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Hooker's Theological Method and Modern Anglicanism

Nigel Atkinson

What does it mean to be Anglican? This very question has exercised many minds over many years and even today some Evangelicals often wonder whether they should be Anglicans first and Evangelicals second or Evangelicals first and Anglicans second. Of course it is not just Evangelicals who are absorbed with questions of self identity; for there seems to be an identity crisis taking place not only within world-wide Anglicanism but also within the Church of England. In recent years books such as Paul Avis' *Anglicanism and the Christian Church* and Bishop Stephen Sykes' *The Integrity of Anglicanism* have been avidly read.¹ The temptation for the Church of England, searching for her identity, is to define Anglicanism in terms of sociology rather than theology. In other words the assessment of what constitutes Evangelicalism or Catholicism or Anglicanism is not taking place on doctrinal and theological grounds. Rather, in answer to the question, 'What do Evangelicals/Anglicans/Catholics believe?' the answer is usually given in terms of what Evangelicals/Anglicans believe now. As a result the answer that is given often reflects only the majority consensus at that moment; and no attempt is made to appraise critically whether Evangelicals/Anglicans have any business believing the things that some admit that they accept in the present, when it is patently obvious that none of their Evangelical-cum-Anglican forefathers would have tolerated such wide discrepancies. In this type of situation Hooker would warn us that it is one thing to have the consensus of the moment but it is quite another to have the consensus of the ages. To be merely content with the consensus of the moment is a deplorable state of affairs and we should not be happy to accept that Anglicanism is nothing or less than what she is in the present. My plea, in this paper, is that we should judge both Evangelicalism and Anglicanism from the high ground of doctrinal orthodoxy in order to assess properly what is authentic Anglicanism.

That the state of doctrinal play within Anglicanism is riven with ambiguity and contradiction resulting in theological confusion is nowhere better reflected than in the Doctrine Commission's book *We Believe in God*. Written

1 Paul Avis *Anglicanism and the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1989); Stephen Sykes *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (London and Oxford: Mowbray 1978)

in response to the furore caused by the then Bishop of Durham, David Jenkins, the Doctrine Commission asked itself the pertinent question 'Where, then, is the unity?' It went on to conclude that 'if the Church [as opposed to the churches] is to become fully herself, she will not do so by attempting to achieve a doctrinal definition to which all can assent'.² But if the Church cannot gather around an agreed doctrinal definition one has to ask why do we bother with the creeds. It would seem then that there has been a massive failure of doctrinal nerve. But what has caused this enormous doctrinal collapse? To answer this question I would like to look at a leading Reformed Divine of the Church of England and to illustrate that the way in which he has been read and interpreted has had a colossal impact upon the Church of England's theological self-understanding. I am thinking, of course, of Richard Hooker. I am convinced that if we are to recover our confidence as true Anglicans and as true Evangelicals (for the two are not incompatible) we have, as a matter of some urgency, to re-appropriate and re-assimilate Richard Hooker. In so doing we shall recapture our rich doctrinal heritage both as Evangelicals and Anglicans.

Richard Hooker was born in or near Exeter in April 1554, less than six years before the accession of Elizabeth I. At a very early age he came to the attention of John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, the first official defender of the English Church and author of *An Apology of the Church of England*. With the bishop's support Hooker attended Oxford, became a Fellow of Corpus Christi College in 1579, and taught logic and Hebrew.

In the same year that Hooker was made a Fellow, he was also ordained deacon, and, in due course, was ordained priest. In 1585 his appointment as Master of the Temple made him chief pastor of one of the principal centres of legal studies in London but he gave up his place at the Temple in 1591 in order to work on his *Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*. The Preface and the first four books of the *Lawes* were published in 1593 and book five in 1597. In 1595 Hooker was presented by the Queen to the living of Bishopsbourne in Kent, where he continued to work on the last three books, books six, seven and eight. He died at Bishopsbourne on November 2, 1600.

Despite this rather uneventful, retiring career Hooker is nevertheless widely

2 *We believe in God* (London: Church House Printing 1987)

recognized as ‘unquestionably the greatest Anglican theologian’.³ It has also been said that it is difficult to overestimate the importance of Hooker because he was ‘great with the greatness of Shakespeare’.⁴ It is granted that Hooker’s ‘greatness’ is located primarily in the fact that his *Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity* mark, in the words of Aidan Nichols, ‘the true beginning of Anglicanism’. According to Nichols it is in the *Lawes* that ‘Anglicanism first achieved a relatively coherent form’.⁵ Others agree with this assessment. Louis Weil claims that ‘the first major exponent of the Anglican view was... Richard Hooker’ whilst John Booty thinks that Hooker ‘came to represent a vital turning point in the history of Anglicanism’.⁶ So authoritative is Hooker’s position in the field of Anglican theology that Anglican theologians have often felt the need to demonstrate that major developments in Anglican thought and practice are merely extensions of ideas already contained within the *Lawes*. Examples of this are not hard to find. John Keble, who edited the *Lawes* at the start of the Oxford Movement, added a Preface in which he tried to argue that Hooker would have given his blessing to the High Church movement; even though Hooker’s theological dependence on Augustine and Calvin had previously been taken for granted. Similarly, as the Church of England gradually moved from what has been called an ‘exclusive’ to ‘inclusive’ ministry, Stephen Sykes was compelled to justify this development in the Church’s life by arguing that it was a process entirely compatible with Hooker’s theological first principles.⁷

But what exactly are Hooker’s theological first principles? Obviously if Hooker occupies such a prominent position in the galaxy of Anglican theologians it is important to ascertain, as precisely as possible, the theological matrix that informed his thinking. However, is it especially at this point that difficulties are encountered. Over the years various schools of Hooker scholarship have arisen with the result that an unfortunate impasse has been reached, with some even concluding that Hooker’s theology is contradictory and fatally flawed. It has also recently been pointed out that as the state of

3 P Avis *Anglicanism*

4 S Marshall *Hooker and the Anglican Tradition* (London: A & C Black 1963) pp v, vii

5 Aidan Nichols *The Panther and the Hind: A theological History of Anglicanism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1993) p 43

6 Louis Weil ‘The Gospel in Anglicanism’ in *The Study of Anglicanism* Stephen Sykes and John Booty edd (London and Philadelphia: SPCK/Fortress Press 1988) p 67

7 See Stephen Sykes ‘Richard Hooker and the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood’ in *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition* J M Soskice ed (Marshall Pickering)

doctrinal play within the Church of England is also fatally flawed this is only because she has been so influenced by none other than Richard Hooker. For one can only expect theological incoherence in a Church that is so influenced by a theologian who himself was irrational.⁸ Nevertheless, a closer look reveals that a common thread links both Richard Hooker and the Church of England and that is the assumption that whatever Hooker's theology is deemed to be, and whatever else the Church of England is seen to be, it is certainly not a theology, or a Church, that bears the characteristic doctrinal stamp of the Reformation. Whether this is true needs further investigation.⁹

That Hooker's theological position is not that of the Reformation has frequently been stated. John Keble, the High Churchman of the Oxford Movement, and the nineteenth-century editor of Hooker's works, maintained that English theology underwent such a 'decisive change' in Hooker's hands that the next generation of English divines owe to Hooker's *Laws* 'the fact that the Church of England continued at such a distance from Geneva, and so near to primitive truth and apostolic order'.¹⁰ Note what Keble is saying. He is declaring that Hooker, as the Church of England's greatest theologian, was carving out for himself a theological niche that lay somewhere in between Geneva on the one hand and Rome on the other. In other words that Hooker, as the distinctive theologian of the Church of England, was not committed to the doctrinal first principles of the Reformation. He was, after all, 'continuing at a distance' from the Reformation and following instead 'primitive truth and apostolic order'. Now this begs a lot of questions. It assumes that the Reformers were not seeking to follow 'primitive truth' which flies in the face of their constant claim that they were the ones who were seeking to bring the Church back to ancient and long forgotten truths. It also introduces, for the first time, the novel idea that Hooker was a theologian of the *via media*. And this concept contains, as its fundamental theological idea, the notion that Hooker was not given to the first principles of Reformed orthodoxy.¹¹ He

8 Gunnar Hillerdal *Reason and Revelation in Richard Hooker* (Lund: Lund Universitets Arsskrift 1962)

9 For a fuller treatment of this subject see Nigel Atkinson *Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition and Reason* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press 1997)

10 John Keble 'Preface to the First Edition of the Life of Hooker' in *The Works of Mr Richard Hooker* (Oxford 1845) 1 pp cvi-cvii

11 The pioneer of this appraisal is W J Torrance Kirby *Richard Hooker's Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy* (Leiden: E J Brill 1990). Kirby's book is ground breaking in showing Hooker's close doctrinal connection to the Reformation. Kirby's influence readily acknowledged.

was after all positioned between Rome and Geneva and as such was at some distance from the heart of the Reformation. Once this idea caught on (and it did so very quickly) students of Hooker began to fall over themselves to show that Hooker was trying, in one way or another, to undo the evangelical work of the Reformation.

The *via media* doctrine then is that which is said to isolate both Hooker and the Church of England from the Reformation's first principles and this, it is inferred, is what is so unique about Hooker and the Anglicanism that he first espoused. As we have already seen, Hooker's standing as the first 'Anglican' theologian has been accepted by all shades of scholarly opinion and it is taken for granted that as an Anglican theologian Hooker was pursuing a unique doctrinal approach that marks the Church of England as doctrinally distinct from Catholicism or Protestantism. After all, if Anglicanism's doctrinal position lies between Rome and Geneva, a singular doctrinal approach is clearly being implied. Consequently a great deal of both Hooker scholarship and Anglican self-understanding is built on the premise that Hooker, as the theologian of Anglicanism, was forging a new and novel approach to theology that terminated somewhere between Rome and Geneva. But, if this is true, it should be admitted that neither Hooker nor the Church of England of which he was the theological representative, was in any serious way committed either to Reformed orthodoxy or to the Council of Trent. But if this is true, then what were the doctrinal convictions that the Church embraced at the Reformation? If Hooker and the Church of England did not embrace the central theological insights of the Reformation did they remain clinging to a late medievalism? If not, what was the theological base on which they justified severing themselves from Rome? In answer to these questions three responses can be given. It could be said, firstly, that Hooker's stance is made up of an unprincipled mish-mash, a syncretistic mixing of two theological systems, a mixture that can constantly change, depending on which theological parties at any one moment are in power or, secondly, it could be claimed that Hooker did achieve a real, coherent, consistent and compatible theological *via media* that placed the Church at some distance from the Reformation. But if one accepts this, one has to spell out the doctrinal distinctives of this *via media* so that it can be seen that Hooker is not a Reformed theologian and that the Church of England is not to be considered as one of the Reformed churches of Europe. The third, and most likely position that can be adopted, is that Hooker, and the Church of

England embraced the Reformation and that, as a point of fact, a Reformed position was willingly adopted in all the cardinal doctrinal beliefs. In short that Hooker's mind is a consistent Evangelical mind.

Notwithstanding this however, numerous academics have tried to convince us that Hooker '*qua* Anglican and therefore a proponent of a doctrinal *via media* between Protestantism and Catholicism, was not strictly committed to the principles of Reformed theology'.¹² But there are serious problems with this approach. First of all it is anachronistic to apply the label 'Anglican' to Hooker. Not only was the term 'Anglican' never used by the theologians of the Church of England at the time of the Reformation, it also has to be borne in mind that when it was first used (by Dr John Fell in his *Life of Dr Hammond* published post 1662) it was used as a blanket label for all members of the Church of England; with no theological discrimination taking place. The fact that they might have been either strict Elizabethan Calvinists or more liberally minded Jacobean Arminians did not alter the designation 'Anglican' from being attached to them. Just as today the label Anglican can be used to describe the leaders of *Reform*, or *Forward in Faith* or the *Sea of Faith* movement. Thus, because the term 'Anglican' is so theologically anaemic, vacuous and imprecise it is almost meaningless as a term of theological definition. This should put us on our guard on at least two fronts. Firstly, the fact that the term 'Anglican' is a term of later coinage, and was used to describe the supposedly unique doctrinal position of the Church of England, lends significant weight to the argument that, at the time, the theologians and Reformers of the Church were blissfully unaware that they were hammering out a theological position that was distinct from that being pursued by the Reformation in general. And the reason that they were so blissfully unaware was not due to theological naiveté on their part but simply because they were convinced that they were not departing, in any significant way, from the high ground occupied by an explicitly Reformed position. Secondly, even if we accept the anachronistic term 'Anglican' being applied to Hooker, it gets us no further forward in terms of defining his theological stance, in which case the term might as well be dropped.

We now need, briefly, to examine the various schools of thought that have attempted to categorize Hooker, and therefore the Church of England, as

12 W J Torrance Kirby *Richard Hooker's Doctrine* p 34

someone less than whole heartedly supportive of the Reformation.¹³ The first school of thought is that which is associated with the Oxford Movement. Obviously, in trying to link the Church of England more directly with Rome, it was incumbent upon the Oxford Apostles to represent the Church's doctrinal position as less than Reformed and closer to Rome than had previously been perceived. This they attempted to do by developing the idea of the *via media* and trying to read this back into Hooker, the Articles, the Prayer Book and the Ordinal. Although Newman was later to confess that the

via media has never existed except on paper, it has never been reduced to practice; it is known not positively but negatively, in its differences from the rival creeds, not in its own properties; and can only be described as a third system, neither the one nor the other, partly both, cutting between them and, as if with a critical fastidiousness, trifling with them...

he might well have taken warning that his desire to create a true *via media* was doomed to failure.¹⁴ The Church of England was so wedded to the Reformation in her doctrinal formularies that any attempt to secure a divorce had little chance of success. Eventually Newman admitted this, writing in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*:

The *via media* was an impossible idea; it was what I had called 'standing on one leg'; and it was necessary, if my old issue of the controversy was to be retained, to go further either one way or another.¹⁵

Newman's ideas with regard to Anglicanism in general however have proved to be tenacious and difficult to dislodge. The fact that Newman himself abandoned the Anglican *via media* should at least have given scholars pause to reassess the *via media* case. But this has not happened. On the contrary, it has greatly influenced not only scholarly approaches to Hooker, but indeed the whole of the Church of England as well as Evangelicalism, so that the majority of Anglicans, including the Evangelicals, have by and large accepted this reading of Anglican identity which Newman invented and later

13 See Egil Grisli *The Hermeneutical Problem in Richard Hooker* pp 159-67 and W J Torrance Kirby *Richard Hooker's Doctrine* pp 33-41

14 J H Newman *Lectures on the Prophetic Office of the Church viewed relatively to Romanism and Popular Protestantism* (London 1837) p 20

15 J H Newman *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London: Everyman 1912) p 148

repudiated. But we should at least be aware of what we are buying into if we accept this interpretation of the Anglican mind. We are, in short, buying into a theological system that not only severely undercuts and seriously weakens the Church of England's theological edifice but which also bears and contains within itself the seeds of evangelical self-destruction.

Lest it be thought that I am exaggerating, this can clearly be seen in the way that the other two schools of thought with regard to Hooker have sought to re-appropriate the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* for their own ends. Again it should not be surprising that they have all accepted Newman's thesis as the basis for their 'big idea' and thus can be read as mere adaptations of the *via media* concept. In other words they all accept that some form of the *via media* concept is operating.

The first line of critical opinion is that which sees great similarities between Hooker and Thomas Aquinas.¹⁶ As Aquinas is generally regarded as Rome's foremost theologian, any similarities noted between the two theologians serve to pull Hooker away from any explicit dependence upon Reformed thought. It is maintained that Hooker's dependence upon Aquinas is best seen in Hooker's hierarchically structured universe which 'mediates in a "gradual order" between man and God'. This clearly contradicts 'the Reformed doctrine of an immediate and inward union between the soul and God through the action of imputed righteousness'.¹⁷ This, of course, is devastating not only for an evangelical soteriology but also for Reformed theology in the main, for it would affect the concomitant doctrines of man, sin, the fall and Scripture. If this is true, then it would have to be conceded that Hooker should not in any way be looked upon as a Reformed divine.

The second school of thought offers a further variation on this common theme. This school argues not that Hooker was indebted to Rome, Aquinas and Tradition but rather that Hooker is best understood as an Erasmian Humanist.¹⁸ This also serves to promote the *via media* concept for it is well known that Erasmus rejected the key Reformed doctrinal planks of *sola*

16 It is most notably Peter Munz who has seen the influence of Aquinas on Hooker. His book *The Place of Hooker in the History of Thought* (Westport Conn: Greenwood Press 1971) has proved influential.

17 W J Torrance Kirby *Richard Hooker's Doctrine* p 38

18 See Egil Grislis *The Hermeneutical Problem* p 163 and Torrance Kirby *Richard Hooker's Doctrine* p 39

gratia and *sola fides* (grace alone and faith alone). It is well known that Erasmus had an attenuated view of the Fall and consequently held to the possibility of man co-operating with grace, so weakening Reformed teaching on man's depravity and of his need for salvation *sola gratia* and *sola fides*. Once more, such arguments only serve to distance Hooker from the Reformation. All these various schools have one common theme, and that is their insistence upon Hooker's deviation from the theological and doctrinal principles associated with the high ground of Reformed orthodoxy. In short they all seek to extinguish any lines of thought within Hooker that promote the fundamental and great truths of classical Evangelicalism. It has also to be said that to the extent that they have succeeded they have unwittingly sought the death of an authentic Anglican mind.

At first sight it might appear that those who promote the *via media* doctrine are on solid ground. After all did not Hooker direct the *Lawes* against those who were championing themselves as the real disciples of Calvin and the Reformation; and was not Hooker, in seeking to demolish the theological platform of the Puritans, really training his guns on Geneva? At this point, however, it must be remembered that Hooker's argument with these radical Puritans was that they were the ones who had misunderstood Reformed thought. Accordingly, we should not think that just because Hooker was intolerant of these Puritan radicals he was therefore *ipso facto* seeking to undermine Calvinist orthodoxy. On the contrary, Hooker was to argue that the Church of England was to be counted as one of the Reformed churches in matters of doctrine, notwithstanding outward differences in ceremony and government. In this context we should note that when Hooker objected to the Puritans' insistence that all Reformed churches should be alike in matters of ceremony, he did so whilst maintaining that 'all the Reformed churches ... are of our confession in doctrine'.¹⁹ Although Hooker had points of disagreement with Calvin, he did not detect any substantial doctrinal irregularities between them. Indeed, it is more than likely that Hooker would have accepted Bishop Jewel's assessment of the English Reformation. Jewel was convinced that the Church of England's doctrinal position was in complete agreement with both the Swiss and French churches. He wrote enthusiastically to Peter Martyr that

19 Richard Hooker *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press 1977) 4.13.9, 1, p 334. All references to the *Lawes* are taken from the Folger Library Edition of Richard Hooker's works and I shall give the section in the *Lawes* where the reference is to be found along with the volume number of the Folger Edition and the page.

'we do not differ from your doctrine by a nail's breath' whilst Bishop Horn could write to Bullinger that 'we have throughout England the same ecclesiastical doctrine as yourselves'.²⁰ Hooker simply agreed. According to Hooker, the Reformed churches, which included the Church of England, were united on an agreed doctrinal platform.

We have to ask how did the reformers arrive at their settled convictions? The answer that is normally given is that the reformers appealed to Scripture and Scripture alone and this stands in marked contrast to the Roman Catholics who appealed to Tradition and both the reformers and the Catholics stand over and against the Anglicans who appealed, not just to Scripture, or just to Tradition but to Scripture, Tradition and Reason. This, it is claimed, is what is unique to Anglicanism and what is most exemplified in Richard Hooker. But it is precisely this assertion that needs to be radically questioned. Stephen Neil's claim, that the defence of Reason is a 'characteristically Anglican thing' is highly debatable.²¹ Hooker was just as biblicist in his approach as any other magisterial Reformed Divine and, in fact, closely followed the principal reformers in their understanding of the respective roles of Scripture Tradition and Reason. I would like, very briefly, to look at Hooker's use of Scripture and Tradition before commenting on developments in modern Anglicanism.

Richard Hooker and Scripture

It needs to be said straightaway, that for Hooker, Scripture was the ultimate authority in the Church. Scripture is even to be trusted above empirical observation. He writes in *Lawes* 2.7.5 that:

Scripture with Christian men being received as the word of God, that which we have probable, yea, that which we have necessary reason for, yea, that which we see with our eyes is not thought so sure as that which the scripture of God teacheth; because we hold that his speech revealeth there what himselfe seeth and therefore the strongest proof of all, and the most necessarily assented unto by us (which do thus receive the scripture) is the scripture.²²

20 John Jewel and Heinrich Bullinger cited in C Sydney Carter *The Anglican via media* (London: Thyne & Jarvis Ltd 1927) p 34

21 Stephen Neill *Anglicanism* (London & Oxford: Mowbray 1977) p 123

22 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 2.7.5, 1, p 79

Because Scripture is nothing else than that which God 'seeth' it is of greater authority than Tradition. Hooker complained that Rome taught Scripture to be so 'unsufficient, as if except traditions were added, it did not contein all revealed and supernaturall truth'. Scripture was absolutely sufficient. God had not left anything out that needed to be supplemented either by Tradition or by developments in culture or society in order to arrive at the text's true significance. Such things are mere human 'divisinges' and 'God hath not omitted any thing needful to be accomplished' by our fallen imaginings.

It was nevertheless necessary for Hooker to stress the full authority of Scripture because he was still maintaining the Church of England's defence against the Church of Rome. When Hooker was guarding this defence he was as Protestant as any Puritan could wish. He constantly underscored the 'absolute perfection of scripture'. 'The schooles of Rome', Hooker complained:

teach scripture to be so unsufficient, as if, except traditions were added, it did not conteine all revealed and supernaturall truth, which absolutely is necessarie for the children of men in this life to know that they may in the next be saved.²³

Hooker was insistent that neither he nor the Church of England so revered tradition that they yielded to it 'the same obedience and reverence' as they did to God's 'written lawe'. In Hooker's thought it was 'unlawfull, impious, [and] execrable' to 'urge any thing as part of supernaturall and celestiallie revealed truth' upon the Church 'and not to shewe it in scripture'.²⁴ Hooker might well have had in mind Article VI of the Church of England, established by Convocation in 1563 and doctrinally binding on all clergy. Article VI is headed 'Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures' and it makes the exact point being established by Hooker. 'Holy Scripture', the Article asserts, 'containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that what is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith'. Thus both Hooker and the Article's main quarrel with the Roman Catholicism of his day was twofold. First of all it was imagined that the 'generall and main drift of sacred scripture' was not as large as in fact it was and secondly that God did not 'intend to deliver' a 'full

²³ Richard Hooker *Lawes* 2.8.7, 1, p 91

²⁴ Richard Hooker *Lawes* 2.5.3, 1, p 60

instruction in all things unto salvation necessary'. As a consequence Rome was tempted either 'to look for new revelations from heaven' in order to make up Scripture's poverty or 'dangerously to ad to the word of God uncertaine tradition' so that the doctrine of man's salvation may be made complete. For Hooker, as for all the reformers:

The testimonies of God are true, the testimonies of God are perfect, the testimonies of God are all sufficient unto that end for which they were given. Therefore accordingly we do receive them, we do not thinke that in them God hath omitted any thing needful unto his purpose, and left his intent to be accomplished by our divisinges. What the Scripture purposeth the same in al pointes it doth performe.²⁵

On this doctrinal foundation Hooker is quick to challenge Rome whenever she relied on extra-scriptural sources and to all intents and purposes treated them as Scripture.

Hooker's confidence in Scripture as 'the strongest proof of all', however, rests on a thoroughgoing doctrine of verbal inspiration. Hooker would have concurred with the Puritan Thomas Cartwright who wrote in his *Letter to Arthur Hildersham* that the biblical authors were said to have written Scripture with the Holy Spirit, as it were, 'continually holding their hands'. Hooker says much the same thing. In his first *Sermon on Jude* he includes an extensive passage in which he describes the way the Scriptures came to be written. Hooker teaches that the men who wrote Scripture were not taught 'the knowledge of that they spake' nor 'the utterance of that they knew' by 'usual' and 'ordinary meanes'. Generally speaking, men learn through the ministry of others 'which lead us along like children from a letter to a syllable, from a syllable to a word, from a word to a line, from a line to a sentence, from a sentence to a side, and so turn over'. But this was most certainly not the case with those who wrote Scripture. 'God himselfe was their instructor' and so they became 'acquainted even with the secret and hidden counsels of God'. Possessed in this way with 'lightned... eies of understanding' it might be thought that a lapse could occur between the Divine knowledge now injected into and held in the heart of the prophet and the moment of its transmission. Hooker concedes that this is often what

25 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 2.8.5, 1, p 89

happens with human thought. Very often ‘when we have conceived a thing in our hearts’ great ‘travail’ and ‘paines’ need to be taken in order that what we have understood is properly received by others. Even then ‘our tongues do faulter within our mouthes’ and ‘wee disgrace the dreadfull mysteries of our faith and grieve the spirit of our hearers by words unsavoury, and unseemly speeches’. The ‘speech’ of Scripture however is of a different order. God ‘did so miraculously himselfe frame and fashion’ the ‘wordes and writings’ of the prophets that, Hooker continues quoting St Paul, in Scripture we have received ‘not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God’, neither have we received the ‘words which mans wisdom teacheth, but which the holy Ghost doth teach’. Hooker further elaborates on this subject and explains how it was that in Scripture we have the ‘words which the holy Ghost doth teach’. God gave his prophets scrolls to eat, Hooker explains:

not because God fed them with inke, and paper, but to teach us, that so oft as he employed them in this heavenly worke, they neither spake, nor wrote any worde of their owne, but uttered sillable by sillable as the spirit put it into their mouths, no otherwise than the Harp or the Lute doth give a sound according to the discretion of his hands that holdeth it and striketh it with skill.²⁶

As elaborated, Hooker’s doctrine of the plenary inspiration of Scripture can exist side by side with a similar doctrine held not only by the Puritans but indeed by all the reformers. Indeed, Hooker is even prepared to argue that because the Scriptures are a product of Divine handiwork it is natural they should share in some of the Divine attributes. Because God cannot err and make mistakes and because he always tells the truth, then the same is true of Scripture. It also cannot fail to be true and it cannot deceive:

God him selfe can neither possibly erre, nor leade into error. For this cause his testimonies, whatsoever he affirmeth, are alwaies truth and most infallible certaintie. Yea further, because the things that proceed from him are perfect without any manner of defect or maim; it cannot be but that the wordes of his mouth are absolute, and lack nothing which they should have, for performance of that thing whereunto they tend.²⁷

26 Richard Hooker ‘The First Sermon Upon Part of S Jude’ in *Tractates and Sermons* p 15

27 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 2.6.1, 1, pp 167-8

With this sure grasp on the Reformed doctrine of scriptural inspiration it is hardly surprising that the authors of the *Christian Letter* did not try to call into question Hooker's doctrine on this particular score. They realized that Hooker was not vulnerable to attack at this level but what is interesting is the way in which Hooker, in his marginal notes, brings the attack to them. At every opportunity Hooker challenged attempts to elevate sources outside Scripture to the same authoritative standing as Scripture, and in his polemic with Rome this is a feature of Hooker's theology.

Hooker was persuaded of the full sufficiency and authority of Scripture. It was to Scripture that the first place both of credit and obedience was due and so, even though 'ten thousand generall Councils' should 'set downe one definitive sentence concerning any point of religion whatsoever', then it could not be but that should 'one manifest testimony cited from the mouth of God to the contrary' exist, it 'could not chose but overweigh them all'.²⁸ Hooker was most concerned to protect the supreme and final authority of Scripture and this concern led him to oppose the Disciplinary use of Scripture which, he thought, could not but ultimately undermine Scripture's authority in as complete a way as was being accomplished in the Church of Rome. For whilst Rome only considered Scripture to be an incomplete form of revealed truth, the Puritans, 'justly condemning this opinion', moved in the opposite direction into a 'likewise daungerous extremitie' as if 'scripture did not onely containe all things in that kind necessary, but al things simply'.²⁹

The distinction that Hooker makes between 'all things... necessary and al things simply' brings us to the core of the problem. Hooker emphasized over and over again that Scripture was given for a particular purpose and end. The 'absolute perfection' of Scripture must be seen in relation to 'that end whereto it tendeth'. Although Hooker, as we have seen, magnified the 'testimonies of God' as 'true', 'perfect' and 'sufficient', they were only 'true', 'perfect' and 'sufficient' unto 'that end for which they were 'even'. Hooker readily admits that Rome 'daungerously...[adds] to the word of God uncertaine tradition'. In so doing Rome admits 'the maine drift of the body of sacred scripture not to be so large as it is'. Nevertheless, although this may be true of the Church of Rome, it does not warrant the Puritans to enlarge the 'scope and purpose of God' and to take it 'more largely than behoveth'. If this is done, Hooker

28 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 2.7.5, 1, p 80

29 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 2.8.7, 1, p 191

argues, the ‘racking’ and ‘stretching’ of Scripture can lead to ‘sundry as great inconveniences’ as anything contemplated by the Papal Church, and he recoils from such a scenario. He is insistent that Scripture ‘is perfect and wanteth nothing requisite unto that purpose for which God delivered the same’. But just because Scripture is perfect and provides the individual, in his search for truth, with ‘the strongest proof all’, this does not mean that ‘all things lawful to be done are comprehended in the scripture’. The nature of Scripture was to provide us with supernatural knowledge so that we might be saved everlastingly, and it is entirely appropriate, and indeed necessary, that Scripture should have Christ as its centre and as its interpretative key. ‘The mayne drifte of the whole newe Testament’, Hooker reminds his readers,

is that which Saint John setteth downe as the purpose of his owne historie, These things are written, that yee might believe that Jesus is Christ the Sonne of God, and that in believing yee might have life through his name. The drift of the old that which the Apostle mentioneth to Timothie, The holie Scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation. So that the generall end of both olde and newe is one, the difference betweene them consisting in this, that the old did make wise by teaching salvation through Christ that should come, and that Jesus whome the Jewes did crucifie, and whome God did rayse agayne from the dead is he.³⁰

Hooker’s approach to Scripture is therefore filtered through a christological lens that is not imposed upon the Scripture but is rather provided by Scripture itself. The purpose and end of Scripture is to save and it is for that reason that Hooker terms it ‘the word of life’.

This christocentric approach to Scripture enables Hooker to interpret the Scriptures in a radically different way from his Puritan objectors. He is, first of all, able to see the whole sweep of Scripture and to understand its proper scope and emphasis. On this basis, Hooker can guard himself, for example, from a reading of Scripture that would place an equal emphasis on the Levitical penal code and on the Sermon on the Mount. In a sense the whole debate between Hooker and the Puritans can be reduced to a question of hermeneutics and Hooker’s frustration with Puritan exegesis becomes evident when he tackles the Disciplinarians when they began to ‘pleade against the

30 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 1.14.4, 1, p 128

politic of the Church of England'. In pleading against this polity the Puritans commonly alleged 'the law of God, The worde of the Lorde' but when pressed which 'law' and which 'worde', Hooker points out, 'their common ordinarie practise is, to quote by-speeches in some historicall narration or other, and to urge them as if they were written in moste exact form of lawe'. In Hooker's estimation, to use some 'by-speeche' in an obscure 'historicall narration' deeply embedded somewhere in the Old Testament as if this was legally binding on all Churches, was simply absurd. When this is done, 'bare and unbuided conclusions' are placed into the minds of men who either then doubt their faith because they cannot believe that the Scriptures teach what they are said to teach or they doubt Scripture altogether. In this way, Hooker warns, 'we add to the lawes of God' and 'the sentence of God is heavy against them that wittingly shall presume thus to use the scripture'. On the contrary, obscure parts of the Old Testament are to be subordinated under the overarching christological essence of Scripture and the christological core is not to be abandoned in favour of some obscure part of the Old Testament that might seem to favour Genevan Church polity. It can now be seen why Hooker was so horrified at Puritan attempts to impose Old Testament civil legislation upon society. If this course was pursued, it could only successfully be accomplished if the central message of Scripture viewed in its entirety was wholly eradicated.

Richard Hooker and Tradition

As Hooker contemplated the Puritan arguments that confronted him, he adopted an historical approach that sought to place the Church of England's settlement within the broader perspective of historical development. Hooker, unlike his Puritan opponents, saw history as a gradually unfolding continuum and not as a series of unrelated events that allowed certain periods to be exalted above others whilst at the same time permitting other ages to be dismissed and ignored.

What prompted Hooker to take up this position was the Puritans' insistence that in calling for 'the reformation of *Lawes*, and orders Ecclesiastical, in the Church of England' they were merely reconstituting the essence of the Apostolic Church. Hooker, of course, realized that far from rebuilding the Apostolic Church they were, in fact, engaged in building something radically new, whilst the whole time protesting that presbyteral government was truly

Apostolic and ancient. The trouble was that Calvin's so-called followers had deceived themselves into thinking that the Genevan system of Church discipline was divinely revealed and was 'simply propounded as out of the scriptures of God'. But Hooker was able to show that Calvin's discipline grew up in response to the historical circumstances that were then prevailing in Geneva, and once a form of government was decided on such pragmatic grounds then, and only then, was scriptural justification found for it.

Hooker wrote, after examining all the scriptural proof texts advanced by the Presbyterian party:

the most which can be inferred upon such plenty divine testimonies is this, That some things which they maintain, as far as some men can probably conjecture do seem to have been out of scripture not absurdly gathered.³¹

Hooker was confronted therefore with men who had been brainwashed, reading into the Scriptures that which they had already been prepared to accept as biblical, and automatically rejecting any interpretation that did not fit in to their already prepared scheme. This exegetical technique Hooker deemed to be both socially dangerous and historically naive. It was socially dangerous because when 'they and their Bibles were alone together, what strange phantasticall opinion soever at any time entered into their heads, their use was to think that the Spirit taught it them.' Having set out on this path, Hooker warns, no one should be surprised if they continually discover new innovations that need to be introduced into the life of the Church and their practices become more and more deviant. 'These men', argues Hooker, 'in whose mouths at first sounded nothing but only mortification of the flesh, were come at length to think they might lawfully have six or seven wives apiece'.³¹

Hooker has now succeeded in isolating what he understands to be the theological mistake that lies at the centre of the Puritan's case. It lacks consensus and is distinctly marked by what Hooker terms 'singularity'. Hooker identifies an ever present danger that often afflicts theologians who become so enamoured of their opinions that they lose any sense of objectivity, because 'nature worketh in us all a love to our own counsels' and any contradiction is often 'a fan to inflame that love' so that the constant quest 'to

31 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 2.7.9, 1, p 185

maintain that which once [they] have done, sharpeneth the wit to dispute, to argue, and by all means to reason for it'. When this occurs, individual and subjective thinking has been so elevated that what is merely private opinion becomes a powerful means of coercion to subject others in the Church to the same opinion. But, Hooker maintains, those whose hearts are so possessed by unique and novel opinions ought to be extremely suspicious of their motives. Hooker argues that:

where singularity is, they whose hartes it possesseth ought to suspect it the more, in as much as if it did come from God and should for that cause prevail with others, the same God which revealeth it to them, would also give them power of confirming it unto others, either with miraculous operation, or with strong and invincible remonstrance of sound reason, such as whereby it might appear that God would indeed have all mens judgements give place unto it.³²

Hooker is cautious and suspicious, then, of any new and continuing revelations that supposedly come from God and which have been revealed only to a few. In Hooker's view any new revelations that have bypassed the Church for some fifteen hundred years need to be accompanied either by miracles or by such powerful demonstration of reasonable arguments that no man will be able to gainsay or repudiate the obvious truth.

Hooker has now warned his readers of the dangers inherent in adopting a subjective approach in the search for truth. Individualism is to be guarded against and not encouraged, for it is the following of individuals that has caused Luther with the Germans 'and with many other Churches, Calvin to prevaile in all things'.³³ The trouble was that it was all too easy, when reading the Scriptures in isolation or at best only in the company of like-minded people, that 'strange phantasticall' opinions should rapidly grow. Hooker's remedy to this is to search for a truly genuine consensus and catholicity.³⁴

32 Richard Hooker *Lawes* Preface.8.12, 1, p 49

33 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 5.10.1, 2, 1, pp 46-7

34 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 5.10.1, 2, p 46. For a detailed analysis of Hooker's treatment of the concepts of catholicity and consensus see Egil Grisliis 'The Role of Consensus in Richard Hooker's Method of Theological Inquiry' in *The Heritage of Christian Thought, Essays in Honour of Robert Lowry Calhoun* R E Cushman & E Grisliis edd (New York: Harper & Row 1965) pp 64-88 and also E Grisliis 'Richard Hooker's Method of Theological Inquiry' in *Anglican Theological Review* 45 (1963) pp 190-203

Hooker develops his thoughts on this matter at various points throughout the *Lawes*. He realizes of course that in stressing the tradition of the Church he would quickly be accused of hanging his judgment ‘upon the Churches sleeve’, and so, once again, be fulfilling the Puritan’s prophecy that Hooker was searching for means to contradict all the principal points of English belief and to subject the Church once more to Roman dominion. Hooker is therefore very careful to spell out early on in the *Lawes* that his understanding of Tradition is not the same as that currently held by the Church of Rome. He provides a direct and strong ‘no’ in answer to the demand as to whether the Church of England is bound in the sight of God ‘to yeeld to traditions urged by the Church of Rome the same obedience and reverence as we doe his written lawe, honouring equallie and adoring both as Divine’. That Hooker holds to the supremacy of Scripture he admits to, writing, ‘what scripture doth plainelie deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience is due’. In giving Scripture the supremacy it must not be thought that Hooker allows no scope or room to be given to the power and weight of Church tradition. For Hooker it is a matter of humility. It is presumptuous to think that God would reveal unto a few what he has not revealed unto many. Over and over again Hooker writes in this vein. He insists that Christians should not:

lightlie esteeme what hath bene allowed as fitt in the judgement of antiquitie and by the longe continewed practise of the whole Church, from which unnecessarilie to swarve experience hath never found safe.³⁵

Moreover, it must also be remembered that if the Church changes ‘a lawe which the custome and continuall practise of many ages or years hath confirmed in the mindes of men, to alter it must needs be troublesome and scandalous’. Great damage can be done to a society that seeks to change its laws and this no more so than in matters of religion. It must be remembered that ‘lawes as in all other things humaine, are many times full of imperfection, and that which is supposed behooful unto men, proveth often times most pernicioius’.

Of course the Puritans could argue, and they attempted to argue, that they did indeed have the consensus for which Hooker was seeking. Did not the

35 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 5.7.1, 2, p 34

'best of the reformed churches' all agree with them? Had not Geneva, Scotland and the Reformed churches in France embraced Presbyterianism and should not the now Reformed Church of England also follow suit? Once more Hooker dissented and he dissented because of the particular form of consensus with which the advocates of radical change were working. For whilst they might have the majority consensus of the moment, in so far as Presbyterianism was being adopted by many of the Reformed churches, they certainly lacked the consensus of the ages. For Hooker this is an extremely important point. True catholicity is recognized by the presence of a doctrine, not in any one particular age or in one particular regional or national church, but in the whole community of the Church throughout the whole of Christian history. In a very real sense this is merely an extension of his suspicion of 'singularity'. Hooker, as we have already seen, was deeply suspicious of singularity in individual exegesis, in groups of individuals who all think the same, and in regional and national churches, and he was suspicious because he realized that it was easy to absolutize permanently the partial and imperfect insights of any individual church or age. This is what the Puritans were seeking to do in imposing their 'methinketh' into the orders of the Church of England. On the other hand in defending Episcopacy Hooker can not only call upon the witness of the whole church universal but also claim apostolic authority. In fact, because Hooker can lay claim to the former he can also lay claim to the latter on the simple basis that if it was the practice of the whole church it must needs be Apostolic. Two quotes from Hooker to establish this point will suffice. In appealing for support from the whole church in all ages Hooker writes:

A thousand five hundred years and upward the Church of Christ hath now continued under the sacred regiment of Bishops. Neither for so long hath Christianity been ever planted in any kingdom throughout the world but with this kind of government alone, which to have been ordained of God, I am for mine own part even as resolutely persuaded, as that any other kind of Government in the world whatsoever is of God.³⁶

and, in calling for Apostolic support:

The Apostles of our Lord did according unto those directions which were given them from above, erect Churches in all Cities, as received the Word

³⁶ Richard Hooker *Lawes* 7.1.4, 3, p 147

of Truth, the Gospel of God: All Churches by them erected, received from them the same Faith, the same Sacraments, the same form of publick regiment.³⁷

In contrast with this the consistorial discipline being advanced by the Puritan party is a 'strange and absurd conceit... the mother of Schism, and of confusion', nothing 'but a dream newly brought forth, and seen never in the Church before'.

The corollary of Hooker's understanding of consensus and catholicity gives him a breadth of vision and theological understanding denied to both Puritans and Roman Catholics. The Puritan's promotion of Presbyterianism had the unfortunate effect of giving people to understand that truth is simply that which men agree upon in any particular age and is consequently relative and not perpetual. Ultimately this can only have a disastrous effect. Hooker argues that long-standing laws 'induce men unto... willing obedience and observation' simply because they have the 'weight of... many mens judgment' and 'long experience'. Change such laws and the 'force of those grounds, whereby all lawes are made effectual' are considerably weakened and society is rendered increasingly volatile and unstable. It can now be seen why it was so important for Hooker to emphasize the Church of England's continuity with the Church of Rome. Hooker disputes the Puritan's teaching that the Church for the past thousand years had fallen and that the Church of England should not follow her in any thing because they were neither the Church of God nor their forefathers. Rather, and in contrast, Hooker accentuates the Church's continual soundness and he has no truck with the view that the Church had utterly fallen. It may well be surmised that Hooker had learnt from Cartwright's debate with Archbishop Whitgift where the Archbishop had been able to demonstrate that many of the things that troubled the Puritan conscience actually predated the rise of Popery. Be that as it may, Hooker never follows the Puritans or the early Reformers in limiting the testimony of the Fathers to the first five centuries. Hooker rhetorically asks his Puritan opponents that if Presbyterianism was in the 'prime of the Church... how far will they have that prime to extend?' and if the Church for the past thousand years had indeed fallen, 'where the later spring of this new supposed disorder' began?

37 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 7.5.1, 3, p 159

How then does Hooker view the Reformation? Without a doubt, as Hooker demonstrates in his *A Learned Discourse of Justification, Works and how the Foundation of Faith is Overthrown*, he is committed to the central and cardinal tenets of the Reformation. But he does not view the Church of England's break with Rome as a break with that which was held and believed to be true by all Christians in all ages. That would be to violate his own canons with respect to true catholicity and consensus. Hooker's view is clearly stated towards the end of Book IV. According to Hooker, the Church of Rome had sought to undermine the Church of England by mischievously suggesting that her new found faith was so unstable that it was 'not able to stande of itselfe unlesse it lean upon the staff of their Ceremonies'. The Puritans, wishing to undercut that accusation, urged the Church of England to abolish those ceremonies, thereby proving that the reformed churches did not need them to buttress faith. But Hooker is adamant. He argues that many seem to think:

that we have erected of late a frame of some newe religion, the furniture whereof we should not have borrowed from our enimies, lest they relieving us might afterwards laugh and gibe at our povertie; whereas in truth the Ceremonies which we have taken from such as were before us, are not things that belong to this or to that sect, but they are the auncient rites and customes of the Church of Christ; whereof our selves being a part, we have the selfe same interest in them, which our fathers before us had, from whom the same are descended unto us.³⁸

Hooker's position is grounded on two essential premises. Firstly, because the Church 'was from the beginning is and continueth unto the end', even though 'in all parts have not been alwaies equallie sincere and sound', nevertheless it is quite legitimate to retain those things that have always existed in the Church from the very beginning, since at no point in the Church's history could it be ventured that the Church had ceased to be the Church. This was a guiding principle of the English Reformation, claims Hooker, for it proceeded on the basis that only 'those thinges which were least needful and nueliest come should be the first that were taken away'. But once those were removed the Church of England could with integrity maintain and keep that which remained. Secondly, Hooker believed that because the Church had never

38 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 4.9.1, 1, p 301

actually fallen there has also existed a continual consensus of truth. That is not to say that parts of the Church had not suffered from periods of corruption and decay or that individual Christians had not lapsed into heresy and error, but it is to say that notwithstanding such aberrations the Church herself still maintained and held on to the essentials of the faith.

Hooker and Modern Anglicanism

From our study of Hooker's theological method certain key notes have been sounded. We have seen that Hooker's approach to the key issues of Scripture and Tradition buttressed the theological edifice of the Reformed Church of England. Hooker's vision was one that trembled at Scripture, paid humble and close attention to God's dealings with his people in the past, and was suspicious of so-called continuing revelations from God. It is a deeply attractive and deeply Christian approach and for many hundreds of years was able to sustain the *Ecclesia Anglicana*. This Hookerian vision is one that best represented the Church of England's commitment to Reformed orthodoxy and it is one that should be eagerly defended within the Church of England today.

However it is precisely at this juncture that we find Hooker's prophetic voice most under attack.³⁹ I have already argued that where Hooker's theological stance is adulterated by yielding to the various *via media* temptations the direct effect is to weaken the Church of England's commitment to the Reformation. And yet recent modern developments within the Church of England are also, willy-nilly, distorting and undermining Hooker's careful work. The archetypal example of this can be found in the legislation that was promulgated to allow the ordination of women to the priesthood and in the resulting discussions that, at a later date, brought about the *Act of Synod*. In order to make my argument stick it is worth briefly rehearsing both the legislation and the Act of Synod.

Firstly then let us turn to the legislation itself. Draft Legislation was referred to the Diocesan Synods in 1990 in the form of a document known as GS Misc

39 See, for example, *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood; Reference of Draft Legislation to Diocesan Synods*, GS Misc 336 (London: Church House Publishing 1990) where an action contrary to Scripture and unheard of in the Church before is being promoted and which will become mandatory and binding on conscience. The presbyteral ordination of women vitiates Hooker's understanding of Scripture, Tradition, and the Church.

336.⁴⁰ In this legislation General Synod proposed to make provision by canon enabling a woman to be ordained to the office of priest but it specified that nothing in the Measure would make it lawful for a woman to be consecrated to the office of bishop; and in England this is still the case. That was the first part of the legislation. In dealing with this it is important to note that many have been offended by the glass ceiling that has obviously been installed to constrict the ministry of women to the priesthood to say nothing of the division that this creates between the presbyterate and episcopate as well as specifically barring one class of presbyters (the women) from high office. Not only may this be legitimately seen as a gross injustice it also violates the scriptural parity between presbyter and bishop. Not surprisingly there have already been calls on the floor of the General Synod for this obstacle to be removed.

Part two of the legislation deals with the main body of the canon and this is related to the safeguards for those who in conscience could not accept either women as priests or as the head of a parish or a local Christian community. In essence this devolved upon Bishops, Parishes, Cathedrals and individual parish priests. A Bishop in office at the time of promulgation of canon C4B could make all or some of a range of declarations. He could declare (1) that a woman is not to be ordained within his diocese as a priest; or (2) that a woman is not to be instituted or licensed to the office of incumbent or priest-in-charge of a benefice, or of team vicar for a benefice; or (3) that a woman is not to be given a licence or permission to officiate as a priest within the diocese. Parishes were allowed to make up to two declarations known as Resolution A and Resolution B. Resolution A declared that 'this parochial Church Council would not accept a woman as the minister who presides at or celebrates the Holy Communion or pronounces the Absolution in the parish, and Resolution B declared 'this parochial church council would not accept a woman as the incumbent or priest-in-charge of the benefice or as a team vicar for the benefice'. Cathedrals were allowed to pass two Resolutions of their own, also called Resolutions A and B which basically were the same as Resolutions A and B for the parishes, only with the proviso that these would be in effect at any service other than a service held on the direction of the diocesan bishop. The rest of part two dealt with the financial package that would be available to individual parish priests who felt in conscience unable

40 *The Ordination of Women to the Priesthood*

to stay. It would be onerous to rehearse the complex details of this section of the legislation but suffice it to say that depending on the individual's age and length of service any priest who resigned on grounds of conscience was entitled, to up to a period of ten years from the date of promulgation, to receive housing from the pensions board, resettlement grants and periodic payments.

Such was the legislation. To many members of the Church it seemed generous to a fault and gave far too many concessions to opponents. Of course the legislation had to give concessions simply because the opposition was so large and so determined, but be that as it may it has to be asked why parliament's Ecclesiastical Committee was initially so reluctant to declare the legislation 'expedient'. A clue can be found in the legislation that deals with the safeguards that surround the bishops. As we have noted, the bishops could make certain declarations as regards the presbyteral ministry of women within their dioceses but there was a sting in the tail. Paragraph 5 Section 2 of the Measure reads: 'Where the bishop of a diocese who has made a declaration... ceases to hold office, the declaration shall continue to be in force until the expiry of a period of six months beginning with the date on which another person becomes the bishop of that diocese.' In other words since *only* the bishops in office at the relevant date were the ones allowed to make any declarations at all, and since these declarations would lapse after six months from the time another bishop filled the see, it became obvious that the legislation was making no provision for the continuance of a succession of bishops who did consent to the ordination of women as presbyters. This, of course, is serious for it only allowed the bishops to dissent *temporarily* after which time the legislation looked forward to its full acceptance. As we shall see in a moment this contradicted the doctrine of 'theological reception'; the very notion upon which the legislation itself was predicated. As was said in the Ecclesiastical Committee on the 19th of April 1993: 'No doctrine can [be said to be] received if the contrary view is outlawed. If you say those who hold your views cannot become bishops [and make the same declarations] you are actually saying that there is no place in the Church for those [who dissent].' This line of argument was a powerful one and it found sympathy in the Ecclesiastical Committee. As you may be aware, it is the duty of parliament to ensure that none of her Majesty's subjects becomes the victim of oppressive legislation and as time wore on it certainly began to *appear* as if the legislation was set to stifle dissent. Accordingly, some who voted against

the *Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure* did so, not because they were necessarily opposed to female presbyters, but because they felt the legislation was coercive. This was powerfully stated on the floor of the Synod when a leading bishop pointed out the intention of the legislation. He reasoned that although it was claimed that the provisions which were being offered were generous he was not convinced. He pointed to the Revisions Committee's report (GS 830 Y) which concluded that 'women priests must be accepted with theological and ecclesiological integrity and that their acceptance must become the new theological understanding of the Church of England'. According to this document, all that the safeguards were intended to achieve was to 'give opponents an opportunity to plan their future'.

A member of that committee, in presenting the legislation in 1989 underscored this point. He said: 'We must never lose sight of the basic fact that the various safeguards are unusual and exceptional. They are exceptional provisions given by the majority to the minority with very strong views.' And why are these exceptional provisions made? The answer: 'so that the minority may have space to assess the reality of the ordination of women as it takes place in our provinces. However, because the provisions are exceptional they must in the end be seen as temporary'.

Now it is important to realize that the Ecclesiastical Committee (rightly) did concern itself with theological issues. It was not part of that Committee's remit to discuss the theological niceties of the various arguments for and against. That was neither its role nor would it lie within its competence. All that the Ecclesiastical Committee had to do was to decide whether the legislation before it could be presented to parliament as 'expedient'; in other words that it did not trample roughshod over the deeply held conscientious convictions of Her Majesty's loyal subjects. As time wore on the House of Bishops began to grow anxious for it was becoming clear that serious and sustained objections were being levelled, not against the principle of female presbyteral ordination, but against the legislative instrument by which that principle was to be executed. The House of Bishops had met in January 1993, predating the meetings of the Ecclesiastical Committee, and they fleshed out what came to be known as the *Manchester Statement*. This document formed the basis of the *Act of Synod* and it was there in the wings when the Ecclesiastical Committee began their proceedings. Even so there was some reluctance by the Synod's Representatives to bring the *Manchester Statement*

forward, hoping that the Committee would approve the legislation without recourse to its use. At this, Baroness Seear, a doughty champion of female priesthood, grew exasperated. Turning to the Bishop of Guildford she exclaimed: 'Bishop, most of us like myself... are desperately anxious to get this through. Do not make it difficult for us to do what we earnestly want to do. You are making it very difficult.' Likewise, Patrick Cormack bluntly told the representatives 'either assume the legislation is going back to Synod or pass a parallel piece of legislation'.⁴¹ On the promise that the Bishops would introduce into the Synod an Act creating three Provincial Episcopal Visitors and so enshrine a continuance of bishops opposed to female presbyteral ministry, the Ecclesiastical Committee declared the *Priests (Ordination of Women's) Measure* expedient. It seemed as if two integrities were on the way to being created at last. However, it must be carefully noted that although the Measure is law the *Act of Synod* is not. It can be rescinded at any time by a simple majority in the Synod.

Despite this caveat we must appreciate that the theology that underpinned the *Act of Synod*, and which to a certain extent lies behind the legislation, was not a theology that was plucked out of the heated air of the debates in the Ecclesiastical Committee. In fact the 'doctrine of reception' is an undergirding principle of both the legislation and the Act of Synod. In 1988 the Lambeth Conference was exercised by the consecration of female bishops in the USA. Clearly this was going to place a strain on the Conference as there were many other bishops who would not recognize the episcopal orders of these female bishops. As a consequence Lambeth 1988 passed the following resolutions:

1 That each province respect the decision and attitudes of other Provinces in the ordination or consecration of women to the episcopate, without such respect necessarily indicating acceptance of the principles involved, maintaining the highest possible degree of communion with the provinces which differ.

2 That bishops exercise courtesy and maintain communications with bishops who may differ, and with any woman bishop, ensuring an open

⁴¹ *Reports by the Ecclesiastical Committee upon the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure and the Ordination of Women (Financial Provisions) Measure* (London: HMSO 1993) p 70

dialogue in the Church to whatever extent communion is impaired:

and also

3 That the Archbishop of Canterbury, in consultation with the Primates, appoints a commission:

a to provide for an examination of the relationships between the Provinces of the Anglican Communion and ensure that the process of reception includes continuing consultation with other Churches as well;

b to monitor and encourage the process of consultation within the Communion.⁴²

The Commission subsequently drawn up was known as the *Eames Commission*, named after its Chairman, The Most Reverend Robert Eames Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland. The Commission duly reported that a 'degree of provisionality' would inevitably attach itself to the priestly and episcopal ministry of women and that this provisionality would have application where

some Anglicans, individuals, dioceses or Provinces, call in question or cannot yet be certain of the priestly or episcopal ministry of women until this development is more fully received within the Anglican Communion and the Universal Church.

The Report continues:

Any interim application of this principle would call for a high degree of sacrifice by the admission of some provisionality to the ministry of women.⁴³

What is meant by the notion that orders might be 'provisional' is that women ordained under the legislation are not priests in the same sense that men are. It would appear then, that despite Canon A4 which authoritatively states that:

42 *The Truth Shall Set You Free* The Lambeth Conference 1988 (London: Church House Publishing 1988) p 201

43 *Report of The Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Communion and Women in the Episcopate 1989* (London: Church House Publishing 1989) p 13

the Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests and Deacons... is not repugnant to the Word of God, and those so made, ordained or consecrated Bishops, Priests, or Deacons, according to the said Ordinal, are lawfully made, ordained or consecrated, and ought to be accounted, both by themselves and others, to be truly Bishops, Priests or Deacons...⁴⁴

the priesthood of women is in some sense exploratory and experimental. According to this doctrine of reception it would appear that only in some future time, when consensus in the Church of England or the Anglican Communion has been reached and the doctrine in question has been 'received', will it be possible, without qualification to say that the women so ordained are truly priests. Until this time it will be a recognized theological position within the Church of England (as it is in the Anglican Communion at large) to maintain that women, although legally, technically and canonically ordained to the priesthood are not in fact *truly* priests. To quote the House of Bishops in their *First Report on the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood*:

were the Church of England to proceed to ordain women, those remaining opposed might seek to reverse the decision through legitimate means as part of the process of reception by the wider church.

However, this doctrine of reception when applied to the sacred ministry vitiates the Church of England's understanding of Orders. Richard Hooker in the *Lawes* specifically rules out just such experimentation. Speaking on the nature of the ministry he writes:

They which have once received this power [of ordination] may not think to put it off and on again like a cloak as the weather serveth, to take it reject and resume it as oft as themselves list, of which profane and impious contempt these later times have yielded as of all other kinds iniquity and apostasy strange examples.⁴⁵

Accordingly parishes could now not only pass Resolutions A and B they could also pass Resolution C and petition the diocesan bishop to provide a

44 *The Canons of the Church of England* Fourth Edn (London: Church House Publishing 1986) p 3

45 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 5.77.3 pp 424-6

bishop of their integrity. This was permitted under the *Act of Synod* because as the Act itself maintained:

all concerned should endeavour to ensure that discernment in the wider Church of the rightness *or otherwise* of the Church of England's decision to ordain women to the priesthood should be as open a process as possible.⁴⁶

Thus to make space within one church for those supportive of women's ordination, and those convinced that it was wrong, the House of Bishops now indicated how in practice the dioceses and local churches can live with this diversity. A diocesan bishop might remain opposed to women as priests, but permit another bishop to ordain and licence women within his diocese although, of course, that puts a strain on the relationship between the diocesan bishop and some clergy in his diocese. Naturally this works the other way, for a diocesan bishop in favour might invite a bishop who does not accept women's priesting to minister to priests and congregations in his diocese who do not accept it. This would express at least the collegiality of a House of Bishops which accepts the legitimacy of both positions. What is more, the House of Bishops wrote: 'each diocesan Bishop will ensure that provision continues to be made for the care and oversight of everyone in his diocese including those opposed to the ordination of women'.

Such then is the current state of play. But how are we to assess it in the light of Hooker's theological method?

With regard to the substantive issue let it be said at once that Hooker contemplated the priestly ordination of women and immediately dismissed it.⁴⁷ But the important point for us and, I suspect for Hooker, is not so much the exegesis. As Hooker already knew, one could prove almost anything by citing proof-texts and claiming the leading of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

But what is inimical to Hooker's theological method is not that the validity of presbyteral ordination has to be recognized by all within the Church; but

46 *The Act of Synod 1993*, as approved at the November 1993 Group of Sessions, General Synod, London.

47 Richard Hooker *Lawes* 5.62.2 p 269

48 *The Anglican Evangelical Crisis* Melvin Tinker ed (Fearn Rosshire: Christian Focus Publications 1995) pp 218-19

rather that once women have been ordained to the presbyterate that will also have to be recognized throughout the Church as Canon A4 envisages. Once this step has been taken an issue that was never witnessed, heard of or countenanced and that cannot be proved by Scripture will in fact become mandatory for all members of the Church of England. That this development vitiates Scripture, abandons the Tradition and enforces itself on conscience is a radical and detrimental step not only for the Church as a whole but also for classical evangelicalism. As Don Carson has written: ‘unless this step is reversed the number and witness of conservative Evangelicals is heading for precipitate decline’. As yet I do not see classical Evangelicals defending the heritage that Hooker won for them.

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