

Lancelot Andrewes
and
THE BLESSED SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

By Dr. Marianne Dorman

*The ordaining of His last sacrament, [is] ... the means to re-establish 'our hearts with grace,' and to repair the decays of our spiritual strength; even 'His own flesh, the Bread of life, 'and 'His own blood,' 'the Cup of salvation.' Bread made of Himself, the true 'Granum frumenti. Wine made of Himself, the true Vine.'*¹

ANDREWES believed it was hardly possible to be a Christian if one did not receive the Sacrament regularly. Every Christian needs to partake of the Sacrament for many reasons, of which the chief is to receive the life of Our Lord. Other reasons are to be united with Christ, to renew our covenant, to be assured of the forgiveness of sin and to be united with fellow Christians, living and departed.

The high regard that Andrewes had for the sacrament in the life of the Christian was evident in this Christmas sermon preached at St. Giles, Cripplegate, his parish church in London (now in the shadow of the Barbican). “We are said to come to Christ in Baptism, ... in the hearing of the word,” and in preaching, “but Christ receiveth none of these, but that we come to him as is *panis vitae*, when we come to Christ, as he offers himself in the Sacrament.” Christ gathers “us as close and near as *alimentum alito*, that is as near as near may be.” Indeed it is more, for by “that blessed union” it enables us to enter into “the highest perfection we can in this life aspire unto.” It is then at the altar that our faith is “at the highest; for when we have the body and blood of Christ in our hands, then it makes us say with Thomas ... *Domine mi and Deus mi*”.² It is no wonder then that Andrewes like Gregory of Nazianzus advocated frequent communion.

Like the early Fathers, and indeed even Luther Andrewes believed exactly what our Lord said, “This is my body” and “This is my blood”, and that communicants receives Christ’s Body and Blood at the Eucharist, illustrated in his 1615 Christmas sermon when he spoke of the perpetual

¹ *The Works of Lancelot Andrewes*, eds. J. Bliss & J. P. Wilson, 11 vols. LACT (Oxford, 1841—54), afterwards referred to as Andrewes, Vol. 1, p. 169.

² *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 Andrews, Lord Bishop of Winchester (London, 1657), afterwards referred to as *Apos. Sacra*, p. 597; Andrewes, Vol. 1, p. 281.*

Bethlehem. Unlike the shepherds or wise men no one has to travel to “the town itself”, or “go out of this room” because “here is to be had the ‘true bread of life that came down from Heaven’. ... and where that Bread is, there is Bethlehem for ever.” Andrewes pointed out that was why in the early Church a star was engraved on the canister “wherein was the Sacrament of His body”.³

This belief was also very evident in that first Christmas sermon that Andrewes preached before James I in 1605 when he announced that Christ has taken our flesh, and on this day we partake of His flesh. By this partaking the union between Christ and us is closer than that of a wedded couple.

For *the Word* He is, and in the word He is received by us. But that is not the proper of this day, unless there be another joined unto it. This day *Verbum caro factum est*. But specially in His flesh as this day gives it, as this day would have us. Now *the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the body, of the flesh, of Jesus Christ?* It is surely, and by it and by nothing more are we made partakers of this blessed union. ...Because He has so done, taken ours of us, we also ensuing His steps will participate with Him and with His flesh which He has taken of us. It is most kindly to take part with Him in that which He took part in with us, and that, to no other end, but that He might make the receiving of it by us a means whereby He might *dwell in us, and we in Him*. He taking our flesh, and we receiving His Spirit; by His flesh which He took of us receiving His Spirit which He imparts to us; that, as He by ours became *consors humanae naturae*, so we by His might become *consortes Divinae naturae, partakers of the Divine nature*. Verily, it is the most straight and perfect *taking hold* that is. No union so knits as it. Not consanguinity; brethren fall out. Not marriage; man and wife are severed. But that which is nourished, and the nourishment wherewith—they never are, never can be severed, but remain one for ever. With this act then of mutual *taking*, taking of His flesh as He has taken ours, let us seal our duty to Him this day, for taking not *angels*, but *the seed of Abraham*.⁴

³ Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 173, 247, Vol. 2, p. 362.

⁴ Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 16–7.

Christmas is indeed a special time to reflect on the Sacrament, that time when the Word became flesh was inseparable from the altar, as reflected in his sermon for Christmas, 1612. “And this day they first came together, the Word and flesh; therefore, of all days, this day they would not be parted.” Two years later he concluded his Nativity sermon with this commendation. “This then I commend to you, even the being with Him in the Sacrament of His Body—that Body that was conceived and born, as for the other ends so for this specially, to be ‘with you’; and this day, as for other intents, so even for this, for the Holy Eucharist.”⁵ And so it is not surprising that most of his sermons given at the Royal Court ended with interweaving of the particular festival with receiving Christ at the celebration of the Eucharist. Of course it was his Nativity sermons that especially expressed this union when we celebrate “the Word became flesh”. Thus he concluded his 1610:

Let us honour this day with our receiving, which He has honoured by His first giving; yielding Him evermore ... our unfeigned hearty thanksgiving for this so good news, for this so great a gift, both of them this day [given to] us; in Him and for Him, Who was Himself the gift, our *Saviour, Christ the Lord*.⁶

The next Christmas he would conclude in a similar vein:

To go to the word and flesh together. ... But at this now, we are not to content ourselves with one alone; but since He offers to communicate Himself both ways, never restrain Him to one. The word we hear is the abstract of *Verbum*; the Sacrament is the antetype of *caro*, His flesh. What better way than where these are actually joined, actually to partake them both? Not either alone, the word or flesh; but the word and flesh both, for there they are both. ... If it be grace and truth we respect, how may we better establish our hearts with grace, or settle our minds in the truth of His promise, than by partaking these the conduit-pipes of His grace, and seals of His truth unto us? Grace and truth now proceeding not from the Word alone, but even from the flesh thereto united; the fountain of the Word flowing into the cistern of His

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 116, 151–2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

flesh, and from thence deriving down to us this grace and truth, to them who partake Him aright.

But setting them aside, the day *the Word was made flesh it is most kindly that a memorial be kept, as well of the flesh as the Word*. On the feast of their union, they would be united; the day they were joined by Him, they would not be sundered by any; but we to celebrate both, in honour of both, ... that we may hold this feast aright, and do the duty that properly belongs to it, let us by both do honour to both, that from both we may receive the fruit of both—grace, to enable us; truth, to guide us to the hope of glory,... [and thus] to see Him as He is, and by seeing to be transformed into the same image of glory.⁷

When Andrewes preached on covenantal theology it was from a sacramental approach. Our covenant with God is first made in baptism, the first seal. But as this covenant is constantly broken by sin, it has to be renewed just as constantly, which it can in the receiving of the Sacrament, the second seal. “We know the Sacrament is the seal of the new covenant, as it was of the old. Thus, by undertaking the duty He requires, we are entitled to the comfort which here He promises. And *do this* He would have us, as is plain by His *hoc facite*.” So the Sacrament in

all the times in our life, when we settle ourselves to prepare thitherwards, we are in best terms of disposition to covenant with Him. For if ever we be in a state of love towards Him, or towards one another, then it is. If ever troubled in spirit, that we have not kept His commandments better, then it is. If ever in a vowed purpose and preparation better to look to it, then it is. Then therefore of all times most likely to gain interest in the promise, when we are best in case, and come nearest to be able to plead the condition.⁸

Calvary and the altar were also inseparable. At Calvary His death was made “the medicine”, of which “the Water and the Blood” flowing from His wounded side were “to be the ingredients” for what Augustine described as the “twin sacraments”. This Andrewes illustrated in his 1597 Passion sermon

⁷ Ibid, pp. 101–1.

⁸ Ibid, Vol. 3, p. 161.

when he took Zechariah's words [Zec. 13.1] that "out of His pierced side God 'opened a fountain of water to the House of Israel for sin and for uncleanness;' of the fullness whereof we all have received in the Sacrament of our Baptism." Of "'the blood of the New Testament' we may receive this day; for it will run in the high and holy mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ. There may we be partakers of the flesh of the Morning Hart, as upon this day killed. There may we be partakers of 'the cup of salvation,' 'the precious blood' 'which was shed for the remission of our sins.'"⁹

Again like the early Fathers, Andrewes stressed the unifying nature of the Sacrament. It is the "Sacrament of peace and unity", he preached, and therefore ideally the Eucharist should be the meeting place for all Christians. It is "for all sorts", Andrewes insisted, but nothing had divided his contemporaries, as it still does to-day, as much as over Christ's Body and Blood. Yet at the Liturgy God's people gather together for prayers and for "the dispensation of His holy mysteries". That gathering should reflect "the symbols of many grains into the [bread] ... and many grapes into the [wine]" which is completed at the altar where "we gather Christ Himself". The importance of coming together as one, Andrewes pointed out, is reflected in one of the names given for the Eucharist in the early Church, *Synaxis*.¹⁰

This concern for unity was particularly evident in some of his lectures at St. Giles'. In one of these he compared the fraction of Christ's body with that which Paul addressed in the Corinthian Church when he appealed to the schismatics and contentious at Corinth to live in "love and concord" with one another. Paul's reason for pressing unity was that they were all "one body" in Christ who is the head and only source of Christians' "one beginning and one nourishment". That beginning is "in the fountain of regeneration" when we are "baptized into one body by one spirit, and all made to drink of one spirit." After that Christians come together in "the Sacrament of accord". Such accord was seen in the Apostles as they broke bread together and "in the many grains kneaded into *one loaf*, and the many grapes pressed into one cup", a quotation from Cyprian, used not only by Andrewes but by many theologians of his day. This unity is also demonstrated at the fraction when Christ's body is broken for all, and as St. Paul said, "We are all 'one bread and one body, so many as are partakers of one bread.'" This makes it *locus* of unity". Furthermore just

⁹ Ibid., p. 113, Vol. 2, p. 134.

¹⁰ Ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 281—2.

as the two natures in Christ are “united together” so in the Sacrament all Christians should be united. Like St. Paul, Andrewes insisted that if Christians could be persuaded they are partakers of the one Body of Christ and members of that Body “there would not be such divisions and dissensions in the World as they are”. Andrewes always maintained that we cannot ideally participate in the Sacrament unless we earnestly desire union with one another which makes our participation active rather than passive as Christians are meant to be “living stones” in that “body mystical” by growing in “mutual love and charity.”¹¹

At a time when the Calvinist doctrine of predestination abounded, Andrewes preached incessantly on the universality of redemption and grace. Never is this teaching more transparent than in his eucharistic teaching. In this lecture delivered at St. Giles in 1599 he stressed that all who come to Him, receive Him, despite who they are. No one is excluded from His banquet because we are all sinners. “We come to Christ, as he offers himself in the Sacrament to be the lively food of our souls.” Christ will not “cast out” any who come, but rather he will be “received to be a member of Christs mystical body, ‘and partaker of the divine nature’”. He also emphasised that if ever we are going to be “contrite and broken in spirit” it is in the context of the Eucharist. Of course another reason for sinners to come to the Sacrament is to receive “active grace” in order to resist sin, to endure “the conflict of sinne, and to be conquerors over Satan and own our corruptions”. Andrewes also emphasised that the ancient Fathers had noted that there is “no unworthnesse by means of any filth, either of body or soul”, will keep Christ “from us”. In His incarnate life Christ showed for “bodily uncleannesse, he was content to be received by Simon the leper, ...and... in regard of spirituall pollution ... Christ ... doth not only receive sinners, but ‘eats with them’.” Thus the sinners’ assurance is that Christ not only eats with them “but receives them into that union, that is, to be one with him; which is a greater union that is either between brother and brother or between man and wife.” Another assurance is that at Calvary Christ “was content to receive the thief”, where he also prayed “‘Father forgive them.’” “Therefore it is most likely that he will

¹¹ Ibid., p. 282, Vol. 2, p. 289; *Apos. Sacra*, p. 614; Cyprian, *The Epistles Of S. Cyprian*, L.F. Vol. 17 (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1844), p. 161 (lxiii.10).

receive us, if we come to him.” As the Fathers also emphasised, the only condition is “that we come.”¹²

And what if in coming the communicant is an unrepentant sinner? Andrewes does not explicitly say, except he still receives “the body and blood” of our Lord, but he implicitly implies that it is to his damnation. And what of those who do not come? Andrewes believed though they deserve to be cast out, “yet Christ doth not cast them out, but they cast out themselves, in as much as they sever themselves from this Sacrament and from the memorial of his loving kindness.” He insisted that they who do not come to the Eucharist are heathenish, and are no better than Jews and Turks. If they want to “be bidden to the Lambs Supper” then it is imperative they “come to the Lords Supper”, but if they “neglect the opportunity, they shall be cast out, as Saul was.” It also reflects another of his favourite themes, Paul’s teaching, though “sin abounds, grace superabounds”. By coming to Christ in the Sacrament Christians providing they show some contrition are assured of forgiveness by receiving the cup of Salvation. He again followed St. Paul’s teaching that when our lips touch “the cup of blessing” our sins are purged, bringing healing and forgiveness. We must therefore never underestimate the power of God that in Christ “that our sins shall be taken away by the outward act of the sacrament.”¹³ Just as the Sacrament is for sinners, it is also the remedy against sin; it is the antidote against the wiles of Satan as it assures us that Christ as “the seed of the woman” has vanquished “the seed of the Serpent”.¹⁴

Thus the Blessed Sacrament restores man to his rightful nature. Andrewes taught this in another of his favourite images, “the tree of life”. Adam by being cast out of the garden was “kept from the tree of life”, the original sacrament, but was restored with the second Adam. He restored the original purpose of the tree in the garden, which was to give eternal life, and now unlike Adam we are not barred from that “tree of life” that is freely given by partaking in the life of the second Adam who “is a Paradise of all joyes and

¹² *Apos. Sacra*, pp. 596—7, 601. He preached in a similar vein in his first Christmas sermon at the Jacobean court. Verily, it is the most straight and perfect ‘taking hold’ that is. No union so knitteth as it. Not consanguinity; brethren fall out. Not marriage; man and wife are severed. But that which is nourished, and the nourishment wherewith—they never are, never can be severed, but remain one for ever. Andrewes, Vol. 1, pp. 16—7.

¹³ *Apos. Sacra*, pp. 519—20, 600, 624.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 683.

happinesse.” “By eating the flesh of Christ, the first fruits of life” we overcome death in the “first Adam” by becoming “branches of the Vine.” Hence we are “partakers of His nature, and so of His life and verdure both.” That Sacrament is the dispenser of life, life from “the fruit of the Tree in Paradise” as well as life from the Living Bread, that is the flesh of Son of God. All this Christ has promised providing we are faithful; if not, like Adam we shall be forbidden entrance by the angel holding a “fierie sword”. This means we must “strive to overcome ... every temptation”. When we fall from grace “we obtain victory again sinne and death by *the blood of the Lamb, being drunk in the Sacrament.*”¹⁵

One of his favourite texts in his teaching on participation in the Eucharist was from St. John’s discourse on “*I am the Bread of Heaven*”. Accordingly in a lecture at St. Giles’, he taught that they were “*to Labour not for that bread which perisheth but Labour for that which endureth;*” the first kind cannot endure for long before it perishes, but the bread for the soul never does. It never perishes because “it is Christ, *the Sonne of man, that gives us this bread of life*”. “Therefore it stands us upon to come to Christ, that he may receive us to be one with him in the life of grace, and partakers with him in his kingdom of glory.” We must never forget that Our Lord “commands us not only to seek and desire in our hearts” this everlasting Bread, “but to hunger for it as we doe for the food of our bodies”.¹⁶

Another of Andrewes’ favourite themes was *theosis*, that is, man becoming like God of which the main was by receiving Christ’s body and blood. “He is in us and we in him, we and Christ are made one, we receive him and he receives us: So that as God cannot hate Christ, so he cannot but love us, *being engrafted into him.*” Hence through the Sacrament we are absorb His nature. Andrewes saw the fraction as the visual teaching for the fusing of the divine and human. “Now ‘the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the body, of the flesh, of Jesus Christ?’ It is surely, and by it and by nothing more are we made partakers of this blessed union. ... Because He hath so done, taken ours of us, we also ensuing His steps will participate with Him and with His flesh which He hath taken of us. It is most kindly to take part with Him in that which He took part in with us, and that, to no other end, but that He might make the receiving of it by us a means whereby He might

¹⁵ Andrewes, Vol. 2, p. 220; *Apos. Sacra*, pp. 573—4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 531, 534, 537, 601.

‘dwell in us, and we in Him.’” His *theosis* teaching mirrored the Orthodox Church on this. Gregory of Nyssa had taught that “He disseminates Himself in every believer through that flesh, whose existence comes from bread and wine, blending Himself with the body of believers, to secure that, by this union, with the immortal, man, too, may be sharer in incorruption.” A few centuries later Gregory Palamas wrote by “partaking of the body and blood of His humanity, we receive God Himself in our souls—the Body and Blood of God.”¹⁷

The Sacrament is also the source of comfort in our pilgrimage to the Supper of the Lamb. In his 1610 Pentecost sermon Andrewes explicitly taught how the Church teaches us that that Sacrament was ordained for “our comfort” for we hear it read so often: “‘He hath ordained these mysteries of His love and favour, to our great and endless comfort’”, and “‘The Father shall give you the Comforter.’” That Comforter is Christ, and so “by the flesh we eat, and the blood we drink at His table, we be made partakers of His Spirit, and of the comfort of it.” The comfort we receive can be ascertained in that bread itself strengthens or makes strong, and comfort means “to make strong”, while wine, cheers and gladdens the heart and therefore comforts those who “mourn and are oppressed with grief.” The outward symbols “show that the same effect is wrought in the inward man by the holy mysteries,... that there the heart is ‘established by grace, and our soul endued with strength, and our conscience made light and cheerful, that it faint not, but evermore rejoice in His holy comfort.’”¹⁸ He continued in this sermon:

Besides, it was one special end why the Sacrament itself was ordained, our comfort; the Church so tells us, we so hear it read every time to us: *He has ordained these mysteries of His love and favour, to our great and endless comfort. The Father will give you the Comforter. Why He gives Him, we see; how He gives Him, we see not. The means for which He gives Him, is Christ—His entreaty by His word in prayer; by His flesh and blood in sacrifice, for His blood speaks, not His voice only. These means for which; and the very same, the means by which He gives the Comforter: by Christ the Word, and by Christ’s body and*

¹⁷ Andrewes, Vol. 1, p. 16; *Apos. Sacra*, p. 600; J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology* (New York, 1983), pp. 201, 205.

¹⁸ Andrewes, Vol. 3, pp. 161—2.

blood, both. In tongues it came, but the tongue is not the instrument of speech only but of taste, we all know. ... That not only by the letter we read, and the word we hear, but by the flesh we eat, and the blood we drink at His table, we be made partakers of His Spirit, and of the comfort of it.¹⁹

The Supper of the Lord leads us to the Supper of the Lamb. It is in his Paschal sermons that Andrewes emphasised how the Passover Supper anticipates the Supper of the Lamb, which will be a perpetual feast of joy.

There is a further matter ... for as this feast looks back as a memorial of that is already past and done for us, so does it look forward, and is to us a pledge of another and a better yet to come, the feast of the marriage of the Lamb here who is our Passover, where whosoever shall be a guest, the angels pronounce him happy and blessed for ever.

That is the last and great feast indeed, when all destroyers and all destructions will cease and come to an end for evermore, and we hear that joyful voice, *Transi in gaudium Domini, Passover into the joy of the Lord*, the joys of heaven, joys not mingled with any sour leaven as this world's joy is, but pure and entire; not transient as that of this world, and ever flitting and forsaking us then soonest when we think we have best hold of them, but permanent and abiding still. A Passover that will never be passed over, but last and continue as feast to all eternity. Of that, this here is a pledge, if we neglect it not as it were not worth the taking. And He who at this time gave us this pledge, in His good time also bring us to the Passover whereof this is the pledge, even to the never-passing but everlasting joys and happiness, of His heavenly kingdom, through the offering of His blessed Son the very Paschal Lamb!²⁰

Undoubtedly we Christians are the happiest of all people "in this valley of tears".

So it is "in this Sacrament we have both a means of victory and a pledge of our reward, that is, the life of grace begun in us here, to assure us of

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 308.

a glorious life in the world to come.” Just as “every tree must have a root, so Christ speaks of the Sacrament being a root when it is sown “in the hearts of the receivers”. In time through the work of the Holy Spirit it “shoots forth and becomes a tree” giving “a life of grace”. 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”. In this sense for Andrewes the Sacrament is the bridge between “the Church Militant” and “the Church Triumphant”.²¹

²¹ *Apos. Sacra*, pp. 576—7.