

Project Canterbury

Lancelot Andrewes—Prelate, Preacher, Pastor
by Dr. Marianne Dorman

ON September 25th we commemorate and give thanks for the life of Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626). That life has touched and influenced not only many who were his contemporaries, but also countless Christians over the last four centuries. As a theologian he never spent enormous energy over religious controversies, but rather preached and lived out the Catholic faith of the early Church. For him that was always his criterion for teaching and preaching in the post-Reformation Church in England. He vehemently believed that his vocation as a priest and later on as a bishop demanded that he articulate that faith handed down by the apostles, enshrined in the teachings of the Patristics and laid down in the early councils of the first five hundred years.

His ordained ministry covers close to fifty years. We tend to see Andrewes as a Jacobean divine because he was the regular preacher for all the major festival during James 1's reign, but his pre-Jacobean period as a preacher, pastor and teacher covers more years. From 1578 as Catechist at Pembroke College he was delivering lectures, which have come down to us as *The Moral Law Expounded* and in Lambeth Palace Ms. 3707 while from 1588 onwards he was preaching in London, especially in his parish church of St. Giles, Cripplegate, and giving term lectures as a prebend of St. Paul's Cathedral on the opening chapters of Genesis. Thus his sermons touched the lives of monarchs, courtiers, academics and students, as well as the artisans and poor in his parish. Preaching to regular congregations, Andrewes could give a continuity of teaching the faith and exercising pastoral care.

What draws me back time and time again to Andrewes' sermons is not only their literary fineness which Eliot commended, but more than anything else his belief in the perennial Bethlehem. For you see, for Andrewes what happened at Bethlehem almost two thousand years ago still happens every day at the altar and will continue until our Lord's return to claim this world as His. Important as preaching is, the Sacrament is more important for Andrewes. Nearly all his sermons end by linking Christ in the various aspects of His life with that life being with us now in the Eucharist under the guise of bread and wine.

For what are they, but weak and poor elements of themselves? yet in them find we Christ. Even as they did this day in the beasts' crib the food of angels; which very food our signs both represent, and present unto us.

Another reason for admiring Andrewes is that he conveys the awe and mystery of the faith through the creation of the cosmos and its Creator. I suspect part of this comes from his respect and study of the Orthodox liturgies and the writings of the Eastern Fathers. The great mystery is God Himself, and the greatest mystery is the Incarnation. Andrewes unveils his own continual amazement that God could leave His heavenly home and take upon Himself our flesh, and not only that, but to die a despicable death for us, so we in turn may become the sons of God. This was the greatest act of love by God. Thus God is always Love, and it is this Love which bore our human flesh. Hence from the moment of His conception within the womb of our Lady His love was for us.

Although Andrewes spent endless hours in the pulpit, he was above all a man of prayer, as Buckeridge indicated in his funeral oration for Andrewes. The depth and range of his prayers are contained in his *Preces Privatæ*. As the first translator of this devotional book tells us, "Had you seen the original manuscript, happy in the glorious deformity thereof, being slubbered with his pious hands, and watered with his penitential tears, you would have been forced to confess that book belonged to no other than pure and primitive devotion."

The devotional content follows the traditional structure: confession, thanksgiving, praise, intercession and petition, while his prayers reflect his concern for the entire world, all creation, all humanity, and of course for the universal church, especially for its unity.

We who live in the twentieth century tend to think that ecumenism is a modern concept. Yet four hundred years ago Andrewes prayed with a great desire for unity amongst Christians.

For the Catholic Church:

for the churches throughout the world:

their truth, unity and stability to wit:

in all let charity thrive, truth live:

for our own church:

*that the things that are wanting therein be supplied,
that are not right be set in order.*

Lancelot Andrewes should be more than an illustrious name in the English Church when he is commemorated on the 25th September each year. The richness, joy, love, worship and service which explode from his sermons have touched many lives, even in the latter part of the twentieth century. For anyone whose Christian living is Eucharistic based, Andrewes will always have a special appeal.

Footnote

His sermons for the great feasts and fasts are now available in a two volume set, edited by me, primarily for meditation and to make Andrewes sermons more accessible to Christians.

They are available through Pentland Press, 5 Hutton Close, South church, Bishop Auckland, Durham. DL14 6XB. UK.