

ANDREWES AND THE PATH TO PERFECTION

By Dr. Marianne Dorman

MUCH OF ANDREWES' preaching was directed towards the attaining of perfection and holiness in this life, illustrated in these statements: "The state of grace is the perfection of this life, to grow still from grace to grace, to profit in it. As to go on still forward is the perfection of a traveller, to draw still nearer and nearer to his journey's end;" and "'To work to-day and to-morrow as Christ said, and the third day to be perfect, perfectly perfect.'"¹

In the course of his preaching he explained how the Hebrew word for "flesh" was the same as "for good tidings". This "good tidings" has now "come to pass" as "the Word is now become flesh." God was content to be born of "'the woman's seed,'" that is, of the nature of man in order to restore him to the perfection of that first paradise. This means that "He and we become not only 'one flesh,' as man and wife do by conjugal union, but even one blood too, as brethren by natural union." Thus the most wonderful feature of God taking our flesh is that through His Spirit we "are partakers of his Divine nature", and that "He might 'dwell in us and we in Him.'" Therefore we have the potential to perfection, which in its highest form "we come near" to the likeness of "an angel."²

Yes, Christians now have that potential but to attain this perfection every Christian soul has first to face those hindrances that hinder this. It is simply no good for us to believe that as Christ has purged our sins "we do not have to be careful of the holiness of life" for "unlesse we temper our affections we shall never be partakers of the divine nature." If we continually gloss over our sins, or ignore or make excuses for them, we shall never taste of eternal life. "When we commit sin, we die, we are dead in sin;" and any progress made is brought to a standstill until we say, "what have I done" and to be sorry "for our sinnes, while they are fresh and newly committed", and also be able to say humbly and sincerely as David did, "I have sinned and done wickedly." The

¹ *The Works of Lancelot Andrewes*, eds. J. Bliss & J. P. Wilson, 11 vols. LACT (Oxford, 1841-54), afterwards referred to as Andrewes, Vol. 3, p. 367.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 4, 9, 16, 24, 89.

purpose of our repentance is to allow us to follow a new life and be refreshed and renewed in Christ. So we must repent quickly and often of our sins. Indeed as he preached at Easter 1606 “our lives become a cycle of sinning, repenting, confessing, and amendment; when we repent, we revive again; when we repent ourselves of our repenting and relapse back, then sin riseth again from the dead; and so *toties quoties*. And even upon these two, as two hinges, turneth our whole life. All our life is spent in one of them.”

Yet we tend to forget the benefit of our contrition and cleansing, and the remembrance of our sins “soon departeth away”. So we must follow the examples of “the sinfull woman, when she remembered that Christ had forgiven her many sinnes, was provoked thereby to love him much”, and Paul who was more than “carefull to walk in holiness of life” when he remembered that his sins were forgiven after his persecution “of the Church of God.” It is “ceasing from sin [which] brings with it a good life, [and] that ever carries with it a good conscience.”³

Actually when Andrewes preached, “to cease from sin” what he really meant was to cease “not from sin altogether - that is a higher perfection than this life will bear, but ... from the ‘dominion of sin.’” Until we are free of “death itself, which in this life we are not, we shall not be free from sin altogether.” One of the safeguards against the dominion of sin, he believed, was not to be an “idle Christian”, no doubt a reminder to predestinarians who felt “secure” in their faith. “We must remember that many things and much time must be bestowed in seeking to garnish our souls” as we progress in overcoming the “dominion of sin”. Hence Christ’s way demands from us to “labour” in “a new life” and with a “new conversation”.⁴

From his *Preces* it is obvious that Andrewes knew personally the pains of attaining perfection. When he preached at St. Giles that “men must not persuade themselves it is an easie matter to be a good Christian”, he was also addressing himself. It takes “all care and diligence ... and the spirit of God to direct ... in

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 202-3; *Apospasmata Sacra: Or A Collection of posthumous and orphan Lectures: Delivered at St. Pauls and St. Giles his Church by the Right Honourable and Reverend Father in God Lancelot Andrewes, Lord Bishop of Winchester* (London, 1657), afterwards referred to *Andrewes, Apos. Sacra.*, pp. 548-9, 631.

⁴ *Andrewes*, Vol. 2, pp. 200; *Andrewes, Apos. Sacra*; p. 127; *Cosin*, Vol. 1, pp. 119-20.

ceasing from evil and following good.” Yet God knows of the conflict within us when “we cannot do what we would.” Another example of this struggle is in his 1610 Pentecost sermon when he preached, “for who can do this, keep the Commandments?” It is as impossible as it is “to fly or walk on the sea”.⁵ Thus Andrewes sermons unfolded his own spiritual journey with many confessions of failures, of struggling with sin, the pain and joy of a penitent, and the longing for the final consummation with the glorified Christ. “That day will come; ... when ... He will ... take us to Himself. That as He hath been our *Emmanuel* upon earth, so He may be our *Emmanuel* in Heaven; He with us, and we with Him, there for ever.”⁶

Accordingly his sermons repeatedly manifested a longing to overcome all imperfections. This is clearly demonstrated in his 1606 Paschal sermon.

[To] die and live as He did, that is ‘once for all;’ which is an utter abandoning ‘once’ of sin’s dominion, and a continual, constant, persisting in a good course ‘once’ begun. Sin’s dominion, it languisheth sometimes in us, and falleth happily into a swoon, but it dies not quite ‘once for all.’ Grace lifteth up the eye, and looketh up a little, and giveth some sign of life, but never perfectly receiveth. O that once we might come to this! no more deaths, no more resurrections, but one! that we might once make an end of our daily continual [relapses] to which we are so subject, and once get past these pangs and qualms of godliness, this righteousness like the morning cloud, which is all we perform; that we might grow habituate in grace, ... ‘rooted and founded in it; ... ‘steady’ and ‘never to be removed’; that we might enter into, and pass a good account of this our *similiter et vos!*⁷

Those early sermons on the Temptations of Christ also manifested that they were preached by one who struggled and fought against sin in order to attain perfection. Hence he preached that we should not be discouraged as Christ Himself was sorely tempted as were the monks and hermits of the desert for all their solitude. Indeed we can learn from these holy men who were “content to creep on hands and feet to Him” in times of temptations.⁸ None can escape this struggle, as Andrewes intimated in one of the Genesis lectures. “Every Christian is ... to strive against his own lusts, and to fight with sinne, which is the Serpents seed: There must be a bruising between the heel of the

⁵ Andrewes, *Apos. Sacra.*, p.625; Andrewes, Vol. 3, p. 151.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 152.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 202-3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 486.

Adams seed and the Serpents head; this combat we must all undergoe.”⁹ It is a combat lasting to the grave, but Christians are given a shield in Christ, especially in the Sacrament, against sin.

The Christian begins his covenantal relationship with God in Baptism when he/she is begins the path to perfection. Through Baptism “our souls are endued with inherent virtues, and receive grace and ability from God, to proceed from one degree of perfection to another all our life time, even till the time of our death, which is the beginning and accomplishment of our perfection.”¹⁰ After Baptism is the other twin sacrament, the Eucharist to support us in the “accomplishment of perfection” when we receive our Lord Himself. We “are never so near Him, nor He us, as then and there.” So we must come to the altar for “that blessed union [which] is the highest perfection we can in this life aspire unto.”¹¹

Andrewes compared the Sacrament to a tree. “Every tree must have a root”, so Christ speaks of the Sacrament being a root where “it is sown in the hearts of the receivers”. In time through the working of the Holy Spirit it “shoots forth and becomes a tree” giving “a life of grace” to fight against sin. In due time from this “life of grace” we shall receive, when our bodies are raised up from “the dust of death”, “the life of glory” in “the heavenly Paradise”.¹²

In the course of his teaching Andrewes suggested that meditation is an important asset in our path towards perfection. One reflection was to ponder on God’s act of creation. All was perfect. Nowhere was perfection more manifested than in paradise where God placed man for his eternal enjoyment and pleasure. Here were “herbs, flowers, plants and trees, of all sorts, ... speciall to that place alone.”¹³

Another reflection is none other than repentance. Repentance must also bring forth fruit like the trees of summer. Therefore “we may not stand ... about the tree, we are called on for *proferte*, to bring somewhat forth; else how shall we know it is a

⁹ Andrewes, *Apos. Sacra.*, p. 406.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. 5, p. 315.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 283, Vol. 2, p. 322; W. Laud, *The Works of The Most Reverend Father in God William Laud D. D. Sometime Lord Archbishop of Canterbury* eds., J. Bliss & W. Scott, 9 vols., LACT (Oxford, 1847 - 1860), Vol., 4, p. 284.

¹² Andrewes, *Apos. Sacra*, pp. 576-8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 51, 81 - 2, 116-7.

tree and no log? ... It is the bringing forth that makes the difference.” Thus repentance had to lead to an amendment of life that gradually enables a Christian to grow in perfection, a life’s work.

Yet another reflection is Our Lord’s encounter with the Devil. If Christ had succumbed to him He would have thwarted God’s purpose, and so do we when we are lured by Satan to take the easy way. This, Andrewes illustrated, in the fourth Temptation sermon, when he described the devil taking Christ up to the highest point in the mountain. “Whereas the ordinary way was down the stairs, he would have Him leap or throw Himself over the battlements.” From this “a man may see to what end the devil’s exalting cometh; he brings a man up by little and little to some high place, that so high may send him at once with his head downward. Yet all the preferments that he bestoweth on a man is not to any other intent but that he may do as the devil himself did.” That is not the way towards perfection, but damnation.¹⁴ However there were five “ordinary means” to prepare against the devil’s temptations and to grow towards perfection: using God’s sacraments; meditating in a “solitary place ... to kindle good thoughts”; fasting; praying vigilantly and “perfecting ourselves in the Scriptures.” To seek in any other way is not God’s.¹⁵

Undoubtedly for Andrewes one of the main functions of angels is their support for Christians in their daily warfare against the devil’s temptations to strive towards perfection. The aim of all Andrewes’ preaching was to lead his auditors to the beatific vision, a place of unspeakable joys where our corruptible bodies become incorruptible, and the faithful are united to Christ. This certainty made it possible, Andrewes believed, for every Christian to rise above all uncertainties and difficulties in this life.¹⁶ That was why it was a constant theme with him to live this life in union with Christ in the Sacrament, and through grace, to grow little by little towards perfection. Then the faithful could attain that eternal joy of living in the presence of God and his angels and saints in heaven, and escape the eternity of hell.

So until the grave we must persevere in the path to perfection. As St. Gregory said, “of all Virtues only Perseverance

¹⁴ Andrewes, Vol. 5, p. 520.

¹⁵ Ibid., Vol. 5, pp. 503-4.

¹⁶ Ms. 3707, p. 109.

is crowned.”¹⁷ “We receive grace to proceed from one degree of perfection to another all our lives.” We must recognise “to go on still forward is the perfection of a traveller”, and “to grow still from grace to grace”, until our lives’ end.¹⁸ That day of perfection is what the early fathers called the eighth day of creation.

¹⁷ Ms. 3707, p. 125, Andrewes, *Apos. Sacra*, p. 124.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.625, Andrewes, Vol. 3, p. 367, Vol. 5, pp. 479, 482-3,488, 495, 531.