

EQUIP

Richard Hooker

19 Feb

Admonition to the Parliament (1572)

"The church of Christ ought to be a communion of saints, governed **not by the will of man but by the Word of God alone**. Christ is the only King and Head of His church, and His apostles have delivered unto us the pattern of true government, **where pastors, teachers, and elders labor together** in one body for the edification of the saints. We seek not to overthrow but to reform, to **cast off the remnants of popery—the lordly pride of bishops, their courts, and their ceremonies**—things drawn from the Church of Rome and not from the Gospel of Christ. O that this Parliament would establish the ministry of **pastors chosen by the people**, teaching sound doctrine and administering the sacraments purely, without superstition! The Scriptures teach us that the power of the church lies not in pomp and outward authority but in faithful preaching, godly discipline, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we humbly appeal to you, most noble governors, to remove the burdens of corrupt traditions and establish the discipline of Christ's church, as in the days of the apostles. For in true reformation is the safety of the commonwealth, and in obedience to God's Word is the peace and prosperity of the realm."

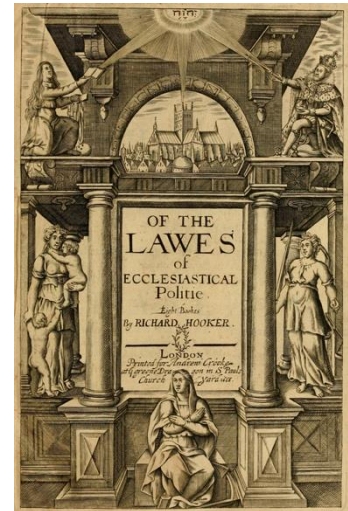


Richard Hooker (25 March 1554 – 2 November 1600)

The Temple Church controversy (1585–1586)

The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity

1. Danger of one-size-fits-all church



I do not see how even the wisest man could have improved upon this course of action, if we consider the condition of Geneva at the time. After the bishop and his clergy fled by night, to replace him with another bishop was utterly impossible, and if their ministers had sought sole coercive power over the whole church the Genevans probably would have taken a rather dim view of it.



JUST because someone might point out that speech is necessary for all men throughout the world, this does not mean that all men must speak the same language. In the same way, while all churches need a polity and order of some sort, not all need to have exactly the same sort.

2. Making God's word say more than it does

For when divine authority is used to justify things which are not the commandments of God, but your own mistaken suppositions, you will attribute to God whatever you are later led to say or do in defence of your cause. And what this may lead to, God only knows! In these sorts of errors, once the mind imagines itself to be executing God's will, it immediately removes anything or anyone that stands in its way, and if anything strange or new seems to be necessary, some strange new argument proving its lawfulness is introduced under the name of divine authority.

But when the necessities of this life drive men to do that which the light of nature, common discretion, and judgment teaches them, while this doctrine claims that in doing so they sin against their own souls by not having first sought direction from God's sacred Scripture, how can this not bring the simple a thousand times to their wits' end? How can it not trouble and bewilder them? Even if we were all experts in Scripture, it would give us no end of trouble if, for every action of common life, we had to find in Scripture some sentence clearly and infallibly setting before our eyes what we ought to do. Who knows what anguish this requirement would breed in those of tender consciences, to say nothing of the disruptions it would cause in everyday life?

3. Just because it "smells" of Rome doesn't mean it's automatically bad

In St. Paul's time, the integrity of the church in Rome was famous; that in Corinth was in many ways rebuked; that in Galatia full of disorder; and in St. John's time, those in Ephesus and Smyrna in far better states than those in Thyatira and Pergamus. We can certainly hope that those of us who reform ourselves where we have gone astray do not thereby cut ourselves off from the Church of prior ages.

Nevertheless, we have had and do have fellowship with them, as far as we lawfully can. For just as the apostle says of Israel that they are in one respect enemies, yet in another beloved of God (Rom. 11:28), in the same way we dare not participate in Rome's many grievous abominations, yet to the extent that they continue upholding the main tenets of Christian truth, we gladly acknowledge that they are part of the family of Jesus Christ.

1. How should we be a "word-shaped church?" What *do* we mean by this and what *don't* we mean?
2. How do Hooker's arguments help us understand despites in the church today?



Part 2: What Hooker really said

1. Via media or “middle way”

"The 'judicious' Richard Hooker (1554–1600) gave classic expression to the via media position of Elizabethan Anglicanism."
—Lee W. Gibbs

"The glory of the English Church is, that it has taken the VIA MEDIA, as it has been called. It lies between the (so called) Reformers and the Romanists."
—John Henry Newman 1834

There are two opinions concerning the sufficiency of Holy Scripture, each opposite to the other, but both repugnant to the truth. Rome teaches Scripture to be so insufficient that, without adding traditions, it would not contain all revealed and supernatural truth necessary for salvation. Others, rightly condemning this view, fall into the opposite ditch—just as dangerous—thinking that Scripture contains not only all things necessary for salvation, but indeed simply all things, such that to do anything according to any other law is not only unnecessary to salvation but unlawful, sinful, and downright damnable.

1. Who are the two groups arguing against?
2. What error is he speaking about?

"Christ hath merited righteousness for as many as are found in him. In him God findeth us if we be faithful, for by faith we are incorporated into him. Then, although in ourselves we be altogether sinful and unrighteous, yet even the man which in himself is impious, full of iniquity, full of sin... him being found in Christ through faith, and having his sin in hatred through repentance, him God beholdeth with a gracious eye, putteth away his sin by not imputing it, taketh quite away the punishment due thereunto by pardoning it, and accepteth him in Jesus Christ as perfectly righteous."
— A Learned Discourse of Justification

2. The Three-legged stool

"As Hooker reminds us, the coherence of Anglican theology is maintained through a dynamic interplay of Scripture, reason, and tradition."
—Rowan Williams

"This must be founded in Scripture, in reason, in tradition, in theology and the Christian faith as the Church of England has received it; it must be based on good, healthy, flourishing relationships, and in a proper 21st-century understanding of being human and of being sexual." —Bishop of London, *Living in Love and Faith*

1. Tradition

This very same error makes others today ask us where our Church lurked and in what cave of the earth it slept for hundreds of years before the birth of Martin Luther, as if we thought that Luther started a completely new Church. The Church of Christ remains as it was from the beginning and will continue to the end, though not all parts in it have been equally sincere and sound.

What Scripture plainly delivers, to that the first place both of credit and obedience is due.



2. Reason

If the Prophets who succeeded Moses or the blessed apostles had thought this [everything has to be reasoned from Scripture], they would never have made such an effort to make arguments from nature to teach the faithful their duties. For them to appeal to any other motive than 'so it is written' would have been to teach another basis for action besides Scripture. Certainly they often appeal to the written Word in this way, but they would have to do so exclusively if they were convinced that we sin when we do anything without direction from Scripture.

When the apostles quote from the Psalms to prove the resurrection, the argument would fail if David were merely speaking of himself; therefore the apostles disprove such an interpretation and show by clear reason that David could not possibly be speaking of himself (Acts 2:34; 13:36). If we refuse to use our natural reason to know what Holy Scripture teaches about the articles of our faith, then how could we even know that Scripture contains these articles of faith?

3. Scripture

We learn what God's Church is obligated to know or do partly from nature. But nature teaches this only incompletely—neither as fully nor as clearly as we need in order to have knowledge sufficient for salvation. Therefore, God has revealed in Scripture that which we need for salvation and could never know without supernatural revelation, and has also restated more clearly the most important truths that nature teaches.

Since all flesh therefore cannot attain by natural means to salvation and life, behold how the wisdom of God has revealed a hidden and supernatural way that directs us to this same life. This way presupposes the guiltiness of sin and our just reward of condemnation and death. This way begins with the compassion of God towards those of us who are drowned and swallowed up in misery, according to which He redeems us from this misery through the precious death and merit of our mighty Savior, who has said that He is the way that leads us out of bondage into bliss. This supernatural way God Himself prepared before all worlds and commanded by our Savior in the Gospel of John: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (Jn. 6:29).

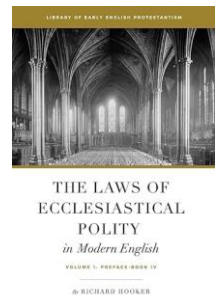
1. What are people unable to achieve with their reason (natural means)?
2. What is needed instead?

Hooker today

1. Claim him!
2. Listen to him!
3. Don't be embarrassed Anglicans!

Further reading

The Laws Of Ecclesiastical Polity In Modern English



Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition and Reason

