

# Words from the most patient of preachers

This study of a small part of Andrewes's work is very thorough — but too limited, laments *Nicholas Cranfield*

**Lancelot Andrewes: Selected sermons and lectures**

**Peter McCullough, editor**  
Oxford University Press £90  
(0-19-818774-2)  
Church Times Bookshop £81

SHORTLY before he was put to death, Charles I wrote of religion to his son: "the best profession of which I have ever esteemed that of the Church of England". In that faith he had been well-encouraged by his father's trusted Lord Almoner, the noted preacher Lancelot Andrewes. Andrewes, who was born in the England of Philip and Mary in 1555, had first risen to eminence as a Cambridge academic through the good offices of Queen Elizabeth's senior spymaster, Francis Walsingham.

In 1605, while Andrewes was working as one of the team of scholars producing the Authorised Version of the Bible, he was consecrated bishop, and served for more than 20 years at Chichester, Ely, and finally Winchester. After his death in 1626, some 96 sermons were printed by royal command, edited by two leading bishops.

That selection, reprinted by a partisan press for the Oxford Movement, remains the *textus receptus* for how we most readily encounter Andrewes. It is largely biased towards the court sermons that he delivered before James VI and I, and quite overlooked the hundreds of parish sermons and Cambridge addresses that are known to have been given by this most patient of preachers.

McCullough has chosen an illustrative selection, although his edition includes only ten sermons, the first preached before the Spanish Armada, and the last more than 30 years later, on Easter Day in 1620 before the Lords in the royal household. He adds a few Cambridge lectures, a couple of prayers, and some catechetical notes.

The endnotes (more than 200 pages of them) become as absorbing as the literature on which they comment. These provide the context for each passage, and chart Andrewes's avant-garde theological development in post-Reformation England, as well as his literary style. We are treated to indecently long quotations from Augustine, shown to what degree St John Fisher may or may not have influenced him (this in his disquisition on the 1597 Good Friday sermon), and given a brisk survey of current thinking on the genesis of the Gunpowder Plot — and much more.

In his magisterial way (McCullough wrote the useful life of his subject in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*), he shows how a Paschal homily concentrates on Mary Magdalene at the tomb, and progresses from death and grief to recognition and redemption, a cycle that, he reflects, can be found in *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, and *The Winter's Tale*. This observation is typical of McCullough's scholarly interest.

OUP has treated the texts and the editorial apparatus with customary care. My one regret is that this is so exhaustive that it is unlikely, if not infeasible, that a complete edition of all Andrewes's works (some of which only now are coming to light in manuscript) will appear, with such authority, for many years; and that for the *Preces Privatae* we will still need to turn to F. E. Brightman's edition and translation of 1903.

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Ecclesiastical wonder: this is how David Stanford, in his *Suffolk Churches*, describes the mid-14th-century retable in St Mary's, Thornham Parva. After the Dissolution it was hidden by a Roman Catholic family in Stradbroke, and rediscovered in the stable loft of Thornham Hall in 1927. Stanford chooses 56 Suffolk churches for their architectural beauty or historical interest (see also the picture below) (Frances Lincoln, £14.99 (£13.50); 0-7112-2496-X)

## Practice makes perfect

*John Gaskell recommends two books that aim to teach the art of preaching*

**Preparing to Preach: A handbook for preachers**

**Maurice Burrell**  
Athena Press £5.99  
(1-84401-446-0)

**A Guide to Preaching**

**Roger Bowen**  
SPCK £9.99 (0-281-05726-5)  
Church Times Bookshop £9

HERE are two useful and reasonably priced books about preaching — one mostly descriptive, the other prescriptive. Both would be helpful for people embarking on preaching preparation, perhaps preparing for it in a class or a group. For those already preaching, both would be useful for self-examination — and for the review of others.

Maurice Burrell's *Preparing to Preach* is the easier read. The typeface is larger, the layout spacious, and the author's approach relaxed. There is an illuminating introduction on the preacher's calling, commitment, study, character, and spirituality. Little is said about authorisation. Burrell writes from experience as both preacher and listener, and he briefly and clearly expounds styles, types of sermons, and schemes of preparation.

He also provides useful checklists on aspects of the preacher's art. There is a good chapter on preaching as performing. He is clear that "there are no off-the-peg patterns to which sermons conform," and he cautions preachers against developing inflexible habits. There are some diverting quotes, such as Winston Churchill's "The head cannot take in more than the seat can endure."

Churchill also has his place in Roger Bowen's *A Guide to Preaching*. It gives the text of his devastating speech in the House of Commons after Munich in 1938. Here are, also, extracts from Dr Martin Luther King and Allan Boesak. Impressive examples of oratory show what can be done with words, but (as Bowen points out) "they were delivered to large crowds at times of danger or challenge": they were not sermons but speeches.

The emphasis in both books on the preacher's aim and the sermon's context, however, should ensure that the reader has no delusions about what is appropriate to a

particular proclamation of the Word of God.

I did, however, wonder whether either book gave sufficient attention to the setting of the sermon. There is usually a liturgical (or similar) setting, and that will influence the style and the content of the sermon.

I question, too, whether the occasional sceptical attitude to a historical approach to holy scripture helps the preacher. Bowen asserts that "instead of worrying about textual, historical and literary criticism we should spend more time praying that God will show us what the writer meant to say to his hearers in the text, and how that message can come alive for our hearers today." Reaching that understanding is the goal of biblical criticism, and a part of the Holy Spirit's work in the minds and hearts of preachers as they approach the Bible. Thinking about the commentaries is not an alien activity.

Bowen ends each chapter with useful study suggestions, valuable in connection with preacher training or renewal. With worship teams undertaking leadership at services, there is a need to train the enthusiast and coach the novice, as well as the prospective ordinand or Reader. These books provide ample material to get any group talking, and, later, by the grace of God, preaching.

Essentially, of course, the books are to be recommended as stimulating for the individual reader.

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All Saints', Sudbourne, was restored in 1878-79 by Sir Richard Wallace, of the Wallace Collection. From *Suffolk Churches* (above)

## Speaking of power, darkness, joy and light

These themes underlie a wide-ranging set of fine sermons, says *Richard Coles*

**Seeing in the Dark: University sermons**  
**Nicholas Lash**  
DLT £12.95 (0-232-52619-2)  
Church Times Bookshop £11.66

THIS IS A characteristically attractive and thought-provoking volume, both in the sermons themselves and in the matter of sermonising generally. The 25 sermons were delivered between 1969 and 1996, fewer than a quarter of them being "University Sermons" in the formal sense. Most were given in college chapels in Cambridge, where Professor Lash has his being, moving on to the universities of Oxford, Leeds, and Edinburgh via a London industrial chaplaincy, and — an anomaly — a requiem mass in rural Northamptonshire.

As one might expect from the Norris-Hulse Professor Emeritus of Divinity, they are wide-ranging, touching on the centenary of the death of Karl Marx, the message of St Valentine for the notoriously prim gentlemen of Peterhouse, and on the Madonna in Mesopotamia, at Magdalene College.

But, for all the lightness of touch, there are deeper themes. These may be charted partly by date — hearing the account in Genesis 2 of events around the River Euphrates must have resonated powerfully in October 1990, as the first President Bush planned his own excursion there; and "In Search of a Body", preached in 1996, wouldn't have been preached, I suggest, had it not been for the efforts to ascribe infallibility to the Pope's letter on the ordination of women in the preceding year.

They also deal with the preoccupations of the preacher, which are plain. He is interested in the exercise of power and authority; in the darkness that precedes any dawn; in the relationship between past and present in the proclamation of the gospel now. Most of all he is interested in joy, light, freedom. These themes swell underneath the more intimate sermons — given at chapel evensongs, mostly — and rise to the fore in the bigger set pieces, the University Sermons.

Two of these are particularly memorable. In Edinburgh, he preaches on the image of the servant, and in Great St Mary's, Cambridge, on authority and impotence. These recall a grander kind of University Sermon, the kind one associates with Newman. He is one of the figures who appear, reappear, and half appear out of the dark whenever Lash is at his best (the ghosts of Marx and Barth are also often abroad).

These sermons were launched from the pulpit into the turbulent three decades that brought the past century in the Church's life to a close, from Vatican II to JP II. Issues of power and authority, of the past and the present, are perennial for any preacher, but they have distinctive configurations here. The affinity between Lash, Timothy Radcliffe, and, say, James Allison, anglophone Roman Catholic intellectuals of a particular, often Dominican, kidney, is marked.

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