
Richard Hooker: Invention and Re-invention

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This study traces the way in which a typical Elizabethan Reformed Protestant became something slightly different during a ministerial career prematurely terminated by death in his forties, and what he became in the centuries that followed. It explains the background of divided theologies in the national Church of Elizabethan and Jacobean England, the emergence of 'avant-garde conformism', and the way in which Hooker was used by opposing sides to justify their positions, particularly after the Restoration of 1660, when the term 'Anglicanism' first becomes fully appropriate for the life and thought of the Church of England. As the Church moved from national monopoly to established status, Hooker became of use in different ways to both Tories and Whigs, though in the nineteenth century the Oxford Movement largely monopolised his memory. His views on the construction of authority may still help Anglicanism find its theological way forward.

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AN IDIOSYNCRATIC PARSON

In 1568, Richard Hooker came up from Devon to study at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, aged only 14. The shy but precociously intelligent boy boasted enviable international protestant credentials, for he was nephew to John Hooker alias Vowell, a cosmopolitan historian and scholar from Exeter who once had lodged with the famous reformer theologian Peter Martyr Vermigli while studying in Strasbourg. Student gossip would also reveal that young Richard was only at Corpus because one of England's greatest protestant names, Bishop John Jewel of Salisbury – exile for the faith under Queen Mary, personal friend of Zürich's Heinrich Bullinger and writer of Elizabeth I's official defence of her Church Settlement – paid for him to come to the bishop's old college.

From this exemplary Reformed Protestant background, Richard Hooker took a surprising turn; the great book that he wrote, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, was one of the chief starting points for England's move away from mainstream

¹ This is the text of the 2018 Lyndwood Lecture delivered at the Temple Church in London on 7 November 2018. Background will be found in D MacCulloch, *The Later Reformation in England 1547–1603*, second edition (Basingstoke, 2000). I extend the arguments presented here in 'Richard Hooker's Reputation' in D MacCulloch, *All Things Made New: writings on the Reformation* (London, 2016), pp 279–320.

European protestantism. Much of Hooker's career, after some years as an Oxford don, was spent in rural parishes, but he was the reverse of a country Puritan: he became fascinated by the life of London, then at the height of its Elizabethan cultural brilliance, was intimate with the printers' workshops in the city and kept up with the latest plays of Shakespeare.

In his one London appointment, ministering to the lawyers of the Temple, Hooker clashed with a prominent Puritan spokesman, Walter Travers, and this won him esteem from the scourge of Puritans, John Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury. Whitgift encouraged Hooker to write a book which would contribute to his campaign against Puritanism; this was the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, the first part of which appeared off the press in 1593, at the moment of Whitgift's fiercest action against Puritans.

The *Laws* had little impact at first. It was never translated into Latin, which would have been essential to win an international audience, and Western Christendom outside Anglicanism has remained resolutely indifferent to Hooker. Yet the scale of Hooker's work was grander than its occasion, and only gradually did readers realise that its arguments combated the whole mindset behind the sermon-based, 'Bible alone' style of English Reformed Protestantism, let alone the arguments for a presbyterian future for the English Church.

Central to Hooker's argument was a careful sifting of the ways in which Scripture should be used as an authority for Christian life and practice, and the ways in which it should not. The purpose was to widen the areas which could be regarded as matters indifferent – *adiaphora*. These might then be considered using a variety of norms, and so they were open to the authorities of Church and Commonwealth to regulate in the wider public interest. By meticulous definition and argument, Hooker extended such areas way beyond those which scripturally minded protestants would consider appropriate: notably in the field of church government.

In such matters which did not affect salvation, Hooker's criteria for making decisions became as much the weight of collective past experience and the exercise of God-given reason as the commands of Scripture itself. History mattered, and there was no great break in the Church's history in the Reformation: perhaps there might even be good in the Church of Rome, and it was not appropriate to call the Pope Antichrist, as most English protestants were inclined to do. Hooker went on to the practical outworkings of his principles, starting in Book V of his work with a massive defence of aspects of English Church worship attacked by Puritans: a remarkably relentless defence of the exact shape of Queen Elizabeth's 1559 Settlement of Religion. After reading it, one feels that, had the parliamentary legislation of 1559 laid down that English clergy were to preach standing on their heads, then Hooker would have found a theological reason for justifying it.

Hooker knew that he was on dangerous ground, in terms of the intellectual orthodoxy of his day, and when he went on to say unconventional things about salvation and predestination he was extremely careful in works intended for publication not to challenge Reformed propositions too directly. His views on the sacraments were not exceptional for a Reformed commentator: nearer to Calvin than to Zwingli in his sacramental outlook, he was also typical of English theologians of his time in briskly dismissing Lutheran real presence views of the Eucharist, as much as the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation. What was individual, however, was what Hooker did with this discussion.

Deliberately and at some length Hooker re-emphasised the role of the sacraments and liturgical prayer at the expense of preaching; he felt that the sermon had been over-emphasised in the English Church. His reassessment of preaching might have had something to do with the fact that he was notoriously dull in the pulpit: it is, however, more charitable to note that Hooker had been considered one of the best lecturers in logic in his generation, at a time when the nature of Oxford University's curriculum encouraged students to make a choice between considering logic or rhetoric a priority. It would not therefore be surprising if the master of logic looked down on the claims of pulpit rhetoric.

Whatever the motivation, Hooker's attitude to preaching was not at all a popular stance to take at the time. He made choices in his avant-garde views: he chose not to echo fellow-conformist English polemicists who in the 1590s were beginning to emphasise divine right claims for episcopacy. Even if Hooker thought that the Church was best governed by bishops, he did not go so far as denying that presbyterian churches were true churches, any more than he approved of calling the Pope Antichrist. In a similar independent fashion, when it came to secular government, unlike many contemporary ecclesiastical lawyers who might otherwise have been congenial to him, Hooker did not let his anti-Puritanism take him down the road which produced arguments for divine right secular monarchy.

It was this sheer individuality, the stubborn independence of mind, the variety of hares started by Hooker's indefatigable quest in his subject, which made him such a protean source for commentators in the future. Yet one person would have been pleased if she had read the *Laws* (and there is no evidence that she did): Queen Elizabeth I. Hooker had few recorded encounters with the Queen, but the accumulated vision of his work is uncannily close to the idiosyncratic private religious opinions of this very private woman. She too defied contemporary wisdom in her reluctance to characterise Rome as Antichrist; she too was sceptical about excessive claims for episcopacy; she too had an ambiguous attitude to preaching and valued prayer more than sermons; she too loved dignified church ceremonial. Even her views on the Eucharist veered towards Reformed formulations because of her growing irritation with German Lutheran dogmatism on the subject, and so she would have sympathised with

Hooker's Calvin-like talk of mystical participation. In this sense, Hooker's theology is truly Elizabethan.

THE PREHISTORY OF ANGLICANISM

Hooker provided many clues to the future thought of what later became 'Anglicanism', yet that brew had more complicated ingredients. Among his close friends and admirers was Lancelot Andrewes, a clergyman who chose a much more glittering career, and who was destined to foster a startlingly new style of devotion in the Church of England. Like Hooker, his early connections were in the vanguard of Reformed Protestantism. Yet in the 1580s Andrewes had already begun to diverge from the Elizabethan norm: he also proved to be in a strong position to protect himself and encourage others, being a noted controversialist against Roman Catholicism and an increasingly popular Court preacher.

One of the most remarkable new developments in the late Elizabethan Church was the proposition that God had intended bishops to be a necessary part of Church structure: no other Church of the Reformation developed such a theology. Conformist polemicists for this idea were in fact going further than Archbishop Whitgift; when defending the episcopal structure of the English Church earlier, Whitgift had simply argued that it was appropriate and convenient for the English situation. He did not try to justify the Elizabethan Church polity by detailed reference to the New Testament Church, declaring

I find no one certain and perfect kind of government prescribed or commanded in the scriptures to the Church of Christ; which no doubt should have been done, if it had been a matter necessary unto the salvation of the church.²

This, of course, was the heart of presbyterians' disagreement with Whitgift. The essence of their case was that there was indeed one certain and perfect kind of church government to be discerned in the New Testament, and it was presbyterian in character; anything else represented disobedience to God's word and was a fatal hindrance to the salvation of those who were members of the Church. Presbyterianism was commanded by divine law: *jure divino*. Now, by contrast, the conformists took up this *jure divino* claim and reapplied it to the institution of episcopacy. This adroit reversal of the argument went beyond the aggression of Whitgift's drive for subscription in 1583 to attack the presbyterians on their own theological ground.

2 J Ayre (ed), *The Works of John Whitgift D.D.*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1851–3), vol I, p 184.

Central to the new mood emerging in the 1590s was an emphasis on the difference and special character of the Church of England: a mood at its clearest in Andrewes, but also implicit in Hooker, that the Reformation was something which happened not here but somewhere over the English Channel. On this reading of recent history, if there were disturbingly protestant features in the English Reformation, such as iconoclasm, or unacceptably minimalist views about the nature of the Eucharist in Cranmer's Prayer Book, then they were the result of foreign interference from the likes of Peter Martyr, Bucer or Calvin. Curiously, such arguments had first been heard not from members of the Church of England but from Roman Catholic polemicists attacking it; now they were borrowed in order to reshape the Church from inside. Anglicanism in later centuries has continued steadily to distance itself from the rest of international protestantism – indeed, from the nineteenth century many Anglicans would be embarrassed to be called protestants, and would insist on being thought of as catholics, even inventing the label 'Anglo-Catholic' to distinguish themselves from 'Roman' Catholics.

These modern Anglicans are echoing a distinctive synthesis of all the ideas which we have surveyed which emerged into a coherent body of thought around 1600. It was voiced by a group of English clergy and a few laypeople (generally those who had been to university with the clergy), who began uniting all these strands of thought together into a distinctive outlook on the English Church. They saw themselves as offering a more authentic catholicism than that offered by the Church of Rome. It is difficult to find a satisfactory name for them: one common label, 'High Churchmanship', is vague and begs many questions, and the label 'Anglo-Catholicism' is best left applied to the heirs of the Oxford Movement in the nineteenth century. Another name used at the time, 'Arminianism', also has problems. 'Avant-garde conformism', a term coined by the historian of theology Peter Lake around thirty years ago, sounds clumsy but accurately conveys the flavour of what was happening.³ The 'avant-garde conformists' sought to impose conformity on the Church but they actually wanted to alter what conformity represented; they were themselves moving the goalposts.

Where had all these individual voices behind 'avant-garde conformism' come from, or what had inspired them? A vital factor must be a feature of the 1559 Settlement unique among European protestant churches: the survival of cathedrals and a handful of similar surviving collegiate foundations as corporations without substantial alteration. Elsewhere in Europe the buildings might be preserved, and in some European Lutheran state churches the shadow of the organisation, but there was nothing like the English cathedral close, with its round of

3 P Lake, 'Lancelot Andrewes, John Buckeridge and avant garde conformity at the court of James I' in L Peck (ed), *The mental world of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge, 1991), pp 113–133.

regular liturgy involving a large staff of clergy and elaborate music sung by paid professionals, nothing of which seemed at the time to have much relevance to a protestant church.

The English survival is a puzzle: a cynical view is that cathedral estates and offices could act as a reservoir of patronage for the powerful to dispense to the deserving or the greedy. But perhaps more important was the stubborn love of church choral music shown by that midwife of the Church of England, Elizabeth I. Since her choir in the Chapel Royal went on singing and her composers went on producing music of superlative quality, then the cathedrals were emboldened to follow suit, despite considerable strains of finance. Strangely, this exquisite sacred music, with a continuity broken only by the seventeenth-century civil wars, had virtually no effect on musical and devotional life in English parish churches from Elizabeth's reign to the time of the 'Oxford Movement' in the nineteenth century: the parishes sang metrical psalms in the manner of Geneva, at least until the major evangelical 'revival' in the eighteenth century popularised a new sort of hymn which was not exclusively based on the text of the psalter.

Nevertheless the survival of the cathedral tradition had huge significance for the future of Anglicanism. It struggled through what might have seemed unpromising Elizabethan years to reveal the potential for liturgical splendour in Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* (a development which the archbishop would not have welcomed). Naturally those involved in such a devotional life did not regard the pre-Reformation past with the same loathing as many Reformers. They did not see beauty as an obstacle to worshipping God. They would certainly have been inclined to put preaching in its place alongside prayer, and given a special value to the highest form of prayer, the sacrament of Holy Communion. They might have come to re-evaluate bishops, seeing them not so much as Reformed superintendents but as endowed by God with a special authority as guardians of the Christian tradition.

CREATING A REPUTATION

Meanwhile, Richard Hooker had died in 1600 in his Kent parsonage. He was only 46. He left books unfinished, and a reputation full of contradictory possibilities. Yet within a half-century this obscure and slightly controversial figure was transformed into an iconic and much-contested authority. Right after his death, one party tried to claim him for their own: the 'avant-garde conformists' chose those aspects of Hooker's work that defended their case, and used his constant pose of 'moderation' to manoeuvre themselves into the rhetorical centre ground of the Church. It was a strategy with a major long-term future. Only 18 years after Hooker's death, Ben Jonson, a good hater of Puritans, could tell his Scottish host the poet William Drummond of Hawthornden that Hooker's

book was authoritative in England ‘for church matters’.⁴ Hooker could be quarried for two themes which appealed to avant-garde conformists: his polemical role against Puritans and his conciliatory attitude to the Church of Rome.

But Hooker’s stance on Rome had a wider use. It had become unexpectedly fashionable with the accession of James I to the English throne in 1603. Despite the unfortunate hiccup caused by Guy Fawkes’s spirited attempt to remove James and his parliament from the scene, a major element of James’s policy was national and international ecumenicism. At home, he wanted to reconcile his Roman Catholic subjects to his rule, as he had done so successfully in Scotland; thus when the new English order of baronets was instituted in 1611, prominent Roman Catholics were among the leading beneficiaries (at a price). Internationally, James made overtures to Rome for the general reunion of Christendom, and he was even prepared to suggest that the Pope could be the patriarch of a reunited Church. So an author who provided a sustained rhetoric of moderation on this subject was liable to find his stock suddenly rising.

Particularly unexpected was a client base that Hooker’s work now developed on top of this: English Roman Catholic propagandists. Here was a Church of England writer who denigrated Puritans, and who might be taken as readjusting the role of Scripture in discussing questions of doctrinal authority. Hooker could be read as stressing the importance of tradition as an arbiter of doctrine. If such an author says such things, the argument ran, then the catholic case is made by the Catholic Church’s opponents: this was a particularly effective line in the atmosphere created by James I’s ecumenical busyness. However, if this strategy was to work, it was essential for Roman Catholics to stress the authority of Hooker’s works. It also achieved results. For instance, Elizabeth Lady Falkland (authoress, translator, mother of the patron of the Great Tew circle) said of her conversion to Catholicism around 1604 that the *Laws*

had left her hanging in the air; for having brought her so far (which she thought he did very reasonably) she saw not how, nor at what, she could stop, till she returned to the Church from whence they were come.

Equally, James II attributed his conversion to Rome primarily to reading Hooker. This is a backhanded tribute to Hooker’s authority.⁵

- 4 P Sidney, (ed), *Conversations of Ben Jonson with William Drummond of Hawthornden* (London, 1906), p 20.
- 5 On Lady Falkland, see M Brydon, *The Evolving Reputation of Richard Hooker: an examination of responses* (Oxford, 2006), pp 35, 151. On James II, see J Keble (ed), *The Works of That Learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker*, 3 vols in 4 (Oxford, 1836), vol I, pp civ–cv; and J Miller, *James II: a study in kingship* (London, 1978), pp 57–58. Brydon observes how little Hooker was used by Anglicans in the polemical battle with Roman Catholics in James II’s reign, and attributes that to the success of earlier Catholic exploitation of Hooker’s writings: Brydon, *Evolving Reputation of Hooker*, pp 156–157.

How would mainstream protestants in the Church of England reclaim Hooker for their own? They must stress his protestant arguments against Rome, find in him an acceptable champion of the Reformed Church and range him alongside other great names of the cause. This seems to have been the agenda behind a burst of publication of Hooker's lesser works in 1612–14 by Henry Jackson, the assistant to Hooker's literary executor, Dr John Spenser, President of Hooker's old Oxford college, Corpus Christi. Jackson provided prefaces for two of these works, printed in Oxford by the university printer. The first, prefacing Hooker's *Discourse of Justification*, spoke of the necessity of publication because 'it will free the Author from the suspition of some errors, which he hath been thought to have favoured', and Jackson darkly added the Latin proverb 'he who lacks an enemy will be crushed by his friends'.⁶

All the time, however, Hooker the respectable protestant divine could be challenged by Hooker the protestant ceremonialist and theologian of the middle way, in order to aid and comfort the growing power of Laudianism in the English Church in the last years of James I and in the reign of Charles I. On ceremonies, Hooker did not entirely chime in with Laudian preoccupations: he couched his defence of them too much for Laudian sensibilities in terms of legal validity and 'things indifferent', rather than affirming their directly divine institution. Yet his exhaustive discussion of ceremonies in Book V could hardly be other than a resource for the ceremonially minded, and there was much else in Hooker for Laudians to savour.

Besides Hooker's irenicism, his moderation was important. That had been part of his literary self-image and undoubtedly it formed an authentic part of his personal style in life. The earliest effort at quasi-biographical description of him, John Spenser's preface to the 1604 edition of the first parts of the *Laws*, had stressed his 'soft and mild disposition'.⁷ The Laudians claimed to represent the centre ground of English religion in the face of opposition from much of the rest of the Church, so it was particularly useful for them to celebrate Hooker's moderate style and measured learning. It seems to have been the Laudians who first made much of the adjective which came to characterise the man: 'judicious Hooker'.

Laudian celebration of Hooker brought him his most socially exalted admirer yet: King Charles I. Sir Philip Warwick, a royal servant during the 1640s, reminisced that 'Bishop Andrewes, Laud and Hooker were this Prince's three great

6 'Cui deerat inimicus, per amicos oppressus': R Hooker, *A learned discourse of justification, workes, and how the foundation of faith is overthrowne* (Oxford, 1612); W Speed Hill et al (eds), *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, 7 vols (Cambridge and Binghamton, 1977–94) vol V, pp 83–170, Preface, sig A2. John Keble commented sourly on Jackson that he was 'evidently of the Reynolds school in theology' (in reference to the celebrated Puritan President of Corpus Christi College John Rainolds): Keble, *Works of Richard Hooker*, vol I, p xlvihi.

7 Speed Hill et al, *Folger Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, vol I, p 347.

authors'.⁸ This is not surprising, since Hooker's old friend Lancelot Andrewes, while Dean of the Chapel Royal, had been instrumental in turning Charles away from the international Reformed tradition in which his father and elder brother had stood. Andrewes, one of the literary executors and a consistent champion of Hooker, would naturally point the King to his work; after that, in the 1630s Andrewes and Hooker were destined habitually to be paired by Laudians as reliable precursors of their own activity.

At the same time, Hooker took on a different valence, becoming a hero of the loose grouping of intellectuals who gathered round the second Viscount Falkland at his Oxfordshire mansion at Great Tew, notably the polymath scholar William Chillingworth. The group equally deplored Reformation dogmatism and the new clericalist ceremonialism of the Laudians, even though Chillingworth was a personal friend of Laud. Chillingworth, a convert to Rome who then thought better of it, was well aware of the misuse of Hooker by Catholic writers, and the chief themes which they had explored were also what attracted him in Hooker: the discussion of reason, to which Hooker appeals so much throughout his work, and of moderation, a quality which meant much to the Great Tew circle. In a three-cornered contest for the meaning of reason and authority between Chillingworth, Laudians and Roman Catholics, Hooker was an ambiguous force, whose pronouncements were capacious enough for all sides to be able to quote him.⁹

HOOKER IN THE INTERREGNUM

With the outbreak of civil war in 1642, England dissolved into more than political and social confusion: the new and uncontrollable situation produced ideological confusion and bewilderment. Any writer like Hooker who represented stability and continuity would therefore be at a premium. His varied old admirers predictably clung to him throughout the changes of regime of the next two decades. So apologists for the old Prayer Book like Anthony Sparrow, Henry Hammond or Peter Heylyn found him their mainstay. Admirers of the shattered episcopal Church of England began taking a belated interest in finding out who Hooker actually was: so Thomas Fuller in his *Church-History* of 1655 began to scrape together what he could find about the man's life.

Even the defenders of what little stability had been re-established in the 1650s tried to use Hooker's name: nervous presbyterians worried about the Independents and the excesses of the radical sects, and apologists for

8 K Fincham (ed), *The Early Stuart Church, 1603–1642*, (Basingstoke, 1993), p 42.

9 C Condren, 'The creation of Richard Hooker's public authority: rhetoric, reputation and reassessment', (1997) 21 *Journal of Religious History* 35–59 at 45–46; R Eccleshall, 'Richard Hooker and the peculiarities of the English: the reception of the *Ecclesiastical Polity* in the 17th and 18th centuries', (1981) 2:1 *History of Political Thought* 63–117 at 71–74.

Interregnum governments trying to persuade recalcitrant Anglicans to offer de facto allegiance and ecclesiastical conformity to the new order in Church and State. The one significant silence comes from the man who most passionately sought stability after the national catastrophe, but did so in his own distinctively bleak fashion: Thomas Hobbes. It is not surprising that Hooker's sacramental mysticism, moderation and defence of the Church's distinctive identity should hold little appeal for the expounder of an ultra-Erastian absolutism.

Nevertheless, Hooker was beginning to take on a wider political significance because the full scope of his writings was now being put into print. At his death, three of the eight books of the *Laws* (VI, VII and VIII) were still in manuscript. What is interesting is that, even when the manuscript books were safe in the hands of reliable leading churchmen such as Archbishop Laud, they were still not finally put into print. This may well have been not because they were unknown but because their content was only too well known. In Book VII Hooker had been unacceptably minimalist in Laudian eyes on the apostolic origins of the episcopate, in line with the fact that, in Book III, he had already written off episcopacy in James VI's Church of Scotland. Equally, in Book VIII, he did not uphold the universal divine right of monarchs, and he enlarged on the theme of an original contract between governed and governors. With such associations, an extended version of Hooker was not what the ruling clique in Church and State wanted to read in the 1630s. In the end, publication of Books VI and VIII had to wait until 1648, and it was the responsibility of Archbishop James Usher, a former discreet opponent of Laud and now the focus for hopes for a moderate protestant settlement.

In reaction to this 1648 publication there began a new and paradoxical phenomenon: the efforts of some High Churchmen and exponents of royal divine right to combat or discredit the newly revealed message of Hooker; this was matched by an interest in Hooker from some of those who supported the new order in Church and State. The leading contribution on divine right was the work of Sir Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha*, which during the 1650s gradually emerged into the general political consciousness in the same manner as Hooker, through the circulation of manuscript copies. Filmer, probably originally writing in the early 1630s, had argued that absolute monarchical power derived from the original power enjoyed by fathers over their households: an idea which Hooker explicitly rejected. Encountering the manuscript versions of Hooker's Book VIII, with their objectionable message of an original contract, Filmer could hardly belittle the great man, given the reputation which the published portion of Hooker's work enjoyed among Laudians. His reaction was to express rhetorical respect for Hooker's authority, ranking him along with Aristotle as a giant, while describing himself as a dwarf in their company:

this was a springboard for selective and minimal quotation from Hooker's work.¹⁰

HOOKER FULLY PUBLISHED AND REMODELLED

In 1660 came the collapse of Interregnum government and the Restoration of Charles II. The immediate problem to be solved was the future shape of English religion. Could the English Church be rebuilt on the basis of episcopacy, yet heal the wounds of the previous 20 years and recreate the protestant comprehensiveness which it had enjoyed in the reign of James I? Many wished this to happen: both episcopalians and moderate presbyterians. Others were determined to take revenge on those who had helped to destroy not just the king but the old Church and Commonwealth, and as part of that revenge they intended to draw the boundaries of conformity as narrowly as any pre-war Laudian would have wished.

Among this latter group was a determined set of clergy led by a politician of genius, Gilbert Sheldon, who would soon become Archbishop of Canterbury. We may safely call them Anglicans, and soon the most extreme and politically active among them would acquire the label of High Churchmen. The question now was which party could most effectively shape the identity of the new Church. It will be no surprise to discover that the identity of Richard Hooker was part of the answer to that question.

The moderates did their best to claim back Hooker for themselves, just as their predecessors had tried to do in the 1620s. They included no less a figure than Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, a veteran of the pre-war Great Tew circle and, despite the many bitternesses which he had accumulated over two decades, now doing his best as chief minister of the Crown to stem the tide of Cavalier extremism and the hard line of the clerical grouping around Sheldon. It is well known that the opening sentence of Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion* is an imitation of the opening sentence of Hooker's Preface in the *Laws*. And now came the first attempt to write a full life of Hooker, by Bishop John Gauden, as the introduction to the first complete assemblage of the surviving text of the *Laws*.

Gauden had been the ghost-writer of Charles I's best-selling *Eikon Basilike*, and he was rewarded at the Restoration with the bishopric of Exeter for keeping reasonably quiet about his work. He was nevertheless a moderate episcopalian who had managed to conform throughout the Interregnum, and already, as plans for the King's Restoration were gathering momentum, he had published an extended study of how the new Church might move forward in a comprehensive way; Hooker played an important supporting role

¹⁰ Brydon, *Evolving Reputation of Hooker*, pp 133–137.

in his case. The bishop was an ambitious man no doubt eager to seize the chance of promoting his abilities in such an important literary venture as the Hooker edition, but he was to be disappointed in his hopes of advancement by his efforts: his introductory biography appalled Sheldon and resolute High Churchmen when it appeared in January 1662.

It is indeed a strange production. In its 40 quarto pages of rambling moralising and shameless padding, Gauden adds virtually nothing to the scraps which had already appeared in print, apart from a guess at Hooker's exact birthplace in Exeter (culled from one of the Bishop's recently acquired flock in that city) and (alarmingly) more than a page fleshing out in detail Fuller's hints about a blackmail attempt on Hooker, exploiting Oxford undergraduate gossip from Gauden's youth. Gauden also takes his cue from Fuller in being less than hagiographical, particularly on the subject of Hooker's dull preaching. He gives a broad hint that he finds Book V of the *Laws* fairly tedious, and his encomium of Hooker is less than overwhelming: 'in whom some things were admirable, many things imitable, and all things commendable'.¹¹

Perhaps more offensive and dangerous in the eyes of observers like Archbishop Sheldon was Gauden's aggressive moderation. He was openly and repeatedly rude about pre-war Laudianism, giving it its share of blame for the catastrophe of the 1640s.¹² Amid the triumphalist Anglican crackdown of 1662, this was subversive talk. Something would have to be done, and when in the same year Fuller's *Worthies* appeared, correcting his own errors on Hooker, which Gauden had copied, the perfect excuse was provided. The result famously was that Gilbert Sheldon commissioned Isaak Walton to write a replacement life. It was a labour of love which Walton had in any case previously contemplated undertaking; it proved a delightful and masterly shaping of what was known about Hooker into an image which back-projected Walton's own gentle sacramentalist Anglicanism onto the gentle divine of the previous century. Much of it is fiction.¹³

One of the most remarkable features of Walton's work is its deliberate effort to undermine the authenticity of the three last books of the *Laws*, which contained such unpalatable material on divine right and episcopacy; indeed Walton devoted a substantial appendix to arguing the case against the three books. Using circumstantial anecdotes and statements derived from partisans in the family feuds of Hooker's heirs, Walton did his best to show that Books VI to VIII had been tampered with by ideologically motivated subversives, and that they did not now

11 J Gauden (ed), *The Works of Mr. Richard Hooker, (that learned, godly, judicious and eloquent Divine) ... with an account of his holy life and happy death ...* (London, 1662), 'Life', p 22.

12 *Ibid*, 'Life', pp 4 and 5.

13 Equally masterly are the accounts of that shaping now provided by J Martin, *Walton's Lives: Conformist commemorations and the rise of biography* (Oxford, 2001), pp 227–272; and Brydon, *Evolving Reputation of Hooker*, pp 105–122. An older account is D Novarr, *The Making of Walton's Lives* (Ithaca, NY, 1958).

represent Hooker's true intentions. It was a remarkable exercise in having one's cake and eating it: Hooker the defender of Anglican ceremony and of the established polity of the Church of England could continue to provide authoritative aid and comfort to high-flying Anglicanism, while his problematic political statements could be quarantined. Few editors can have striven so hard as Walton to shake their readers' confidence in the work which they had edited, and few can have achieved such success in their aim. Thanks to the affection in which Walton's work was held, the authenticity of these sections of Hooker's works was still in question right down to the twentieth century – quite unnecessarily.

The story of Hooker's reputation and influence after the Walton biography now becomes two stories, distinct although repeatedly overlapping: one his reputation as ecclesiastical authority, the other his usefulness as a political theorist of consent and contract. Those who commented on the ecclesiastical strand tended to reject or ignore the last three books; those who commented on the political strand affirmed their authenticity. Both camps were nevertheless anxious to apply Hooker's now axiomatic authority to the repeated crises which they faced. The result was to pitch a gentle, clerical High Church Hooker against a Whig, contractarian Hooker.

A NATIONAL OR ESTABLISHED CHURCH?

The aftermath of the Glorious Revolution also finally destroyed the reality of the polity which Hooker had described. Hooker had known a Church which had embraced virtually all the protestants of the nation and, despite his polemical rhetoric which implied that Puritans were separatists, he had in reality been addressing opponents who were part of the same broad national Church as himself. Indeed, his text implied that everyone in England, Catholic recusants included, was part of that same ecclesial body. With the failure of a Comprehension Bill in the wake of the Revolution, this was no longer the case even for protestants; a comprehensive protestant Church was not rebuilt. Protestant Dissenters there had been, ever since the completion of the Anglican Settlement in 1662; now they were to form a permanent feature of the national religious landscape. The Toleration Act which was passed in 1689 would have to deal not with a small minority of separatists, as had been intended, but with a substantial proportion of the protestant population. The eighteenth-century evangelical revival and the gradual separation of Methodism from the Church of England only exacerbated the situation. In Judith Maltby's phrase, 'in 1689 a *national* church was finally replaced by the more pragmatic idea of an *established* church'.¹⁴

14 J Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabeth and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998), p 235, emphasis in original.

Far from rendering Hooker obsolete, this new situation added yet further dimensions to his usefulness. If Whigs used him to discuss original contracts, then Tories nostalgic for a truly national church would look to him as part of their ongoing attempts to restore the Church of England to its old position of virtual monopoly. Other Tories, however, had been unable to cope at all with the new political order; they had taken the radical step of leaving the established Church to remain faithful to their oath of loyalty to the Stuarts, and they had formed the church grouping known as the Non-jurors. As time went on, some of them even began to profit from their separation, to glory in the unsullied purity of their Church and to assert that there was no necessary link between Church and State. Now Hooker could be used against the Non-jurors by those Tories who had accepted the post-1689 regime and remained within the establishment, because Hooker had insisted on an undivided church and state in a Christian society.

Hooker entered the eighteenth century a moderate Whig, a Lockean Whig, a moderate Tory, a ceremonialist parson and a Non-juring defender of the Church's apostolic government. By now, indeed, anyone in English politics who wanted a name to command instant respect or who wanted to score a debating point for their cause was ready to quote Hooker: even Socinians and Deists tried it on. It is not surprising that the noisiest claimants for Hooker were whoever happened to be in power. During the brief Tory renaissance under Queen Anne, it was his Tory aspect, the organic union of Church and State, which was most stridently proclaimed. Once the Hanoverians were on the throne and the Tories routed, then variations on Hooker the Whig re-emerged as paramount. As John Locke gradually became more widely esteemed by the establishment, many read Hooker through his eyes.

The debacle for Hookerian High Church hankerings came with the transformation of the basis of British national government in 1828–32, when a series of legislative measures extending a raft of civil and political rights to protestant Dissenters and even Roman Catholics dealt the death blow to the long-wounded idea of a confessional English state. Not merely Tories were affected: the Whig interest disintegrated and Hooker's long association with Whig political preoccupations became relegated to intellectual history. Among Tories, one reaction to the developing situation was that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1830). Coleridge, a great admirer of Hooker, may be said to have creatively misunderstood him. Coleridge envisaged a national church which had a cultural as well as a religious function, a church which could be distinguished from the Church of Christ: if the two had any relationship, it was 'a blessed accident'. Coleridge then identified his two faces of the church in Hooker's discussion of the visible and invisible church. But Coleridge's visible church, whose primary role is as bearer of a

nation's civilisation, is hardly the same as Hooker's visible church, the embodiment of divine truth and divine action in the world.¹⁵

If Hooker's political legacy was effectively dead from the 1830s, his ecclesiastical and liturgical arguments continued to be useful to the Church of England as it rethought its role in the nation. The Oxford Movement was one distinctive and innovative response to the new situation: an attempt to rescue the catholic character of the English Church from liberal and rationalist distortions, while showing a flexibility towards the notion of an intimate union between catholic church and confessional state which had sustained High Church theology since the days of William Laud. Much inspiration for the Oxford Movement's new departures came from its explorations of Non-juror spirituality and theology, as part of a general re-examination of the Church of England's past in order to find inspiration for the present. Who better to explore than Hooker? Therefore central to the Oxford project in the 1830s was a new edition of Hooker that would have a contemporary relevance. It was undertaken by John Keble, an old High Churchman prepared to move beyond the world which he knew, and openly determined to rescue Hooker from the multifarious uses to which he had been put over the previous century.¹⁶

Keble's editorial preface, despite its genuine insight and probing of previously unused manuscript sources, is a formidable exercise in special pleading designed to turn Hooker's ecclesiological, sacramental and liturgical outlook towards the best possible approximation to a Tractarian of the 1830s. Keble does not ignore the problems in doing this: he deals at length with Hooker's unhelpfulness on divine right episcopacy, his receptionist eucharistic views and his generally Reformed discussion of predestination, but the reader is left with the impression that such unfortunate features of the Elizabethan divine can more or less be nuanced out of sight. Any regrettable aspects of Hooker's theology were in Keble's eyes more than compensated for by the mystical beauty of his sacramental outlook, a dimension which it was difficult otherwise to find in seventeenth-century High Church divinity.

On the whole, the effect of Keble's magisterial edition was to cement Hooker firmly into Victorian High Church tradition. In late Victorian England, Anglo-Catholics rather than evangelicals wrote Anglican Church history. Different wings of a diverse catholic movement chose different features of Hooker's works to exploit. Moderate Tractarians excavated him for discussion of the *via media*, a concept by then given canonical status in the Anglican writings of John Henry Newman. More extreme Anglo-Catholics selectively

15 J Gascoigne, 'The unity of Church and State challenged: responses to Hooker from the Restoration to the nineteenth-century age of reform', (1997) 21 *Journal of Religious History* 60–79 at 69–70.

16 Keble, *Works of Richard Hooker*, vol 1, p cv. Contrast Benjamin Hanbury's clear-sighted account of the reality of Hooker in B Hanbury (ed), *The Ecclesiastical Polity and Other Works of Richard Hooker . . .*, 3 vols (London, 1830), vol 1, p xiii.

savoured what Hooker had to say about the Eucharist and episcopacy. Others revelled in a theologian of the Reformation who was not afraid to cite mediaeval scholasticism and canon law, no doubt not realising how common this had been in late sixteenth-century England. The Church of England as a whole, no longer merely a national church but enjoying a newly central status in a worldwide Anglican communion, was happy to find an Anglican saint viewed through the agreeable filters provided by Isaak Walton and John Keble. As statues of saints came back into architectural and theological fashion, and proliferated amid the newly restored or rebuilt Gothic of Anglicanism's churches, Hooker's statue was often to be found, usually clutching his great book.

Perhaps one can see this final Anglican and specifically Tractarian victory in the contest for Hooker's identity as Pyrrhic. No-one else wanted to exploit him any more. The central assumption around which his theology evolved – a unitary church and state in which the national parliament is the expression of the will of a Christian commonwealth – was gone for ever. An added paradox in the story of his reputation is that no-one has ever wanted to adopt everything which he propounded; everyone has made choices to suit themselves. There is no Hookerian Movement.

Yet it would be a mistake for theologians entirely to leave Hooker to the historians. His intricate discussion of what constitutes authority in religious matters gives him a contemporary usefulness. The disputes which currently wrack Western Christianity are superficially about sexuality, social conduct or leadership style: at root, they are about what constitutes authority for Christians. The contest for the soul of the Church in the West rages around the question as to how a scripture claiming divine revelation relates to those other perennial sources of human revelation, personal and collective consciousness and memory; whether, indeed, there can be any relationship between the two.

Hooker provides one major discussion of these problems in one historical context, and it would be foolish for modern Christians to ignore such a resource. But finally, if one feels any gratitude for the shape of modern Anglicanism – its exhilarating variety, its engaging inability to present a single identity, its admirable unwillingness to tell people what to do – much of this is to do with the chameleon-like nature of Richard Hooker: for no-one since his death in 1600 has been able permanently to pin him down.