

Chapter 6

'A Way Mystical and Supernatural'

Scripture

When Hooker moves from the largely philosophical considerations of Book I to a more focused response to contested points in Book II of the *Laws* he reckons that he is not only addressing 'the very main pillar' of the non-conformists' cause, but entering new theological territory.¹ The territory in question involves the non-conformists' 'root' desire 'to enlarge the necessary use of the Word of God' and by consequence to assert (as Hooker renders their position) 'that one law only, the Scripture, must be the rule to direct all things, even so far as the "taking up of a rush or straw"'.² That issue of Scripture's legitimate authoritative scope seems to Hooker new in that it had not been 'moved' in other churches; nor had the Admonition Controversy in England that had generated the troublesome non-conformist principles resolved it. Hooker alone realised as he sought to defend the church as established by law that a complete and consistent answer to non-conformist insistence on the 'universal jurisdiction'³ of Scripture over and against all other laws was required. In so doing he set about to clarify an issue that the sixteenth-century Reformers had themselves left largely unexplored.⁴ So in Book II Hooker explicitly takes up the challenge posed by this new question and then spins out the consequences of his answer in the books that follow. At one level, therefore, the entire *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* is an extended treatment of the proper authority, place and function of Scripture in Christian life.

This chapter surveys Hooker's doctrine of Scripture as it took shape in relation to his context and apologetic purposes. That involves identifying strands in the theological tradition that aided his response to the 'new question'; identifying key features in his understanding of Scripture's unique

1. Preface, vii, 3 [I, p. 172]; as Hooker quotes them there: 'That Scripture ought to be the only rule of our actions'.

2. II, i, 2 [I, p. 287]. The phrase "taking up . . ." had arisen in the volleys between Whitgift and Cartwright.

3. So Loyer, I, p. 132.

4. Haugaard, 'Introduction to Books II, III & IV', *FLE*, VI, I, p. 126; taking Haugaard's point further, Ranall Ingalls, '*Sola Scriptura*': 76. Ingalls' unpublished study 'Richard Hooker on the Scriptures' (henceforth cited as 'Scriptures' as distinct from the article just cited) argues that Hooker made a substantial contribution in clarifying the Reformer's principle of '*sola scriptura*'.

revelational role; placing Hooker's views in relation to its alternatives; and specifying aspects of Hooker's hermeneutics, that is, his principles for interpreting the Bible. In all of this Hooker sought to confirm the reformed credentials of the Church of England, to pick up the unfinished business with Thomas Cartwright and perhaps also with Walter Travers; but with uncharted terrain before him he was able to fashion a perspective with its own new and yet very traditional contours and priorities.⁵ To those too we need to be alert.

Book II's Relation to Book I **'That unemptiable fountain of wisdom'**

The contribution of Book II to Hooker's theology of Scripture cannot be separated from the argument and exposition of laws in Book I. By setting Scripture within a particular definition and a larger system of laws Hooker already laid the groundwork for his response in later books.⁶ Hooker extends that point into Book II by turning one of Cartwright's own proof texts against him (a tactic Hooker often employs). For instance, the appeal to 'Wisdom' in Proverbs 2.9, Hooker argues, does not narrow the access to God's truth to scriptural revelation. Quite the reverse; it widens and extends it. Of course wisdom teaches 'every good way', admits Hooker, quoting Cartwright, but not every good way by '*one only way* of teaching.' Why? Because 'the bounds of wisdom are large.'⁷

This is a clever move on Hooker's part. His first rebuttal to the non-conformists in Book II uses their own proof-text from Scripture to support his appeal to natural theology in the first ten chapters of Book I. Nonconformists, Hooker contends, have failed to grasp the range and richness of Scripture's concept of wisdom; they have straightened the means and manner of divine self-expression, and so have claimed for Scripture alone more than it can rightly bear. In contrast, Hooker describes how from the 'unemptiable fountain of wisdom' which is God's own self a diverse impartation of truths flows 'unto the world'. He explains:

As her [wisdom's] ways are of sundry kinds, so her manner of teaching is not merely one and the same. Some things she openeth by the sacred books of Scripture; some things by the glorious works of Nature: with some things she inspireth them from above by spiritual influence; in some things she leadeth and traineth them only by worldly experience and practice. We may not so in any one special kind admire her, that we disgrace her in any other; but let all her ways be according unto their place and degree adored.⁸

5. There is general agreement that the Admonitioners, especially Cartwright, are the objects of rebuttal in Books II and III.

6. Loyer, I, p. 130.

7. I, ii, 4 [I, p. 289].

8. *Ibid.* [I, p. 290].

A foundational aspect, then, of Hooker's response to the new question regarding Scripture's role and authority is an embrace of the patristic and medieval concept of the 'two books', or, as Hooker puts it in the passage above, 'the sacred books of Scripture' and 'the glorious works of Nature'.⁹

Augustine's *On Christian Teaching*

Ranall Ingalls argues that Hooker's reprisal of this idea owes much to the influence of Augustine's influential treatise *On Christian Teaching* (*De Doctrina Christiana*). From that quarry, chiefly its first book, Hooker extracted a view of the varied sources of truth that *together* could lead the Christians to their heavenly homeland.¹⁰ The first ten chapters of Book I, as we have seen, reflect two key Augustinian views: first, that a limited but real and necessary knowledge of God is possible through creation; and second, that reason, however weakened through sin, retains a necessary place in the apprehension of God and of the 'way to the fatherland' (*via ad patriam*) in the sphere of both natural theology and of revealed truth. 'It sufficeth therefore', says Hooker, 'that Nature and Scripture do serve in such full sort, that they both jointly and not severally either of them be so complete, that unto everlasting felicity we need not the knowledge of any thing more than these two may easily furnish our minds with on all sides'.¹¹

Both Augustine and Hooker are clear that the role of reason, so necessary with regard to the natural knowledge of God, must have a secure and honoured place with regard to the revealed knowledge of God too. They are equally clear that on account of 'the guiltiness of sin' and the condemnation it entailed God in his wisdom has revealed in Christ 'a way mystical and supernatural'.¹² In keeping with Augustine, what is important about this 'way mystical and supernatural' for Hooker's view of Scripture is this: it does not displace the way of nature, the truths it teaches, and the exercise of reason and will by which its truths are known and acted upon. Rather, it heals the workings of reason and will while it honours and builds upon the insights and truths quarried from nature; after all, 'her voice is but his instrument'.¹³ Only by recognising the legitimate claims of nature and reason can Scripture be itself and offer its uniquely saving truth to humankind.

9. The idea of nature as a 'book' that complements Scripture goes back at least as far as St Basil's treatise on the creation story in Genesis, the *Hexaemeron*.

10. See Ingalls, 'Scriptures', pp. 146-169. Ingalls argues that while the Augustinian references are few, Hooker is drawing upon Augustinian commonplaces which all of his learned readers would recognise.

11. I, xiv, 5 [I, p. 271]. See Paget's *Natural Laws and Human Laws* (p. 66).

12. I, xi, 6 [I, p. 261]. See Paget's *Supernatural Laws*.

13. I, viii, 3 [I, p. 227].

That coordination of reason and revelation, of nature and grace, the book of nature and the books of Scripture, inspired by Augustine and then adopted and adapted by Aquinas and others, determines in large measure what Hooker says about Scripture. With this template in mind, therefore, we can turn to Hooker's understanding of various characteristics of Scripture as men and women assess its divine authority, and as Christians understand its role and depth of meaning as a 'doctrinal instrument' in their pilgrimage home to God and explore its depths of meaning.

Scripture and Law

The humanist phrase '*lex Christi*', or 'law of Christ', was not one that Hooker seems to have used but it accurately expresses his understanding of Scripture.¹⁴ In contrast with Luther's basic hermeneutical principle dividing 'law' and 'gospel' not just as biblical testaments but, more importantly, as what we might call existential postures, Hooker, like Augustine and the tradition of western theology that he bequeathed, holds them together.

Hooker's careful exposition of law in Book I asserted that creation is *lawful* in that it is ordered by the reason and goodness of God. In that basic sense Scripture also is lawful not because it contains particular laws and regulations, but because it too is ordered by the reason and goodness of God toward humankind's proper end, salvation. The laws of created things are the ways in which they participate in the reason and goodness of God. In the case of human beings in need of salvation Scripture teaches the ways by which humankind can participate in the offer of salvation, which is God's consummate expression of reason and goodness toward it. Scripture, uniquely comprising the 'way mystical and supernatural', is a divine law by which believers discover the necessary form and expression of fulfilment in their return to God.¹⁵

Scripture and Spirit

If Hooker differentiates himself from Luther in regard to Scripture and law, he takes issue with Calvin and his successors in regard to the relation between Scripture and the Spirit. Hooker, perhaps by temperament and certainly by conviction, opposes the illuminist tendencies in Calvin and Calvinism, that is, reliance on the interior illumination of the Spirit to convey and assure of revealed truth and scriptural interpretation.¹⁶ Or perhaps more accurately,

14. Erasmus, for instance, who also took the view that the precepts of Christ did not abrogate the laws of nature; on both see Roland Bainton, *Erasmus of Christendom* (New York, 1969), p. 115.

15. See Ingalls, 'Scriptures', pp. 267-8.

16. Loyer, I, p. 145. I do not mean here simply to identify the views of Calvin in

he locates the Spirit's testimony elsewhere. After all, Hooker does not deny that faith and Christian understanding are gifts of the Spirit. He does, however, position and coordinate the Spirit's revelational economy rather differently than his non-conformist contemporaries.

In keeping with the coordinated witness of the two books described earlier, Hooker presents two means by which the Spirit guides humankind into saving truth, the one, 'that which we call by a special divine excellency Revelation, the other Reason'.¹⁷ But those two means work together, 'both jointly and not severally either of them', as we have seen. Engagement with revelation, therefore, requires the use of reason. Right reasoning rather than ardour, with its abusive potential, is the basis of the surest convictions concerning things divine.¹⁸

Natural Knowledge Presupposed

Having established those two ways by which divine truth is accessible, Hooker is able to detail how reason is employed with regard to revelation. First, and in keeping with Augustinian and Thomist inspiration, Hooker recognises that knowledge of God through revelation, like knowledge of any subject, presupposes knowledge gained from elsewhere; in the case of revelation, the knowledge it presupposes is from the book of nature and the sphere of reason. 'Scripture teacheth us that saving truth which God hath discovered unto the world by revelation, and it presumeth us taught otherwise that itself is divine and sacred.'¹⁹ Some have seen here Hooker's reliance on the scholastic concept of 'subalternate' knowledge, that is, the view that all knowledge presupposes principles learned from elsewhere and taken from other spheres of knowledge.²⁰ If so, it was but a scholastic specification of the basic approach of Augustine.

This is a key element in the position Hooker takes with regard to a chief point in Reformation polemic, namely, by what authority a Christian accepts Scripture as conveying the authoritative revelation of God. The

this regard with those of the English non-conformists of Hooker's day; there was, though, a line of theological connection. In any case, Nigel Atkinson's argument of parity between Calvin and Hooker in interpreting, say, the Old Testament is insupportable (*Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition and Reason* [Carlisle, 1997], p. 120).

17. Preface, iii, 10 [I, p. 150].

18. Preface, *ibid.* [I, p. 151]; speaking of the Admonitioners, Hooker comments: 'It is not therefore the fervent earnestness of their persuasion, but the soundness of those reasons whereupon the same is built, which must declare their opinions in these things to have been by the Holy Ghost.'

19. III, viii, 13 [I, p. 376].

20. So D. H. Marot, 'Aux origines de la Théologie anglicane', *Irénikon*, XXXIII (1960): 333.

importance which Hooker credits to reason moves him to argue that reason, rather than some illuminist impulse provides the motives for accepting Scripture as Scripture. The argument assumes that the Spirit is at work in rightly-ordered reason, and that the universal testimony of believers, that is, the church, has Spirit-led, rational, evidential power in forming an accurate understanding of Scripture. It also assumes that while reason, together with the authority of the church's witness, provided the initial motive, the truth inherent in Scripture would gain greater persuasive power once a person has stepped into the scriptural world.²¹ Still, Hooker's approach to the acknowledgement of Scripture as Scripture is weighted in the direction of reason, and by implication church, far more than that of Calvin and his English non-conformist successors.²² It was that which gave the author of *A Christian Letter* pause, and prompted suspicions of 'the underpropping of a popish principle' in Hooker's theology of Scripture.²³

Reason's Role in Interpretation

Hooker's understanding of the relation between Scripture and reason does not end there. In establishing reliably 'the sense of Holy Scripture' with respect to the content of faith, reason is essential. As he explains in chapter eight of Book III:

Exclude the use of natural reasoning about the sense of Holy Scripture concerning the articles of our faith, and then that the Scripture doth concern the articles of our faith who can assure us? That, which by right exposition buildeth up Christian faith, being misconstrued breedeth error: between true and false construction, the difference *reason must show*.²⁴

There we have, as applied to the interpretation of biblical texts, a practical application of the primary epistemological issue in debate between Hooker and the non-conformists:²⁵ the cooption of reason, indeed its coordination, with revelation in the receipt and understanding of divine truth.

21. See III, viii, 14 [I, p. 376].

22. So Calvin: 'Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence its own truth'; 'we ought to seek our conviction in a higher place than human reasons, judgments or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Holy Spirit' (*Institutes*, Book II, 2 and 4 [LCC, vol. I, pp. 76-78]). Calvin gives here his view on Augustine's important remark 'I would not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church'; a view much debated in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theology.

23. The popish principle suspected was, the author stated, 'the Churches authoritie above Holie Scripture' (I, p. 376, note 13).

24. III, viii, 16 [I, p. 378]; emphasis mine.

25. So Haugaard describes the theme of Book II ('Books II, III & IV', p. 129).

A Triad of Characteristics: Sufficiency, Perfection and Clarity

There is no cause to think that in his theology of Scripture Hooker wished to be anything but faithful to the established views of the Church of England as expressed, for example, in the Prayer Book and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. Article Six, for instance, while it did not use the word 'sufficient', was clear that 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation'. For all the Reformation movements it was a point of self-definition against the Roman Catholic Church's insistence on the complementary role of tradition in matters 'of faith'.²⁶ In the Elizabethan context, however, the matter could not be left there. If that concise article had been regarded as wholly satisfactory to Reformers then the epistemological issue implied in the Elizabethan debates with non-conformity would never have arisen. Beyond that, with an eye toward drawing as many Roman Catholics as possible into the national religious settlement, how was the notion of sufficiency to be interpreted in light of the decrees of the Council of Trent and its affirmation of unwritten traditions necessarily supplementing the written scriptural record?²⁷ Insofar as he was advocating for the Elizabethan Settlement, Hooker had to bear both of these elements of the debate in mind.

Sufficiency and Perfection

In light of the coordination of reason and revelation that Hooker proposes in Book I, the notion of scriptural sufficiency must be suitably nuanced in terms of what Loyer calls Scripture's 'proper field of reference'.²⁸ Sufficiency can only be gauged within that appropriate 'field of reference'. We have already described much of that 'field'; we can specify it somewhat more in these terms.

First, Scripture contains natural as well as supernatural truths. In keeping with Aquinas' view, Scripture contains those natural truths, aspects of the moral law, for instance, for the sake of what we might call 'ease of access'.²⁹ Scripture's sufficiency in regard to saving doctrine does not really relate to those areas that are in principle discernible by rational enquiry. Second, positive law in Scripture is not necessarily supernatural law; within Scripture itself an array of diversely ordered laws, from various sources and so of different weight, can be found. Scripture's sufficiency

26. For descriptions of views leading to Trent see Tavard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church. The Crisis of the Protestant Reformation* (London, 1959), pp. 113-91.

27. Session IV, first decree ('*hanc veritatem et disciplinam contineri in libris scriptis et sino scripto traditionibus*') (DEC, II, p. 663); see also Tavard, *Holy Writ*, pp. 195-209.

28. I, p. 131; my discussion here follows Loyer.

29. E.g. the Decalogue. On this Thomist influence on Hooker, see Grislis, 'Hermeneutical Problem', pp. 186-7.

only pertains to the supernatural sphere of Scripture's witness. So, third, Scripture is 'sufficient' with respect to 'all things necessary for salvation' (Article Six); however, not all that it contains is necessary for salvation. Sufficiency pertains to a specific field within the overall scriptural testimony. Fourth, therefore, Scripture is 'sufficient' with respect to matters necessary for salvation while at the same time containing a field of truths not strictly necessary, and a domain of matters that are, in the language of contemporary debate 'indifferent', that is, undetermined in Scripture and so determinable by other means and authorities.³⁰

Finally, Hooker's teleological view of law expounded in Book I ties sufficiency closely to perfection, that is, to Scripture's end or purpose. We understand Scripture's sufficiency by answering the question: what is Scripture's 'principle intent'? For Hooker that answer is clear: 'to deliver the laws of duties supernatural'.³¹ Speaking more specifically in terms of 'perfection' Hooker puts it like this: 'the absolute perfection of Scripture is seen by relation unto that end whereto it tendeth', namely, 'a full instruction in all things unto salvation necessary'.³² In a stroke, then, Hooker has responded to the twin pillars of the current debates. Against non-conformists who wished to 'rack and stretch' Scripture's sufficiency and perfection to mean far more than they legitimately can, he has opened the field of relevant laws and freedoms beyond a narrow scripturalism; and against Tridentine Roman Catholic doctrine he has fastened 'all things necessary for salvation' to the written record of Scripture. 'Whatsoever to make up the doctrine's of man's salvation is added, as in supply of the Scripture's unsufficiency, we reject it'.³³

Clarity

If Scripture is thought to be sufficient because it is perfect, and perfect insofar as it is sufficient with respect to 'all things necessary to salvation', are all things 'necessary' clear? There was an element of tension in the early Reformers' assertion of Scripture's clarity, and Hooker was sensitive to this in his reading of Article Six. With respect to Scripture containing

30. So-called '*adiaphora*'; see chapter fifteen.

31. I, xiv, 1 [I, p. 267].

32. II, viii, 5 [I, pp. 333-4]. Having said that, because different parts of Scripture have different aims, for instance, some the aim of imparting natural knowledge, others supernatural knowledge, the quality of 'perfection' applies across all its areas: 'As therefore God created every part and particle of man exactly perfect, that is to say in all points sufficient *unto the use for which he appointed it*; so the Scripture, yea every sentence thereof, is perfect, and wanteth nothing *requisite unto that purpose for which God delivered the same*' (II, viii, 5 [I, p. 334]; emphasis mine).

33. II, viii, 5 [I, p. 334].

necessary articles of faith, what was the implication of the Article's claim that those articles had either to be 'read therein' or 'proved thereby'? The phrase 'read therein' suggests truth that is apparent and accessible; so Hooker describes 'the word of life' as a treasure 'though precious, yet easy, as well to attain, as to find; lest any man desirous of life should perish through the difficulty of the way'.³⁴ At the same time, the phrase 'proved thereby' could be read to suggest that even things necessary to be believed are not immediately clear, and that an exegetical process and tools – 'the industry of right discourse' and 'travail' – are required to extract and establish that content and its meaning.³⁵ So Hooker distinguishes what Scripture 'contains' from what it 'comprehends'.³⁶ On the one hand, according to Hooker, Scripture possesses an evangelical simplicity, an open exposure of its central, transcendent message; on the other hand, it requires both exegesis treating literal meanings and potential senses, and theology exposing implicit meanings by probable deductions. Out of that last aspect flows Hooker's appreciation of 'antiquity', or tradition, as an important element in expounding scriptural faith which we will consider later in relation to Hooker's practice of theology.³⁷

Scripture's Christocentric Core

In keeping with its diversity of laws and their various ends or purposes there exists within Scripture a hierarchy of intent, a scriptural expression of Hooker's hierarchical principle. For Hooker the principal intent is its christocentrism, its unifying spiritual core.³⁸ Hooker is clear that the 'irreducible object of faith' and the 'specifically supernatural centre of Scripture' is Christ the Saviour: God manifested in the flesh and justified in the Spirit, that is, incarnate, crucified and risen.³⁹ Not only is that Scripture's centre; it is also, in accordance with Article Eight, Scripture's unifying theme.

It is noteworthy that the same tension inherent in Scripture between clarity, on the one hand, and depth on the other, pertains to Christology; and no wonder, since the person of Christ defines Scripture as core and content.

34. V, xxi, 3 [II, p. 85].

35. Loyer, I, pp. 149-50.; *ibid.* [II, p. 86].

36. I, xiv, 2 [I, pp. 268-9]; Hooker himself emphasises those words in the passage. Here he cites basic Christian tenets that are 'no where to be found by express literal mention' but can only be 'deduced' by 'collection'.

37. Marot, 'Aux origines': 331; Hooker was of course aware that Article Seven regarded the creeds as 'proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture'. Tradition is taken up in chapter twelve.

38. Loyer, I, p. 157.

39. That phraseology is Loyer's, I, p. 133; so Hooker in his *LDJ* [III, p. 501].

Attention is sometimes drawn to Hooker's appeal to the ancient Chalcedonian Definition of the person of Christ to interpret this tension in Scripture. Far from supporting an unnuanced claim for Scripture's all-encompassing authority, Hooker sees in the Chalcedonian pattern a rationale for the diversity-in-unity in Scripture. This is really an argument for Scripture's unity, a unity that comprehends the diversity and variation in scripture's content, message, and importance arising over time, out of different settings, with varying aims. In employing the paradigm of Chalcedon, Ingalls explains, Hooker understands Scripture 'as a divinely-constituted unity in which what is human, historical, natural and what is divine and revealed are brought together "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation"'. As a result, 'temporal, natural and human things become the means of an eternal good by reason of their relationship to the Person of the Word of God'.⁴⁰ We are reminded of the Augustinian and Thomist insistence that the 'way of nature' is requisite for the 'way of grace'.

Outlines of an Interpretive Method

It is fair to say that Hooker does not offer a full-blown account of the interpretation of Scripture; what we would call today a hermeneutical theory. Still, his issues with the exegesis of those whose views he wants to counter indicate some favoured perspectives on his part. Further, the exegesis in the course of the arguments in the *Laws* and elsewhere reveals his own distinctive hermeneutical 'techniques'.⁴¹ Five of them are worth noting.

Letter and Truth

In line with Reforming preferences, Hooker shows no sympathy with the traditional medieval fourfold allegorical method of interpretation; he is firm that where it will stand the literal meaning of a passage is to be preferred. Having said this, he recognises that Scripture comprehends within itself the dimensions of promise and fulfilment that broadly characterise the relation between the two Testaments.⁴² Hooker's intent is to recover the approach and usage of 'the ancient Fathers' in whose writings the language, themes and usages of the age of promise continue under the new dispensation. '[T]he only difference', he explains, 'is, that

40. For instance, Ingalls, 'Scriptures', pp. 94-5.

41. Loyer, I, p. 151; on Hooker's own 'techniques' see Haugaard, 'Book II, III & IV', pp.154-7.

42. *Ibid.* I, p. 154; those dimensions can be variously expressed: law and grace, and shadow and reality, to name but two.

whereas before they had a literal, they now have a metaphorical use, and are as so many notes of remembrance unto us, that what they did signify in the letter is accomplished in the truth.⁴³ Hooker's point is that when the letter, or literal meaning, acquires a metaphorical or symbolic meaning for Christians, the literal sense is not abrogated, as Calvin, Cartwright and others thought, but rather fulfilled.⁴⁴

A Harmonic Hierarchy

The concepts of letter and truth, promise and fulfilment, point to the theme of *relation* informing the whole scriptural testimony. For that reason Hooker's interpretation acknowledges and seeks out the relation of all of its parts to the whole. Just as creation is a hierarchy of intersecting laws, so Scripture is a hierarchy of intersecting senses. They are unified in their relation to Christ the Word of God; beyond that, however, they form a rich and varied hierarchy of meaning, truth, and inspiration. As a result, Hooker can be remarkably nuanced in his approach to the issue of inspiration. This is a debated point in the interpretation of Hooker's view of Scripture, but it seems fair to say that Hooker sees how different scriptural truths can occupy different positions in relation to the promise of salvation.⁴⁵ That subtle discernment is the exegete's careful task. It requires sensitivity to the 'complex ensemble' that makes up Scripture. Indeed, the exegete's success depends on developing a trained ear that is attuned to Scripture's unique 'harmonics'.⁴⁶

History

Hooker was not just a reformed theologian but a Renaissance theologian, so he took seriously a chief gift of Renaissance intellectual culture, namely, what William Haugaard calls 'historical contextualisation'.⁴⁷ The aim of

43. IV, xi, 10 [I, p. 460]; Hooker is responding to non-conformist criticisms of the use of the words 'altar', 'priest', and 'sacrifice'.

44. Loyer, I, p. 156; words like 'void' and 'abrogation' not fulfilment characterise Calvin's treatment of the relation of the Testaments in his *Institutes*; see Book II, ch. 10, secs. 7-10 [LCC, vol. I, pp. 454-60].

45. So Loyer, I, p. 158; he notes, for instance, that the natural moral law is not of the same inspired quality as, say, the Beatitudes. I see nothing here, if not pressed too far, contrary to the Augustinian notion of the two ways discussed earlier as the bedrock of Hooker's view of Scripture.

46. So Loyer describes this exegetical posture (I, p. 158).

47. In his 'Books II, III & IV', p. 157; I rely on many of his points in this section, as well his essay 'The Scriptural Hermeneutics of Richard Hooker', in D. Armentrout, ed., *This Sacred History: Anglican Reflections for John Booty* (Cambridge, USA, 1990), pp. 166-7.

the approach lay in judging the aptness of a text's example, meaning or direction in regard to an issue at hand, and it was a commonplace of the age to bring that contextualising approach to bear on matters of church history and historical interpretation generally. Hooker, however, was more vigorous and thorough in contextualising *biblical* texts in order to assess aptness in relation to considerations and debate over theology, praxis, and polity.⁴⁸

The exegetical debates in which Hooker was implicated, and which the *Laws* address, were well-tilled soil among disputants who preceded Hooker in the establishment-non-conformist conflict. To these on-going debates Hooker made an important contribution by joining his teleological principle with thorough and acute historical perspective.⁴⁹ The perfection and absoluteness of God's words as recorded in Scripture, be they a moral law, a judicial law, or the record of an historical fact or precedent, are such only 'for the performance of that things whereunto they tend'. *Telos*, end or purpose, is key in determining the aptness of a scriptural text for contemporary needs. So, as Haugaard explains it, just as the identification of purpose within the particular human situation described in a historical text is an essential element of reasoned interpretation, so likewise in the exegesis of biblical texts. An important element in such an approach is the balanced operations of philosophical principles on the one hand, and historical analysis on the other. With his own alchemy Hooker unites philosophy and logical abstraction with a sharp historical sense in the exegetical task.⁵⁰

Exegesis, Equity and Common Law

An inspiration parallel to that Renaissance historical sense was juridical science, and in particular the dynamic developments in legal theory associated with Hooker's contemporary Sir Edward Coke and the common lawyers of the Elizabethan period.⁵¹ The ramifications of Hooker's exposure to that intellectual world during his years as Master of the Temple pervade his writings. As to the interpretation of Scripture, we need note first Hooker's understanding of the legal concept of 'equity'. It is a process by which laws that 'continually and universally should be of force' can be adjusted, extended, restrained and applied in particular

48. Ingalls fairly notes that this approach is legitimated by the principles of Augustine's *On Christian Teaching* too ('Scriptures', pp. 280-1).

49. In so doing, says Haugaard, Hooker introduces 'a seminal hermeneutical tool' into exegetical method ('Books II, III & IV', p. 159).

50. On the relation of scholastic and Renaissance concerns in this domain, see Loyer, I, p. 159-60.

51. Loyer, with special interest in law and legal theory, is insightful on this theme; for his discussion see I, pp. 167-75.

circumstances so as to practice 'general laws' 'according to their right meaning'.⁵² All students of Aristotle's ethics had a grasp of this key aspect of the application of justice.⁵³ To the extent that Hooker understands Scripture as law, exegesis and interpretation must deal with this very issue: the elements of law within it must be correctly identified; the general character of the law must be discerned (is it, for instance, permanent or by intent limited?); judgment must be rendered as to how its general and permanent purpose can be suitably applied in a new and different context. As Hooker says: 'The end wherefore laws were made may be permanent, and those laws nevertheless require some alteration, if there be any unfitness in the means which they prescribe as tending unto that end and purpose'.⁵⁴

The common law tradition was also important for Hooker. For in contrast to equity law's movement from the general to the particular, commonlaw moved from the particular, that is, from precedent to the general. In broad terms this meant working toward the identification of a legal rationale by the analysis of the concrete facts of a case. What was most important for the evolving tradition represented by Coke and then assimilated by Hooker is the close link between precedent law and the universals of reason and justice. The upshot is that precedents are not to be applied mechanically; from the precedents a principle or reason (Hooker would call it an end or purpose) needs to be identified. The reason arises from the concrete facts when they are accurately and judiciously analysed. In the practice of common law there is, therefore, a 'reciprocal interaction' between the principle and the facts. Finally, accurate and judicious analysis is required; in other words, the exercise of reason and discernment specific to the task acquired by intense study and experience. As we will see in a later chapter concerned with the practice of theology, those characteristics apply to exegetical and theological reasoning as well.

Example and Negative Argument

Two particulars flow from the interpretive values of history and law we have discussed so far: first, Hooker's use of examples cited in Scripture; and second, his evaluation of the so-called 'negative argument'.

The value of examples cited from Scripture in support of one's argument had been a contested point since Whitgift's volleys with the Admonitioners.

52. V, ix, 3 [II, p. 39]; in this section of Book V Hooker is discussing 'dispensations', or economies, in the life of the church.

53. See his discussion of equity as a corrective of legal justice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, V, 10.

54. III, x, 3 [I, p. 387].

He had criticised Cartwright for repeatedly arguing ‘from particulars’, that is, from scriptural examples, ‘to universals.’⁵⁵ It figured, given the omniscience accorded to Scripture by the non-conformists, that they would be disposed to see universal lessons in facts or deeds taken from the scriptural narratives or its rules.

For his part, Hooker was more open than Whitgift to the importance of scriptural example, and the influence of common law theory with its stress on precedent goes far to explain why. It is simply a fact of experience, says Hooker, that we live our lives ‘partly guided by rules, and partly directed by examples.’⁵⁶ The chief issue, however, is not whether examples have an appropriate force to guide thought and actions, but whether whatever is invoked, however ‘good’, is ‘fit’ as an example. With respect to the evaluation of fitness the interpreter must bring the various tools already described; only in light of that critical scrutiny can the suitability of such citations from Scripture be made.

If the non-conformists seemed over-generous in their appeal to scriptural examples prescriptively to determine Christian attitudes and actions, they adopted a straightened approach in their commitment to the so-called ‘negative argument’. This principle of interpretation, namely, that the absence of an express order to do something constitutes a negative order *not to do* something, accorded well with non-conformists’ commitment to Scripture’s ‘universal jurisdiction’ in ordering the life of the church. The trouble is, Hooker argues, if taken up without qualification, nuance or, indeed, reason, it is simply untenable. At one level Hooker’s response exemplifies his reasoned analysis of historical evidence: could Tertullian’s insistence that ‘Scripture denies what it does not designate’ be taken at face value? Then Hooker the logician comes to the fore in his dismissal of this approach to exegesis, for is it logical to suppose that Scripture denies the existence of Henry VIII because it does not mention him?⁵⁷

In fact, Hooker is so little given to pedantry that he will not expend much energy in gainsaying this feature of non-conformist exegesis. It is noteworthy, however, in that it further signals Hooker’s regard for Scripture as an open text whose rich history, complexity of content, and hierarchy of laws, makes simplistic approaches to its interpretation untenable.

The ‘doctrinal instrument’ of Salvation

In the fifth book of the *Laws*, amid a discussion of preaching by sermons, Hooker defines ‘the word of God’ as the ‘heavenly truth touching matters of eternal life revealed and uttered unto men.’ ‘We therefore have’, he adds,

55. ‘*ex solis particularibus*’ or ‘*a facto ad ius*’ (Loyer, I, p. 164).

56. V, lxxv, 13 [II, pp. 328-9].

57. II, v, 5 [I, pp. 303-4].

‘no word of God but the Scripture.’⁵⁸ With the end or purpose of that word of God in mind, Hooker declares that it is *to save*. Scripture is, by his reckoning, ‘in the nature of a doctrinal instrument.’⁵⁹

Each of the words of that phrase is important. Scripture is ‘doctrinal’ because ‘they which live by the word must *know* it’. As we saw earlier, both the way of nature and the way of grace rely on the proper use of reason; reason, that is, ordered so that it might fully enjoy God as Truth. The ‘way mystical and supernatural’ that Scripture uniquely conveys involves what Hooker describes as ‘an Apprehension of things divine in our understanding, and in the mind an Assent thereunto.’⁶⁰ Those ‘things divine’ – ‘things above nature which our reason by itself could not reach unto’⁶¹ – are the things ‘necessarily required for the attainment of eternal life’ and ‘to procure our assent.’⁶² It is that knowledge, and the commitment of the will that such knowledge directs, that Scripture conveys so that humankind might be “wise unto salvation”. Scripture is the ‘instrument’, or means, that God has ‘purposely framed’ to that end.⁶³

It would be wrong, though, to suppose that Hooker’s intellectualism has got the better of him in so defining Scripture. Ranall Ingalls reminds us that for Hooker the word of God in Scripture must always be understood in relation to the Word of God incarnate. Scripture is only an effective doctrinal instrument when it is the means by which Christ is received by reason and will, and by those faculties indwells a believer. Hooker’s *Discourse on Justification* describes the role of the doctrinal instrument like this:

The cause of spiritual life in us, is Christ, not carnally or corporally inhabiting, but dwelling in the soul of man as a thing which (when the mind apprehendeth it) is said to inhabit and possess the mind. The mind conceiveth Christ by hearing the doctrine of Christianity . . . [O]ur life is Christ, by hearing of the Gospel apprehended as a Saviour, and assented unto by the power of the Holy Ghost.⁶⁴

As a doctrinal instrument, therefore, Scripture’s purpose is spiritual; indeed, it is nothing less than the union of the believer with God through Christ by the Spirit.

58. V, xxi, 2 [II, p. 85]; the emphasis is Hooker’s.

59. V, xxi, 3 [II, p. 85].

60. *Ibid.*

61. III, viii, 12 [I, p. 374-5].

62. V, xxi, 3 [II, pp. 85-6]. On the meaning and relation of ‘apprehension’ and ‘assent’ in Hooker see chapter ten below.

63. Cranmer had used the word ‘instrument’ of Scripture years before in his first homily ‘A Fruitful Exhortation to the Reading of Holy Scripture’ in Book I of the *Homilies*.

64. *LDJ*, 26 [III, p. 516].

Scripture: A Reasonable and Reverent Approach

When the author of *A Christian Letter* accused him of esteeming Scripture no more than Aristotle and the schoolmen, Hooker bristled: 'I think of the scripture of God as reverently as the best of the purified crew in the world . . . in which mind I hope by the grace of God that I shall both live and die.'⁶⁵ However honest the protestation, Hooker's exploration of Scripture's authority, especially in relation to reason and law, developed new insights and opened up wider horizons than English theologians had so far grasped. By synthesising insights from Augustine, Aquinas and the scholastic tradition, from Renaissance learning and from the legal theorists of the day, Hooker is rightly said to have entered fields that had been largely untouched by theologians in England and on the continent.⁶⁶

The approach Hooker takes with respect to the themes of subsequent chapters is in large measure the fruit of those creative steps on Hooker's part to re-formulate the 'general grounds and foundations'⁶⁷ of a genuinely reformed yet Catholic Christian doctrine of Scripture as the basis for the understanding and exposition of Christian truth.

65. *FLE*, IV, p. 68.

66. So Haugaard, 'Scriptural Hermeneutics', p. 166.

67. Preface, VII, 5 [I, p. 172].