

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Anvil* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_anvil\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_anvil_01.php)

ALAN BARTLETT

# What has Richard Hooker to say to Modern Evangelical Anglicanism?<sup>1</sup>

**Richard Hooker's relevance to modern evangelical Anglicans is tested by Alan Bartlett in relation to two crucial and controverted areas of Christian life: the Scriptures and church order. With an critical eye particularly on some writers from Reform, Bartlett encourages us to find in Hooker methodological inspiration – humane, faithful and balanced.**

## Introduction

Is Richard Hooker an evangelical Anglican hero? He would be an unlikely choice. He is a reflective thinker rather than a pioneer of the Faith. He dies quietly in his bed, though at a relatively young age, perhaps only forty-six. Worst of all, he is most famous for his controversies with the Puritans,<sup>2</sup> to whom many Evangelicals rightly look back as 'giants in the Faith'.<sup>3</sup> But in an era when evangelical Anglicanism

1 I am indebted to the Revd Neil Evans and Mr Charles Clapham, both of St John's College, and the Revd Dr Chris Knights of Ashington for advice on this essay. An earlier version of this essay appeared in M. Bowering and C. Knights, eds, *Roots in the Future. A Collection of Theological Essays in honour of the Rt Revd. A. Graham*, Diocese of Newcastle, Newcastle 1997.

2 It must be stressed, following in particular the work of Patrick Collinson, that these Puritans were not, and did not regard themselves as alien to the reformed Church of England. The struggle was over the direction of a Church to which almost all of these people belonged and we can simply note that the continued disputes resulted in the tragedy of civil war and the expulsion of many clergy and laity leading to, as yet, unhealed schism. P. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, Jonathan Cape, London 1967, p 467, 'That our

modern conception of Anglicanism commonly excludes Puritanism is both a distortion of part of our religious history and a memorial to one of its most regrettable episodes.'

3 E.g. J. I. Packer, *Among God's Giants*, Monarch, Eastbourne 1991, a study of the Puritan vision of the Christian life almost entirely ignores Hooker; though he cites 'the judicious Hooker's...majestic and poignant declaration' on justification by faith in his essay: 'Justification in Protestant Theology', in J. I. Packer, ed., *Here We Stand*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1986, pp 98f. We might also note Alister McGrath's very favourable citations of Hooker in *The Renewal of Anglicanism*, SPCK, London 1993. But extended studies by modern Evangelicals are sadly and damagingly rare, though fascinatingly as we shall see he features frequently in some Reform documents.

is yet again in turmoil about its identity and boundaries, when many evangelical Anglicans are looking back to the Puritans for devotional and doctrinal inspiration, there is a pressing need for us to return to our roots in the Anglican<sup>4</sup> Reformers and their direct descendants under Elizabeth I so as to remind ourselves that it is these people who are crucial for our identity and understanding as evangelical *Anglicans*, especially if we are to make a constructive contribution to the life not just of our Church but of our country. Amongst the Elizabethan Anglicans, Richard Hooker stands out as the most systematic and creative thinker.

There will be other reasons why Hooker will be relatively neglected by modern evangelical Anglicans. His works were widely influential in the seventeenth century<sup>5</sup> but mostly amongst those who remained committed to the Prayer Book and episcopacy, and the great revival of interest in his ideas in the nineteenth century owes much to Keble, who spent six years editing his works and rather regarded him as a proto-Tractarian born into unfortunate times, who had to temper what he said publicly.<sup>6</sup> In certain other quarters this could be seen as disreputable company.

One of the difficulties of Hooker scholarship is the ability of many readers to find their own concerns discernible in his writing, but too often it is as if they are projecting themselves rather than hearing Hooker in his own right. So for example, Archbishop McAdoo seems to portray Hooker as an early liberal catholic.<sup>7</sup> (It is also perhaps worth noting that despite the acclaimed beauty of his writing, Hooker is not the most accessible of authors, as will be evidenced by the length of some of the quotations. He is truly a man who writes in paragraphs.) But the hope is that this essay will remind evangelical Anglicans that they too possess a share in the heritage of Hooker and that whilst he will have much to teach us, especially perhaps in our attitudes to Scripture and ecclesiology, that he also reinforces our

4 The use of the term 'Anglican' is clearly anachronistic but a very good case can be made that Hooker is the source of much of the modern understanding of Anglicanism. It would be possible to argue that he is already part of a tradition of thought stretching back through Whitgift and Jewel to Cranmer himself. This case is particularly well made in P. White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic*, CUP, Cambridge 1992, ch. 7.

5 H. McAdoo, 'Richard Hooker', in G. Rowell ed., *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism*, IKON Productions, Wantage 1992, p 105, for a list of the seventeenth century divines influenced by Hooker.

6 E.g. Keble on Hooker on episcopacy. See his Preface to 'The Works', vol. 1, 7th ed. 1887, p lxxxv. Evangelicals in contrast would note the respectful pragmatism of Hooker's defence of episcopacy and the absence of restrictive views on, for example episcopal ordination; a position Hooker

shared with much of the Elizabethan Church. See Book VII and the provocative discussion in W. Cargill Thompson, 'The Philosopher of the "Politic Society"' in W. Speed Hill, ed., *Studies in Richard Hooker*, Cleveland and London 1972, pp 56f. Surely this pragmatism is of crucial relevance in our ecumenical conversations.

7 H. R. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, London 1965, p 22: 'It may seem to be part of the perennial paradox of Anglicanism that its theological method should be involved not only with the freedom of reason, but with the inevitability of the visible Church. It was so with Hooker and it was so during the seventeenth century and the situation was in all respects the same at the time of the *Lux Mundi* debate, for Gore and his colleagues believed in the Church and they also believed in the freedom of reason.' We may note here the absence of any reference to Scripture in this summary of Hooker.

rightful place within Anglicanism. It is striking that whilst this article was in preparation, we have seen a serious monograph on Richard Hooker from Nigel Atkinson of Latimer House as well as a recent *Anvil* article by Kenneth Locke.<sup>8</sup> Hooker's particular relevance to our context is increasingly apparent.

## Life

Hooker's own life was relatively uneventful. Born near Exeter, probably in 1554, his infancy would have seen the vicious persecution of Protestants under 'Bloody' Mary, perhaps the most concentrated period of religious persecution in English history, but he grew to adulthood amongst the second generation of English Protestantism. Our knowledge of his family life is sketchy, but he was sponsored by Jewel, Reformer and Bishop of Salisbury, and so admitted to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he became a fellow in 1577 and deputy professor of Hebrew in 1579. He was most in the public eye when for six years, 1585-91, he was Master of the Temple in London, the lawyers' church, where he would preach in the morning, to be controverted in the afternoon by Travers, the Puritan 'reader' or 'lecturer'. It was an uncomfortable period but out of it came his great work, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, of which the first five books were published in his lifetime, leaving three to a complicated posthumous editing and publishing.

It can be an eerie experience for a modern evangelical Anglican to read Hooker. So many of our current internal debates were rehearsed four hundred years ago. How comprehensive should the Church be? Is episcopacy essential? Above all, does Scripture supply us with a detailed blueprint for the ordering of the Church? Indeed, what is the role of reason in understanding and applying Scripture?

## Human understanding and Scripture

Although we will begin our investigation with Hooker's understanding of Scripture, we need to set that in a wider context. Hooker, in practice unlike some of the other Reformers, retains a strong emphasis on this world as being constituted by God. In other words, God has created this world and embedded his principles, or laws, deep within it:

And because the point about which we strive is the quality of our laws, our first entrance hereinto cannot better be made, than with consideration of the nature of law in general, and of that law which giveth life unto all the rest, which are commendable, just, and good; namely the law whereby the Eternal himself doth work. Proceeding from hence to the law, first of Nature, then of Scripture, we shall have the easier access unto those things which come after to be debated...<sup>9</sup>

8 N. Atkinson, *Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Reason and Tradition*, Pater-noster, Carlisle 1997; K. A. Locke, 'Equal Ministries: Richard Hooker and Non-Episcopal Ordinations', *Anvil* 14 (1997), pp 172-182.

9 I.i.[3], p 149. For ease of access most quotations are taken from C. Morris, ed., *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Books I-V, Everyman, London 1907, and are cited book, chapter, section and page. They have been checked against the Folger critical edition, ed. W. Speed Hill, 1977 onwards, varied places of publication.

For Hooker this means that there could not be a rigid demarcation between the ways in which God revealed himself. The revelation in nature and in human society, which is accessible to obedient reason, would coinhere with that of Scripture. Further, when we approach Scripture we do so with our God-given faculty of reason, and as we are set within God's created natural and social order.<sup>10</sup> It was within this framework that Hooker defines the sufficiency of Scripture for salvation.

We note first that Hooker is committed in a straightforward sense to what may be perceived as the classic Protestant doctrine of the self-sufficiency and authority of Scripture:

...all those writings which contain in them the Law of God, all those venerable books of Scripture, all those sacred tomes and volumes of Holy Writ; they are with such absolute perfection framed, that in them there neither wanteth any thing the lack whereof might deprive us of life, nor any thing in such wise aboundeth, that as being superfluous, unfruitful, and altogether needless, we should think it no loss or danger at all if we did not want it.<sup>11</sup>

Hooker's commitment to the ultimate authority of Scripture is well demonstrated in Atkinson's recent book,<sup>12</sup> which marks an attempt, as does this paper, to portray a more 'Protestant' Hooker than has been the dominant picture. The point needs reinforcing because some commentators interpret Hooker as arguing that Scripture is only 'infallible' – a most uncharacteristic word for Hooker – in communicating 'the laws of duties supernatural'.<sup>13</sup> But for Hooker this is of course the revelation of the way of salvation itself:

...concerning that Faith, Hope, and Charity, without which there can be no salvation, was there ever any mention made saving only in that law which God himself from heaven hath revealed?<sup>14</sup>

There is no other way for human beings to know this with such clarity. Further, in Scripture God reveals other things which natural humanity cannot discover, including especially the resurrection of the flesh.<sup>15</sup> And even where Scripture simply confirms what humanity can know through the natural law, Hooker notes that often humanity cannot see these things because of its sinfulness and that by including them in Scripture, God confirms their importance, as with the Ten Commandments. This is a high doctrine of Scripture indeed, pointing clearly and uniquely and above all, to Christ the Redeemer.

But one of the joys of reading Hooker is the commonsense and honesty with which he treats contentious issues. He goes on, and most significantly it is almost

10 We must note that by reason Hooker does not mean autonomous human rationality and nor does he regard human reason as an infallible guide to truth. He recognised the existence of whole societies whose reason was clouded by sin; e.g. III.viii.[9], p 315.

11 I.xiii.[3], p 214. We might note as practical proof of Hooker's faith in Scripture that his biblical citations outnumber by 3:1 all other citations – Folger, vol. 6, part 1, 1993, p 143.

12 See esp. ch. 3, esp. pp 94f on Scripture as 'the strongest proof of all'.

13 A. Nichols, *The Panther and the Hind*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh 1993, pp 44f. It is a slightly mischievous book.

14 I.xi.[6], p 209.

15 I.xii.[3], p 211.

immediately, to point out first that not only does Scripture not tell us which books Scripture consists of, but also that for us to believe Scripture to be Scripture we must first bring to it certain reasoned and informed judgements. Then, and above all, that everyone knows that the simple phrase, 'Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation', requires definition:

In like sort, albeit Scripture do profess to contain in it all things that are necessary unto salvation; yet the meaning cannot be simply of all things which are necessary, but all things that are necessary in some certain kind or form; as all things which are necessary and either could not at all or could not easily be known by the light of natural discourse; all things which are necessary to be known that we may be saved; but known with presupposal of knowledge concerning certain principles whereof it receiveth us already persuaded...<sup>16</sup>

Hooker hammers the point home by pointing out how many crucial aspects of the Christian faith are understood by the application of reason to Scripture and not just by 'literal' reading:

For our belief in the Trinity, the co-eternity of the Son of God with his Father, the proceeding of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, the duty of baptising infants: these with such other principal points, the necessity whereof is by none denied, are notwithstanding in Scripture no where to be found by express literal mention, only deduced they are out of Scripture by collection.<sup>17</sup>

He reinforces the case later by arguing that the Scriptures are not simply self-authenticating, though again he did not thereby intend to diminish the status of revelation, but that we often come to trust the Scriptures precisely because of the witness of the Church, not least in its rational apologetic.<sup>18</sup> In this of course he was faithfully following Augustine.

## Scripture and church order

It was because of his conviction that God did not intend Scripture to answer all our questions, that Hooker felt able to go on the offensive against the Puritan conviction that God meant Scripture to provide, for example, a detailed blueprint for church order.<sup>19</sup> Hooker prepares his ground so carefully, that as C. S. Lewis noted, by the time he comes in Book III to the detailed refutation of the Puritan case on church order, 'the puritan position has been rendered desperate by the great flanking movements in Books I and II... Thus the refutation of the enemy (*sic*) comes in the end to seem a very small thing...'<sup>20</sup>

Hooker had other reasons for being sceptical that God would mean Scripture to provide such detailed blueprints. It would not be consistent with the world which

---

16 I.xiv.[1], p 215.

17 I.xiv.[2], p 216.

18 III.viii.[14], p 320.

19 It is ironic that some authors cite Hooker favourably in the midst of an article which is trying to argue for a narrowly defined view of church order as based on the NT,

thereby missing completely the essence of Hooker's own case that this is only partially in evidence but that the almost universal mind of the Church since then has been episcopal. Cf. C. Green, *An Oversight?*, Reform Discussion Paper No. 3, 1993.

20 Cited in S. Neill, *Anglicanism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1958, p 122.

God has created or with the maturity with which God expects men and women, and especially his church, to behave:

So I trust that to mention what the Scripture of God leaveth unto the Church's discretion in some things, is not in any thing to impair the honour which the Church of God yieldeth to the sacred Scripture's perfection...it is no more disgrace for Scripture to have left a number of other things free to be ordered at the discretion of the Church, than for nature to have left it unto the wit of man to devise his own attire...<sup>21</sup>

He reminds his readers that even where Scripture lays down 'laws' that these almost always require reflection before they can be applied to real human societies and that Scripture does not provide even precedents for many contemporary questions.<sup>22</sup> But this is not a counsel of despair, for Hooker is adamant that God's truth for the Church comes forcibly both in Scripture and in reason, not least because of course God continues to guide it by the very active role of the Holy Spirit within the Church:

Be it whatsoever in the Church of God, if it be not of God, we hate it. Of God it must be; either as those things sometime were, which God supernaturally revealed, and so delivered them unto Moses for government of the commonwealth of Israel; or else as those things which men find out by help of that light which God hath given them unto that end. The very Law of Nature itself, which no man can deny but God hath instituted, is not of God, unless that be of God whereof God is the author as well this latter way as the former.<sup>23</sup>

Hooker teases the Puritans for being inconsistent, for claiming to base their church order on scriptural mandate and yet having to admit that much of their current practice could not be found explicitly in Scripture and therefore was as much the product of reasonable reflection as was Anglican church order.<sup>24</sup> He is particularly sharp on those who claim access back to Scripture in a privileged way which ignores the history and mind of the catholic Church down the ages:

A very strange thing sure it were, that such a discipline as ye speak of should be taught by Christ and his apostles in the word of God and no church ever have found it out, nor received it till this present time; contrariwise, the government against which ye bend yourselves be observed every where throughout all generations and ages of the Christian world, no church ever perceiving the word of God to be against it.<sup>25</sup>

21 III.iv.[1], p 303. Atkinson I think downplays Hooker's balanced view on the role of the Scriptures. He talks of Hooker being committed to the view that the fall necessitates revelation for salvation, but not for 'trivial matters of everyday life' p 79. I think and have argued that Hooker allows for more scope for proper human decision-making not tied to a legalistic view of Scripture than is allowed for by this word 'trivial'. Rather it is about human maturity.

22 III.ix.[1], pp 324f.

23 III.ii.[1], p 298. Here Hooker is drawing on Cicero, via Lactantius, a Christian apologist writing in the late third and early fourth centuries. This instinct and tactic of commending Christian faith by showing its resonances with the 'best' of 'secular' thought, and so with the deeper structures of our world is surely not redundant.

24 III.ii.[1], p 298.

25 Preface, iv.[1], p 107.

It is only within the totality of this framework that Hooker will go on to justify the particular national character of Anglican church government and customs. So it is within this framework of a hierarchy of laws and of the proper authority of a regional Church that Hooker places the classic Anglican argument distinguishing matters of faith from matters 'indifferent', i.e. church order.

## Lessons from Hooker

Some of the lessons which modern evangelical Anglicans might learn from Hooker are already becoming clear. He demonstrates the limits of what we might term 'biblicism', the belief that Scripture functions as a detailed rule-book laying down everything that Christians need to know without having to exercise their rational faculties and listen to the common life of the Church. This realism leads to a balanced exegetical method which does not try to pretend that all parts of Scripture carry the same authority, or that Scripture is a sort of blunt instrument for bludgeoning others into submission, or indeed that there is not room for genuine debate.<sup>26</sup> For those of us nurtured within the sometimes restrictive or even repressive atmosphere of conservative Evangelicalism, such honesty, realism and balance is little short of a draught of cool water in a desert.<sup>27</sup> It is disconcerting to find many commentators of a more conservative hue at one point citing Hooker with approval, and to justify their own highly 'Reformed' position as 'Anglican', when they would not dream of citing him fully when he writes of Scripture in this way. But Hooker is able to write with realistic honesty without surrendering his convictions about the primacy of Scripture as divine revelation. It is interesting that, for example, McAdoo, whilst still recognising the centrality of Scripture for Hooker's faith, tries to relativise him here, by stressing that Hooker retained a 'sixteenth-century' view of the Bible.<sup>28</sup> A modern evangelical Anglican would argue, on the contrary, that whilst we may have a more developed hermeneutical sensitivity, any position which would lay claim to building on Hooker's heritage must also take his principle of scriptural revelation with the utmost seriousness.

## Church order today

One of the most telling ways in which Hooker's theological method provides creative practical strategies is precisely in that which was his main stated concern, the ordering of the Church. Again we must note the breadth and realism of his argument. So for example when defending the ceremonial of the Church of England, he does not hesitate to draw on simple human observation:

We must not think but that there is some ground of reason even in nature, whereby it cometh to pass that no nation under heaven either doth or ever did suffer public actions which are of weight, whether they be civil and temporal or else spiritual and sacred, to pass without some visible solemnity:

26 For more material on Hooker and Scripture see J. Marshall, *Hooker and the Anglican Tradition*, A. & C. Black, London 1963, ch. VI and J. Booty, 'Hooker and Anglicanism', in W. Speed Hill, ed., *Studies in Richard Hooker*, Cleveland & London 1972, pp 215-220.

27 Cf. for example the fine use of Hooker made by Peter Baron in 'The Case against Reform' in C. Yeats, ed., *Has Keele Failed*, Hodder & Stoughton, London 1995.

28 Rowell, *English Religious Tradition*, p 116.

the very strangeness whereof and difference from that which is common, doth cause popular eyes to observe and mark the same. Words, both because they are common, and do not so strongly move the fancy of man, are for the most part but slightly heard: and therefore with singular wisdom it hath been provided, that the deeds of men which are made in the presence of witnesses should pass not only with words, but also with certain sensible actions, the memory of whereof is far more easy and durable than the memory of speech can be.<sup>29</sup>

Here Hooker is directly contradicting Calvin and it is a particularly good example of the wisdom with which he approached controversy. He drew on such a variety of sources – scriptural, patristic, medieval, Reformed and perhaps most remarkably of all, contemporary Roman Catholic – as well as from his own observations, that his conclusions continue to resonate.

To resume his case on church order, we note that he begins, in Book III, with the classic doctrine which separates the visible and the invisible church:

That Church of Christ, which we properly term his body mystical, can be but one; neither can that one be sensibly discerned by any man, inasmuch as the parts thereof are some in heaven already with Christ, and the rest that are on earth (albeit their natural person be visible) we do not discern under this property, whereby they are truly and infallibly of that body.<sup>30</sup>

But he is equally clear on the unity of the visible church and how this is defined:

The unity of which visible body and Church of Christ consisteth in that uniformity which all several persons thereunto belonging have, by reason of that *one Lord* whose servants they all profess themselves, that *one Faith* which they all acknowledge, that *one Baptism* wherewith they are all initiated.<sup>31</sup>

So far, so good, but Hooker presses on with less palatable conclusions. He argues that these are the marks of membership of the visible church and that we must accept all those who hold these simple outward signs to be members of the Church, even if we find their beliefs or morals to be sub-Christian. Hooker defends this position with a stream of scriptural references, showing how the people of Israel fell into sin and idolatry but did not thereby cease to be the visible people of God, even if we might guess that some of them did not belong to the invisible people of God. True to his methodology, he then proceeds to show how, in the history of the Church, the rigorist position of, say Cyprian, in denying the validity of 'heretical' baptism was over-turned by later councils of the Church.

It is on the basis of this line of argument, that Hooker claims that the Church did not cease to exist, even when apparently at its most corrupt, and that therefore the Church of England can claim continuity back through the medieval Church to

29 IV.i.[3], p 361.

30 III.i.[2], p 284.

31 III.i.[3], p 285. David Holloway cites this passage approvingly but without perhaps perceiving that Hooker uses this to argue

both for the authority of the ongoing *visible* (i.e. episcopal) church and also to argue for wide toleration of fallibility within this visible church. D. Holloway, *Reform*, Reform Discussion Paper No. 1, 1993, p 7.

that of the Scriptures. Incidentally, it was on the same grounds of the inevitable imperfections of the visible church that Hooker was to argue that the Roman Catholic Church was indeed still a Church, much to the horror of some of his Puritan opponents.<sup>32</sup> The only separation he would allow was the temporary exclusion from fellowship with the visible church, but even this was not proof of exclusion from the invisible church.

Hooker then defines the nature of this visible church very carefully. He uses a striking picture, comparing the Church to a sea, to argue both for the proper identity of geographically distinct churches, but also for the unity of those churches within their agreed boundaries:

In which consideration, as the main body of the sea being one, yet within divers precincts hath divers names; so the Catholic Church is in like sort divided into a number of distinct Societies, every of which is termed a Church within itself. In this sense the Church is always a visible society of men; not an assembly, but a Society. For although the name of the Church be given unto Christian assemblies, although any multitude of Christian men congregated may be termed by the name of a Church, yet assemblies properly are rather things that belong to a Church. Men are assembled for performance of public actions; which actions being ended, the assembly dissolveth itself and is no longer in being, whereas the Church which was assembled doth no less continue afterwards than before.<sup>33</sup>

The relevance of this both to a sixteenth-century defence of Anglicanism but also to a modern defence of the unity and integrity of the Church of England scarcely needs pointing out, but we can perhaps indicate a few useful starters.

### **Reform, the Church of England and Hooker**

In 'The Case for Reform', David Holloway writes, 'Reform...is a network of Anglican individuals and parishes committed on the one hand to the biblical gospel of Jesus Christ and on the other hand to principled action to evangelise the nation and to make the parishes of this land once again the heart of the Church of England.'<sup>34</sup> Hooker would have regarded any statement that saw the Church of England being founded upon 'the biblical gospel' as true but woefully inadequate. Apart from the fact that he might have had a rather more solid and sophisticated understanding of 'the gospel' than many modern Evangelicals, being deeply driven by the doctrine of justification by grace through faith rather than a claimed commitment to the innerancy of the Scriptures, he would have responded that a view which supposedly defined the Church of England in relation to 'the gospel' is ignorant of human nature, human society, the work of God in the church and in this nation and both the complexity and simplicity of 'the gospel'. We must not, for example, overplay Hooker's flexibility on episcopacy and the three-fold order. He was too much of a realist to be entirely tied to sixteenth-century bishops, and too much a man of grace

---

32 III.i.[10] and [11], pp 292f.

33 III.i.[14], p 296.

34 Yeats, ed., *Keele*, p 63.

to imagine that God would be tied by a secondary issue of church order, and yet he would not surrender his belief that in England episcopal authority was an inescapable part of the catholic Church. To do other than this was of course to fall into schism.

Hooker had a strong sense of the proper lawful authority of the Church<sup>35</sup> and might have regarded our stress on individual conscience as a little excessive. Yet it was not unknown in his own time:

Yea, I am persuaded, that of them with whom in this cause we strive, there are whose betters amongst men would be hardly found, if they did not live amongst men, but in some wilderness by themselves. The cause of which their disposition so unframable unto societies wherein they live, is, for that they discern not aright what place and force these several kinds of laws ought to have in all their actions.<sup>36</sup>

This individualism is all too apparent in the extraordinary way in which contemporary Reform writers use Hooker and the Thirty-Nine Articles to justify, in essence, congregationalism. Green writes in his booklet that:

The local church in the New Testament means the regular gathering of God's people in one place; no other grouping, no matter how valuable, can be a local church, and no ministry which is exercised outside the context of a local church, no matter how valuable, can be understood to be New Testament *episkope*.<sup>37</sup>

He asks rhetorically 'Is this too congregationalist and independent a view?' Time does not allow an investigation of the NT evidence (though remember our earlier criticisms of this methodology) but in terms of Hooker this view is unsupportable. The church for Hooker is the visible church. We must remember that he sees the English Church, as did the Anglican Reformers on whose foundation he built, as a visible unity. It was simply the Church for the English people, and as his famous image of the church as an ocean demonstrates, the Church in England was one of these regional 'seas', but nevertheless in continuity with and part of the whole visible Church of Christ.<sup>38</sup> And it was governed episcopally and 'synodically'. It is ludicrous to try to use the Articles to prove congregational independence – as both

35 Contrast this with the contemptuous dismissal as a 'denominational regulation' of presbyteral presidency at the eucharist, which is established by the near universal tradition of the church and therefore was something which Hooker prized so highly. M. Tinker, *Currents of Change*, Reform Discussion Paper 11, n.d., p 11.

36 I.xvi.[6], p 229.

37 Green, *Oversight?*, p 15.

38 It is perhaps his lack of appreciation of Hooker's sense of the continuity of the visible church that allows Holloway to

describe the C. of E. as a denomination and so as mere 'scaffolding' for the true Church of Christ. Holloway, *Reform*, p 8.

Fragmentation and denominationalisation of course stops us claiming *any* visible church to be coterminous with *the* visible church but this is hardly an argument for internal disobedience or further schism. A visibly reunited church will have its own internal structures of authority and is unlikely to be a 'federation' of free-floating congregations.

Green<sup>39</sup> and Holloway do<sup>40</sup> – by citing Article 19, when the very next Article clearly uses the word ‘church’ to describe, at the very least, a national institution which had a God-given authority to regulate its inner life. This is further reinforced by Article 36 which, by including the Ordinal into this key Anglican formulary, emphasised the role of the Bishop in the ‘government’ and ‘administration’ of the Church of Christ. The bishop who is, indeed, the church officer to whom all priests and deacons swear obedience.<sup>41</sup> This is not to say that there is no need for reform of episcopacy, nor indeed for a more specific evangelical Anglican view of episcopacy, but it needs to be done in an authentically Anglican and intellectually honest way.<sup>42</sup>

I am not arguing that we can simply follow Hooker in all his details. He is never more a man of his times than when he is writing about order, and it was almost inconceivable to him that a people should not have a united religious and political identity, or that the monarch and government should not have a proper jurisdiction over religious institutions.<sup>43</sup> We would certainly not be able to follow him in his easy equation of English citizenship with membership of the Church of England,<sup>44</sup> though of course as he retained a firm emphasis on baptism as the sign of membership.<sup>45</sup> In his own terms, he was, strictly speaking, almost entirely correct.

39 Cf. Green, *Oversight?*, p 15 where he describes the diocese as a ‘para church organisation’ and justifies this by use of the Articles. We might consider Cranmer’s energetic use of his episcopal and archiepiscopal authority in promoting reform before we agree to such an interpretation of the Articles.

40 See D. Holloway, *Finance, Centralism and the Quota*, Reform Discussion Paper No. 6, 1994, p 15. A very well and subtly argued case to the contrary is readily available. See O. O’Donovan, *On the Thirty Nine Articles*, Paternoster Press, Carlisle 1986, chs. 7, 8 and 9.

41 Though now of course it is only in ‘all things lawful and honest’, testimony perhaps to the value of the despised ‘Liberals’ within the Church.

42 It is striking that the conclusions of historical-critical methods are applied to church history and traditional ways of reading the NT – as by Green, *Oversight?*, in his critique of episcopacy in the Early Church – but without using the same methods to critique the ‘new’ models being suggested.

43 It is however possible to over-emphasise Hooker’s sense of the authority of the Crown. See Cargill Thompson, ‘The Philosopher’, pp 59f, where he both outlines Hooker’s pragmatic rather than *de jure*

defence of the royal supremacy but also emphasises that the (not unconditional) supremacy of Crown in Parliament would not be acceptable to the Church in a non-Christian state. Again, this provokes new thinking for us.

44 E.g. ‘We hold that seeing there is not any man of the Church of England, but the same man is also a member of the Commonwealth, nor any man a member of the Commonwealth which is not also of the Church of England, therefore as in a figure triangular the base doth differ from the sides thereof, and yet one and the selfsame line, is both base and also a side; a side simply, a base if it chance to be the bottom and underlie the rest: So albeit properties and actions of one kind do cause the name of a Commonwealth, qualities and functions of another sort the name of a Church to be given unto a multitude, yet one and the selfsame multitude may in such sort be both and is so with us, that no person appertaining to the one can be denied to be also of the other.’ VIII.i.[2] cited A. S. McGrade, ed., *Hooker – Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, CUP, Cambridge 1989, p 130.

45 If space had allowed, we could have included a more seminal discussion on the relationship of grace, justification and the sacraments in Hooker. He is particularly helpful in this area.

But we may well want to ponder his sense that most peoples have public spiritual institutions and that the absence of these is a cause of deep disunity and moral disorder:

...for of every politic society that being true which Aristotle hath, namely, *That the scope thereof is not simply to live, nor the duty so much to provide for life as for means of living well*, and that even as the soul is the worthier part of man, so human societies are much more to care for that which tendeth properly unto the soul's estate than for such temporal things as this life doth stand in need of. Other proofs there needs none to show that as by all men *the kingdom of God is first to be sought for*: So in all commonwealths things spiritual ought above temporal to be provided for.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

Most of the commentators on Hooker agree that it is not so much in the details but in his method that Hooker's greatest legacy lies, his disciplined way of holding together Scripture, reason and tradition, his sense of balance. We have seen the beneficial consequences of this balanced mind and spirit for Hooker's understanding of Scripture and of the church, and of how we too might benefit from this, especially in an age of extremism and panic. It was rooted in convictions about the humility of God and of the unity within the world which he created, and with these quotations we will close. In reply to Puritan critics of 'The Laws', Hooker wrote:

You have already done your best to make a jarre between nature and scripture. Your next endeavour is to do the like between scripture and the Church. Your delight in conflicts doth make you dreame of them where they are not.<sup>47</sup>

The relevance of this comment today can scarcely be overstated. On the character of God he wrote:

If therefore it be demanded, why God having power and ability infinite, the effects notwithstanding of that power are all so limited as we see they are: the reason hereof is the end which he hath proposed, and the law whereby his wisdom hath stinted the effects of his power in such sort, that it doth not work infinitely, but correspondingly unto the end for which it worketh, even 'all things *chrestos* [well], in most decent and comely sort'...<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps at the heart of the current wranglings in Anglican Evangelicalism lies, unsurprisingly, the issue of what sort of God we believe in. Hooker has much to teach us here of this awesome, orderly and yet profoundly loving God deeply committed to his creation.<sup>49</sup>

**The Revd Dr Alan Bartlett is Tutor in Church History, Spirituality and Anglican Studies at Cranmer Hall, St. John's College, Durham.**

46 McGrade, *Hooker*, p 132.

47 Booty, 'Hooker and Anglicanism', p 218.

48 I.ii.[3], p 152. The quotation is from Wisdom 8:1. See Folger vol. 6, part 1, p 481.

49 A superb example of the classic English evangelical Anglican openness is of course R. T. France, 'Not One of Us', in G. Kuhrt, ed., *To Proclaim Afresh*, SPCK, London 1995.