

Eminent English Churchmen By the Reverend Canon Arthur Middleton

Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626)

ANDREWES WAS BORN at Barking in 1555, nine years before Shakespeare and six years before Bacon his close friend. For fifteen years he was successively student, Fellow, and Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge. He taught himself fifteen languages. He was successively Vicar of St. Giles' Cripplegate, prebend of St. Paul's, Master of Pembroke, chaplain to Archbishop Whitgift. When chaplain-in-ordinary to Queen Elizabeth he refused the bishoprics of Ely and Salisbury because the Queen's policy was to alienate part of the revenues. As Canon and then Dean of Westminster he was prominent in the school after which he was successively Bishop of Ely, Chichester and Winchester in the reign of James I. A Privy Councillor he was confidant to James I, whose unsavoury court from which George Herbert and Richard Baxter fled, may have left some scars on one naive in political and worldly affairs that continued to pain him in the penitential cries of his *Private Devotions*. By nature he was an affectionate and generous man, a friend to those in distress, so that as scholar, don, schoolmaster and bishop, his ministry was always essentially pastoral. He had a reputation for saintliness and profound learning, despite the fact that for a greater part of his life he lived in a climate uncongenial to saintliness, in a corrupt court where the King was anything but a saint. Successive generations of English people owe him a lasting debt for his prominent part in the translation of the Authorised Version of the Bible.

Hooker and Andrewes

He shared much in common with his predecessor Hooker. Formed under the same circumstances they recoiled from the popular systems and traditions which, under Elizabeth, had claimed to interpret and represent exclusively the English Reformation and stood on the same positive ground that they identified as the true and positive basis of the teaching of the English Church. Dean Church claimed that they shared "that devotional temper, those keen and deep devotions of awe, reverence and delight, which arise when the objects of theological thought and interest are adequately realised according to their greatness by the imagination and the heart." [*Pascal and Other Sermons*, p. 641]. Their differences lay in the fact that Hooker was the obscure country priest while Andrewes, as a bishop, counselled in the

nation's corridors of power. Nevertheless, for twenty-five years after his death, Andrewes followed the theological method Hooker had opened up.

True Theology

True theology must always be mystical, which means that it is a spirituality expressing a doctrinal attitude whose roots must lie in the praying and worshipping Church. The theology of Andrewes is mystical in this sense. For him, spirituality and theology are not opposed, but the one cannot be conceived without the other. Spirituality, a modern term not used by Andrewes, means the experience in the Church of the union of man with God, and not an individualistic pietism. So for Andrewes theology is not a speculative intellectual system about God, but the translating of this ecclesial experience into terms that can be used to transmit it. It is a vision of God not a system of thought, a theology that can be preached.

Despite a jerky, uncouth style and quaint word-plays, the sermons are representative of the true mind of the English Church but in print they lose the personality and delivery of the man that made them effective. His aim in preaching is to convert his hearers to this ecclesial experience of God in the rectitude of the *lex credendi* (the rule of faith) which cannot but be in profound harmony with the *lex orandi* (the rule of prayer). Therefore he does not merely quote the Fathers, because he has integrated their essential attitude to theology itself, which is not thinking about God but the attempt to translate into intelligible terms the experience of life in God. This acquiring of the *mind of the Fathers* is what makes Andrewes himself a Father of the Church, because a Father is not confined to one age but can live in any age when there are persons who have acquired that essential attitude to theology that characterises the patristic mind.

Not Antiquarianism

The base of that theology is best summarised in his own words, "One canon reduced to writing by God himself, two testaments, three creeds, four general councils, five centuries, and the series of Fathers in that period ... determine the boundary of our faith". For Andrewes the authority of the Church of England is based on the Scriptures and on the fact that her faith is that of the Church of the first five centuries. She holds as *de fide* neither more nor less than did the Fathers. This was not antiquarianism because Andrewes does not imply that all subsequent developments are to be condemned, provided they are not held to be *de fide*, nor does he contemplate a return to the precise conditions of the Primitive Church. His concern is to provide a standard within the history of the Church by which the development of doctrines and institutions might be tested, identifying that

standard or norm of faith in its purest form in the New Testament and in the first five centuries of Church History. This continuity of Anglicanism with antiquity meant that the Anglican Church was part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. His *primitivism* is not a simple return to the past, never a search for some 'golden age' as a period of reference *par excellence*. The 'tradition' of the Church can never be reduced to a simple conservation of what has been said or done in the past. For Andrewes it is a dynamic process transcending ordinary time without destroying it. It is a way of living in time in the light of eternity, which recapitulates past, present, and future because everything is lived in contemporaneity with the reality of the Gospel. 'What the Churches of God have done at all times' is of importance to Andrewes, not in a spirit of imitation or conservatism, but to the extent that they have done it in a consciousness of living by 'memorial', 'anamnesis', the past events of the Gospel and their consequences to come, in the Church of the present (*see Lancelot Andrewes the Preacher*, N. Lossky, p. 340).

Tradition in the Modern World

Like Hooker, Andrewes saved his age from being stifled in a Protestant scholasticism. They did this by leading their contemporaries away from the stifling polemics of contemporary controversies into a diviner, purer, freer atmosphere, back to the many-sided thought, to the sanctified divinity of the undivided Church. They led them away from what was purely "Church of England", English or European, into the larger room of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of which the Church of England claimed to be part. As Dean Church noted, it took them out of a theology that ended in cross-grained and perverse conscientiousness and placed them in a theology that ended in adoration, self-surrender and blessing, into the awe and joy of welcoming the Eternal Beauty, the Eternal Sanctity and the Eternal Love, the Sacrifice and Reconciliation of the world. This fusion of thought and feeling in Hooker and Andrewes is what drew T.S. Eliot back to Christianity, because for Eliot it embodied the learning, the theology and the devotion which marks the best men of this age, and made the English Church more worthy of intellectual assent. In them, as in the actual life and worship of the period, he found Catholicism, which was not ignorant either of the Renaissance or the Reformation. Here was a tradition, which had already moved into the modern world that was a way of living and thinking the Christian tradition, and which had taken humanism and criticism into itself without being destroyed by them.