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Richard Hooker and the Rhetoric of History

W Speed Hill

On the quatercentenary of his death, students of Richard Hooker face an embarrassing problem: he is becoming all but impossible for non-specialists to read. W J Torrance Kirby remarks on the 'essentially alien character of his thought'.¹ John Booty, a lifelong student of Hooker, in a recent dialogue of a 'modern' Anglican with his early modern counterpart, emphasizes 'the historical distance between Hooker and ourselves'.² Peter Lake, who has written perceptively on Hooker and his contemporaries,³ has described Hooker as 'anamalous'.⁴ Even contemporaries, friend and foe alike, found his style difficult. Reading a draft of Book VI, George Cranmer urged: 'I could wishe for more perspicuity (for that is it which D Some requireth in your booke)'.⁵ And *A Christian Letter*, a contemporary response to the publication of Books I-V of the *Lawes*, complained that 'your bookes bee so long and tedious, in a style not usuall ... the like harde to be found, farre differing from the simplicities of holie Scripture' (*FLE* 4:71). Much of Hooker's former stature as a literary figure derives, I suspect, from our reading Book I of his treatise *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie* as a synecdoche for the whole, for Books II-VIII are stylistically and substantively very unlike the luminous exposition of God's manifold laws that we find in Book I.⁶

Stylistic opacity is usually a function of a missing or misconstrued context. A given discourse may be stylistically dense, or syntactically involuted (as Hooker's often is), or puzzlingly allusive, but familiarity with the relevant context generally facilitates comprehension. With the ample notes of the

1 *Richard Hooker's Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy* (Leiden: E J Brill 1990) p 4

2 *Reflections on the Theology of Richard Hooker: An Elizabethan Addresses Modern Anglicanism* (Sewanee TN: The University of the South Press 1998) pp 2, 3

3 *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982) and *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London and Boston: Unwin Hyman 1988)

4 In discussion following a lecture at The Graduate Center, CUNY, 23 April 1999.

5 W Speed Hill gen ed *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker* vols 1-5 (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1977-90) vols 6,7 (Tempe AZ: MRTS 1993, 1998) 3:112 (hereafter, *FLE*)

6 On his reputation, see W Speed Hill 'Richard Hooker in the Folger Edition: An Editorial Perspective' in Arthur Stephen McGrade ed *Richard Hooker and the Construction of Christian Community* (Tempe AZ: MRTS 1997) pp 7-9

Folger Library Edition commentary to hand, that immediate context is now laid open for all to see. Still, while the thrust of Hooker's polemic is clear enough to those acquainted with the religious and political issues of his day, the *Lawes* is simply not as accessible to the general reader as his sermons.⁷ A further impediment is the unfinished state of the posthumously published Books – VI, VII, and VIII.⁸

If, however, we rotate the *Lawes* on its historicist axis, one dimension of Hooker's writing, his distinctively humanist historicism,⁹ will appear to be quite familiar. Even if we do not have first-hand familiarity with the topic under review, Hooker's analytical method, his 'judicious' weighing of what evidence the text sustains, is one we belated humanists remain comfortable with. Schooled as he was at Corpus Christi, itself the explicitly humanist foundation of Richard Fox, Bishop of Winchester,¹⁰ Hooker read the texts of the Bible and the Church Fathers as we do other literary or historical texts of the period – by contextualizing them, by 'not[ing] the circumstance of the place, and the occasion of uttering the words' (*FLE* 1:159; I.5.3¹¹), so as to evaluate the

7 A particularly eloquent example is 'A Learned and Comfortable Sermon of the Certainty and Perpetuity of Faith in the Elect' *FLE* 5:69-82; see W Speed Hill 'The Authority of Hooker's Style' *Studies in Philology* 67 (July 1970) 328-38

8 Despite considerable effort on the part of both the textual editor (Paul G Stanwood) and two commentary editors (Arthur Stephen McGrade and Lee W Gibbs), I find myself unconvinced that the text we have for the bulk of Book VI (ie chs 3-6) belongs in the *Lawes*. As Keble pointed out long ago (John Keble ed R W Church and F Paget rev *The Works of Mr Richard Hooker* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1888) 1:xxxiv-xxxix), its polemic is directed at the Church of Rome, not at the Puritan Disciplinarians. While the issue of penance as a sacrament does indeed address an issue of 'Ecclesiasticall Jurisdiction', the announced topic of Book VI (*FLE* 3:1), the audience is not the 'pretended reformers' addressed in Books I-V and VII-VIII. See *FLE* 3:xxvi-xliv (Stanwood); 6:237-42 (McGrade); and 6:249-55 (Gibbs).

Book VII I take to be complete but unvetted by Cranmer and/or Sandys (as was Book VI; see *FLE* 3:107-40) and so unrevised by Hooker. Book VIII I take to be unfinished. The tangled textual history of the posthumous books is summarized in W Speed Hill 'An Editorial Perspective' pp 4-6

9 See William P Haugaard 'Introduction to Books II, III & IV' *FLE* 6:157-61; see also Arthur B Ferguson 'The Historical Perspective of Richard Hooker: A Renaissance Perspective' *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 3:1 (Spring 1973) 17-49, reprinted (substantially) in *Clio Unbound* (Durham NC: Duke University Press 1979), ch 6; and F J Levy *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino CA: The Huntington Library 1967), chs 2, 3

10 See Philip B Secor *Richard Hooker: Prophet of Anglicanism* (Tunbridge Wells: Burnes & Oates; Toronto: Anglican Book Centre 1999) pp 63-6.

11 Citations from the *Lawes* are to book (roman), chapter, and section (arabic), as here.

historical authenticity of the text under review and to discover its meaning.

We have scarcely begun the Preface to the *Lawes* when we find ourselves in the midst of an extended historical paraphrase, narrating the founding of the reformed Church of Geneva under the skilful but wily John Calvin (*FLE* 1:3-12; Pref 2). Hooker is no dispassionate historian here (the very notion of an historical disinterestedness is anachronistic, the product of the Enlightenment), as his aim is to show that the Genevan polity is a product of the time and circumstances particular to Calvin and to Geneva in the 1530s. As such, it is not an authoritative model for 'reforme' of the polity of the Church of England in the 1590s. Hooker chose his sources with care: Theodore Beza's authorized biography of Calvin and its associated collection of Calvin's letters. 'For out of their books and writings', Hooker writes, 'it is that I have collected this whole narration, to the end it might thereby appeare in what sort amongst them that discipline was planted ...' (*FLE* 1:9-10; Pref 2.7). Unless we happen to be expert in this particular piece of Reformation history, most readers today are persuaded simply by the rhetoric of Hooker's account: it is clear, pointed, evidential, and persuasive. Its Folger editor judges it to be substantially faithful to its sources (see *FLE* 6:405-22). A look, then, at Hooker as an historian may well help us bridge the historical distance that four centuries of cultural change have inserted between him and us.

Like Poe's story of the 'purloined letter', Hooker's historicism is omnipresent but often overlooked by non-historians. While Hooker himself restricted the *Lawes* to issues of polity, ministry, and worship, not doctrine, recent commentators have emphasized his reformed doctrinal orthodoxy¹² or his continued theological relevance (Booty). Earlier advocates, following Keble, saw him as the exponent of a *via media* between Rome and Geneva, or, more recently, as an Erasmian Christian humanist¹³ or latter day Thomist.¹⁴ But, given the upshot of his dispute

12 Nigel Atkinson *Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition and Reason* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press 1997); Kirby *Richard Hooker's Doctrine of the Royal Supremacy*

13 Herschel Baker *The Dignity of Man* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1947) p 290; cf W Speed Hill 'Editor's Preface' *Studies in Richard Hooker* (Cleveland and London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University 1972) pp xiii-xv

14 Peter Munz *The Place of Hooker in the History of Thought* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1952); cf C S Lewis *English Literature of the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1954) p 449, who praised Hooker for having 'to our endless joy, [drawn] out all the tranquil beauty of the old philosophy'.

with Walter Travers at the Temple,¹⁵ Hooker chose not to engage his adversaries in disputes over doctrine. This focus on discipline means that he is constantly citing, interpreting, and weighing the historical materials cited by his opponents (principally Thomas Cartwright), as well as those he introduces himself – what he calls the ‘helps and furtherances of direction which Scriptures, counsels, Fathers, Histories, the lawes and practises of all Churches, the mutual conference all mens collections [ie, logical inferences] and observations may afford’ (*FLE* 2:6; V.Ded.9). By ‘histories’ Hooker means ‘all those old Historiographers, out of which *Eusebius* gathereth his story’, referring to the *Ecclesiastica Historia* initiated by Eusebius, the fourth-century Bishop of Caesarea, and continued by Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen, and Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrhus, who bring Eusebius’ account from 323 down to 439 AD. Hooker cites this compilation some 59 times. Unlike the hapless historian in Sir Philip Sidney’s *An Apology for Poetry*, ‘loaden with old mouse-eaten records, authorising himself (for the most part) upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay ...’¹⁶ Hooker’s sources were authoritative. They include the historical texts preserved in Scripture, praised as ‘looking glasses to behold the mercie, the truth, the righteousnes of God towards all that faithfullie serve, obey and honor him’ (*FLE* 1:124; I.13.3), Eusebius and his continuators, the letters and tracts of the early church Fathers (Augustine, Cyprian, Tertullian principally, but others as well, many newly edited by Erasmus and his fellow humanists),¹⁷ collections of canons adopted by general councils, and legal citations from such compilations as the *Corpus Juris Civilis* and the *Corpus Juris Canonici*. His citations of individual historians extend literally from A (Aelius Lampridius, the fourth-century Roman historian) to Z (Joannes Zonaras, a twelfth-century canonist and historian). Classical historians, such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus (described as ‘A learned judicious and polite historian’ [*FLE* 2:494.g; V.81.15]), Herodotus, Julius Caesar, Livy, Pliny the Elder, Plutarch, Polybius, Sallust, Tacitus, and Xenophon,¹⁸ appear incidentally – though a passage from Tacitus’ *Annales*

15 W Speed Hill ‘The Evolution of Hooker’s Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity’ *Studies in Richard Hooker* pp 117-58; see also *FLE* 5:261-92

16 Ed Geoffrey Shepherd (London: Thomas Nelson 1965) p 105

17 William P Haugaard ‘Renaissance Patristic Scholarship’ *Sixteenth Century Journal* 10 (1979) 37-60; for a detailed enumeration see *FLE* 7 (Index).

18 Lesser known (to me) Roman historians include Ammianus Marcellinus, Aristeas, Cassiodorus, Dio Cassius, Diogenes Laertius, L Julius Florus, Herodian of Syria, Marcus Junianus Justinus, Quintus Valerius Maximus, Pliny the Younger, and Velleius Paterculus. Greek historians – or writers cited as historians – include Nicephorus Gregoras, Nicephorus Callistus, Georgius Cedrenus, and Harmenopoulos.

(cited at *FLE* 1:196.i; III.1.4) is 'one of the earliest (? 116) non-christian references to the new movement' (*FLE* 6:554). Apart from those associated with the *Ecclesiastica Historia*, church historians are equally numerous: Eadmer, Flavius Josephus, Isidore of Spain (the encyclopaedist), Rufinus, Sulpicius Severus, the Apostle Paul, and Bede; lesser known – at least, to me – figures include Athanasius, Epiphanius, Fabius, Foebadius, Paulus Orosius, Palladius, Rabanus Maurus, Gennadius of Marseilles, Hegesippus, Victor, Bishop of Vita, Mamertus of Vienne, and Henry, archdeacon of Huntington. Roman Catholic writers, cited principally in Book VI (see n 8, above), include Robert, Cardinal Bellarmine, Caesar, Cardinal Baronius, Onuphrius Panvinius, and Bartholomaeus Barolomeo (Platina). Finally, there are scattered references to near contemporaries: Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, John Calvin, Hector Boece, Matthias Flavius, and Nicolo Machiavelli.¹⁹

Full as they are (I count 64 individuals), these lists are incomplete, for virtually every citation of every author or compilation, legal or conciliar, has a historical point to make, and the texts Hooker cites, whether formally denominated as 'histories', sacred or secular, are treated as historical texts. From Aristotle's *Politics*, for example, Hooker cites one Pittacus as author of a law 'that he which being overcome with drinke did then strike anye man, shoulde suffer punishment double as much as if hee had done the same being sober' (*FLE* 1:104; I.19.9; see 6:508), and Strabo's *Geography* is cited on the religious origins of civil community (*FLE* 1:133.d; I.15.4).

Superseding all these as the basic historical document for Hooker is the Bible.²⁰ The number of scriptural citations dwarfs those from non-scriptural sources. The historical character of his citations – and his collaborators, Edwin Sandys and George Cranmer, were at pains to insist that Hooker supply accurate references in each of his citations²¹ – only states the obvious, as the point at issue was fundamentally a historical one: What exactly was the polity of the early church? Did God through Christ's teachings outline a model of what that early church polity should be? If so, was it documented?

19 Each Folger commentator on the *Lawes* includes in his introduction a brief account of Hooker's sources; see *FLE* 6:63-72, 91-6, 143-53, 204-23, 261-71, 323-6, and 349-55.

20 See Indexes of scriptural References, *FLE* 5:851-909 and 6:1101-56.

21 For a discussion of Hooker's citations, see W Speed Hill 'Commentary on Commentary on Commentary: Three Historicisms Annotating Richard Hooker' D C Greetham ed *Margins of the Text* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press 1997) pp 323-52

If so, was it normative, in the sixteenth century, for the reformed Church of England? In rebutting the disciplinarian challenge to the Elizabethan settlement (see *FLE* 1:338; 2:352), Hooker, trained as a theologian, was obliged to refashion himself into a historian of the early church.

In surveys of Tudor historians,²² church history itself enjoys a distinct historiography.²³ Augustine, in *The City of God*, is generally credited with its initial formulation, which he envisioned as a counter to the meaningless flux or endless cyclicity of pagan historiography. For Augustine, human history has a shape that is theologically meaningful. It begins with the Creation, is punctuated by the Flood and the Incarnation, and ends with Christ's Second Coming, at which time temporality as we experience it simply ceases. Later chronologists supplied a precision and a tripartite symmetry that Augustine was hesitant to impose.²⁴ James Ussher deduced that Creation took place in 4004 (others supplied different dates²⁵), that the Flood occurred 2000 years after Creation,²⁶ that the Incarnation was another 2000 years in coming, and that the Last Judgment would close out the third bimillennium. The first 2000 years were the realm of Nature, the next, of the Law, the final one, of Grace. Hooker applies these categories as follows:

There have been in the world from the eerie first foundation thereof but three religions, *Paganisme* which lived in the blindnes of corrupt and depraved nature, *Judaisme* embracing the law which reformed heathnish impietie, and taught salvation to be looked for through one whome God in the last daies would send and exalt to be lord of all, finallie *Christian*

22 Levy, Ferguson (both cited above, n 7), Herschel Baker *The Race of Time* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1967), and F Smith Fussner *Tudor History and the Historians* (New York and London: Basic Books 1970). A more recent survey, D R Woolf *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1990), treats post-Tudor historians.

23 See Donald R Kelley, *Faces of History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1998) ch 7, Levy ch 3, and Ferguson chs 5,6.

24 John M Headley *Luther's View of Church History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1963) p 109

25 Baker *Race of Time* p 55; Hugh Broughton's essay on biblical chronology was attacked by John Rainolds, Hooker's former tutor. Hooker's friend, Adrian Saravia, was asked by Whitgift to mediate the dispute. Saravia sided with Broughton; see Secor *Richard Hooker* p 292

26 Hooker is uncertain as to just when Adam and the angels fell: 'concerning some things we may lawfully doubt and suspend our judgement ... as namely touching the time of the fall both of man and Angels ...' (*FLE* 1:179; II.7.5).

beliefe which yeeldeth obedience to the gospell of Jesus Christ, and acknowledgeth him the Savior whome God did promise. (*FLE* 2:348-9; V.68.6)

Using the prophecies enunciated in the Book of Revelation, Protestant historians further subdivided the final 2000 years with the coming of the Anti-Christ, identified by many Protestants with the Pope (see *FLE* 6:348 n18), and of the last days preceding the Second Coming.

If Hayden White is correct in associating various historical narratives with corresponding literary types,²⁷ the Augustinian view of human history would be comedic (as in Dante's *Divine Comedy*): out of a series of crises a final resolution – happy for the saved, less so for the reprobate – is wrought by God's active intervention in human affairs. For Hooker, as for Augustine, human history is purposive: its *telos* is the restoration of eternal life to deserving human believers. Humans experience that intervention as a divine providence, which works in ways mysterious to men but which is nonetheless omnipresent, whether visibly active or not:

... the naturall generation and processe of all things receyveth order of proceeding from the settled stabilitie of divine understanding. This appointeth unto them their kinds of working, the disposition whereof in the puritie of Gods owne knowledge and will is rightly tearmed by the name of *Providence*. The same ... was woont by the auncient to be called *naturall destinie*. (1:68; I.3.4)

Hooker reiterates his personal belief in Providence (I count over 20 references), and, while he does not elaborate on 'the worldes end', he does limit human temporality to 'as long as the present world doth last' (*FLE* 3:396; VIII.6.9), and he anticipates that God 'in that day shall condemne the wicked' (*FLE* 3:397). When he comes to describe 'the finall consummation of the world' (*FLE* 1:199; III.1.8), he invokes Romans 2:5, where Paul sternly promises 'the day of wrath, and evident appearance of the just judgement of God' to the unrepentant (*FLE* 3:57; VI.5.5).

Corresponding to the binary of eternity *vis-à-vis* history, reformed

27 Hayden White *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press 1978) esp ch 2 'Interpretation in History'

ecclesiology divided the church into a ‘mystical’ or spiritual body, whose members are known only to God, and a ‘visible’ or worldly one, whose membership requires only baptism and a profession of faith.²⁸ Only the latter can be historicized, for God’s ways with the mystical church remain shrouded in mystery, and it is presumptuous to inquire after them.

Hooker thus participates in a distinguishing characteristic of Judaeo-Christian religious tradition, which holds not only that God is an active participant in human affairs (Homer does as much) but also that his participation, recorded by generations of scribes, constitutes an ongoing, continuously updated and retransmitted textual witness to that activity. A divinely hypostatized history, then, becomes textualized in the narrative that we know as Holy Scripture, a narrative first of Jews and then of Christians. This divine participation sustains Hooker’s reading of Scripture and, by extension, that of the early church Fathers, whose letters, tracts, and homilies continue the sacred record. The historical participation of God in the creating of human texts thus underwrites human history as ontologically real and worthy of our trust. Conversely, the textualization of that history facilitates and underwrites the work of later continuators, interpreters, commentators, and – one may say – of editors. It is in this sense that God is the ‘author’ of Holy Scripture.

However, there are qualifications to this largely positive view of Christian historiography. As human history moves purposively from the Creation to the Last Judgment, the thrust is forward, toward a definitive, fore-ordained conclusion. To those who were heirs to the Protestant Reformation, that history will move from initial goods – Creation, God’s Covenant with his people, the Incarnation – to an end in which the damned are deservedly punished and the saved are richly, if spiritually, rewarded. Rather than divine comedy, this is tragic trilogy: a world saved only by and through its repeated destruction.

One consequence of this the latter, rather bleak narrative is a bias toward earlier, and therefore, purer times. For the Elizabethan Church, Bishop Jewel had laid out the basic parameters: the first four ecumenical councils (Nicaea I,

²⁸ Hooker scandalized Walter Travers at the Temple by the inclusiveness of his definition of church membership; Travers protested: ‘I thinck the like to this ... have not ben heard in publick places, with in this land, synce Quene Maries daies’ (‘A Supplication to the Privy Counsel’ *FLE* 5:189-210 esp 208; 638-40).

Constantinople I, Ephesus, Chalcedon), concluding with the latter in 451; and the early church Fathers – ie, those who wrote within the first 600 years of the Christian era. Hooker shares Jewel's bias, but it is not as salient in Hooker as in Jewel. Still, later writers, in general, are deemed less authoritative, as worldly corruption overtook the visible church – now identified with the imperial ambitions of the Church of Rome. Were it not for the heroic efforts of the early Reformers, the triumph of Anti-Christ and his collaborators would have been unchallenged. Still, the millennial expectations of the time promised only that things would get a great deal worse before they would get better.

Hooker is reticent about the anticipated chaos of 'the last daies', but his anxiety is expressed in a variety of ways: in the elegiac tone of the famous first sentence of the Preface: 'Though for no other cause, yet for this ... (FLE 1:1; Pref 1.1); in allusions to the religious and political instability of the times: '... we have just cause exceedingly to fear, that those miserable times of confusion are drawing on, wherein the people shall be oppressed one of another' (FLE 3:263; III.18.12, citing Isaiah 3:5); in his first two surviving sermons on the brief Epistle of Jude, whose verse 18 speaks of 'mockers in the last time, which should walke after their owne ungodly lusts' (FLE 5:13).²⁹

Hooker's repeated assertion that 'the dayes are evill' (FLE 1:98; I.10.3) seems to have been confirmed by his re-reading of the historical narratives of the early church, threatened as it was by numerous heresies. (Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis, distinguished 80 such heresies in his tract *Contra octaginta haereses*, cited seven times in the *Lawes*.) It is not that he regards the Disciplinarians as themselves heretics; rather, he fears that disputes within the church render it vulnerable to attack, whether by heretics (whom he associates with idolators, by which he means unreformed, superstitious worshippers in the Church of Rome), or by atheists (FLE 2:22-31; see V.2-4), to whom he devotes chapter 2 of Book V.

A historiographic dilemma arises: Is the direction of history up or down? Is historical 'progress' good or bad? Is the 'promised end' (*King Lear*) one to be welcomed or feared? One resolution was to invoke the Augustinian argument that the Old Testament is to be read typologically, in conjunction with the

²⁹ Jude 18 is cited in Book V as a warning 'that the miserable tymes whereinto we are fallen should abounde' (FLE 2:24; V.2.2).

New. This view restores a comedic closure to the biblical narrative, seeing divine participation in the human experiment in the reciprocity of prophesy and fulfilment – though at the expense of a drastically foreshortened sense of historical process. This, however, is *not* Hooker's view. He rarely reads Scripture typologically, and the Augustinian scheme is less useful in post-biblical times, the locus of the currently disputed disciplinary issues. Although he rarely invokes philological arguments *per se*, Hooker embraced humanist textual assumptions, favouring the literal reading of scriptural texts (by which he meant non-allegorical, and hence non-typological), over the fourfold explication, used by earlier scholastics but rejected by exegetes like Erasmus, Tyndale, and John Colet:

I holde it for a most infallible rule in expositions of sacred scripture, that where a litterall construction will stand, the farthest from the letter is commonlie the worst. There is nothinge more daungerous then this licentious and deludinge arte, which chaungeth the meaninge of wordes as alchymie doth or would doe the substance of meatal, maketh of any thinge what it listeth and bringeth in the ende all truth to nothinge. (*FLE* 2:252; V.59.2)

Hooker has a humanist faith in the texts of history, *as* history, that underwrites his own historical reading of Scripture; a typological hermeneutics is not necessary.

A second historiographic issue arises: What is the force of the 'ancient examples' that have been submitted as authoritative precedents for contemporary implementation? The answer is, 'it depends' – on context, on circumstance, on 'whether the example alleged be pertinent pregnant and stronge' (*FLE* 2:313; V.65.14). In an extended meditation on the rhetorical force of examples – the building blocks, after all, of narrative history – Hooker notes that men are persuaded by the force of a given example because of its concreteness:

... wee naturallie all incline to observe examples, to marke what others have don before us, and in favor of our own ease rather to followe them then to enter into new consultation... So that the willingnes of men to be led by example of others both discovereth and helpeth the imbecilitie of our judgment. ... [thus] Reasons provinge that which is more particular by

thinges more generall and farther from sense are with the simpler sorte of men lesse trusted for that they doubt of their owne judgment in those thinges; but of examples which prove unto them one doubtfull particular by an other more familiarly and sensible knowne, they easilie perceyve in them selves some better abilitie to judg. The force of examples therefore is great, when in matter of action beinge doubtfull what to doe we are informed what others have commendable done whose deliberations were like. (*FLE* 2:312-13; V.65.13)

However, the complement to 'example' is 'rule', which Hooker judges to be a more reliable, if more demanding, guide. He concludes: 'In all perswasions which ground them selves upon example, wee are not so much to respect what is done, as the causes and secret inducementes leadinge thereunto' (*FLE* 2:318; V.65.19). Examples are not laws, or commandments, 'but of counsels onlie and perswasions not amisse to be followed by them whose case is the like' (*FLE* 2:64; V.17.5; cf *FLE* 3:22; VI.4.5).

Hooker is thinking rhetorically, but the issue is historiographical: How does one deploy as authoritative precedent a history that is no more than a collection of discrete examples, chronologically ordered? How can one develop a historical intelligence that searches out 'the causes and secret inducementes' to human actions? How can one confidently ascertain what lessons history has to teach us? Trained to think abstractly, confronted by example after example cited by the Disciplinarians, each requiring inquiry into context and circumstance, fitness and pertinence, Hooker loses patience with opponents fixated on finding a model of church polity in the spotty historical records of the early church. The beauty of 'rules' is their efficiency: 'Although tenn thousand such examples shold bee brought, they overthrow not this one principle...' (*FLE* 3:88; VI.6.11). It is an economy John Whitgift never mastered.

The ultimate historical 'cause' is divine providence, which Hooker subdivides into ordinary oversight and 'special' or 'extraordinarie' intervention, the latter working through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Its 'inducementes' are 'secret', however, for the ways of God to men are finally unknowable. A sceptic might urge that such a providence is no more adequate a foundation for historical causation than the pagan concept of destiny it replaced. Still, its ultimate directionality is assured even if its intermediary meanderings are obscure, for the

history recorded in Holy Scripture is at its core a history of positive divine intervention in the lives of men.

The proximate historical ‘rule’ is that the church in each of its ‘distinct societies’ enjoys a separate and distinct existence, which he famously compares to ‘divers precinctes’ within ‘the maine body of the sea’ (*FLE* 1:205; III.1.14). Each such church, as a ‘politic societie’,³⁰ is entitled to determine the form of its political structure – its ‘politie’ – by the use of the human resources available to it at any given time in its particular history. Thus, there are certainly historical precedents Hooker does claim as authoritative: government by bishops, for example; ceremonial practices as set forth in the *Book of Common Prayer*; and, most politically important of all, the commingling of secular and ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the person of the queen. These precedents have the rhetorical authority of a ‘rule’, which mutates into the political authority of the ‘rule of law’. He is prepared to argue passionately the ‘fitness’ of the examples he urges as precedents. But it is not the isolated example that commands assent so much as the series of examples, over time, that constitute the substance of history itself, which over time cohere into ‘custome’,³¹ an explicitly legal authority ‘by silent allowance famously notified ... reach[ing] beyonde the memorie of man’ (*FLE* 3:340; VIII.3.3).

Hooker’s history of the English Reformation is an instructive instance of his own historiographical practice. On the one hand, he rarely uses the term ‘reformed’ in addressing his opponents without being dismissive in diction or tone. The very first title the reader encounters is addressed to ‘them that seeke (as they tearme it) the reformation of the Lawes, and orders ecclesiastical, in the Church of ENGLAND’ (*FLE* 1:1; Pref 0.1). He refers to ‘this reformation [in which] there will be though little wisdome, yet some indifferencie’ (*FLE* 1:23; Pref 4.3; cf *FLE* 1:295; IV.7.4). Yet Hooker is by no means dismissive of ‘reformation’ itself. It is a normal process of institutional self-correction, not a rupture from or wholesale repudiation of the historical church out of which the English Church itself grew, which he takes the disciplinarian agitation for a more radical reformation to be: ‘To reforme our selves, if at anie time we have

30 W D J Cargill Thompson ‘The Philosopher of the “Politic Society”’ *Studies in Richard Hooker* pp 3-76

31 Lawrence Manley *Convention: 1500-1750* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press 1980) esp chs II 1-2

done amisse, is not to sever our selves from the Church we were of before. In the Church we were and we are so still.' Referring to 'the indisposition ... of the Church of Rome to reforme hir selfe' (*FLE* 1:201), its maintaining of 'extremely most hurtfull corruptions' and its 'tyranny and superstition' (*FLE* 1:341), Hooker praises Henry VIII as 'the first that with us made way to repaire the decayes thereof by beheading superstition' (*FLE* 1:343; IV.14.7). Still, the appropriate model of reform is not the radical polities of the French and Scottish Churches (cf *FLE* 1:11; Pref 2.8; *FLE* 1:264; III.11.16), of which Hooker is cognizant but sceptical, but 'such, as we see in Juda, which having some time beene idolatrous became afterwarde more soundlie religious by renouncing idolatrie and superstition' (*FLE* 1:201-2).

Hooker's historical synopsis of the English Reformation (*FLE* 1:343; IV.14; see esp *FLE* 6:651-2) is benign, even complacent. Henry VIII was its indispensable inaugural agent; the saintly Edward VI, its divinely ordained advocate, a king 'in whome (for so by the event we may gather) it pleased God righteous and just to let *England* see what a blessing sinne and iniquitie would not suffer it to enjoy'; Mary (unnamed), the 'overthrow[er]' of the 'worke' Henry had begun and Edward continued; and Elizabeth, its miraculous culmination, whom 'God ... caused in the depth of discomfort and darknes [as] a most glorious starre to arise, and on hir head setled the Crowne, whome him selfe had kept as a lambe from the slaughter of those bloudie times'. 'The state of reformed religion', the nominal subject of the *Lawes*, 'the present matter we treat of', is

a thing at hir comming to the Crowne even raysed as it were by miracle from the dead; a thing which we so little hoped to see, that even they which beheld it done, scarcely believed their own senses at the first beholding. Yet being then brought to passe, thus many years it hath continued, standing by no other worldly meane but that one only hand which erected it, that hand which as no kind of imminent daunger could cause at the first to withhold it selfe, so neyther have the practises so manie so bloudie following since bene ever able to make wearie. (*FLE* 1:343-4; IV.14.71)

The vagueness of the grammatical subject – is it Elizabeth? or 'the state of reformed religion' in England? – is Hooker's: queen and church merge so that we read of God's providential subvention of both, the one embodied in,

embedded in, the other. Only at the closing two sentences is it finally clear that 'it' is 'the veritie of religion established' and that the 'glorious and sacred instrument' is Elizabeth:

Which grace and favour of divine assistance having not in one thing or two shewed itself, nor for some few dayes or yeares appeared, but in such sort so long continued, our manifold sinnes and transgressions striving to the contrarie, what can we lesse thereupon conclude, then that God would at leastwise by tract of time teach the world, that the thing which he blesseth, defendeth, keepeth so strangeli,³² cannot choose but be of him? (*FLE* 1:344; IV.14.71)

The 'miracle' is all the more stunning in the larger European context that precedes his account, in which Hooker divides reformation into two 'kinds': 'this moderate kind, which the church of England hath taken', and 'that other more extreme and rigorous which certaine Churches elsewhere have better liked' (*FLE* 1:343; IV.14.6). Clearly, faced with the self-destructive civil wars provoked by continental variants of reform, 'Christendome flaming in all partes of greatest importance at once' (*FLE* 1:342), Hooker endorses as providential England's course of moderation.

This is reformation as divine comedy. History's *telos* is manifest in 'the tract of time' – at least in hindsight – 'for so by the event we may gather'. It has a heroine in distress who is transformed (or who fashions herself) into a miraculous, divinely sustained saviour. Its providentiality is not to be gainsaid by extremists masquerading as 'pretended' reformers. In a world in which one might go to sleep a Protestant and wake up a Roman Catholic, then five years later reverse the process, it must have taken a remarkably strong faith to sustain one's conviction that, behind the wrenching historical changes that characterized the politics of the Church of England in the sixteenth century, there was a sustaining, beneficent, interventionist deity. Hooker's view of the English Reformation is not as nationalistic as John Milton's,³³ but he insists on its 'reasonable moderation', good order, and 'calme', as compared to its continental (and Scottish) counterparts (see esp IV.14.6; *FLE* 1:342-3). Ratification of the established 'Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie', the announced

32 The sense must be: 'remarkably, astonishingly' (see *New Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, s strange).

33 Hill 'An Editorial Perspective' p 14

aim of the *Lawes*, is crucial to the maintaining of that good order.

That note of self-congratulation has long since entered into 'Whig' readings of the English Reformation,³⁴ in which the transformation of England under Elizabeth from medieval to modern flourished thanks to her resolute path of moderate reformation.³⁵ What latter-day whigs forget is that it is Hooker's explicitly *religious* sense of history, historical change, and historical causation that underwrites what they laud as secular progress. But to secularize Hooker is to drain his historical discourse of its core agency, its belief in God's providential care for the actual, historical church, the visible church in England that is the subject of his treatise and the object of his protective care.

When we read the *Lawes* there is a tension between his religious view of history, which we no longer credit either as religion or as history, and its theological subtext that recent writers (Kirby, Booty, Atkinson), in their various ways, seek to recuperate. Appropriately historicized, issues of 'doctrine' and of 'politie' should be inseparable – as they were in the sixteenth century – and we misread the work when we ignore their reciprocity, which is underwritten by Hooker's own sense of history. A lively awareness of the tension between his sense of history and ours would go far in rendering the *Lawes* a less alien text for contemporary readers.

W SPEED HILL is Professor Emeritus of English, Herbert Lehman College and The Graduate Center, City University of New York.

34 Robert B Eccleshall describes Hooker as providing 'window dressing for the command structure of Elizabethan society' and as exhibiting 'a peculiarly English brand of national smugness with regard to the native political system'. Cited from McGrade 'Foreword' *Richard Hooker and the Construction of Christian Community* xiii; see Eccleshall 'Richard Hooker and the Peculiarities of the English: The Reception of the "Ecclesiastical Polity" in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries' *History of Political Thought* 2.1 (Spring 1981) 63-117

35 William P Haugaard *Elizabeth and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1968)