

Lancelot Andrewes

This month gives me the opportunity to write about someone who was influential in shaping the Church of England in the years after the Reformation: Lancelot Andrewes, 1555-1626. We commemorate him on 25th September. In the Calendar of Common Worship he is listed in ordinary black roman typeface, indicating that his is a Lesser Festival, which puts him on a par with most of the saints listed; only the very special saints, such as the Apostles, are listed in red, indicating that their days are Festivals. So who was Andrewes, and why is he so important?

He had a distinguished career in Cambridge, becoming Master of Pembroke College. But he was also incumbent of St Giles Cripplegate in London and his preaching, for which he became renowned, caught the attention of Queen Elizabeth, who in 1598 offered him the bishoprics of Salisbury and Ely, But he declined each in turn because he didn't agree with the conditions attached, which were to do with the stripping away of some of their revenues. He became Dean of Westminster in 1601, where he continued his very considerable scholarly work and gave close attention to the development of Westminster School. He assisted at the coronation of James I and took part in the Hampton Court Conference in 1604, from which the most substantial outcome was a new translation of the Bible, known as the King James Bible or the Authorized Version, published in 1611. Andrewes's name is the first on the list of those appointed to compile it and he was in effect the general editor for the whole project, taking direct responsibility for the first books of the Old Testament (Genesis to 2 Kings). Under James, Andrewes rose rapidly, becoming Bishop of Chichester in 1605, of Ely in 1609, and of Winchester in 1619. He was very tied up with the controversy about the Oath of Allegiance which was imposed after the Gunpowder Plot (1605), and it is often said that we owe our annual Bonfire Night celebrations to Lancelot Andrews. He was asked to write a sermon for the first anniversary of the event, to be presented to the king, and in it he argued that the deliverance was so momentous that it should be joyously celebrated each year, almost as a kind of feast-day. I'm not sure that our traditional events were quite what Andrewes had in mind, but certainly the idea of an annual commemoration was his.

Andrewes played a major role in the development of a distinctive Anglican theology which was removed from the rigidity of Puritanism, 'reasonable' in outlook, and broadly Catholic in tone. He had a High Church view of the Eucharist, and he was very much in favour of the Church of England worshipping with ordered ceremonial. Many of his ideas were published in sermon form, although he also wrote various treatises and polemical works. But perhaps his best known work nowadays is his collections of private prayers, some of which John Rutter has set to music. And when we read the beginning of T.S. Eliot's poem *The Journey of the Magi*, we are hearing Andrewes's voice from his 1622 Christmas sermon: 'A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey. The ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun farthest off, in solstitio brumali, the very dead of winter.'

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