

**THE LAWS OF ECCLESIASTICAL POLITY
IN MODERN ENGLISH**

BY RICHARD HOOKER

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ISBN-10: 1949716910

ISBN-13: 978-1-949716-91-7

Front cover image taken from *Interior of Temple Church, City of London, c. 1860–c. 1922*
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Cover design by Rachel Rosales, Orange Peel Design

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INTRODUCTION

Bradford Littlejohn

“THOUGH FOR NO other cause, but for this—that posterity may know we have not loosely through silence permitted things to pass away as in a dream”—thus Hooker opens his great *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, and we might fittingly take these lines as our own, in explaining the need for this “translation.” It might more conventionally be called a “modernization,” though this usually implies something more minimal, confined to alterations of spelling, punctuation, and not that much more, whereas “translation” is usually reserved for the rendering of a text from one language into another. Here, however, we have taken a masterpiece of English theological writing—stylistically “for its purpose, perhaps the most perfect in English”¹, in the judgment of C.S. Lewis—and rendered it in contemporary English prose.

The need for such a bold—even brazen—undertaking can be summarized in those haunting opening lines of the *Laws*. If we are not careful, this *magnum opus* of English Protestant theology might be permitted to pass away as in a dream, as the slow but steady flow of linguistic development bears us ever onward and leaves 16th-century prose far behind on distant shores. Hooker deserves—demands—to be read, and by and large he is not anymore. In our consistent experience, at least one key reason why people no longer read him is because they *cannot* read him; not, at any rate, without great effort and risk of miscomprehension. This should hardly surprise us; the English language has after all changed quite a bit in the last 430 years. English literature majors who have cut their teeth on Shakespeare may be an exception, but often even they are lost amidst the dense thickets—or perhaps we should say the elaborate labyrinths—of his prose. Hooker, after all, was (in)famous even amongst his contemporaries for his distinctive

¹ C.S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 462.

prose style, “long and pithy, driving a whole flock of several clauses before he came to the close of a sentence.”² Magnificent the style may be, but accessible it is not, especially when many of the words employed have changed their meaning subtly over the centuries.

If Hooker were merely an also-ran among the theological polemicists who wore out the printing presses of Elizabethan England, a third-rate thinker of merely antiquarian interest, this growing language barrier need not trouble us so much. But there is a good case to be made that he ranks third only to Luther and Calvin in both intellectual stature and historical significance among Protestant theologians, and surpasses both in his treatment of matters of law and liturgy. Luther and Calvin are not reserved for specialist scholars nowadays, but are read widely by theologians, students, and ordinary Christians. Why? Because of great translation efforts undertaken in the past century and a half to render them in contemporary English. The riches of the English Reformation, on the other hand (and Hooker foremost among them) are receding rapidly from our contemporary consciousness, as 16th-century English increasingly becomes almost as alien to us as a foreign language.

Is something lost in such translation? Absolutely! No one who reads Luther or Calvin in contemporary English translations should consider this an adequate substitute for the original. But realistically, only a small minority will be able to read them in German, Latin, or French, and, poor substitute though the translation may be, it is much better than nothing. In the present case, our “translation” of Hooker need not even serve as substitute, but rather for many will serve as an introduction and an invitation, a first access point to Hooker’s work, from which they will move further up and further in to read the *Laws* in the original. In the meantime, we are convinced that whatever meaning and style may be lost in translation is made up for meaning that is gained by greater comprehensibility. And we have done our very best to ensure that as little as possible is lost in translation. For more on our method and approach, turn to the end of this introduction. Or, if you want to get right down to business and read the text, skip the rest of the introduction altogether. Otherwise, stick around for a bit of context on Richard Hooker’s life and times, an overview of what drove him

² Thomas Fuller, *The Church History of Britain, from the Birth of Jesus Christ until the Year MDCXLVIII*, 3 vols (3rd ed.; London: Thomas Tegg, 1842), III:128.

to write *The Laws*, the key themes of the books included in this volume, and their startling relevance today.

Who Was Richard Hooker?

Richard Hooker is a name little known today outside of the Anglican tradition, and less and less even within it. His works, once standard reading for any educated Englishman, have receded far into our cultural rear-view mirror, increasingly unreadable and seemingly obsolete in our postmodern age. But they are, as I hope you will find, nearly as relevant today as when they were first penned, and as worthy of our attention as the other literary monuments of the Elizabethan Golden Age.

Hooker wrote in the 1590s, that high tide of Elizabethan intellectual and literary culture which defined the shape of our language and culture right down to the present. While Hooker was in London drafting his *Laws*, Shakespeare was just on the opposite bank of the Thames writing *The Taming of the Shrew* (which has some interesting thematic parallels with the *Laws*, actually),³ and Spenser had just returned to Ireland after coming to London to publish and promote his *Faerie Queene*. Francis Bacon was a leading advisor at court, just beginning his literary career. Like these other men, the scale of Hooker's achievement looms up out of the relative mediocrity of his predecessors with a suddenness that can baffle the historian. Stanley Archer observes, "It is no more possible to account for Hooker's achievement than for those of Shakespeare and Milton, Spenser and Bacon."⁴

What was this achievement? It consists chiefly (though certainly not solely) in Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, which ranks alongside the greatest productions of the 16th-century Reformation. Indeed, though merely a quiet and unassuming scholar rather than a visionary church leader like Luther and Calvin, Hooker deserves mentioning in their company for the clarity and timeliness of this theological vision, without whose insights Protestant theology would be forever impoverished. Of course, although Hooker left a legacy from which all Protestants can profit, he is particularly

³ See Ken Jacobsen, "The Law of a Commonwealth: The Social Vision of Hooker's *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* and Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Animus* 12 (2008): 15–28.

⁴ *Richard Hooker* (Boston: Twayne, 1983), 1.

known as the theologian of Anglicanism, or perhaps even its “inventor.”⁵ Hooker, of course, would have been surprised to hear that there was any such “ism,” and he certainly did not knowingly write in defense of it. He wrote rather, as the haunting opening lines of the *Laws* make clear, in defense of the Church of England, as it had been established in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. To understand the man and his work, we must understand the church that he so deeply loved.

A Contested “Middle Way”

Although the Protestant Reformation provoked fierce conflict wherever it broke out, the English Reformation is notorious for being particularly chaotic. Beginning with Henry VIII’s fitful and inconstant reformation, prompted more by dynastic and fiscal concerns than theological convictions, the Church of England lurched, in just a fifteen-year period, through at least four distinct phases. In 1546 it was autonomous from Rome but still traditionalist Catholic in its doctrine and practice. It then witnessed first a thoroughgoing embrace of Reformed theology and rapid reformation of worship under Edward VI, then a violent Roman Catholic counter-Reformation under Queen Mary, and finally Elizabeth I’s imposition of a moderate Protestantism that owed much to Melancthonian Lutheranism, but which soon provoked a Puritan backlash.

Richard Hooker was born in the bloodiest and most tumultuous phase of this whole bloody and tumultuous story, sometime in late 1553 or early 1554 in Heavitree, a village on the outskirts of Exeter in southwest England, which was then, as now, a prosperous port and a cathedral city. Hooker’s family was not particularly prosperous, save for his uncle John, who was not merely well-to-do but well-educated and well-connected, most notably to the great Italian reformer Peter Martyr Vermigli, who had been serving as Professor of Divinity at Oxford under the Protestant king Edward VI. The year 1554, however, was not a very good time to have such connections. Queen Mary (known to history not unreasonably as “Bloody Mary” for her martyrdom of hundreds of Protestants) had just ascended the

⁵ Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought From Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 227. For more on this question, see my *Richard Hooker: A Companion to His Life and Work* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015).

throne on the boy-king's death, and was determined to reverse the rapid progress the Reformation had made in England over the past few years. Vermigli had fled to the continent, along with many of his friends and students, including John Hooker and Vermigli's star student, John Jewel, who was also to play a significant role in the young Richard's life. Those Protestants who already held high office in the Church of England were not so fortunate; they remained at their posts, were arrested, and before long burned at the stake: most notable among them were Bishop John Hooper on February 9, 1555, Bishops Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer on October 16 of that year, and Archbishop Thomas Cranmer on March 21 of the following year.

Fortunately for the Hooker family, the Protestant cause did not have to wait long for a dramatic change of fortunes. The sudden death of Mary in late 1558 and accession of the firmly Protestant Queen Elizabeth struck contemporary Protestants as a great act of divine deliverance, and it is difficult for us looking back, and seeing the profound ambiguity of Elizabeth's policies, to understand just how fervently many of her Protestant subjects revered her. Hooker himself would later write of her, having lived virtually his whole life under her extraordinarily long reign, as

her especially whose sacred power matched with incomparable goodness of nature has hitherto been God's most happy instrument by him miraculously kept for works of so miraculous preservation and safety to others, that as "By the sword of God and Gideon," was sometime the cry of the people Israel, so it might deservedly be at this day the joyful song of innumerable multitudes, yea the Emblem of some estates and Dominions in the world, and (which must be eternally confessed even with tears of thankfulness) the true inscription style or title of all Churches as yet standing within this Realm, "By the goodness of God and his servant Elizabeth we are" (Book V, Dedication.10).

Elizabeth's accession brought the exiled English Protestants hastening home, but the delicate work of hammering out a contested "middle way" was just beginning. In the early years of the Elizabethan Settlement, all of Elizabeth's bishops expected further reformation to move forward in due course, once the dust had settled from the chaos of the recent violent transitions. Elizabeth herself, however, seems to have genuinely favored a more

ceremonial mode of worship, and feared the religious radicalism that she attributed to the two-hour long sermons favored by more zealous reformers. Besides, the maintenance of some outward trappings of the old medieval religion (whether it be the threefold order of bishops, priests, and deacons, the special vestments worn by priests while celebrating the liturgy, or the retention of ceremonies like confirmation) was, Elizabeth realized, politically desirable. After all, the mere accession of a Protestant monarch had hardly converted the whole kingdom to the new Reformed faith; many thousands of closet Catholics, some among the high nobility, remained throughout the realm, their loyalty to the new regime uncertain. By retaining many forms of worship familiar to them, Elizabeth deemed, she could make their outward conformity easier and reduce the risk of rebellions or conspiracies—ever-present threats throughout her long reign. Just as importantly, she could ease the alarm of Catholic monarchs abroad, especially King Philip II of Spain, who was on the lookout for any opportunity to reassert control of an island kingdom he had briefly gained through his marriage to the short-lived Queen Mary. Spanish diplomats could be selectively shown the more traditionalist worship of the cathedrals and royal court and left with the impression that perhaps England wasn't too Protestant after all.⁶

Unfortunately for Elizabeth, some of her more zealous subjects could be left with that impression as well. Beginning with an outbreak of controversy over the required clerical vestments in 1564–66 (the so-called Vestiarian Controversy), Elizabeth and her bishops found themselves facing a series of reformist agitations, each seemingly more comprehensive and uncompromising than the last. The situation was the more difficult for the bishops, since they by and large sympathized with the protests and hoped to see significant further liturgical reform. However, they admitted that there was nothing genuinely sub-Protestant about the debated ceremonies, which ultimately concerned matters of *adiaphora* or “things indifferent,” practices on which Scripture was silent and concern for edification of the

⁶ Even so, however, Elizabethan worship was far more minimalist and Reformed in appearance than most Anglican worship today; candles and crucifixes were so scandalous that they were used only in the Queen's private chapel, and incense and images were out of the question.

body should guide us.⁷ Although many had objected precisely on grounds of edification that weak Christians were being led astray by this visual continuity with Rome, the bishops could contend, with some plausibility in their context, that some uniform national practice was necessary to prevent strife, and the Queen's proposals for uniformity were reasonable enough.⁸ This was at any rate the line they took publicly, whatever their private reservations; this succeeded in quelling the immediate controversy, but laid the foundation for a wider one.

The bishops, by enforcing and defending the Queen's demands for uniformity, quickly found themselves vilified by some of the more radical Puritans, who began to call for an overhaul of the whole system of church government along broadly presbyterian lines. A young Cambridge don named Thomas Cartwright had first begun to outline these ideas in a series of lectures in 1569–70, but they entered the public eye with the publication of the incendiary *Admonition to Parliament* in 1572 by two of his younger disciples, John Field and Thomas Wilcox. This document, ostensibly addressed to Parliament, brazenly declared, "We in England are so far off from having a church rightly reformed, according to the prescript of God's word, that as yet we are not come to the outward face of the same,"⁹ and called for the establishment of presbyterian government, along with other major reforms. The pamphlet was suppressed by the authorities, but still traveled far and wide, creating a sensation.¹⁰

A tedious but heated literary battle ensued over the following five years between Cartwright (now in exile in Holland) and John Whitgift, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and the future Archbishop of Canter-

⁷ For an excellent discussion see ch. 5 of W.J. Torraine Kirby, *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁸ It should be noted that scarcely any party in late 16th-century England, and very few even in the early 17th century, questioned the notion that national uniformity of religious practice was desirable. Thus the Puritans tended to argue not so much for freedom to dissent as for replacing the Prayer Book with a new, biblically-mandated order of worship.

⁹ W.H. Frere and C.E. Douglas, eds., *Puritan Manifestoes: A Study of the Origin of the Puritan Revolt* (London: SPCK, 1907).

¹⁰ The classic study of the rise of the Puritan movement, including the Admonition controversy, remains Patrick Collinson's *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

bury. Despite the frequently trivial nature of the issues (for instance, where in the church the minister should stand at certain points in the service), profound differences in ecclesiology lay under the surface, and the interaction generated heated polemics, especially from the younger Cartwright. Hooker was later to refer obliquely to Cartwright with one of his most famous lines in the *Laws*: “Concerning the defender of which admonitions, all that I mean to say is but this: There will come a time when three words uttered with charity and meekness shall receive a far more blessed reward than three thousand volumes written with disdainful sharpness of wit” (Pref. 2.10). Indeed, many scholars have suggested that the *Laws* was written in part as a response to Cartwright’s last salvo in the controversy, which Whitgift had never bothered to answer.

As the stakes were raised, so was the rhetoric. Puritans like Cartwright began to insist, in terms perhaps familiar enough to us today but out-of-step with the early Protestant Reformers, that the Bible only was the standard for liturgy and church government, and any church that failed to radically reform itself in conformity to Scripture alone was not worthy of the name of church. Some conformists began to insist, for their part, that anyone who questioned the established order of the Church of England must be hell-bent on overthrowing it, perhaps even by force, and thus might be as good as traitors to the Crown.

Hooker in the Crossfire

It was against this increasingly tense background that the young Richard pursued his theological education. John Hooker had found his nephew to be a boy of precocious talents, and funded his education at the local grammar school. By 1568 or 1569, Richard was deemed ready for further study at university, a privilege reserved for just a handful in his day. To financially support his studies, John Hooker turned to his old friend John Jewel, now installed as bishop of nearby Salisbury and the leading apologist of the Church of England. Jewel interviewed Richard, was deeply impressed by his talents, and agreed to secure him a place at his own alma mater, Corpus Christi College at Oxford, provide financial support, and keep an eye on Richard’s developing career.

Hooker excelled at Oxford, rising by 1579 to become a fellow of Corpus Christi, and earned the lifelong friendship of influential individuals in the Elizabethan Church. These included his older mentor John Rainolds (an

important spokesman for the moderate Puritan movement in the decades to come) and his students Edwin Sandys (son of the Archbishop of York, and later a leading member of Parliament) and George Cranmer (a relation of the late Archbishop Cranmer). As best we can tell, at this stage the younger Hooker was initially sympathetic to many of the concerns of the Puritan party, though perhaps not their more radical wing.

By the time the 1580s began, Hooker was being encouraged by his mentors to take a more active part in church affairs. He was ordained a deacon in 1579 and a priest in 1581, and shortly afterward was given an opportunity to preach at Paul's Cross, the great public pulpit by St. Paul's Cathedral where aspiring preachers could expect to have many of the great men and women of London, including sometimes the Queen herself, among their audience. Hooker seems to have made a positive impression with his 1581 sermon on predestination, and in 1585, at the age of just 31, secured the appointment to the prestigious position of Master of the Temple. The Temple Church, so named because it had founded by the Knights Templar in the late 12th-century, and built as a small-scale replica of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, served as the parish of the lawyers and law students of the Inner and Middle Temple. As the heart of the legal profession in England, the Temple was a position of substantial influence and political importance.

However, because of its importance, it was also a position at the heart of the rapidly intensifying controversy between Puritans (many of them now openly calling for an overhaul of the Church of England along presbyterian lines) and defenders of the Establishment. Hooker was considered a middle-of-the-road candidate who could satisfy both parties, though his assistant, Walter Travers, was a fire-breathing presbyterian. Travers, who had been there before Hooker, and did not consider him to hold legitimate authority without being properly called by the congregation at the Temple, did not hesitate to pick fights with his superior, most famously in a series of sermons he preached against Hooker on the doctrine of justification. Hooker's responses, later published as *A Learned Discourse on Justification*, stand as a masterful and irenic statement of the Protestant doctrine and precisely how it did and did not differ from the Catholic understanding. Travers was eventually dismissed, but Hooker found his position at the Temple quite uncomfortable thereafter, and he eagerly accepted transfer to a less prestigious rural parish in 1591.

INTRODUCTION

By this time, Hooker had decided to dedicate himself to the writing of a book, originally intended to be of modest length, investigating the causes of the controversy engulfing the Elizabethan Church and by and large defending the established order. Recognizing that conformists and Puritans were largely talking past each other, in ever more heated terms, Hooker saw the need to take the entire debate back to first principles, with a sweeping theological inquiry into the nature of law, political authority, biblical authority, and church authority, which would then help to clarify many of the particular disputed questions on episcopacy, liturgy, discipline, and more.

Over the preceding five years, the situation had grown considerably more tense. Many presbyterians, despairing of ever getting their reforms through Parliament (due chiefly to the Queen's opposition, though they blamed it on the bishops), had begun secretly establishing a shadow presbyterian synodal structure throughout parts of England. This may not seem particularly alarming to us today, but in the sixteenth century, the notion of multiple church organizations competing within the same territory (or an organization being established without the magistrate's leave) was almost unthinkable. Even more unthinkable was the barrage of satires mixed with slanders unleashed by an anonymous Puritan pamphleteer named Martin Marprelate. So shocking was the tone of these pamphlets that Cartwright, Travers, and other leaders rushed to condemn them, but the damage was done. Counter-propagandists and court preachers were quickly able to begin turning the public-relations tide. In this they were helped also by the seemingly-miraculous defeat of the Spanish Armada that year, which seemed to manifest God's favor toward the English Church, and by drastically reducing the Catholic threat, enabled the government to focus their attention on the presbyterians as the leading public enemy.

Indeed, by 1593, when the first four books (volume 1) of Hooker's tome were finally published, the controversy was well on its way to winding down, due to harsh government crackdowns on dissenters. Still, it was hardly laid to rest for good, and eventually (combined with other factors) burst forth into a civil war that engulfed all of Great Britain fifty years later. Hooker warned of such dangers at the outset of his *Laws* and methodically sketched out what he saw as a better way forward. Working diligently from his parish at Bishopsbourne, near Canterbury, he extensively revised and expanded Book V, which was published in 1597, and was still tinkering away with Books VI-VIII at his untimely death in 1600.

By all accounts, he had spent the years at Bishopbourne as a faithful parish pastor: patient, unassuming, and seemingly free from that ambition for high office that marred the characters of so many other great churchmen of his day. Indeed, one of Hooker's friends, John Spenser (not to be confused with the poet, Edmund), wrote shortly after Hooker's death,

What admirable height of learning and depth of judgment dwelled in the lowly mind of this true humble man, great in all wise men's eyes, except his own; with what gravity and majesty of speech, his tongue and pen uttered heavenly mysteries, whose eyes in the humility of his heart were always cast down to the ground; how all things that proceeded from him were breathed, as from the spirit of love, as if he like the bird of the Holy Ghost, the dove, had wanted gall; let those who knew him not in person judge by . . . his writings.¹¹

The *Laws* made only the smallest of splashes on its original publication, but its ripples steadily grew as the 17th century progressed, with Hooker eventually emerging as the preeminent theologian of the Church of England, and in the minds of many, the founder of what came to be called "Anglicanism." I have disputed that interpretation in much of my own work, given that Hooker, like most of his contemporaries, seems to have considered himself part of the broader Reformed tradition, with the ecclesiastical battles in England being a dispute over what direction that tradition would take. Unfortunately, Hooker's own contribution, however much light it shed on the debate, failed to resolve it, and the sixty years after his death saw a decisive split between the Puritan tradition, which claimed the Reformed legacy, and the Church of England, which increasingly adopted a distinctive "Anglican" ethos. None of that later history, however, is particularly important for understanding Hooker's own text.

In what follows I will seek to lay out the basic themes and arguments of the texts that make up this first combined volume of our modern English version of the *Laws*.¹²

¹¹ Quoted in John Keble, ed., *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker: with an Account of His Life and Death by Isaac Walton*, 3 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1836), 1:152–53.

¹² These were previously published in four slim volumes: the Preface appeared as *Radicalism: When Reform Becomes Revolution* (2016; 2nd ed., 2017); Book I as *Divine Law*

The Preface to the *Laws*

As one can soon tell from length alone, this is not your ordinary preface. Indeed, it is even more extraordinary from a 16th-century viewpoint. Customarily in that period, works of this sort would be dedicated to a monarch or prominent leader, impressing on them the importance of the topic, flattering them a bit, and encouraging them to take action based on the policies advocated in the text. Many other conformist polemics of Hooker's day began in such a way. Hooker, however, begins by appealing directly to his presumed adversaries, "them that seek (as they term it) the reformation of laws and orders ecclesiastical in the Church of England." Of course, Hooker is writing with multiple audiences in mind, seeking the approbation of conformist leaders and the persuasion of the undecideds by some sharply-worded critiques, but he also seems at points to be making a genuine appeal to win over his readers. The result of Hooker's attempt to juggle his multiple audiences is a rhetorical masterpiece that brims over with trademark English understatement and ironic humor, damning with faint praise more often than by direct criticism.

Perhaps best of all, Hooker seems remarkably aware that he was writing not only for various contemporary audiences, but for posterity, as we see in his famous opening line: "Though for no other cause, yet for this—that posterity may know we have not loosely through silence permitted things to pass away as in a dream" (1). One of the gifts that he seems most eager to have bequeathed to posterity is his attempt to sort through just why it was that so many of his brothers in the faith had become so angry and in some cases so dangerously radical. What was it that led righteous and well-meaning Christians to become convinced that there was no other path to truth but theirs, no true church but theirs, and that any who opposed them were godless and corrupt? The question is a profoundly relevant one in any age, and the answers that Hooker comes up with are startlingly perceptive and remain apt today, particularly for American Christians all too familiar with sectarian squabbles. Although renowned as a philosopher, theologian, and liturgist, perhaps one of Hooker's greatest contributions may have been as a social psychologist of religious radicalism. And not just religious radicalism. The great 20th-century political theorist, Eric Voegelin,

and Human Nature (2017); Books II–III as *The Word of God and the Words of Man* (2018), and Book IV as *In Defense of Reformed Catholic Worship* (2018).

lauded Hooker as the great analyst of the psychology of radicalism in general, showing how his diagnosis of Puritan would-be revolutionaries applies just as well to 20th-century political movements, and indeed to the 21st-century insurgencies that have upended the American political process in the last ten years.¹³ Hooker's basic contentions that "when the minds of men are once erroneously persuaded that it is the will of God for them to do those things they fancy, their opinions are as thorns in their sides, not allowing them to rest until they have put their speculations into practice" (p. 42), and that "it is not how passionately someone is convinced, but how soundly they argue, that should persuade us that their views genuinely come from the Holy Spirit, and not from the deceit of that evil spirit" (p. 16), are warnings to every age to be careful about valuing too highly the rightness and righteousness of our own opinions.

Reasons for Writing

We have already provided some of the broader context behind Richard Hooker's decision to undertake the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, but most modern readers are unlikely to understand why something as small as a disagreement over church government could call forth such a sweeping response. One answer is simply to emphasize, as already mentioned, that in the sixteenth century, and in Elizabethan England in particular, hardly anyone had yet envisaged the feasibility of multiple church structures existing alongside one another. At every level of English society, churchly matters and civil matters were deeply intertwined, so that to admit the possibility of a church outside of the national church was to propose a rival to the monarch's authority and the unity of the realm, a realm that was fragile indeed in the Elizabethan period, surrounded by Catholic foes. Moreover, to suggest that churchmen might take it upon themselves to reform or restructure the church without the Queen's approval was, for many Englishmen, far too close for comfort to the Papacy's claims to stand in supremacy over all civil authorities.

Accordingly, the years leading up to 1593 had seen England's printing presses glutted with refutations of the "dangerous proceedings and po-

¹³ Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952, 1987), ch. 5.

sitions” of the presbyterian party.¹⁴ Most of these publications, some short pamphlets, some enormous tomes, approached the debate with one (or all) of the following three strategies:

- 1) Ridicule the Puritans as stubborn, malicious (and maybe even treasonous) opponents of public order.
- 2) Emphatically assert the duty of obedience to the civil magistrate, and justify the disputed structures and liturgy of the Church of England as simply those which had been established by law.
- 3) Go toe-to-toe with the Puritans on Scriptural exegesis, trying to argue on a point-by-point basis that various passages either did not condemn episcopal church government or did not require presbyterian church government.

Inevitably, of course, every such polemic called forth a Puritan counter-polemic, insisting that they were loyal Englishmen, and it was their opponents who, by inviting God’s wrath, were endangering the nation, proclaiming that God must be obeyed before men, and slugging out the exegesis point-by-point.

It is only against the background of this (enormous and rather tedious) literature that we can understand how Hooker’s *Laws* constituted, in C.S. Lewis’s words, “a revolution in the art of controversy.”¹⁵ Hooker realized that neither Puritan dissenters nor the large share of the English reading public poised uncertainly in the middle were likely to be persuaded by this sort of polemic. Instead, Puritan grievances had to be taken seriously, dissenters had to be shown that obedience to God and obedience to the magistrate were compatible in the disputed matters, and the whole debate over Scripture had to be framed within a broader context—should we even expect Scripture to explicitly address these issues?

This is not to say that Hooker’s response to Puritanism in the *Laws* is mild-mannered or always even-handed. He agreed with other polemicists in considering them a grave threat to English Protestantism, but here too he went further and deeper than most of his contemporaries—and herein lies his continued interest for us today.

For Hooker, the fundamental problem with English Puritanism lay not in its theory of church government *per se* (although a defender of epis-

¹⁴ This being the title of one of Richard Bancroft’s scathing 1593 polemics.

¹⁵ *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*, The Oxford History of English Literature, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 459.

copy, he stopped short of considering it to be divinely required), nor even in its attack on the magistrate's role in the church (Hooker does offer a nuanced defense of the royal supremacy, but not until the very end of the *Laws*), but in its hermeneutic. The Puritan hermeneutic, he recognized, ran something like this: 1) Christians need guidance in this area. 2) Scripture is a guide for the Christian life. 3) Therefore, Scripture must provide a clear answer to our questions. 4) Therefore, those who disagree are not living in submission to Christ. This syllogism, Hooker argued, was filled with equivocations, and was in the end deeply dangerous. At the level of the individual conscience, it fostered a legalistic preoccupation with outward works of obedience. At the level of the church and civil community, it fostered a sectarianism that could not brook uncertainty or compromise. And when it came to Scripture, it managed to undermine the authority of the Word by stretching it further than Scripture itself claimed, and distracting our attention from the central Gospel message of the Bible. Worst of all, there were really no brakes on such a hermeneutic: once you had acquired the habit of searching for direct Scriptural justification for any action, and had become convinced that all those who opposed you were agents of Satan, then what was to stop you from falling into stranger and stranger notions, confusing the promptings of an imbalanced conscience with the testimonies of the Spirit?

It was this that Hooker saw as the fundamental problem, and this which he sought to tackle squarely in the first volume of his *Laws*, comprising the Preface and Books I-IV, before addressing any of the more specific matters under debate. In the Preface, we see the argument framed with particular pungency, urgency, and precision.

Prudence vs. Biblicism

Although he will elaborate his critique particularly in Books II and III, already in the Preface we see Hooker's identification of the fundamental problem with the whole Puritan movement: biblicism, that is to say, the attempt to seek for clear, comprehensive, and detailed Scriptural guidance for any area of life. This was not, as it is sometimes misrepresented, simply the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. *Sola Scriptura* meant quite specifically that Scripture was the only infallible and finally authoritative standard in matters of faith, and thus the only basis on which any doctrine or action could be required of the Christian conscience as needful for salvation. Lu-

EDITORIAL APPROACH

THE ATTENTIVE book-buyer will note that the present volume is not the firstfruits of our initiative to present Richard Hooker's work in modern English. Over the past two and a half years, we have put out the text that you see here in four slim volumes: *Radicalism: When Reform Becomes Revolution*; *Divine Law and Human Nature*; *The Word of God and the Words of Man*, and *In Defense of Reformed Catholic Worship*. The present text is simply the result of taking those four, cleaning up any errors, standardizing a few conventions that had varied between them, and consolidating the texts, and the introductions, into one, which will be volume I of a three-volume edition of *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity in Modern English*. Going forward, we will be producing other slender volumes of Hooker's sermons (beginning with the *Learned Discourse on Justification*) and excerpts of Books V-VIII of the *Laws*, before publishing the fruits of these projects in consolidated editions that will comprise volumes II and III of this text. (Note, however, that Books V-VIII will likely involve considerably more abridgment than the very minimal abridgment—exclusively in Book II—undertaken in this volume).

Modernizing Hooker's prose was a complex task, certainly more complicated than updating a few archaic words and breaking apart a few lengthy sentences. Hooker's sentences are not just lengthy; his syntax itself is often dense and unwieldy, even by 16th-century standards, and so the majority of sentences required syntactical re-working of some kind. Hooker's idioms and turns of phrase are also frequently archaic or rhetorically elevated in Shakespearean ways that can be obscure to the modern reader, so our vocabulary updates were extensive. Our project is therefore a deep and pervasive one, with the outcome being more akin to a *translation* than a modernization.

In general, our method was as follows. Brian Marr would separately read and carefully re-write Hooker's prose from scratch, translating Hook-

er's meaning and prose into modern parlance as best as he was able.¹ Second, at a later date the three of us—Brian Marr, Bradford Littlejohn, and Bradley Belschner—would sit down and meet to read the prose aloud, beginning with Hooker's original and comparing it to the original draft translation. In this way we worked through Hooker's work, sentence by sentence, paragraph by paragraph, with an eye towards style, subtle connotations in the text, and key terms in Hooker's argument. It was a laborious process, and often the final version would end up looking markedly different than the first draft. Finally, we read aloud through the entire modernized version on its own, our ears listening for any needless impediments to clarity or readability.

Since our goal in this "translation" process was to render Hooker's prose easily accessible to a modern audience, we adopted a method that in traditional terms would be considered dynamic rather than literal. The goal was to convey Hooker's *meaning* as accurately and intuitively as possible to a modern audience. We felt free to use reasonably modern colloquialisms, though we also eschewed any words or phrases that smacked entirely of the current century. We often found that such phrases, transparently modern as they were, drew attention to themselves rather than to the underlying text. This defeated one of our main goals, which was to remove as many distractions as possible from the meaning that Hooker was trying to convey, allowing it to shine through without occasioning the reader any uncomfortable pauses. Indeed, when in doubt, we erred in favor of what might be a more 19th- than 21st-century English style, when the latter was so clearly incongruous with the subject matter to feel out of place. For this reason, there were certain conventions that we did not seek to bring into line with common 21st-century standards, most notable among them Hooker's convention of using masculine nouns and pronouns where gender-neutral ones are now widely preferred. To change his "man" to "humanity" or his "he" to "he or she" would have been so incongruous with the habits of his age as to have drawn needless attention to itself.

For devotees of Hooker's original, let it not be thought that we needlessly flattened out his often noble rhetoric and remarkable turns of phrase

¹ For Books II and III and parts of Book IV, our friend Sean Duncan also did this work in parallel for many of the chapters, so that we had two draft versions to consult and choose between or combine. For the latter part of Book IV, Brad Littlejohn took over the task of doing the initial draft translation.

into a bland, flat, and simplistic sentence structure. On the contrary, if the basic phrasing and rhetorical cadence of the original could be retained without great loss of comprehensibility, we did our utmost to preserve it. Some famous and luminous passages we left virtually untouched. Any reader of Hooker cannot but come away with an enhanced ear for the English language, for words that sound crisp or sonorous and those that are flat and dull. Thus, even when it was clear to us that we would have to find some more modern synonym for a now-obsolete term, we often puzzled long over a single word until we found the one that did the job without detracting from the elegance of the original.

Capitalization posed a significant challenge in places—specifically, the word “Church.” Our general rule was to capitalize the word when the universal Church (invisible or visible) was in view, and to not capitalize when a particular church (local or national) was in view; however, “Church of Rome” when referring to the organized institution, was capitalized. Likewise, adjectival constructions, like “church government,” were not capitalized. There were a number of gray areas, upon which we expended a great deal of thought, and there is usually a method to our madness in these instances, even if it is not always apparent.

Recognizing that Hooker’s chapter titles are frequently lengthy and ponderous, as was conventional for the sixteenth century, we decided for this volume to include pithier more modern-sounding chapter titles of our own devising. (This was considerably more necessary for Books II–IV than for the earlier material, but we did it throughout for consistency.) Beneath each of these, a modernized adaptation of Hooker’s original appears as a subtitle of sorts.

Examples of Changes

Below are a few examples to give a sense of cases when extensive reworking was sometimes necessary, of when a few judicious changes did the trick, and of when almost no change at all was called for.

Here is a passage where length of sentences, complexity of syntax, archaism of language, and indeed archaism of thought all conspire to render comprehension quite difficult for the contemporary reader:

The knowledge of that which man is in reference unto himself, and other things in relation unto man, I may justly

A Preface to Those who Seek a Reformation (as they call it) of the Ecclesiastical Laws in England

Original Title: A Preface for them that seek (as they term it) a reformation of the laws and orders ecclesiastical in England.

1

MY PURPOSE IN WRITING

The cause and occasion for writing this work and what is hoped for from those for whom such pains are taken.

(1.) THOUGH for no other cause, yet for this—that posterity may know we have not loosely through silence permitted things to pass away as in a dream—for this I write, offering to posterity an account of the present state and legal establishment of the Church of England, and a vindication of those who have fought so hard to preserve and uphold it. I know I have little reason, beloved, to expect from you anything but your usual harshness and bitterness toward all who disagree with you, but this bitterness will never drown the love which we have for all who claim the name of Christ. Man is naturally impatient when it comes to insults and slanders, but we hope that the God of peace will give us the grace to be patient, for the sake of the work which we desire to complete.

(2.) I first decided to undertake this project when I saw how fervently you presbyterians protested against the established government and liturgy of our church; was it true, as all your books insisted, that all good Christians were obliged to join with you in promoting this new church government, which you call “the Lord’s Discipline”? I will confess that, initially, I was disposed to think there must be some very strong reasons why so many well-intentioned and pious men were so worked up about this issue. Unfortunately, however, when I looked into the matter (at least, as far as my own poor abilities would permit) in obedience to St. Paul’s admonition to “prove all things” and to “hold fast that which is good,” (1 Thess. 5:21), I had no choice but to conclude otherwise. Specifically, I arrived at two conclusions. First, no law of God nor reason of man has yet been offered that would prove we do ill to stubbornly resist the alteration of the present form of church-government which the laws of this land have established. Second,

the new presbyterian scheme which you propose in its place has no compelling claim to be called “the ordinance of Jesus Christ,” since you have at least thus far offered no clear proof to this effect.

(3.) In this book, I have undertaken to offer for you a proof of these two theses. I heartily beseech you, for the love you have for Jesus Christ, that if you really care for the peace and quietness of this church, if you have in you that gracious humility which is the crown of Christian virtues, if you care, as I am sure you do, for the integrity of your souls, hearts, and consciences (which cannot with integrity refuse to acknowledge truth merely on account of personal animus), you will “hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons” (Jas. 2:1) and you will regard the truth of what I am writing, not the fact that it is I who am writing it. Please do not think that you are reading the words of someone who is out to oppose the truths that you have embraced, but rather the words of someone who is eager to embrace the same truths, insofar as they are indeed truths. God knows this is the only reason that I have undertaken such a laborious and painstaking project as this. To make all this clearer, let me begin by going back to the very beginning, and showing where this presbyterian discipline was first attempted in this our present age.

2

CALVIN, GENEVA, AND THE ORIGINS OF PRESBYTERIANISM

The first establishment of presbyterian discipline by John Calvin in Geneva and the beginning of the conflict in the Church of England.

(1.) IT WAS founded by a man whom, for my own part, I consider the wisest man the church of France ever had, since the hour it first enjoyed him. He was brought up in the study of the law, but he learned more from teaching others than from attending lectures or reading books. Though thousands learned from him, he learned from God alone, the author of that most blessed fountain, the Book of Life, as well as the author of that most admirable dexterity of wit, which he merely supplemented with other learning. Calvin had to leave France and happened upon Geneva, which had recently been forsaken by its bishop and clergy who had probably feared that the people would suddenly abolish popish religion and had not been too eager to wait around for it to happen. When Calvin came, their government was in the hands of the people, as it is to this day. They had neither king, nor duke, nor noblemen of authority or power over them, but officers chosen yearly by the people to order all things with public consent. They had not yet instituted ecclesiastical government or laws, and simply did what the pastors of their souls persuaded them to do. Calvin, being admitted as a preacher and divinity reader, saw how dangerous it was that the whole estate of the church should hang on so slender a thread as the whims of an ignorant multitude with the power to do whatever they wished. Even though the other ministers were against it, Calvin and two other ministers persuaded the people to swear never again to admit the papacy among themselves and to live in obedience to an order of religion and ecclesiastical government established by true and faithful ministers of God's Word in accordance with Scripture.

(2.) When they began to put these things into law, the people—for reasons best known to themselves—began to regret what they had done and to chafe at the bit they had put into their mouths, because the churches round about them, whose friendship they could not do without, began to dislike them for it. Whether because the necessity of their circumstances required quick decision-making, or because everyone wanted the glory of doing things on their own, it was typical for the church of each city or region to order itself as its own self-appointed leaders saw fit. Since these churches, though small, were all free and self-governing, they could have saved themselves a lot of trouble by taking counsel together. But it led to an even bigger problem: every new Reformed church that came along aspired to remove itself even further from any hint of the Church of Rome than the churches before it. Thus they drifted further and further apart from one another in practice, and as a result there came to be much strife, jealousy, discord, and bad blood between them.

Even with their differences, such discord might have been prevented easily enough if each, when they established their respective church orders as most convenient, had not claimed to be following the direct command of God, presenting their system of church government unto their people as something everlastingly required by the law of that Lord of Lords, whose statutes admit of no exceptions. By doing this, they guaranteed that each church, if it found it differed in any way from its neighbors, could hardly help but accuse them of disobeying the will of Christ. If instead they had simply established the same orders in a more cautious and provisional form, as those rules which they would follow for themselves at least until such time as God gave an opportunity for a general church conference that would establish some common policies, none of this need have happened! Rather, they would have prevented these unnecessary strifes and indeed left themselves much more liberty to each adjust their own church orders as need and further consultation dictated. As it was, however, by taking such a hard line from the beginning, they made it very difficult for themselves to ever back down for fear of losing face. Accordingly, anything these church leaders had once established, they felt compelled to resolutely defend to the end.

For this reason, Calvin and two of his associates were banished from Geneva for stiffly refusing to administer the Lord's Supper to those Gene-

vans who would not quietly submit to the very form of discipline which they so recently had sworn to obey.

(3.) A few years later (such was the levity of the people), the office of one or two of their ministers fell void, and they were now more eager to get their learned pastor back than they had been to get rid of him. Unless the Genevans had been so earnest, the people who had taken Calvin in would never have let him go. One of the town ministers who saw how determined the people were to recall Calvin, expressed their mood this way: “When the senate of two hundred was assembled, they all called for Calvin! The next day the throngs all cry in the same way, ‘We will have Calvin, that good and learned man, Christ’s minister!’ When I heard this, I could not help praising God and thinking that surely ‘this is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes; the stone which the builders had rejected has become the chief cornerstone!’”¹ The other two whom they had thrown out with Calvin they were content to leave in exile.

The Genevans had many reasons to want him back. First, the Genevans hoped that, because he had yielded to them in one thing, with time he might condescend to them even further. For while absent, Calvin had persuaded those around him that, even though he personally preferred to use common bread in the Eucharist, he agreed that they should accept the alternative instead of making a fuss in the church over it. Second, the Genevans saw that the name of Calvin waxed every day greater abroad, as well as their infamy for so rashly and childishly banishing him. His credit in the world would do the town good, and as a matter of fact, before he left Calvin had been their greatest claim to international fame. But whatever their ulterior motives, Calvin put their minds at rest and returned home.

(4.) Calvin saw quite clearly how ridiculous it was for wise and grave men and ministers such as himself to live at the beck and call of such a multitude. To remedy this, he let them know in no uncertain terms that if they wanted him as their teacher, they would have to submit to a form of discipline which both they and their pastors would be solemnly sworn to keep forever. These were the main components of this discipline: the establishment of a standing ecclesiastical court, called a consistory, with one-third, the ministers, serving as permanent judges in that court, and two-thirds made up of annually elected judges. These judges were to have the care of

¹ Wilhelm Baum, ed., *Joannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, vol. 11 in *Corpus Reformatorum* 39 (Braunschweig: Schwetsshke and Son, 1873), 148–49.

all men's manners, the power to decide in all kinds of ecclesiastical disputes, and the authority to assemble, control, punish, and even excommunicate anyone, neither small nor great exempted.

I do not see how even the wisest man could have improved upon this course of action, if we consider the condition of Geneva at the time. After the bishop and his clergy fled by night, to replace him with another bishop was utterly impossible, and if their ministers had sought sole coercive power over the whole church the Genevans probably would have taken a rather dim view of it. However, when presented with a form of discipline in which for every one permanent minister in the consistory, two would be elected by the people, what problem could ever arise that they themselves could not fix?

Even so, this offer troubled the simpler sort who are always suspicious of the plans of wiser men, even when they have no reasonable cause for alarm. The ministers who had remained in the city after Calvin's banishment, seeing that the people wanted to recall him, had written letters of submission, assuring him that they would never abandon him again if he returned, but they too were suspicious of a form of discipline which many other reformed churches had done well enough without. Some of the most prominent in the laity said more forcefully that such a government was little better than Popish tyranny in disguise. Perhaps they were afraid that filling so many seats with members of the laity was merely to trick them into thinking that they had power, but when push came to shove, the citizens would be overawed by their pastors' learning. Moreover, remembering that their lay representatives had only annual appointments, they would be cowed by the perpetual authority of their ministers, who themselves would tend to defer to the judgment of the one whom they held in highest esteem, their own verdicts secretly dependent on his. Thus, while on paper the proposed consistory would be remarkably democratic, when all was said and done only one man would be the soul and spirit of the government, effectively deciding everything. But what was the point to all this worrying? They had only two options: either to disgrace themselves and reveal their fickleness by dismissing the very one whom they had recalled from exile, or to agree to his demand, which he said they could accept or he would leave. They thought it was better to be a little yoked at home than to be forever discredited abroad and agreed with the eagerness of a city in a tight spot that has just received reasonable terms of peace from the enemy.

(5.) Not many years later, these twice-sworn men made their final and hottest attack against the fortress of presbyterian discipline. The town council childishly granted a pardon to one Berthelier whom the Eldership had excommunicated, and they declared, with strange absurdity, that they alone had the final say in matters of church discipline, in defiance of their deeds and oaths. When Calvin heard of the council's decree, he said, "Before this decree take place, either my blood or banishment shall sign it," and two days before the celebration of communion, he publicly continued to take the same line: "I will die sooner than this hand shall stretch forth the sacred things of the Lord to those who have been judged despisers."² Therefore, fearing a riot, Berthelier's friends advised him against using the liberty granted him by the town council or even appearing in church until they saw how things would turn out. After Calvin quietly administered the Supper and it seemed these troubles might have ended peacefully, he unexpectedly ended his afternoon sermon by saying that since he had never been taught to strive with those in authority, nor did he want to teach others to do the same, then, "things standing as they do, let me use the words of the Apostle, 'I commend you to God and to the word of His grace' (Acts 20:32)" and heartily bade them farewell!

(6.) Sometimes the best way to win the day is to run away. This voluntary and unexpected departure made the town council, consistent only in their inconsistency, gather together and temporarily suspend their decree until four Swiss cities decided the matter. If they had done this before they had agreed and sworn to any kind of discipline, it would not have appeared altogether foolish, but to do so now made them look little better than actors on a stage, ready to play whatever role best suited them. Therefore, Calvin wrote letters to all four cities, begging them to treat this matter as if all the religion and piety of their churches depended on it, and all good men would be trampled underfoot unless they took his side. He asked that they affirm—without any ifs, ands, or buts—that Geneva's form of church government was in full agreement with the Word of God and that they earnestly admonish the Genevans not to add to or change it. His fervent request was granted. The Swiss churches had not previously observed the presbyterian discipline, but they now had to answer three questions put forward by the Genevan council: First, how was church discipline to be

² Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin* (New York: Great Christian Books, 2012), 53.

carried out according to Scripture and unspotted religion? Second, could it be carried out by someone other than the consistory? Third, what should the church do in this particular case? The churches answered that they had heard of Geneva's laws concerning the consistory and they acknowledged them as godly ordinances permitted by the Word of God, and therefore that Geneva ought not to change them, but should keep them as they were.³ Although this answer had not quite answered the three questions as asked, it satisfied both Calvin and the Genevans, who made no further reply, since they clearly saw that when the stubborn strive with the shrewd, it is an unfair fight, and thus the controversy began to taper off.

(7.) I hope the present inhabitants of Geneva will not take my repeating all their faults the wrong way, since their very own guides and pastors thought it was necessary to do so. I have retold this story as I found it in their own books so that we might see how the form of discipline which has caused us so much debate was established. As Beza affirms, Calvin was so earnest because he saw how needful it was that bridles be put in the jaws of this city.⁴ What he wisely saw the people needed, he just as wisely put into practice.

But wise men are only human, and the truth is the truth. What John Calvin did to establish this discipline seems better than what he taught about it after it had been established. We all tend to fall in love with our own ideas, and when others contradict them, this only fans our love into a flame and makes us all the more eager to contend, argue, and do everything we can on their behalf. Indeed, it would be remarkable if such an intelligent man with such pressing reasons to do everything he could for his cause could find nothing in the whole Bible that might make him think it likely that divine authority at the very least pointed in that direction. Even then, the most Calvin could prove from Scripture, even after sifting every sentence and syllable, was that certain statements hinted that all Christian churches ought to have elders with the power of excommunication and that a part of that eldership ought to be chosen from the laity in the way he had established at Geneva. But can you point me to a single argument in which Calvin shows that Scripture absolutely requires these things, or any of the

³ Wilhelm Baum, ed., *Joannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, vol. 14 in *Corpus Reformatorum* 42 (Braunschweig: Schwetsshke and Son, 1875), 697.

⁴ Wilhelm Baum, ed., *Joannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, vol. 21 in *Corpus Reformatorum* 49 (Braunschweig: Schwetsshke and Son, 1875), 131.

other policies of Calvin's that you want to embrace against the current order of your own church?

(8.) We wrong virtue itself if we disparage those who have gained fame from their mighty labors. Two things have made Calvin justly worthy of honor: the great lengths he went to in composing *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and his many labors in expounding the Holy Scriptures in a way consistent with those same *Institutes*. His work casts such a long shadow over everyone else that if someone contradicts him, they are looked upon with suspicion, and if they agree, he still gets all the credit for saying it first. In those works published after the dispute about presbyterian discipline had begun, he never passes by an opportunity to praise his form of church government and to insist that it is necessary. What Peter Lombard was to the Roman Catholic Church, so Calvin was to the preachers of Reformed churches, and they came to think that the most learned divines were those best versed in Calvin's writings; his books were the standard against which to measure anything having to do with doctrine or discipline. French churches, whether at home or in exile, were cast in Geneva's mold, and the Scottish churches followed the same line until the very discipline, once so weak that it needed the help of those who were not under it, soon demanded universal obedience and entered into open conflict with churches which had once been its helpers in distress.

(9.) The church of Heidelberg at that time lived in peace, full of learned men famous for their expertise in their fields and of divines whose equals were nowhere to be found, and it was governed in accordance with the Zurich discipline taught by Gualter, instead of by Calvin's discipline. To this city came one who publicly argued, in defiance of the government, that the law of God gave the power of excommunication, even of kings and princes, to a minister and the eldership! Thus were sown the seeds of the controversy about excommunication between Beza and Erastus concerning whether all churches should have an eldership with such power, part of them necessarily chosen by the laity. I think that the truth was equally divided between them: Beza quite rightly insisted on the necessity of excommunication and Erastus just as rightly that lay elders did not need to be the ones who carried it out.

(10.) In our English church, in Edward's reign a question arose due to some men's scruples about certain things, such as vestments. Beyond the seas, some of those who fled Mary's persecution were content to use the

Book of Common Prayer authorized before their departure, while others preferred the prayer-book of Geneva translated into English and so the controversy grew a little greater. Under the happy reign of her majesty who rules us at present, the greatest contention initially had to do with the wearing of the cap and surplice. Then some men wrote admonitions to the high court of Parliament. Though they concealed their names, they had no qualms about revealing their opinions, which were dead set against all the ways in which our church did not conform to the Genevan program. As for the defender of these admonitions, I have only this to say: there will come a time when three words uttered with charity and meekness shall receive a far more blessed reward than three thousand volumes written with disdainful sharpness of wit.⁵ However, no matter how scornfully men write, we must not hide from the truth if it appears they have it. Many follow this defender because they are convinced that he has the truth, just as he follows Calvin, Beza, and the rest because he thinks they have the truth. Since we are firmly convinced otherwise, it remains for us to find some way to determine which side is wrong.

⁵ This is probably a jab at Thomas Cartwright's long and acerbic *Second Replie* and *Rest of the Second Replie*. C.S. Lewis, who attempted to rehabilitate some of the Puritans, said of Cartwright that "hatred so massive as his, so completely reconciled to the conscience, leaves no room for fun." See *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, 449.

3

WHY THE PEOPLE FAVOR THIS CAUSE

How so many people come to be trained to approve of this discipline.

(1.) THE FIRST means that nature provides for us to distinguish between good and evil, in laws as in everything else, is our own good judgment. Paul confirms this when he says “I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say” (1 Cor. 10:15), or when he says later “Judge ye in yourselves. Is it seemly that a woman pray unto God unveiled?” (1 Cor. 11:13). Our Savior Himself required that the Jews exercise this faculty (Luke 12:56, 57), and Scripture commends the Bereans for it (Acts 17:11). Whatever we do, if our own secret judgment does not consent to it, the same is sin, even if it be permissible, and therefore St. Paul says, “Let each man be fully assured in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5).

(2.) In some matters, things are so obvious that even men of ordinary intelligence can readily distinguish truth from falsehood and good from evil. The things necessary to our salvation are of this sort, whether it has to do with things to be affirmed or denied or with things to be done or avoided. This is why Augustine says such things are not only set down, but plainly set down in Scripture, so that whoever hears and reads may understand without great difficulty. Other things of lesser importance must be done by Christians, but because they are more obscure, intricate, and difficult to judge, God has called some men to spend all their time studying them so that in doubtful cases they might be a light to direct others. Galen says, “If reason is like sight and not all have it in equal amounts, why should it not be that, just as clear-sighted men direct those of less sight, so too in deeper matters the wise should guide the simple in their way?” Who can deny that as far as legal disputes go, lawyers should be our guides in difficult matters? So it is in all the other fields of knowledge. And in religious matters, our Lord Himself has appointed that “the priest’s lips should keep knowledge,

and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts” (Mal. 2:7). Gregory of Nazianzus was offended when the people dared to overrule the judgment of those men to whom they should rather have submitted their own judgment, and entreated them to know their bounds: “Members of the flock, do not seek to assume the role of pastor towards your pastors or try to exalt yourselves above your station. It suffices for you to receive good pastoral care. Seek not to judge your judges, or give laws to the lawgivers, for God is not a God of confusion and disorder, but of peace and order.”

(3.) You might reply that if the people’s guides are blind, then the rest must certainly not close their eyes and be led by them (Matt. 15:14). If the priest has shown partiality in the law, then the flock must not depart from the way of sincere truth and naively follow him merely because he has authority. This is true, but not a good defense in this case, because however convinced you may be that you are in the right, this matter is far more complicated than one in five hundred of you can imagine. The uneducated among you should be aware that even the least of the changes you are so set on involves all sorts of debated issues that you have no conception of. I do not say this to deride those who are ignorant, but because I genuinely want them to realize that this matter, in which they are so doggedly convinced, is extremely complex, and that they run the risk of falling under the condemnation of the Apostle who describes those who “rail at whatsoever things they know not” (Jude 10; cf. 2 Pet. 2:12).

(4.) Calvin himself said, “Men in private life are disqualified from deliberating on the organization of any commonwealth, to dispute over what would be the best kind of government” (with a desire of bringing in some other kind than that under which they already live, for I take it this was Calvin’s meaning). If we grant that private men could not determine these questions without rashness (since most of them involve very particular circumstances and any of them can be supported by as many reasons as the next), why on earth are we asking these men what they think the best form of church government is? In matters of public policy, a great deal more insight and experience is needed than these people can possibly have. Some of those who argue for your discipline go so far as to admit that they are not certain about where the truth lies, and if they are uncertain, what certainty can the multitude have?

(5.) If you think carefully about why people favor your cause, you will see that the reasons you allege could never carry them along, unless you had first prepared the way by the sorts of rhetorical devices that always gain the hearing of the common people, regardless of the cause in question. This once done, when you come to the particulars at stake in this debate, they are more than ready to join your enterprise.

(6.) This is the method of winning people over to “the cause,” as you call it: first, they are always attacking their superiors with great zeal and indignation, which usually gives an impression of integrity, zeal, and holiness, since people tend to think that such men would never be so offended by sin unless they were quite good themselves.

(7.) Second, they attribute all the trouble in the world to the established church government. So just as they became known for virtue by their relentless criticism of the authorities, so also they become known for their brilliance since they claim to have uncovered the cause of all the world’s ills.

They might with equal justice condemn the laws of ancient Israel (established by God Himself) for the many failures which the prophets condemned in their days, as they would condemn our English church government (which God Himself has also established in a way) for every stain and blemish found in the church today. These spring from the roots of human frailty and corruption, and thus not only are, but always have been, and for all I know always will be complained of, until the end of the world, whatever form of government prevails.

(8.) Third, having captured men’s imaginations, they put forward their own form of church government as the only comprehensive solution to all these problems, and sing its praises to the sky. Just like sick men, those who are unhappy with the status quo will imagine that anything they hear praised is the answer to all their ailments, but that most of all which they have least tried.

(9.) Fourth, they make men understand certain words in such a way that whenever they read Scripture they imagine that it is constantly advocating the presbyterian cause and attacking the current church government. Pythagoras taught his students to believe so strongly in his metaphysical theory of numbers that they imagined that everything they saw confirmed that numbers gave essence and being to the works of nature. Though this was impossible, a faulty preconception made them as certain as if nature had written it on all God’s creatures in bold letters. For example, when the

“Family of Love” gets it into their head that “Christ” is not an individual person, but a spiritual quality of which many partake, and that “to be raised” means to be regenerated or filled with this spiritual quality, and that whenever those who have this quality separate from those who lack it, this is “judgment,” no wonder they imagine that Scripture is always siding with them. This is why the simple and ignorant think that Scripture is all for the presbyterian cause: they have planted in their minds the idea that an “elder” always refers to a layman elected to office in the church, a “doctor” always to a teacher (never to an administrator of the Sacraments), and a “deacon” always to the one in charge of the poor box, and nothing else. Similarly, they are taught that the “scepter,” “rod,” “throne,” and “kingdom” of Christ only refer to a church with pastors, elders, doctors, and deacons and that “Mount Zion” and “Jerusalem” are churches which include these things, while “Samaria” and “Babylon” are the churches which exclude them. In the same way, they hear that when Ezra, Nehemiah, and their followers repaired the walls and decayed parts of the city and temple of God, this was a foreshadowing by the Holy Spirit of what the authors of the Admonitions to Parliament, the Supplications to the Council, and the Petitions to her Majesty would do and suffer for their cause.

(10.) From this their godly leaders go on to persuade those ready to believe such things that they alone see these things in Scripture because of the special illumination of the Holy Spirit, even though others who read Scripture cannot find such things. St. John warns us not to believe every spirit (1 Jn. 4:1), and the Holy Spirit leads men to the truth in only two ways, one extraordinary, the other common; one belonging only to the few, the other to all that are of God. These two are special prophetic revelation and reason. If the Holy Spirit has secretly revealed this discipline to them from Scripture, they must all be claiming to be prophets—every man, woman, and child. However, if they have actually been led by reason, they must be able to show that every last one of their arguments warrants their commitment to this discipline, since in matters of reason, the strength of our persuasion must depend on the strength of our arguments. If they cannot do this, then there must be some other reason explaining their conviction. As a matter of fact, when men’s passions instead of their reason lead them to believe things, they are often even more zealous than usual in defending their error than they have a right to be, given the evidence we find in Scripture. Some things are plain, such as basic Christian doctrine, while

BOOK I:
Concerning Law and Its General Kinds

*Original Title: Concerning Laws and their Several
Kinds in General*

1

THE NEED FOR THIS INVESTIGATION

The reason for writing this general discourse.

(1.) WHOEVER wants to persuade the multitude that they are not as well governed as they should be will never lack a sympathetic audience, since everyone can recognize the obvious problems in any kind of government, but they rarely have as much insight into the innumerable hidden obstacles which inevitably hinder the business of governing. Thus, those who bewail the current state of affairs are esteemed to be the champions of the people and men of independent thought, and under this guise whatever they say is accepted without question. Whatever their speech lacks in substance is supplied by people's willingness to believe it. On the other hand, those of us who would defend the status quo are quickly judged as mere time-servers or boot-lickers of the establishment, and people will stop up their ears against our arguments before they even hear them.

(2.) Therefore, much of what we are about to say may seem tedious, obscure, dark, and intricate. Many feel themselves at liberty to talk about the truth, even though they have never plumbed the depths from which it springs and, when they are led there, they quickly get tired because they are being taken off the beaten paths they have trod so often. However, this must not stop the argument from going where the subject demands that it go, whether or not everyone likes it. Anyone for whom this argument is too complex can save themselves the trouble and stop reading now. If anyone thinks it too obscure, they should remember that often in both works of art and in works of nature the most important things are not necessarily the things immediately visible to our eyes. We may admire houses for their stateliness, trees for their beauty, but the foundations which bear up the one, and the roots which nourish the other both lie hidden under the earth. When we need to uncover them, it is not necessarily pleasant, either for

those who do it or for those who watch it happening. In just the same way, all who live under good laws may enjoy them and benefit from them with delight and comfort, even if most do not know the grounds or reasons for their goodness. However, when people cease to obey the laws, claiming that they are corrupt and wicked, it becomes necessary to uncover their foundations and roots. Since we are not very accustomed to this, whenever we sit down and do it, it is going to be more needful than enjoyable, and the matters we discuss, because they are so new, will seem dark, complicated, and unfamiliar at first. It is for this reason that throughout this work I have tried to make every premise support what follows after it and to make every conclusion shed further light on what came before. So if men suspend their judgments while we go through these first more general arguments until it is clear where they lead, what might seem to be dark at first will turn out to be quite apparent, just as the later specific determinations will seem much stronger on the basis of what came before.

(3.) The Laws of the Church which have guided us for so many years in the exercise of the Christian religion and the service of the true God, as well as in our rites, customs, and orders of Church government—all these things are being called into question. We are accused of refusing to have Jesus Christ rule over us and of willfully casting His statutes behind our backs and hating to be reformed and made subject to the scepter of His discipline! Behold, for this reason we offer the laws that govern our lives to the trial and judgment of the whole world. We heartily beseech Almighty God, whom we desire to serve according to His own will, that, laying aside all partiality, both we and others will have eyes to see and hearts to embrace what is most acceptable in His sight.

Since we are arguing about the quality of our laws, we cannot make a better beginning than by asking about the nature of law itself, and in particular about that law from which all good laws flow: the law by which God eternally works. Moving on from this law to the law of Nature and then to the law of Scripture, we will have a much easier time once we come to the particular controversies and questions that we have in hand.

2

THE ETERNAL LAW OF GOD HIMSELF

The law by which God has from the beginning determined to do all things.

(1.) ALL THINGS that exist work in a way that is neither unnatural nor random. Nor do they ever work without a preconceived end or goal. And the end which they work for is not achieved unless the work is also fit to achieve it by, for different ends require different modes of working.

Therefore, we define a *Law* as that which determines what kind of work each thing should do, how its power should be restrained, and what form its work should take. No end could ever be reached unless the means by which it was reached were regular; that is to say, unless the means were suitable, fitting, and appropriate to their end according to a principle, rule, or law. This is true in the first place even of the workings of God Himself.

(2.) All things work, in their own way, according to a law. Nearly everything works according to a law subject to some superior, who has authored it; only the works and operations of God have Him as both their worker and as their law. The very being of God is a sort of law to His working, for the perfection that God is, gives perfection to what God does. The natural, necessary, and internal operations of God—the begetting of the Son and the proceeding of the Spirit—are far beyond the scope of this book. For our purposes, we need only note those operations that begin and continue by the voluntary choice of God who has eternally decreed when and how they should be, and that this eternal decree is what we call an *eternal law*.

It is dangerous for the feeble mind of man to wade too far into the doings of the Most High. Although it is life to know Him and joy to mention His name, our surest knowledge is that we do not know Him as He truly is, nor can we; our safest eloquence is our silence, confessing without

confession that His glory is inexplicable and His greatness above our capacity and reach. He is above, and we are on earth; therefore let our words be wary and few.

Our God is one, or rather He is Oneness itself, a unity which has nothing in itself but itself, not consisting of many things, as everything else does. In this essential Unity of God, a hypostatic Trinity subsists in a way that far exceeds the imagination of men. The external operations of God in time and history are such that, even though He is one, each hypostasis does something particular and appropriate. For since they are Three and subsist in the essence of one Deity, it can truly be said that all things are from the Father, by the Son, and through the Holy Spirit. What the Son hears from the Father, and what the Spirit receives from the Father and the Son, we come to receive at the hands of the Spirit (John 16:13-15), and therefore He is the last and nearest to us in order, although in power He is equal to the Second and First.

(3.) Even wise and learned pagans acknowledged that there must be some First Cause, upon which the existence of everything else depends. Nor do they call this cause anything other than an Agent, that is, something that knows what it does and why it does it, and does so according to a certain order or law. Homer, for instance, says that Zeus accomplished his counsel¹ and Hermes Trismegistus admits the same when he says that the demiurge made all the world, not by hands, but by reason.² The same is confessed by Anaxagoras and Plato who call the Maker of the whole world a rational worker, and the Stoics, although they thought that the First Cause was fire, also affirmed that the fire, having art, followed a certain course in the making of the world.³ All these admit that this First Cause took *counsel*, or followed *reason*, or observed a *certain course*. In other words, constant order and law is kept, which order must be its own author. If this were not the case, then it would have to be directed by some worthier or higher cause, and would by definition not be a First Cause. Since it is the first, it alone can be the author of that law according to which it freely acts.

¹ Homer, *Iliad* 1.5.

² Hermes Trismegistus, *The Cup or Monad* 1. Cf. *The Corpus Hermeticum*, trans. G. Mead (United States of America: IAP, 2009), 29, which translates it as “With Reason...not with hands, did the World-maker make the universal World.”

³ *Ioannis Stobaeus Anthologium*, ed. Curt Wachsmuth and Otto Hense, 5 vols. (1884-1912; Berlin: Weidmanns, 1958), 1:37.

God therefore is a law both to Himself and to everything else. To Himself He is a law in all those things which our Savior speaks of, saying, "My Father worketh even until now, and I work" (Jn. 5:17). God works nothing without cause. He does all things with some end in mind, and the end for which each are done is the reason He acts. He would never have created woman unless he saw that it would not be good unless she were created. "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18). God only does those things which to leave undone would not be good.

One might ask why, even though God has infinite power, the effects of that power are limited as we see they are. This is because He works toward a certain end and by a certain law which constrains the effects of His power so that it does not work infinitely but only as much as necessary to reach that end: "all things well" (Wisd. 8:1), all in a decent and comely manner, all "by measure and number and weight" (Wisd. 11:20).

(4.) The general end for which God works all things in time is the exercise of His most glorious and abundant excellence. This abundant excellence shows itself in variety, which is why Scripture so often speaks of God's "riches" (cf. Eph. 1:7; Phil. 4:19; Col. 2:3); "The Lord has made everything for Himself" (Prov. 16:4),⁴ not because they can add anything to Him, but so that in all things he might show His beneficence and grace.

We might not be able to tell the exact reason for every one of God's actions, and therefore we cannot always give a full account of His works. Nonetheless, every finite work of God has some reason or purpose behind it, since some law has been imposed on it; if there were no law, the work would have to be infinite, just as the worker Himself is.

(5.) Therefore those who think that God acts without any other cause than His bare will are greatly mistaken. Again, we will not always know the reason, but it is most unreasonable to imagine there is no reason, since He works all things, not only according to His own will, but "after the counsel of His will" (Eph. 1:11). Whatever is done with counsel or wise forethought must have some reason behind it, even if the reason is in some cases so secret that it makes a man stand amazed, as the Apostle Paul did: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!" (Rom. 11:33). That eternal law which God Himself is to Himself and by which He

⁴ KJV is used here, since it is closer to the original translation.

works all things which have their origin in Him; that law on which the countenance of wisdom shines and says, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old" (Prov. 8:22); that law which is the pattern for the making of the world and the compass by which to guide it; that law which is of God and with Him everlastingly; again I say, that law whose author and sustainer is the God who is blessed forever, how should either man or angel be ever able to perfectly behold? The book of this law we are neither able nor worthy to open and look into. The little which we barely glimpse, we admire; the rest in devout ignorance we humbly and meekly adore.

(6.) Since He works according to this law, and "of Him, and through Him, and unto Him, are all things" (Rom. 11:36), though confusion and disorder may appear to be in this world, "since a good governor does regulate the universe, do not doubt that all things are rightly done."⁵ He is so good that he does not violate His own law, a law than which nothing can be more absolute, perfect, or just.

The law by which God works is eternal, and therefore it is utterly immutable. This is why, since part of that law has been revealed in God's promises to do good for mankind, the Apostle Paul declares that God is just as likely to "deny Himself" and not be God as to fail to carry them out (2 Tim. 2:13). He also says that the counsel of God is similarly a thing unchangeable (Heb. 6:17); the counsel of God and the law of God which we now describe are one and the same.

The freedom of God is in no way diminished by this, since God freely and voluntarily binds Himself to this law. We may therefore call this the *eternal* law, since it is the *order which God before all ages has set down with Himself for Himself to do all things by*.

⁵ Boethius, *Boethius: Tractates, On the Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. H. F. Stewart, E.K. Rand, and S.J. Tester, Loeb Classical Library 74 (1918; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 355 [*Consolation of Philosophy* 4.4].

3

THE LAW OF NATURE

The law by which natural agents work.

(1.) I AM AWARE that most define ‘the eternal law’ not as that law which God eternally chooses to carry out in all His works, but instead as that which He has established for all his different creatures to obey, given the different conditions in which He has created them. Those who speak this way tend to define law only as the rule of working which a superior authority imposes on another, while we on the other hand are defining it much more broadly to include any kind of rule or standard by which an action is determined. The law which they call the *eternal* law, when considered as it exists in the mind of God, has many different names when considered according to the different things it is applied to. When applied to natural agents, we call it the law of *nature*; when applied to the rule which Angels behold and obey without swerving, we call it the heavenly or *celestial* law; when applied to the law which binds reasonable creatures in such a way that they can plainly perceive it, we call it the law of *reason*; when applied to that which binds them in such a way that only special revelation can make it known, we call it the *divine* law; when applied to those laws which are derived from both reason and revelation as prudential judgments, we call it *human* law. When things are as they should be, they are conformed to this second eternal law, and even those things which do not conform to it are still ordered by the first eternal law.¹ Whatever good or evil is done under

¹ Hooker’s distinction of a “first” and “second” eternal law is somewhat idiosyncratic and has occasioned debate among interpreters. Essentially, however, he seems here to be seeking to answer the question of why God sometimes permits things to happen, through his eternal decrees, which are at odds with his revealed will for rightly-ordered creatures. The former Hooker calls the “first eternal law,” the latter the “second eternal law.” Although God’s will is in fact one and con-

the sun, and whatever action conforms to or contradicts the law which God has imposed upon His creatures, will not God still work in it or upon it according to the law which He has chosen to keep forever (that is, the first eternal law)? Once we distinguish between these two eternal laws, it is not difficult to understand how both take place in all things.

(2.) Though we sometimes define the law of nature as the way that God has decided each created thing should act, we need to make a careful distinction. We most properly call natural agents those things which obey their laws necessarily, such as the heavens and the elements of the world, which have no choice in what they do, while we call rational beings with a free will *voluntary* agents, to set apart the two categories. In the same way, it will be helpful if we distinguish the law observed by the one from the law observed by the other—hence my category, the *law of reason*. Everyone recognizes the way that natural agents consistently keep one course, statute, and law; yet man has never achieved, nor perhaps ever will, full understanding of their ways. Perhaps God has given us so much trouble in sounding these depths, so that when we see how much more the least object in the world has within it than the wisest may comprehend, we might better learn humility.

When Moses describes the work of creation, he attributes speech to God: “Let there be light; let there be a firmament; let the waters under the firmament be gathered together into one place; let the earth bring forth; let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven.” Was Moses only intending to show the greatness of God’s power by how easily He did such things without travail, pain, or labor? Surely Moses had another purpose: first, to teach that God was not bound by necessity to work, but that He acted freely, intending and decreeing beforehand what outwardly proceeded from Him; second, to show that God instituted a natural law which His creatures would obey, which, according to the manner of laws, was established by

sistent, from our viewpoint part of it remains inscrutable, and it is to safeguard this inscrutability that Hooker distinguishes the two modes of the eternal law. The second we are given to participate in by reason (and this is what Hooker calls “the law of reason”) but that does not mean we have been given to know the full mind of God, and why he does all that he does. See further, W. Bradford Littlejohn, “Cutting Through the Fog in the Channel: Hooker, Junius, and a Reformed Theology of Law,” in *Richard Hooker and Reformed Orthodoxy*, ed. W. Bradford Littlejohn and Scott N. Kindred-Barnes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2017), 234–39.

solemn injunction. By commanding such things to be as they are and to keep their course as they do, He establishes the law of nature. What is the world's first creation and continued preservation but a manifestation of the eternal law of God in natural things? Just as, when once a law is published, it takes effect far and wide and everyone accommodates themselves to it, so also in the natural course of this world. Ever since God proclaimed the edicts of His law concerning them, heaven and earth have listened to His voice and have labored to do His will. "He made a decree for the rain" (Job 28:26), and He "placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it?" (Jer. 5:22).

If nature even for a little while were to leave off following her course and obeying her laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world from which everything in this lower world is made, were to lose their qualities; if the heavenly arch above our heads were to loosen itself and dissolve; if the celestial spheres were to forget their usual motion and by irregular turnings to go wherever they happened to go; if the prince of the lights of heaven, who like a giant runs his unwearied course, were to stand and rest as if about to faint; if the moon were to wander from her beaten path, or the times and seasons of the years to blend themselves in a disordered and confused mixture, the winds to breathe out their last gasp, the clouds to yield no rain, the earth to be bereft of all heavenly gifts, the fruits of the earth to pine away like children at the breasts of a mother who could no longer feed them; if, I say, all this were to take place, what would become of man, whom all these things serve? Do we not see plainly that the obedience of all things to the law of nature is the foundation of the world?

(3.) Nonetheless, the same thing often happens in nature as in art. If Phidias² had unyielding and obstinate stone from which to carve, however great his skill may be, his work will lack the beauty which it might have had if it had been more pliant. Whoever strikes an instrument with skill may still make a very unpleasant sound if the string which he strikes is out of tune. Theophrastus speaks this way about the matter of natural things, saying that many things are not able to receive the best and most perfect impression.³ The pagans who contemplated nature saw these defects in the natural world

² Phidias was the sculptor of classical Athens, who built the statue of Zeus and statues in the Parthenon.

³ See W.D. Ross and H.F. Forbes's translation of *Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 34-35.

very often, but it was beyond their natural understanding to see that this was the result of God's curse due to man's sin, which he laid on creatures made for man, as God has revealed to his Church in the Gospel. But even though now and again such deviations happen in the course of nature, nevertheless, natural agents so constantly obey the laws of nature that no one denies that whatever nature does is always or for the most part consistent and uniform.⁴

(4.) If we ask what keeps nature obedient to her own law, we must remember that higher eternal law which we have already described, and since all other laws depend on it, from it we must draw whatever insight we need to resolve these questions. Not that we think, as others have, that nature acts following certain blueprints or patterns which exist in God's mind, fixing her eye on them like sailors looking to the North Star and following it. Instead, we embrace the oracle of Hippocrates that "each fulfills its allotted destiny, both unto the greater and unto the less," and that "what men work they know not, and what they work not they think that they know; and what they see they do not understand."⁵ Nonetheless, the works of nature are no less exact than if she were actually scrutinizing some shape or mirror always before her eyes. Indeed, she is so dexterous and skillful that no rational being can with all their intelligence do what she does without understanding or knowledge! Nature must have some director of infinite knowledge who guides her in all her ways. And who is the guide of nature, but the God of nature in whom we "live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28)? Those things which nature is said to do are performed by divine skill with nature as the instrument. The artful workings of nature come not from any divine knowledge found in her, but only in her Guide.

Since natural things which are not voluntary agents must necessarily obey certain laws, then as long as they remain as they are, they cannot help doing what they do. Their many workings are perfectly designed for the many different purposes they achieve, but though they do what is fitting, they know neither what they do nor why they do it. From this we can see that everything they do in this way must be the result of some agent who knows, appoints, holds up, and even fashions it.

⁴ Hooker is borrowing from Aristotle's discussion of nature in *Rhetoric* 1.39 [1369b].

⁵ Hippocrates, *Hippocrates IV: Nature of Man*, trans. W.H.S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library 150 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), 236-7 [*Regimen in Health* 1.5].

The way God does this is so far above us that we can no better imagine it with our reason than irrational creatures can understand how we arrange and determine our affairs. We only know that all things are made and ordered by the fixed purpose of divine understanding. This understanding gives them their different ways of working, and we call this wisdom God's providence. The ancients called this 'natural destiny.' The law which we see carried out by natural agents is like a design in the mind of God himself, executed by the Spirit who creates and sustains every nature and natural agent as His instruments with which He works his own will and pleasure. Nature is nothing more than a tool, just as Dionysius affirmed when he saw a sudden disturbance of the world and said, "Either the God of Nature suffers, or the machine of the world is dissolved." That is, either God suffers impediment, being hindered by something greater than himself; or if that is impossible, then He must have determined to dissolve the workings of the world, since the execution of that law on which the world depends seemed to him to stand still.

This workman whose servant is nature, though only one in reality, the pagans imagined to be many: Jupiter in the sky, Juno in the air, Neptune in the water, Vesta or Ceres in the earth, Apollo in the sun, Diana in the moon, Aeolus and others in the winds, and indeed they dreamed up as many guides of nature as there were different kinds of things in the natural world. They honored these things as if they had the power to act or refrain according to what each man deserved. To us, however, there is only one Guide of all natural agents, both the Creator and Worker of all in all, alone blessed, adored, and honored by all forever and ever.

(5.) Up to this point we have been talking about natural agents taken and considered in themselves. However, we must also remember that just as each has a law which directs it to best seek its own perfection and completion, so also there is another law concerning how they must relate as parts of one body. This law binds them to serve one another's good and to prefer the good of the whole before their own particular interests, as we often see when natural agents forget their customary motions—heavy things sometimes going upward of their own accord and forsaking the earth, which is their natural resting place, just as if they had been commanded to surrender each its own private desire to fall, for the greater good of the rest of nature.

4

THE CELESTIAL LAW

The law by which angels work.

(1.) BUT NOW let us lift up our eyes from the footstool to the throne of God and, leaving natural things, let us consider for a space the state of heavenly and divine creatures. Angels are immaterial and rational spirits, the glorious inhabitants of the sacred palaces where there is nothing but light and blessed immortality, no cause for tears, discontentment, grief, or anxious passions, and where they dwell forever and ever, all is joy, tranquility, and peace. They are in number and order huge, mighty, and royal armies. Their obedience to the law given them by God Most High is such that when our Savior wanted to give us an idea of what we should pray and wish for on earth, He said that we should pray or wish for nothing more than that it would be with us as it is with them in heaven. God, who actively moves mere natural agents by setting them in motion, provokes rational creatures to action in a very different way, including his holy angels. Beholding the face of God, they all adore him in admiration of His great excellency, and enraptured with love, for His beauty do eternally cleave forever to Him. Their desire to resemble Him in His goodness makes them tireless and insatiable in their desire to do all the good they can to God's creatures, but especially to the children of men. Looking down on us, they see a resemblance to themselves, just as looking to God above they see what both they and men resemble. Thus far even the pagans have approached, so that Orpheus confesses that "before thy burning throne the angels wait, much-working, charged to do all things for men,"¹ and that

¹ Quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 5.14, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers of the Church*, vol. 2, *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 473.

mirror of human wisdom, Aristotle, has said that God moves angels to act in the same way as good and beautiful things stir the heart of man to action.² Angels may therefore act in three ways: first with most wonderful love rising from the sight of the purity, glory and beauty of the God who is visible only to spirits that are pure; second with adoration grounded on the proof of the greatness of God, on whom they see all other things depend; third with imitation, nourished by the presence of the perfect goodness of Him who never ceases to fill heaven and earth with the treasures of his free and undeserved grace.

(2.) We must not only consider what angels are and do individually, but also what concerns them as they are linked into a single body among themselves and have fellowship with men. Considering angels individually, their law is that which the prophet David says, "Praise ye Him, all His angels" (Ps. 148:2). Considering them corporately, their law makes them an army, some in rank and degree above others. Considering them, lastly, as having that communion with us which the author of Hebrews recognizes (12:22) and calls them our fellow-servants (Rev. 22:9), from this we see a third law, which binds them to the work of ministering. All these tasks they do with joy.

(3.) Nonetheless, some of these angels have fallen and their fall has come through the voluntary breach of that law which demanded that they continue to exercise their high and admirable virtue. They never could have changed or desired to omit any part of their duty unless something had been able to turn their hearts from God, and drawn them astray before they attained that high perfection of bliss which now prevents the elect angels from falling. They could never have preferred anything to God as long as they saw that it depended upon God, since God would have seemed infinitely better than anything else they would have seen. Anything beneath them was so obviously dependent on God that they could not see it otherwise, so the only way they could sin was by turning to reflect on themselves and their own sublimity, thus forgetting their subordination to God. Their dependence on Him was drowned in this fantasy, and so their adoration, love, and imitation of God were interrupted. The fall of angels therefore was pride. Since their fall, they have been doing the exact opposite of the duties just described. They were dispersed, some in the air, some on the earth, some under the water, some among the minerals, dens, and caves

² Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12.7 [1072a].

under the earth, but by all means they desire to bring about universal disobedience to the laws of God and as much as they can to destroy His works. The pagans honored these wicked spirits as gods, calling them “infernals gods” and seeing them in oracles, idols, household gods, and nymphs. There was no foul or wicked spirit which men did not somehow honor as God until the light appeared in the world and dissolved the works of the devil. This suffices for a description of angels; the next in order are *men*.