation. In that case it is better to seek out companions who like yourself are battling against the tide than those who are just drifting with it.

Those who meet this difficulty best are those who devote their lives to helping others. Frequently their attractiveness for others of the same sex gives them an almost charismatic suitability for helping them.

This brings me to that other question:

6. What about "Acceptance", etc.

The temptation to form or join groups such as this made up of homosexuals who feel a need for banding together and think thereby to help one another is very understandable. Especially when one sees the success of Alcoholics Anonymous, Recovery, etc. But homosexuals are quite different in their needs from other people.

The alcoholic may help the alcoholic; someone with a colostomy may greatly encourage another who is newly suffering this disability. But asking a homosexual man to help a homosexual man must be likened rather to asking a match to help a tin of petrol.

Such groups must be groups of prayer. They need the help of compassionate priests and counsellors. They have great risks but having regard to the extreme desire for acceptance and for understanding found in many homosexuals, I could not find it in myself to absolutely ban such society. But it must be under the same conditions under which one enters into any other area which presents special spiritual dangers. There must be due safeguards and all must be of the one mind; and that is "one mind in Christ".

7. Would you recommend me to become a priest or a religious?

That depends. In the first place, the fact that you have a sexual attraction for others of your own sex does not of itself render you any more or any less suitable for answering such a vocation. It is one thing to have homosexual tendencies; it is a quite different thing to be actively homosexual.

A celibate priest or religious has to take special precautions no matter how he is conditioned. To think that a vowed celibate in his vigorous years can mix with others and live their kind of life just the same as one who is not so committed, is to adopt an attitude that is naive in the extreme and against the lessons of all experience. I am speaking of men who have a normal degree of sexual urgency.

As for the rest, you must pass the same test as anyone else.

(a) Have you shown by your conduct that you are able to remain chaste, either because you always have been, or because you have overcome unchaste habits and shown by a suitable period of testing that you are quite free from them?

(b) If you have been unchaste, are there things in your past life that would give a certain notoriety to your conduct? That is to say, have you been known to have been unchaste? Sinning with another person is not of itself sufficient to make an act "notorious"; but if this is known to others it might well be.

8. Would you advise me to marry?

Not without knowing you personally and knowing the whole history of your homosexual experience. I have known men who seemed to be pure homosexuals who have married happily, had families and been excellent husbands and fathers. Their wives have probably never even suspected their true sexual proclivities.

I have known others who when they were later unfaithful to their wives in a homosexual way, and their wives found out, their whole marriage was wrecked.

All I could say in a general way is that a homosexual marrying needs caution and advice to an even greater degree than the normal man.

9. Do you oppose legislation to legalize homosexual acts in private between consenting adults?

No, I do not. This would be only to put them on the same level as acts of fornication or adultery; morally wrong, but not crimes punishable by law. If they offend against public decency because they involve public indecency, they would still be punishable. If one of those involved was "under the age", there would be crime.

I do not see that anyone who really understands what is proposed by such legislation could oppose it. Some benefits would accrue; some evils, especially the constant fear of blackmail, would be avoided. This was the view of the commission set up by the English Catholic Bishops to advise the Wolfenden Commission in England.

Unfortunately, to speak of "legalizing" something suggests to a lot of people that it is being approved or rendered "not wrong". Sins are still sins though they are not punishable by law. And where would we all stand if whatever is sinful before God was also a crime punishable by the State?

10. Am I always to be a social outcast?

Being a social outcast is not an inbuilt thing like being a diabetic or a homosexual. It depends on whether society casts you out or not.

There is no need for me to tell you that unfortunately this tends to be so. Therefore what I am writing to you in this regard is meant more for others than for you.

Whatever the cause of homosexuality is, it is certainly not likely to be the fault of the homosexual himself. It is scarcely credible that anyone ever wanted to be twisted in this way. So if it is not blameworthy, why treat a homosexual person as if it were?

In our society there are many people who have been shown to be guilty of heinous offences who are fully accepted into that society; some even lionized. But a known homosexual is often rejected,

ridiculed, mocked. At best he is pitied with a hurtful, patronizing pity. And this may be so even without any evidence that he is guilty of homosexual acts.

All the evidence points to the fact that the incidence of this condition is greatly on the increase. We must all accept some responsibility for this since we all, in some way, contribute to the building up of a society that is ultimately its cause and nourisher.

With their growth in numbers, homosexuals are being forced into undesirable publicity in their desire for acceptance. This has been the ruination of many young men of good families. Suffering from a desperate isolation, social solitary confinement, unchristian intolerance, they have been forced into a sort of public commitment; not only to an admission of their condition but also to a sinful way of life. They are young and lacking wisdom and are bereft of the help of those who should be their support - parents, church, civil authorities, society at large.

If He who should always be in our midst, if we were truly, and not nominally, gathered in His Name, were allowed to speak through our lips, (since he must now act through his Mystical Body), the words would be - "Neither do I condemn you".

To you, Aelred, I would say, you are not an outcast to Jesus, nor to his Mother. The very fact that so many who claim to be his followers treat you as they do, should force you even more deeply into their company.

11. It's not unnatural for me!

I knew you would bring up this argument. I've heard it so often. Recently I read a "soft sell" theologian who asserted that when we come to understand homosexuality better the Church may change its mind about the sinfulness of homosexual acts.

This is rot. It is theological rot and like so much theological rot it arises from a lack of clarity in thought and expression.

Homosexual acts are always unnatural because they are always contrary to the nature of man as set by God. When you say that homosexual attraction is natural for you, what you mean is that it is spontaneous in you. It is the form of sexual attraction that ordinarily arises in you. The confusion arises from using the word "natural" in two different senses; and one of them less correct.

To say that when we come to understand homosexuality better we may change our ideas about the sinfulness of homosexual acts should demand as its corollary that those who understand heterosexual acts outside the married state should reconsider the sinfulness of them! Understanding these states better makes for compassion and a better sense of proportion. It should not lead us to say that what is sinful, is not.

Masturbation is an unnatural act; so is contraceptive intercourse. These acts, like homosexual acts, separate the exercise of a faculty as a cause from its natural effects. They may be common human behaviour. Indulgence of this kind may be very ordinary and very understandable. But natural - never!

What we all need is a very great Christian intolerance towards all sin; and a very great Christian tolerance towards sinners in their human weakness. Even when their sinful proclivities differ from our own.

12. In any case I am told it is not condemned in the Bible.

There is a tendency among those who wish to defend homosexual practices to underestimate the strong condemnations in the Scriptures. But even allowing for the fact that the references in the story of Sodom, from which the sin takes its name, are controverted, there are clear condemnations in both the Old and New Testaments.

The following texts speak for themselves:

Leviticus 18:22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

Leviticus 20:13 If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.

Romans 1:27 ...and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

1 Cor. 6:9-10 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the Kingdom of God.

There are some other references which either are less clear or only repeat what is contained in these. But here is clear enough evidence, if any were needed, that such acts are against the law of God. Arguments that are adduced to try to interpret these texts in ways other than their plain meaning are specious and lack any authoritative support. It is worth noting that St. Paul does not pick out homosexual acts for any special condemnation, but lumps them in with the other common failings of mankind.

The greatest sin is to defend sin and pretend it is not sin. Here surely is a sinning against the Holy Spirit. It is against the light.

God is ever merciful to the sinner. If we can only have the humility to acknowledge our sin saying "Lord be merciful to me a sinner", we shall go away justified. But if, after the manner of the Pharisee we say "I do not need mercy or forgiveness", then we exclude ourselves from the reach of God's mercy. We do this when we refuse to acknowledge our sin; or refuse to admit that what we have done is sinful, when we have clear proof that it is.

III

Dear Aelred,

It always intrigues me when people demand a heavenly patron for some special need. Often enough we hear the Church criticized for its practice of appointing saints as patrons for various causes, classes or conditions. But in doing this the Church is only answering a human need; and sometimes not without humour, as when St. Gabriel was designated the patron of radio and television announcers because he was the angel of the Lord who "announced unto Mary".

Perhaps it is that in these days of specialization people are disinclined to believe that a General Practitioner can manage everything! Once I was asked about a special patron to be invoked for protection against atomic warfare. It is not my privilege to appoint such heavenly patrons, but I did express the opinion that St. Atom seemed to be an obvious choice. (Yes, he is for real.)

God is the one protector. All power comes from him. The one mediator is Christ. Nevertheless the Church has constantly held and taught that not only is the veneration of the saints proper and profitable but it is good to seek their intercession for us in all our needs.

First and foremost is Mary the Mother of our Redeemer. Immaculately sinless she is the Refuge of Sinners; but in a special way she is invoked as the model of chastity to guard and protect us in this special need.

You will say that Mary is just another General Practitioner to be invoked in every need. She is called the Mediatrix of All Graces. Isn't there a special saint for this special need?

Well, what about the Ugandan Martyrs? Here are saints right up to date. They were canonized only in 1964. It is not yet a hundred years since they were cruelly martyred for their chastity. In fact they were martyred because some of them refused to consent to homosexual acts.

For some time the Christian converts in Uganda were struggling against the pagan practices of the country. Superstition, slavery and polygamy were general. Those who felt the brunt of persecution most were the pages of the Royal Court into which homosexual practices had been introduced by Arab traders.

The young king in Uganda in the 1880's was Mwanga. He was weak, dissolute and a despot in the worst African tradition. He was given to violent outbursts of rage and cruelty whenever he was crossed or thwarted in any way. Not that Uganda is unused to such demonic rule!

Yet, in the cesspool of his Court there flourished a band of Christian pages like the pure lilies we sometimes see floating on some fetid pond. Some of them were Catholics, others Protestants; but they were united in their basic Christian beliefs and virtue. They were to be united also in martyrdom.

The Christians in his kingdom were at once an admonition and an obstacle to Mwanga. They resisted his orders for indiscriminated pillage and killing. And those closest to him, his court pages, resisted his demands for homosexual pleasure.

Joseph Mukara who was the Major Domo of the Court was the kingpin also of the Catholic Christian Community. He constantly instructed, baptized and protected the pages. In one of his fits of rage, Mwanga had him burned alive!

Fortunately, a few months before this happened, the Court was joined by a young man aged about twenty-two, Charles Luaga (or Lwanga), who had been attracted by the Christian community there. He was at once put in charge of the 200 pages and he became a second Mukara. He was baptized only on the night of Mukara's death and immediately became the strong leader of the Christian community.

On May 25, 1886 Mwanga had a bad day. He had been out hunting but his prey had not been co-operative. He was hunting hippopotamus. It was bad enough noticing that his pages were beginning to find they had something to do at the other end of the palace whenever he appeared on the scene; now the hippos were doing the same thing.

Mwanga came home in a fearful mood. He sent for Mwafa, one of his pages whom hitherto he had always found obliging and compliant. But Mwafa was no longer on call either. When he screamed for an explanation there was at hand someone only too ready to tell him that Mwafa had been seen recently much in the company of the Christian page, Denis.

The young king suspected Denis of instructing Mwafa in the Christian religion. He was infuriated at the thought that still another of his "boys" was becoming lost to him. He sent for the two of them and Denis confessed openly that this was true. Mwanga flew into a passion and dragged the sixteen-year-old Denis through the palace screaming for someone to kill him. Denis was hacked to pieces and his remains thrown into the bush to be eaten by vultures.

Everyone knew that now, it was on. It would not be an exaggeration, not even a theological exaggeration, to say that Hell broke loose. Mwanga raved and roared until everyone knew that the pages were in for it at last. Not least of all did the pages know it. Their first instinctive reaction was one of panic. But assembling around their leader Luaga the Catholic pages soon became calm in the presence of his strength and serenity.

They knew what was ahead of them, but even when given the opportunity to escape they stood fast, saying that to run now would be tantamount to denying their Faith. Some of them were still awaiting baptism.

In another part of the palace the Protestant pages were similarly gathered together and encouraging one another. They got someone to take a message to the Catholic pages: "We also are going to be killed; but do not renounce your religion."

After a fearful night, Mwanga had them all assembled and asked those who still professed Christianity to stand to one side. Charles Luaga stood up and said: "A man cannot deny that of which he is fully convinced. You, Sire, are always telling us that we must do our duty and you know we have never shirked it, despite the threats of your enemies. Today then, once again, we follow your counsel."

Taking Kizito, the youngest boy, by the hand he led the group to one side. Then an incident occurred which takes us right back to the days of the early Roman persecutions. Bruno Serunkuma, the Palace Guard, calmly joined them.

Mwanga ordered them all to be tied up and burnt. But before this happened they were to spend six days during which they were allowed to watch in awful expectation the preparations for their execution. This time they spent in joyful prayer together. When the time came, they were led out to the place of ritual execution.

Charles Luaga was the first. He was burnt slowly from his feet so that his agony would be all the more prolonged. Calmly he addressed his torturers: "You are burning me, but it is as if you were pouring cold water over my body. I am dying for God's religion. But be warned in time or he whom you insult will one day burn you in real fire."

Then the others being tied were wrapped around in something like reed mats or blinds and placed side by side on a great pyre of firewood. One of them happened to be a son of the chief executioner who pleaded with him to recant and save his life. But the boy would not do so and his father gave orders to one of the executioners to club him to death first. He was despatched with one blow from a club and his body was placed on the pyre with the others.

The great fire was lit and the young martyrs, praising God and calmly speaking to one another and to their executioners, passed from this world's suffering to the joy of heaven.

These and others who died in Mwanga's persecution were some of the twenty-two martyrs canonized in 1964. With them must not be forgotten the nine Protestants whose names are inscribed in the Namirembe Anglican Cathedral.

The story of these martyrs, they were mostly teenagers, fills one of the most glorious pages of Christian history. We have to go back to the earliest days of Christianity to find their like.

I think that they might most suitably be suggested to you as patrons in your need - that through their sufferings and prayers you might have the strength to imitate them in their chastity.

IV

Dear Aelred,

So you are not happy with the Ugandan Martyrs? Like so many others you want a patron saint who actually suffered from the same condition under which you labour.

This is natural enough I suppose. After all the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity (through whom we were created and who therefore should know us very well) came on earth to "bear our infirmities" so that we might feel more drawn to him and seek his help in our trials. He knew how natural it is for man to feel this way.

A homosexual saint? That is a tough one. We know of saints who had been adulterers, fornicators, murderers, thieves, hot tempered, perjurers, and all manner of sinners. But have we any saint who had that psycho-genetic condition which- we call homosexual? I think we have; and he is a very loveable saint too.

You may be glad too to learn that he was an Englishman; not one of those foreign types. He was one of those clean-cut handsome, blue-eyed, blond youths whom novelists like to portray as exemplifying the perfect Englishman. In fact he was more English than the English. He was very much a Saxon. His name was Aelred. He is known as St. Aelred of Rievaulx. (Rye Valley.)

He was born in 1110 and from his earliest days he was found to be a very attractive friend to other boys and men, as he was also greatly attracted towards them.

This propensity caused the greatest joys and perplexities of his life, and in great measure provided the stepping stones to sanctity. His life story is one of a series of strong and wonderful friendships. In an atmosphere of exterior peace and calm, he walked a dangerous journey, fighting and battling for the chastity he sought and loved; a romantic, in his own words "desiring only to love and be loved".

David, brother of Scotland's king at that time, when on a visit to England saw the then fourteen-year-old Aelred and was fascinated by him. He arranged to have him sent to the northern court as boy companion to his son Henry and Henry's half-brother Waltheof. With them he formed a strong friendship. He couldn't help it. Aelred was made for friendship. It was his life.

But it was the boy's father, David (who a year later became king) that drew out all Aelred's capacity for human love. In fact Aelred tells us that it was only because David was "so humble, pious and chaste" that his life was not then and there wrecked. (This David was himself the son of a saint, Margaret of Scotland.)

After some ten years at the Scottish Court, Aelred was sent by the King on a mission abroad. On his return journey he decided to make a little side trip on the royal expense account. This was in order to drop in on another of his worshipped friends, William d'Espeç, "huge, black-haired, long-bearded"; and in most other ways unlike Aelred. They must have made a strangely contrasting couple, the gentle Saxon and the trumpet-voiced, commanding Norman.

This same William d'Espeç had founded a monastery in the Rye Valley, in which the newly established Cistercian monks were installed. The two friends made a journey to visit the monks in their struggling, little monastery in the valley which was still scarred by the invaders. If Aelred was capable of any hatred he would have hated the Normans, because he was a Saxon of the Saxons. But the Normans were people, and he could not hate anyone. He could not even be unfriendly.

So there he came with his Norman friend. And there they both stayed.

"I was a prodigal son who had wandered; now I came back to my father's house, leaving behind me the husks of swine." That is how Aelred described his entering the Cistercians. I am sure he exaggerated somewhat his sinful past, but that is how he saw it.

The break was not made without some internal struggle: "The chains of my wretched habits held me; the love of my home held me; the bonds of good fellowship tethered me; more than all, the knots of a certain friendship were straitened in me, sweeter to me than all the other sweetness of my then life."

But his friendships were never over. New ones came to open sweet wounds while the scars of the old ones remained seemingly fresh.

Of his early years he wrote: "When I was a boy at school and the charm of my companions much pleased me, I gave myself over to love and friendship, after the ways and vices with which that stage of life is threatened, so that I found nothing more pleasurable, more desirable, more worthwhile, than to love and be loved. Between these foolish friendships, now for this boy, now for that, my spirit was pulled hither and thither. Not knowing what real love was like, I was often deceived by what was false."

His ardent heart troubled him. He recognized the constant yearning for friendship and its deep consequences for him. Cicero's *De Amicitia* (Concerning Friendship) came to his hands and he was in admiration of the pagan writer's analysis of friendship. But he wondered if a Christian could so indulge. On the other hand in the lives of the saints he was constantly reading of their friendships.

It was in this state that he began his monastic life. Moreover he was thrown into a completely sealed-off, male world. In his early noviceship days and as yet not drilled in that "custody of the eyes" so strongly stressed in the monastic training, his eyes wandered and fastened on the more attractive looking young men around him.

A certain Simon was the first of his monastic heartbeats. Simon came from a less sophisticated background than the courts to which Aelred was accustomed and he was seemingly quite unaware of the flutter he caused in Aelred's little dove-cote. "My son in age, my father in holiness, my friend in love," Aelred wrote of him. His heart and eyes went out to Simon, but as so often happened in his life Aelred was protected by the very chastity of those on whom his loving eyes rested. He found the "most charming" Simon "so radiantly chaste, so silent, answering my questing eyes with no other answer than a smile . . .

Simon died and Aelred felt almost as if he must die too. But Aelred did not die for a long while . . . His sweet torment of friendship would again and again find new sparks.

Besides Simon, there was Hugh, who had been a friend of Simon's before Aelred had met either of them. Then there was Ivo with his "mild eyes" and his "pleasant voice". Walter Daniel was another; and the one to whom we owe much of our knowledge of Aelred.

Aelred opened himself up freely to Walter and he it was to whom, when he was dying, he spoke of his last and most perfect friendship; one in which there was nothing but the image of the greater friendship - with God.

He wrote his Dialogue of Friendship as well as other works in which he discussed his experiences of friendship, its dangers and its joys, its goodness as well as its weakness. In it we trace his own perfecting of friendship within himself; gradually purifying the carnal in it, but never running away from it. Friendship he always faced, suffered and enjoyed.

Chaste he was with a beautiful chastity; no less beautiful for being always like some perfect diamond, ever near to splitting.

Aelred became Novice Master and later Abbot of Rievaulx. He was entrusted with many delicate negotiations, and more than once was employed as a peacemaker in those quarrelsome times. He was witty too; but his greatest quality was his capacity for friendship. He practised notable austerities, over and above the ordinary severities of 12th century Cistercian life. But his greatest asceticism was in the control of his own affections. He would write: "No one has loved perfectly or truly who in this life passionately yearned for anything or anyone."

In all his friendship he would say: "I hope Christ is in our midst as a third."

Aelred must have been one of the most loving and loveable men who ever lived. From childhood till his death his life was a long series of affectionate friendships with other boys and men, in which there was always a temptation to a disordered friendship. All his spiritual life and his writings grow out of and around these friendships. All his querying was how to enjoy these many associations and not lose the love of God.

He is the saint of friendship - homosexual friendship if you like - and his sanctity grew from this phenomenon. I commend him to you, for whom you have been named Aelred. May something of his sweetness descend on you. May you partake of his great strength. May you find comfort in his lifelong struggles and grow in imitation of his understanding of the beauty of true friendship.

Yes, if a patron is asked for homosexuals, I should nominate the gentle Aelred.

Nihil Obstat: BERNARD O'CONNOR, Diocesan Censor Imprimatur: + T. F. LITTLE, Archbishop of Melbourne 15th June, 1975
