Hermeneutical Themes in the Writings of Richard Hooker: The Complications of *Sola Scriptura*

by

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Wycliffe College and the Theological Department of the Toronto School of Theology
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Abstract

For Richard Hooker (1554-1600), if the Bible was to find its rightful place of authority amidst the challenges and changes of the Reformation the theme of hermeneutics required renewed attention. With his English context in full view, Hooker sought to provide readers with an approach to biblical interpretation which celebrated the primacy of Scripture while also recognizing the unique role of reason and the diversity of ecclesial practices. The heart of Hooker’s contribution came through his interactions with contemporaries who disagreed with his position because of a hermeneutical approach which, he believed, was not biblical. Thus, this research explores Hooker’s ability to provide an approach to biblical hermeneutics by the use of four key themes which guide the interpretation and application of key biblical texts. In addressing the concerns of his day Hooker’s insight in the area of hermeneutics makes him one of the most creative theologians of the sixteenth century and a worthy apologist of the English Reformatory tradition.
Acknowledgments

At the inception of this project I was advised that a supervisor could either make or break a student’s passion in completing studies at this level of academic research. Understanding this to be truer than ever, I have been blessed with an excellent supervisor in Dr. David Neelands, Dean of the Faculty of Divinity at Trinity College. Not only did he patiently supervise my slow growth in understanding Hooker’s significance and theological contribution, but he also shared of his lifelong wisdom as it related to my journey of faith and ministry.

Another professor who had a formative influence on my thinking and learning was Dr. Peter Erb. In addition to the trips to Toronto for important meetings Dr. Erb constantly reminded me that theological development requires thoughtful conversations over coffee and an awareness that historical research necessitates discipline. His own research continues to stir my thinking concerning ecclesiology, authority and the important role of tradition.

While my parents never pursued academic training at this level they nonetheless sought to encourage my academic pursuits. From their financial support to those important conversations that kept me going, vi ringrazio. Much of the discipline and focus to accomplish a work like this came from their example grounded in love. My brother Anthony also helped to sharpen my thinking with his thoughtful conversations about the role of authority. While we disagree in many ways, love covers all.

A special note is due to Mary Manafo. A dear sister in Christ whose hospitality and generous spirit was unwavering early on during the initial coursework phase of my studies. Thank you for a room to sleep in and those delicious meals to strengthen a weary mind after those long days of class.

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Part I: Defining the Problem

Introduction: Richard Hooker and England’s Historical Landscape

Few could have predicted that a boy born in the middle of the sixteenth century in the small provincial city of Exeter\(^1\) would become the focus of a theological dialogue relevant for the twenty-first century. Richard Hooker (1554-1600), as that boy was named, continues to elicit both controversial and inspiring emotions, and due to the breadth of his writing and depth in theological acumen, Hooker has garnered the attention of scholars and church members who believe that his perspective on various issues remain pertinent for the challenges present today. Furthermore, the dynamic tensions Hooker dealt with stimulated him to develop into a careful and deep thinker whose overarching framework provided a typical theological insight for an emerging English Protestantism. As Diarmaid MacCulloch suggests, Hooker “was a champion of the establishment who championed it in distinctly un-establishment terms….\(^2\)

Whether Hooker truly succeeded in championing the established church remains a point of dispute; yet it is clear that his primary concerns stemmed from his desire to see the disagreements concerning ecclesial practices within the Church of England resolved so that the new post-Reformation ethos could flourish. At stake was the authority and stability of the political structures represented in God-ordained monarchial headship. For Hooker, the

\(^1\) Although Hooker was related to important people, his context in Exeter England was anything but prestigious. Philip Secor notes, “Nearly half of the eight thousand inhabitants of Richard Hooker’s Exeter lived in poverty and were most probably illiterate.” See Richard Hooker: Prophet of Anglicanism, (London: Burns and Oates, 1999), 28.

proclivities spawned by the magisterial Reformers and the convergence of ideas that ensued became a persistent challenge to the English Episcopalian structure and the larger political stage. Hooker’s response to these emerging disputes ensured him a reputation historians and theologians continue to find noteworthy. However, his theological prowess never garnered him the type of popularity associated with some other theologians of his day. The stakes were high yet few were able to assimilate his thinking in a way that could truly celebrate his brilliance. As Lee Gibbs remarks, “He was a man little understood in his own time, whose successors used him to buttress theologies and political theories that were antithetical to his own.” Remarkably, as the continuous stream of research suggests, it seems that Hooker is taken more seriously today than he was in his own day. Two individuals who had a significant role in elevating Hooker’s theological position for a modern world were fellow Englishmen, John Keble and Henry Newman.

In 1836, John Keble (1792-1866), a leading voice in the Oxford Movement turned to Hooker believing him a theological resource for his own time. In so doing he provided, in his definitive edition, an edition of the Lawes, Hooker’s *magnum opus*, which remains a remarkable work of scholarship. Keble’s colleague and friend John Henry Newman (1801-1890), would subsequently posit that Hooker be celebrated as a significant voice in relation to the Protestant challenges of the day. A longstanding debate continues as to whether Newman’s appropriation of Hooker’s thoughts were justified in paving a *via media* position between the positions of the Roman Catholic tradition and the theological

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positions found within the Continental Protestant ethos which birthed the Protestant Reformation. Commenting on such matters, Ranall Ingalls, for instance has remarked how Newman “maintained that Hooker represented a doctrinal via media peculiar to the Church of England with respect not only to questions of authority, but also questions of saving doctrine.”

A closer look at Newman’s work in his Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification may also be helpful in this regard. In attempting a comprehensive exploration of the doctrine of justification, and the many implications that the Protestant and Roman Catholic definition of this doctrine might propose, Newman suggests the idea of a brewing middle as it related to the English Church and the leading theologians of his time. He writes,

> Our divines, though of very different Schools...not of the Roman schools, [who] have, with few exceptions, agreed...that obedience justifies without a continual imputation of Christ’s merits; nor of the Protestant, that imputation justifies distinct from obedience; but a middle way [emphasis mine], that obedience justifies in or under Christ’s Covenant, or sprinkled with Christ’s meritorious sacrifice.

In this brief note we are introduced to Newman’s developing ideas, but in the following pages he comes to attach Hooker to the larger argument on justification thus proposing that Hooker does not necessarily align with the supposed ‘Protestant school’ nor ‘Roman school’. Nonetheless, Newman actually sought to connect Hooker’s views on justification and the larger Reformation program. Accordingly he writes, “Hooker then holds, or at the

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6 Newman is keenly aware of Hooker’s work and the attacks he experienced due to his theological inquiries. In Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification Newman writes, “Thus Hooker, in a note on the Christian Letter, which asks, “Tell us whether you think, that not faith alone, but faith, hope, and love, be the formal cause of our righteousness?” and, “Is faith then the formal cause of justification? And faith alone a cause in this kind? who hath taught you this doctrine?” but he does not tell us what the formal cause is. Appendix, “On the Formal Cause of Justification.” in Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification, 3rd ed. (Rivingtons, 1874), 364.

7 Ranall Ingalls, “Sin and Grace” in A Companion, 154. While the focus of this dissertation is not to resolve this academic discussion it is difficult to ascertain with clarity how Newman actually sought to connect Hooker to the emergence of his via media argument.

very least suffers the doctrine, that God has not only made his son righteousness to us by imputation, but that He does for us still more; He begins actually to make us in this life with Christ … righteous.”

For Newman, Hooker endorsed a participatory view of God’s grace in the salvific process that pushed matters beyond the early continental views, which had treated justification as solely declarative, as in Luther’s famous dictum ‘*simul iustus et peccator*’. Nevertheless, while the focus of this dissertation is not to resolve this academic discussion, Newman’s interpretation of Hooker has been under considerable scrutiny.

In recent years some have begun to question this venerable assertion suggesting that Hooker fits a more Reformed Calvinist schema instead. Most notably Torrance Kirby has founded his academic study of Hooker on the belief that Hooker was in no way committed to a *via media* position and to continue this narrative of the story of Anglicanism is unfruitful. He asserts “…it does not appear possible to reconcile Hooker’s avowed apologetic aim with a deliberate attempt to define a middle way that bears any resemblance whatsoever to Newman’s definition.”

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10 Nigel Voak’s insight on the terminology here is significant. He remarks, “The terms Calvinist and Reformed…have often been considered synonymous in the past, and some writers use them interchangeably. Calvinist has, however, recently been considered a misleading term, as it places too much weight on the influence of Calvin in a tradition that has, both in the sixteenth and in subsequent centuries, been influenced by many theologians, and which is far from being monolithic.” Nigel Voak, *Richard Hooker and Reformed Theology: A Study of Reason, Will and Grace* (Oxford, 2003), xvii. See Michael Brydon, *The Evolving Reputation of Richard Hooker: an Examination of Responses 1600-1714* (Oxford, 2006), 8.


tension, I believe that a more careful look at Hooker’s biblical hermeneutics will provide another important perspective in this debate.

Moreover, there are other academics that continue to question Hooker’s loyalty to certain aspects of Calvin’s (1509-1564) theology, thus disagreeing with aspects of Kirby’s, and Atkinson’s, arguments.\(^\text{13}\) Most recently A.J. Joyce, in detailed fashion, presents a formidable argument for Hooker’s disapproval of Calvin and his way. She remarks,

… Hooker’s apparently innocuous subtitle introducing the story of Calvin and his new discipline is, in fact, laden with significance, and by implication, deeply damning…In fact, with consummate skill, Hooker uses [Calvin’s rise in Geneva] to undermine the man, his motives, and the impact of his ‘Discipline’ through a use of the acerbic aside and jaundiced parenthetical comment that is at times worthy of Tacitus.\(^\text{14}\)

This academic debate continues to provide ample material that enlivens the importance of sixteenth century history and its influence on current theological realities. For the range of this study I will argue that although Hooker fits the picture of classical Protestantism, he does not *easily* fit into the full Calvinistic framework of his day as some suggest.

Although the challenges in situating Hooker within the larger Reformation tradition persist, this thesis will lend assistance to this venture by focusing on Hooker’s hermeneutics. While the diverse schools of thought on the issue can leave readers wondering how one person could possibly be associated with so many different points of

\(^{13}\) A.J. Joyce provides an excellent reflection on how Thompson and Wall see Hooker’s reference to Calvin as a clever tool in developing his larger argument, rather than a celebratory acknowledgement of the Genevan Reform. See *Richard Hooker and Anglican Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 46,47 Also, Bauckham remarks that of the nine times Calvin is mentioned in the *Lawes*, six of these seem supportive while three are against. See Richard Bauckham, “Richard Hooker and John Calvin: A Comment,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 32 no. 1 (January, 1981), 30-31.

\(^{14}\) Joyce, *Richard Hooker*, 53.
view,\textsuperscript{15} this dissertation will attempt to provide some needed attention on Hooker as a biblical theologian making a substantial effort to deal with the challenges of his day through a careful hermeneutical and doctrinal approach to scripture. While this does not negate the need to contextualize and understand the other approaches to Hooker’s theology, I will argue that a more focused look at Hooker’s hermeneutics might assist in that task and possibly draw divergent ideas to a more amicable center.

Hooker was adamant that the immediate context is formative in shaping one’s hermeneutical approach. A danger he was most carefully trying to address was a hyperbolic approach to biblical authority that was crippling to the long-standing ethos of the Church of England and to the credibility of the Bible and reverence for it that was at the centre of that church’s life. As he writes, “We must…take great heede, last in attributing unto scripture more than it can have, the incredibillitie of that do cause even those things which indeed it hath most abundantly to be lesse reverendly esteemed.”\textsuperscript{16} Hence, for Hooker, a ‘proper’\textsuperscript{17} hermeneutic must begin with a correct position on what the Bible, as God’s revelation, was intended to accomplish, or else doubt will ensue.\textsuperscript{18} As will be discussed, for Hooker,\

\textsuperscript{15} For a helpful example see Egil Grislis’ introduction “The Hermeneutical Problem in Richard Hooker,” in \textit{Studies in Richard Hooker: Essays Preliminary to an Edition of his Works} ed. W. Speed Hill (Cleveland, Ohio: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), 159-206. He provides an extensive breakdown of the factions and diversity within Hooker studies.


\textsuperscript{17} By ‘proper’ I understand an approach to the Bible that is both respectful of the authority of the Bible and its unique status as God’s Word, yet considerate of the Church’s authoritative position in allowing for diverse interpretations while remaining rooted in the orthodox theological positions of the broader Christian community.

\textsuperscript{18} St. Augustine made a similar point about poor hermeneutics leading to a mockery of Christian truth in \textit{The Literal Meaning of Genesis}, book I, chapter 19 “On interpreting the mind of the sacred writer. “Christians should not talk nonsense to unbelievers ”, \textit{St. Augustine The Literal Meaning of Genesis}, trans. John Hammond Taylor (Ancient Christian Writers, no. 41, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 42-44. We shall see the importance of
solidifying the answer to these types of questions remained formative to the complexities related to the Protestant doctrine of *sola scriptura*. What I hope to demonstrate is that, for Hooker, the best way to address these questions was to return to the Bible, while also embracing the ecclesiological realities of a diverse church.

Hooker’s primary engagement in this debate was due to the theological challenges of the English Reformation and the historical realities of a changing political landscape. As will be seen in chapter 1, the English Reformation provided some unique challenges for both Hooker and his contemporaries. One of those was focused primarily on the ecclesial and political outcomes associated with the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547). Specifically, it was the Act of Supremacy (1534), which was the seismic shift in how matters of ecclesial importance were to be handled in England. As part of the first chapter, it will be essential to map out some characteristics that followed Henry’s revolution.

Consequently the foundation of Hooker’s writings is an attempt to defend the beauty and diversity of his own independent English theological tradition, while staying anchored to the catholicity of the ‘universal’ Christian church, as well as honoring the emerging Reformation ideals. Hooker’s most astute response to these historical tensions is found in his literary tour de force, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*. Although it was not overly popular in its inception, nevertheless, Henry McAdoo remind us it was a steady

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Augustine’s accounts for Hooker’s hermeneutical arguments.

19 It is noteworthy that the phrase *sola scriptura* is not present in the official doctrinal formulas of the Church of England, and that Hooker does not himself adopt it—yet the uniqueness of scripture is everywhere assumed.

20 The firm statement that Henry was the “the only Supreme Head in Earth of the Church of England” was a very significant, permanent shift. Although Queen Elizabeth would not call herself “Head”, as “Supreme Governor”, she maintained the royal supremacy, and thus guaranteed the shape of the Reformation in England.

21 Hooker, *Lawes*
seller from 1611 onwards. It is through this work and a few others, including sermons, that Hooker demonstrates the robust theological insight that makes him a significant historical figure, who grappled with pertinent theological struggles with long-lasting implications. As will be noted, the brewing Reformation, the influence and power of the Roman Catholic Church, political power struggles and the tensions of an emerging radical Calvinistic insurgency, form the backdrop of the world Hooker would navigate in defending the unique English reforming tradition.

This dissertation will argue that at the core of Hooker’s writings readers will find both a defense of the beauty and diversity of his own English theological tradition while staying anchored to the catholicity of the ‘universal’ Christian church and core Protestant ideals. Furthermore, it is my suggestion that Hooker’s insights on such matters make him one of the most significant historical figures to wrestle with the tension of the inheritance of a Roman Catholic Church still very much present in the English reforming tradition. As William Haugaard reminds, “In England, as a settlement of religion emerged under Elizabeth’s rule, the church did not fall easily into the continental Protestant categories”\(^{22}\) (emphasis mine). Thus the political underpinnings and theological complexities inherent in his sixteenth century context should not be underestimated. A.J. Joyce, in like manner, posits that Hooker’s thinking and writing “emerged out of a controversy that had its roots in the Elizabethan Church Settlement of 1559. The Act of Uniformity of that year abolished the Mass, which had been restored under the Marian regime, and reintroduced

\(^{22}\) Haugaard adds, “The national body, reflecting earlier stages of Reformation under Henry and Edward, firmly embraced Protestant understandings of justification by grace through faith as well as the authority and nurturing importance of the vernacular Bible, but in contrast to continental Protestant churches, its common liturgy carried more legal weight and parochial influence than their confessional formulary, and they retained traditional catholic orders of Episcopal ministry and government.” William Haugaard, “The Scriptural Hermeneutics of Richard Hooker,” in *This Sacred History*, ed. Donald S. Armentrout (Cambridge MA: Cowley Publications 1990), 166.
the 1552 Prayer Book of Edward VI….”23 In addition, Joyce alludes to another point of contention which reminds readers of the political maneuvering and theological power plays which had become a normal part of both the English Reformation and larger Protestant proclivities. As is often noted, Hooker himself found ways to maximize these realities in his own favor.24

To the above points it is worth adding the impact of the lack of consistent theological fortitude apparent in Hooker’s English context. Half a century ago Gunnar Hillerdal emphasized, “Germany had Luther, Switzerland had Zwingli and Calvin; England had no one comparable to these great Reformers in position of power…”25 What this suggests is that Hooker’s writings provided a necessary apologetic prowess in light of the many non-English Reformation voices. Moreover, presenting an approach to both political jurisdiction and ecclesial authority that was clearly and coherently biblical was paramount in shaping and guiding the lives of faithful believers. Accordingly, Hooker’s context became the impetus for crucial theological dialogue making him one of the most influential thinkers of the sixteenth century.

As I have mentioned, the research herein is specifically concerned with the theme of biblical interpretation and Hooker’s developing hermeneutic as it emerged in his theological framework. I want to suggest that, except for a few writers, Hooker’s exegetical concerns and hermeneutical attempts have been ignored by the majority of scholars exploring the sixteenth century. Approximately thirty years ago, Grislis, one of the few

23 Joyce, Richard Hooker, 20.
24 An insightful perspective on Hooker’s political and polemical maneuvering can be found in Rudolph Almasy, ‘Hooker’s Address to the Presbyterians,’ Anglican Theological Review, 61.4 (1979) 462-474.
scholars discussing Hooker’s hermeneutics with precise attention, suggested the importance of biblical interpretation in Hooker’s overarching theological paradigm. In his early work entitled “The Hermeneutical Problem in Richard Hooker”, Grislis noted how Hooker’s unique ability to pave a considerably fresh approach to biblical interpretation made him noticeably different from his contemporaries. In those early observations Grislis wrote,

Hooker recognizes that a mere appeal — be it to reason or to Scripture — does not automatically produce truth. There is simply no theological method, however correct, that can itself ensure its own infallibility. Even when the best method is most judiciously employed, it yields, at the very best, only the highest probability that can be humanly achieved and is never beyond further debate. Grislis’ early work has recently been expanded and will be used as a principal perspective in the area of secondary literature. Because I firmly agree with Grislis and the direction of his argument, the goal of this dissertation will be to add to the important work he has pioneered.

I will argue that the importance of proper hermeneutics remained at the forefront for Hooker’s theological paradigm. Contextually, Hooker’s desire to shape and distill his own perspective on the theme of sola scriptura remained seminal in light of the challenges ensuing from the Continental Reformation. Because of the dramatic shift sparked by Luther’s theological revolution, Hooker’s generation struggled with providing clarity as it related to ecclesiial and biblical authority. In addition, Luther’s insistence on the authority of the Bible and his view that it could stand as the primary authority on matters of faith also

became a point of contention. Hooker, fully aware of the philosophical tensions of the Reformation, concluded that biblical interpretation was a difficult endeavor, and could not solely be steered by pious learned proclivities. Instead, as noted in a sermon, he remarked, “Yet behold, even they that are wisest amongst us living, compared with the Prophets, seem no otherwise to talke of God, then as if the children which are carried in armes should speake of the greatest matters of state.” For Hooker, one should never lose sight of the limitations of one’s context when interpreting scriptural text. Furthermore, to assume one’s personal interpretation as authoritatively inspired was not only a childlike error, but also required a warning and correction, and hence hostility to purely personal interpretation formed a foundational caution for his theological writing.

It is clear that sixteenth century disagreements related to biblical hermeneutics brought to the fore inconsistencies and complexities inherent in the positions on sola scriptura. Thus vehement conversations about how to uphold this position were pivotal to Hooker’s hermeneutical development. The numerous interpretative perspectives and ensuing questions concerned: What could the diversity of interpretation mean? How were decisions on such important matters to be made? Could a fallible and sinful individual discern with clarity the biblical truth provided by a holy God who was believed on all sides to have authored, in some sense, the biblical text? These inquiries, which Hooker and his contemporaries were forced to struggle with, has already shaped much of sixteenth century theological landscape and significant parts of Hooker’s Lawes.

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Specifically, Part I of this dissertation will examine some of the historical issues related to the above challenges. In so doing, readers will be given a glimpse of Hooker’s indebtedness to other great theologians that provided considerable wisdom related to hermeneutics. Furthermore, I hope to show how these questions came to shape the larger theme of hermeneutics both for Hooker and in the English context. In Chapter 1, I explore the larger issues of authority in Hooker’s context before expanding on how they impacted his approach to the Bible. Hooker makes it clear that the Bible conveys God’s revelation but how that impacts the life of the church and political tensions of the time required considerable human consideration.

As the title of this work suggests the Reformation’s insistence on *sola scriptura* or “scripture alone” was much more than a simple challenge to the Roman Catholic theological vision. The proposed thesis that the Bible could stand as the sole authority on matters of faith and practice needed much clarification and qualification. An essential aspect of the first chapter will be to demonstrate how Hooker’s view of the Bible provided a fresh picture within the tension of the English Reformation. As Hooker expresses the matter, it is the misuse of scripture that some use as a credible platform or opportunity for attacking the very fabric of the English Church by persuading those who wish to be convinced. Lucidly, he notes,

He that goeth about to persuade a multitude, that they are not so well governed as they ought to be, shall never want attentive and favourable hearers; because they know the manifold defects whereunto every kind of regiment is subject....

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30 Part I of this work consists of chapters 1 & 2.
31 Lawes I.1.1; 1:56.7-12.
I want to suggest that for Hooker, this erroneous ‘misuse of scripture’ stemmed from an incorrect reading of the Bible and a lack of wisdom related to the Reformation rallying cry characterized by *sola scriptura*. As will be explored, Hooker made clear that any articulation of *sola scriptura* that implied a simplistic and precise approach to right teaching, or a perfect approach to ecclesial polity, was clearly inconsistent with the Bible itself. Thus the goal of this thesis will be to demonstrate Hooker’s nuanced perspective on such matters, while at the same time pointing to a more rooted way to uphold the authority of the Bible by proposing his own hermeneutical approach.

It is evident that Hooker, as well as his colleagues, believed that minimizing or ignoring these types of politically driven remarks had practical implications and could only be corrected seriously in dealing with the root of the problem: hermeneutics. In addition, for Hooker the effort of these persuaders lent itself to political dissention that would cause increasing strife against the stability of the English nation. Contextually, at least from Hooker’s perspective, this was part of his concern about other Protestants of this time. In particular, his comments about the Anabaptists are significant:

> We are of God, he that knoweth God, heareth us, as for the rest, ye are of the world, for this worlds pomp and vanitie it is that ye speake, and the world whose ye are heareth you. Which cloake sitteth no lesse fit on the back of their causes, then of the Anabaptists, when the dignitie, authorite and honor of Gods magistrate is upheld against them.\(^32\)

In addressing what he saw as extreme errors, Hooker would return to some of the far reaching implications of what the phrase *sola scriptura*, as used in his century, *actually* entailed. Accordingly, such clarification remained paramount for the betterment of the

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\(^32\) *Lawes* Pref.3.14; 1:19.25-31.
‘multitude’ that might be led astray or inadvertently perceive their faith weakened by the persuaders.

In chapter 2, I will explore the broader hermeneutical tradition that Hooker inherited. Interpretation, which hermeneutics means, finds its roots in the legend of the ancient Greek god Hermes. He was believed to be the god of interpretation who relayed the commands and concerns of the gods to the average mortal. Although the earliest Christians did not espouse these legendary myths, they still believed that their God, Yahweh, had accomplished his salvific plan of redemption in Jesus, and thus a different type of divine interpreter was available. In fact, “by the first century, the verb form hermeneuo was used to mean ‘explain,’ ‘interpret’, ‘translate’.” Furthermore, the writers of the New Testament were already in the process of reinterpreting the Hebrew Bible through the lenses of their Christo-centric conversion experiences.

As part of the second chapter readers will notice a return to some of the overarching hermeneutical concerns found in the magisterial Reformers. Subsequently, it will be a point of emphasis to show, in some instances, ways which Hooker might have disagreed with them and suggested his own approach. While I will argue that Hooker pursued his own methodological approach to exegesis, he consistently saw himself aligned with the larger Reformation ethos. As he remarked, “Thinke not that ye reade that words of one, who bendeth him selfe as an adversarie against the truth which ye have already embraced; but

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33 Jesus also exhibited a hermeneutical position. According to Luke’s gospel, Jesus at the outset of his ministry states that it is a fulfillment of the great Hebrew prophet Isaiah. See Luke 4:17-21.
35 Acts 2:36; 5:30. Both texts reveal the importance of returning to and reading the Hebrew Bible through the narrative and reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus.
the words of one, who desireth even to embrace together with you the selfe same truth, if it be the truth….”

While the magisterial Reformers loomed large in Hooker’s hermeneutical consideration, he was lucidly aware of important differing theological leanings, which they would have found disconcerting. In his sermon *A Learned Discourse on Justification* he writes,

> For my owne parte I dare not hereupon deny the possibility of theire [referring to Roman Catholics] salvation which have byn the chefest instrumentes of ours, albeith they caryed to theire grave a perswasion so greatly repugnant to the truth. Forasmuche strength, she doth not directly deny the foundacion of christianitye. I maie truste without offence perswade my self that thowsandes of our fathers in former tymes lyving and dying within her walles have found mercie att the handes of god.  

This important insight situates Hooker’s thinking on a slightly different trajectory from that of Luther. Considering Luther’s strong position that justification by faith *alone* was *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*, Hooker’s comments about the “thowsandes of our father in former tymes” positions him as one with a broadening view of how to embrace the differing views of the Roman Catholics in the church expectant in that they too find themselves in the presence of God.

Hooker’s desire to both respect and learn from forefathers of the past, while at the same time to be aware of their limitations and errors, demonstrates his commitment to generosity with respect to the theological diversity resident within the brewing

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38 Martin Luther, WA 40/III.352.3.
Reformation debates as well as a larger narrative of the church universal. Accordingly, the last part of chapter two will demonstrate this commitment in Hooker’s thinking.

As a culmination of this second chapter I will turn our attention to what is probably the most important work on biblical hermeneutics ever penned in the Western ecclesial tradition: Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*. During the time of Hooker, and long before, it was a unique and valued authority, yet it will be crucial to show how Hooker himself was guided by Augustine’s thoughts and his developing doctrine of scripture.

As a final thought it is necessary to return to another point of contention in Hookerian studies. There remains considerable discussion on how best to describe Hooker’s primary audience, who were his loudest interlocutors. Often termed Puritans, these zealots and committed Protestants faced considerable challenges with the jurisdictional leadership of the Church of England as embodied both by the monarchy and the Episcopal structure of Church governance, and therefore advocated for further Reformation of the institution of the Church. It is noteworthy to mention that Hooker never uses the term Puritan, yet he is keenly bothered by and disappointed with this particular homegrown brand of anti-conformist sentiment.

Often termed Radical Calvinists, this Reformed brand of Protestantism, according to Hooker, felt most at home when identified with Calvin and his Continental popularity. In what has become a consensus among scholars, Collinson provides authoritative insight

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40 According to Peter Marshall, “John Calvin and the English Catholics, c.1565-1640.” *The Historical Journal* 53, 4 (2010), 849-870, this popularity was not just a Protestant phenomenon but also evident among English Catholics.
when noting that Puritans were at the center of the late Elizabethan structure.\textsuperscript{41} This reality was pivotal for Hooker’s considered approach to the Bible. Pointing at Calvin’s significance, David Neelands observes how Hooker is careful when positioning Calvin for his larger argument. He writes that for Hooker “Calvin is treated as a figure of the French, and not the Genevan Church: that is, he would be a ‘foreign’ and interfering influence in Geneva (and, for that matter in England), had he not been invited to assist and dramatically invited by the Genevans to return.”\textsuperscript{42} This perspective is rarely emphasized yet it should remain at the forefront of our thinking since it will be a considerable point of contention in Hooker’s own hermeneutical decisions.\textsuperscript{43}

For Hooker, the challenges related to the emerging doctrine of \textit{sola scriptura} were numerous, but none more important than the issue of a renewed understanding of ecclesial authority. If the Bible was to be the sole authority in one’s life, what role did the church play? Also, should the longstanding ecclesial tradition on which the Church of England was built be rejected based on a fresh reading of the Bible? This type of question lay at the heart of Hooker’s work and his overarching theological and hermeneutical program. Subsequently, Hooker’s most difficult challenge in dealing with such issues was a brand of Reformed thinkers who would remain a ‘thorn in the flesh’ for those who came later. In

\begin{itemize}
  \item[41] Patrick Collinson. \textit{The Elizabethan Puritan Movement}. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Another term often used in Atkinson’s text is ‘Disciplinarians’. For the scope of this paper I will use both radical Calvinists and Puritans interchangeably. Brydon states “When Hooker talks about Puritans he is referring to the lineal descendants of those Protestants who had chosen exile during Mary’s reign, and had returned to England assuming that the revival of the Edwardian Church was but a first step towards a more thorough reform.” Michael Brydon, \textit{The Evolving Reputation of Richard Hooker: an Examination of Responses 1600-1714}, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 8.
  \item[43] While the goal here is not to discern what exactly Puritanism entailed, as a point of clarification, I will use the terms “radical Calvinist” and “Puritan” as synonyms while at the same time emphasizing some unique aspects of the thinkers Hooker is specifically trying to respond to. In addition, I make the assumption that Thomas Wilcox’s and John Field’s \textit{An [First] Admonition to the Parliament} (1572) is the watershed work in defining Hooker’s primary conversation partners.
\end{itemize}
this light, he attempted to interject his own account of what the Bible itself says about its own authority and how only within a proper hermeneutical framework taken from Scripture could the English Reformation find a strong and much needed identity. Again, the competing ideals on the Continent and Calvin’s popularity impinged on what Hooker, and others, believed were needed for the prospering of the English ecclesial model. Correcting these assertions, and repositioning the discussion around a proper view of the authority of scripture, was central to Hooker’s vision. Hence, ideas related to apostolic and ecclesial continuity and their relationship to biblical authority would be lost if Hooker’s opponents had their way.

Part one of this dissertation will specifically examine some of the important themes of biblical interpretation that arose prior to the Reformation period, finding their culmination in leading Continental voices. The goal is to show how these hermeneutical issues shaped both Hooker and the English context. While chapter 2 will explore this issue in depth, it will suffice to state that hermeneutics as both the art and discipline of approaching and understanding a text properly and contextually remained the core of Reformation concerns. Evans emphasizes the long history of such challenges in reminding us that, “In the reformer’s view, this misapplication and misunderstanding [of the biblical text] had become a serious problem in the course of the Middle Ages.”

The goal here is to explore some of the salient aspects of the Reformation transition, its renewed focus on the Bible, and more importantly the role of hermeneutics in the overall arrangement. Although the topic of hermeneutics, at least since the nineteenth

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century, has been approached from numerous perspectives, it remains important to mention that this study is firmly committed to identifying and dealing with the problems, which found their impetus in the sixteenth century Reformation.
PART I: CHAPTER 1
Church of England, Religious Landscape and Emerging Theological Issues

Introduction

Richard Hooker was a son of the church, and not just any church, but the Church of England of the sixteenth century. Hence, his primary involvement was inevitably with the theological challenges of the Reformation and their impingement on the Church. As noted in the introduction, this first chapter will provide some salient points of reference that came to shape Hooker’s world. Moreover, it will become clear that the Reformation brought to the surface a multivalent conversation about ecclesial concerns, theological challenges, and the broader authority of the church, the Roman Catholic magisterium and the Bible. It is the goal of the argument to demonstrate that understanding salient themes within sixteenth century England remains formative for comprehending Hooker and his views concerning scripture. It will be the focus of this chapter to discuss significant disagreements related to scriptural authority and ecclesial tensions brewing among leading reforming factions within the Church of England, thus shedding light on Hooker’s particular dialogue partners and his primary audience.

The Reformation brought to the surface competing visions concerning biblical authority and ecclesial decisions. Consequently, Hooker and his contemporaries were challenged to decide how best to understand the uniqueness of scripture, and the impact of that understanding on the theme of authority and hermeneutics. It is the responses to this challenge that will shape the underlying arguments of this dissertation.
As part of the scope of this first chapter I intend to explore the historical dynamics underlying a complex ecclesial landscape. It is my goal to begin to survey Hooker’s influence within this larger Reformation structure of sixteenth century England. In so doing, it will be helpful to spend some time discussing a unique expression of Reformed Protestantism that carried significant sway in England. This influence would probably not be realized in the way historians can appreciate today were it not for a group of Protestant-minded thinkers who are still termed “Puritan”. Their interactions, disagreements and rebuttals of Hooker, and the larger ecclesial structure, make them a group worth considering in coming to understand Hooker. While “Puritan” remains a term familiar for denoting their identity it will be important to focus on some particular characteristics which brought them face to face with Hooker and his developing theological paradigm.

The tension that will be discussed must not cause one to miss the shared practical and pastoral dynamics of this debate. As John Stafford helpfully observed, “…Hooker was keenly aware that the Puritans themselves, notwithstanding their ‘godly’ dispositions, were no less beset with the same cares and anxieties as other people.” In providing some of this information, the first chapter will help give clarity to the use of their ideas and concerns for the remainder of this work and Hooker’s interactions with them. This first chapter will also begin to hone in on pertinent issues related to Hooker’s views on scripture, revelation and his exploration of the larger Reformation themes of reform of the church and its institutions. Accordingly, readers will get a sense of how Hooker’s intellectual fervor and ecclesiastical commitments find their grounding in his deep passion for the Bible. It is perhaps a temptation in the study of Hooker to minimize his pastoral awareness when

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dealing with hermeneutical issues. It is evident, nevertheless, that Hooker’s approach to the Bible and his hermeneutical and exegetical convictions underlie his position as important among English theologians of the Reformation period. In addition, chapter one will shed light on some key theological works of others that make up our primary sources for understanding and discerning the hermeneutical challenges of Hooker’s day and his theological acumen.

The challenges related to scriptural interpretation and biblical authority were nascent in the emergence of the early church as seen the New Testament.46 The newly formed Christian community understood it was essential to explain, interpret and translate the plan of God as revealed in Christ in the Holy Scriptures in a way that invited others to be included in the plan.47 Despite a powerful mandate of hope, the process by which people came to embrace and learn about their newfound movement soon encountered hurdles and differences that needed addressing. Hooker, noting this reality already apparent in the earliest circles of discipleship, quotes the First Epistle of John writing, “Dearely beloved…give not credit unto every Spirite.”48 Aware of diverse interpretative positions which might not be in line with a biblically-grounded perspective, Hooker’s perspective was filled with a renewed focus on the authority of the Bible as well as the need to give careful attention to people’s theological leanings.

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46 As noted in 2 Peter 3:16 “He [Paul] writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” (NIV Translation).
47 Matthew 28:16-20, often referred to as the Great Commission, states “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (NIV Translation).
48 Lawes Pref. 1.3.10; Pref. 17:14-15
Problems related to a proper understanding of biblical authority in sixteenth century loomed large. Questions such as, ‘How authoritative is the scope of the Bible?’ fell firmly on Hooker’s purview. Accordingly, Hooker provided a judicious articulation in response to such issues and shed light on some unique contextual objections, which shaped the prominent attacks he would suffer under the pen of the Puritans.

While the influence and exponential growth of the first century church remains a scholarly interest,⁴⁹ the sixteenth century questions on authority stirred its own renewed focus on the early church. This shift, characterized as *ad fontes*, saw a fresh attention toward the early primary sources, including the Bible, as the foundation for authority. Furthermore, in dealing with this move, the theme of scriptural interpretation, and ensuing tensions, would remain relevant in Hooker’s thinking, and these dynamic underpinnings were foundational in the Church of England in which Hooker’s thoughts developed. Moreover, it was the way in which the earliest Reformers attempted to deal with the role and authority of scripture in their diverse and changing landscape that will become a focal point of the argument.

The Reformation brought to the surface an evolving challenge within Christianity to provide a consistent hermeneutic and an agreed upon paradigm for dealing with the biblical text.⁵⁰ In addition, the English ethos of the late sixteenth century was at an all time high with factions which all assumed that their interpretative approach to the biblical text was the most reliable. Hooker’s battles lay immersed therein, and led to the challenging task of

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⁵⁰ The many debates over free will, the proper interpretation concerning the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the eschatological possibilities related to the *parousia*, were just a few of the challenges highlighting the tension.
navigating such complex interpretations, while at the same time proving that his approach of the Bible was more than able to guide the Church of England toward a prosperous, peaceful and God honoring future.

For Hooker, the noted struggles did not negate the hope that God’s intended purposes could be discerned by the use of wisdom, reasonable interaction with the biblical narratives, and awareness of one’s own local context. Yet Hooker’s generally hopeful view must be held in tension with other theological points. For him the need for a proper approach to biblical interpretation was always to be encompassed by important theological realizations of human limitations and divine otherness. As he eloquently states,

Dangerous it were for the feeble braine of man to wade farre into the doings of the most High, whom although to knowe be life, and joy to make mention of his name: yet our soundest knowledge is to know that we know him not as in deed he is, neither can know him; and our safest eloquence concerning him is our silence, when we confess without confession that his glory is inexplicable, his greatnes above our capacitie and reach.51

In this regard, Hooker’s passion for God and for an apposite understanding of God’s revelation in scripture was to be viewed through the reality of one’s limited ability to fully comprehend God in his grandeur, except insofar as God has revealed himself. Hooker, in an apophatic declaration, emphasizes a key theological theme that would permeate much of his writing.

While the focus of later chapters will return to the key hermeneutical themes, at the outset we should remember that, for Hooker, the knowledge of God and the hermeneutical task must always be held in tension. Thus, our knowledge of God is most lucid when coupled with our understanding of His hidden nature, and to lose this perspective is to tread

51 Lawes I.2.2; 1:59.11-19.
dangerously beyond God’s intended plan of self-revelation. Reflecting on such grandeur and mystery Hooker expresses how God’s knowledge is hidden yet available, even beyond the scriptures, through God-given wisdom:

Some things she openeth by the sacred bookes of Scripture; some things by the glorious works of nature: with some things she inspireth them from above by spirituall influence, in some thinges she leadeth and trayneth them onely by wordly experience and practise. We may not so in any one special kind admire her that we disgrace her in any other, but let all her wayes be according unto their place and degree adored. \(^{52}\)

Nevertheless knowing what God, the creator, might be trying to say to his people could be rather challenging, and disagreements emerged. Those who could read the biblical text and expound it from its Hebrew and Greek renditions were left pondering how the revelation of God could possibly have such textual discrepancies. Questions about how interpreters were to deal with such problems, and the prevalent reminder that sin’s effect rendered humankind limited when trying to ascertain the things of God, even as revealed in the Bible, remained of grave importance.

Obviously, Hooker does not believe that this should render one helpless in the face of new theological possibilities or important corrections in pursing new biblical insights. If this were the case he would have stopped writing himself. Instead Hooker was trying to counter a perspective on biblical interpretation which some had come to embrace. As we will explore shortly, Hooker’s primary opponents believed the Bible provided precise unquestionable knowledge on \textit{all} matters of faith and action. \(^{53}\) This point of contention will remain at the core of the problem of Hooker’s dilemmas and writing. It is toward exploring this group of thinkers, and defining the central question of this work, that we now turn.

\(^{52}\) Lawes, II.1.4; 1:147.25-148.6. Notice Hooker’s uses of the feminine personification of wisdom as found in the Hebrew Bible.

\(^{53}\) See Book II of the \textit{Lawes}. 
Defining the Problem: Sola Scriptura and the Crisis of Authority

Based on Luther’s theological vision, ensuing Reformers felt a need for renewed focus on the Bible as a center of authority. Far removed from the private, modernist approaches to the Bible, the early Reformers were still much in dialogue with their ecclesial tradition and the creedal legacy of the church. Nevertheless, it is vital to locate the complexities of sola scriptura (a phrase that first became prominent not in Luther, but in Zwingli’s Zurich in relation to church reform) vis-à-vis the early Reformation crisis of authority. The whole of the Reformation project, in a sense, attempted to answer and hold in tension two fundamental concepts of the authority of the Bible and the authority of the believing community, the church. That Luther’s ecclesial disturbance caused ripple effects far beyond its German origins is well studied. For Hooker these issues were still at the heart of his theological dilemmas and pastoral responsibilities two generations later. In addition, his attempt to challenge and correct some of the relevant voices of his day shaped his hermeneutical paradigm, as well as his overarching philosophy of how God’s laws provided structure to the world.

In summation, the essence of the problem for Hooker related to the views held by some of his opponents that, he believed, related to the theme of biblical authority. Simply put, for Hooker their hermeneutical method was inconsistent with the Bible itself. Grislis


56 As explored in Book I of the Lawes, God’s ordered creation also became a way of pointing those who have yet to believe to ponder divine matters. He writes, “...the verie Heathens themselfs, have all acknowledged some first cause, whereupon originallie the being of all things dependeth.” Lawes I.2.3; 1:59-60.34-6.
remarks that Hooker recognized their way of using the scriptures “twisted them to their own liking.”57 Moreover, as will be discussed, Hooker was able to discern that the logical implications of the hermeneutical paradigm being proposed by these contemporaries led to a weakened position on matters of ecclesial authority and the intended role of the Bible as it related to the larger vision of the Reformation.

As mentioned before, the sixteenth century challenges surrounding sola scriptura were instigated by diverse theologians who found inspiration in Luther and Zwingli. This brought about a certain level of complexity that should not be seen as limited only to the Reformation period.58 Yet, as it pertains to Hooker, the fact that ecclesial distrust and political allegiances were extensive the need for a renewed sense of trust and certainty about the role and authority of the Bible took on a clear priority.59 As evidenced in Hooker’s Two Sermons Upon S. Jude’s Epistle60 his own concern for Roman Catholic disfavor was at its apex. Confidently he states, “Jesuits and Papists, heare yee me, ought you not to knowe, that the Father had given al power unto the sonne, and hath made him the only head over his Church…. ”61 In these remarks, Hooker adds his own disappointment at the lack of clarity and the authoritarianism reminiscent of certain aspects of the Roman Catholic church during the sixteenth century. Hooker was aware of similar challenges in the Protestant churches. Actually, it was Hooker’s study of scripture that led him to affirm that every leader in the church should have a posture of servanthood.

58 As chapter two will attest Augustine, the fourth century Bishop of Hippo, was just as concerned with the challenges of biblical interpretation.
61 Hooker, “Jude,” 1.15; V, 31,6-8.
as one called by God. Simut underscores this point when stating, “For Hooker, it is very important that the minister should never lose sight of the fact that he is part of the church of God and is ordained by the church of God to serve the church of God”. Hence, the theological and political climate was ripe for a biblical approach that could address both the charismatic reality of the church and the unique role of God’s gift of revelation to it.

*Sola Scriptura*, at least for the first generation Reformers, cannot be seen as supporting a myopic view of Christian history that ignores fifteen hundred years of theological reflection and creedal authority beyond scripture. In fact David Steinmetz has proposed a helpful point of clarification, noting a better way to understand this dictum he writes, “*sola scriptura* generally meant *prima scriptura*, Scriptura as the final source and norm by which all theological sources and arguments were to be judged….” That is, scripture is not the only authority, as “*sola*” would suggest. Instead, what Luther proposed was a view of the Bible that he thought could be consistently reliable in the face of constant ecclesial upheaval and renewal. Thus the goal of reading the Bible was to have an encounter with the living author of the words on the page. In some sense a spiritual awakening awaits all those who had the courage to read and listen to the voice of the author. Yet in addition to such an experience, there was offered another salient possibility, as Jaroslav Pelikan, one of the most respected students of the Reformation, observed,

What the Reformers claimed to have discovered in their study of the Bible, therefore, was not a philological insight as such, nor a historical fact as such (although it was also to be sure, both of these), but the meaning of the Christian gospel; for it was their conviction that ‘the authority of the text… is identical with

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63 David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 129. Significantly, Hooker had anticipated Steinmetz by 400 years in his famous statement about scripture first, then reason, then the voice of the church. See below.
the understanding of the text,’ and that it could not exist apart from that understanding.64

Few have brought such clarity to the implication of Luther’s movement on biblical authority. In equating the authority of the text with understanding the text, Pelikan affirms the need to view hermeneutics as an essential aspect of the authority of sola scriptura. To understand the text was to unlock its authority. In this light, Luther’s insights suggested that the Church, because of numerous erroneous ordeals, had not properly understood the text, and thus should not be trusted as an authority unless she revisits her theological positions.

The convergence of ‘biblical understanding’ and ‘biblical authority’ is essential in order to comprehend the issue of sola scriptura and the crisis of authority. If the authority of the church cannot be trusted since, as Luther suggested, it has lost the true meaning of the scriptural truth that ‘justification [is] by faith’, then one needs to put one’s trust in those who have the ‘correct’ understanding of the text instead. Accordingly one should ask, ‘How might one know if they have the correct understanding of the text?’ This question captures the essence of the problem and the heart of Hooker’s hermeneutical concerns. Furthermore, the diverse responses were of utmost importance for the broader Reformation trajectory.

Tensions: Henry VIII and Radical Calvinism and Hooker

The above issues provide a starting point for defining the obstacles that Hooker would face in dealing with the diversity inherent in the English Reformation. The legacy of Hooker is built on the decisions of those who preceded him, and while the long, political

history of the English monarchy is not the focus, it is foundational to better understanding the religious interplay between theology, politics and religious ideals.

Dying seven years before Hooker’s birth, Henry VIII (1491-1547) and his decisions altered the ethos of ecclesial issues in England, making way for a renewed conversation on matters of authority by removing church authority from Rome. Henry’s marital catastrophes and the ensuing outcomes were pivotal in shaping the underpinning of the English Reformation tradition. Henry’s struggles with the Roman Catholic Church over such matters in no way caused him to embrace Luther’s vision of Reformation. Instead, in complete opposition to such ideals, Henry would claim to pen the *Assertio*, his own theological defense of the sacraments as depicted in the Catholic tradition against the teachings of Luther. In effect, the Tudor legacy could also be the selection of the subordinate ecclesial role of an Archbishop in the English Church. This monarchy-appointed and monarchy-subordinate position fell to Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) who was formative in helping shape the annulment needed for Henry’s dynastic future and continued political influence, and whose personal views were not those of Henry VIII or of the *Assertio*.

One way in which Henry’s leadership came to impact Hooker was the emergence of *The Ten Articles (1536)*. Compiled by Archbishop Cranmer in dialogue with Protestant theologians, the *Articles* were an attempt to make the King’s voice paramount in the forming of a theological space in which unity in the midst of diversity could be affirmed. In

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this light, G.W. Bernard posits a deeper vision inherent with *the Articles* when stating, “Henry’s twin impulses — the assertion of his royal supremacy and the purification of the church — also characterized the first definition of doctrine and first elaboration of liturgy under the royal supremacy.”\(^\text{67}\) This brief note about Henry should be a reminder to readers that the themes of theological clarity and biblical authority were intermingled with political changes of the utmost importance for the English Church at the time of Hooker’s birth and from before it.

For Hooker, Henry’s legacy is grounded in his significant leadership when dealing with superstitious practices ensued in the Roman Catholic tradition. Aware of such dynamics, and the historical legacy paved by Henrician rule, he writes, “The first that with us made way to repaire the decayes thereof by beheading superstition, was King Henry the eyght.”\(^\text{68}\) Remarks such as this, and others related to the close connection between political authority and theological concerns, show a salient feature of the Reformation period. Speed Hill observes, “Appropriately historicized, issues of ‘doctrine’ and of ‘poltie’ should be inseparable—as they were in the sixteenth century—and we misread the work when we ignore their reciprocity, which is underwritten by Hooker’s own sense of history.”\(^\text{69}\) Subsequently, the next generation of political leadership also had considerable influence on the overarching themes that Hooker would address.


Following Henry’s reign, it was clear that religious troubles and theological debates remained tightly knit. Norris, in addressing the political landscape after Henry’s death, observes how during the reign of Edward VI (1547-1553) the issues that were of enormous concern for Hooker’s generation were less pronounced, “…English Reformers saw no reason to think that there was any inherent opposition between episcopacy and the cause of Reformation, however much they might object to the prelatic shape assumed by the Episcopal office in medieval Europe.”

This comfortable assumption would slowly be eroded by the emerging political decisions ensuing Edward’s short stint as King.

On his passing, Mary I (1553-1558), the daughter Catherine of Aragon (1485-1536), assumed the throne. As a passionate Roman Catholic, her fervency stirred a deep commitment to rid England of those she considered Protestant ‘heretics’. Thus, in a series of exiles, numerous Protestants fled to find refuge on the Continent. This set of circumstances led to a new fruition when “Marian exiles came back from the Continent imbued with the more radical of ideas from Geneva.”

Although Mary’s reign was also short, the ramifications of her actions aggravated matters for her sister Elizabeth’s (1558-1603) accession to the throne. In addition, while Henry’s influence and formidable choices

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70 Richard A. Norris Jr., “Episcopacy,” in The Study of Anglicanism, eds., John Booty and Jonathan Knight, Stephen Sykes (London: SPCK, 1998), 333. In the same pericope Norris reminds, “The Edwardian ordinal regarded it as ‘evident… that from the Apostles’ time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ’s church; bishops, Priests, and Deacons’, and insisted that it was God, by the Holy Spirit, who had ‘appointed divers Orders of Ministers’ in the Church.”

71 John Marshal, Hooker and the Anglican Tradition: An Historical and Theological Study of Hooker’s Ecclesiastical Polity (London: A&C Black, 1963), 56. It should be noted that exiles returned from other major cities in Europe and the Genevan exiles were by no means the most numerous or influential.
highlight the pressures related to Roman Catholic positions and their so-called superstitious tendencies, a much more difficult battle was brewing within the Protestant camp itself.  

The shifts in political leadership lead to confusion when trying to distinguish both the theological landscape of Hooker’s context and some of the important voices. Although the monarchs, in this case Elizabeth, did their best to pacify and lead their adherents toward a faithful, God-honouring legacy, competing visions of reform would interfere with, and shape, the decision making process. Commenting on the far-reaching implication of such political struggles, Secor notes,

John Knox’s established church of Scotland, beginning in 1560, was clearly Presbyterian in form; and the strong advocacies of Travers….Most of these Presbyterians, to be sure, were Puritans; but, many Puritans were not Presbyterians. Many in the church, including Whitgift, Hooker, and the Queen herself accepted much of Calvinist doctrine, but they all staunchly objected to Presbyterianism, which threatened the integrity of an established Episcopal Church polity.

Secor is helpful in highlighting the distinct flavor of English Protestantism, which sought to maneuver through diverse challenges, but yet set forth a fresh theological image. This approach, I believe, requires a more precise examination of the Puritan dynamic at work in Hooker’s context.

Although Hooker’s circumstances and the attacks from the Church’s critics provided a considerable impetus for writing the Lawes, it is also worth reflecting on key episodes that rallied this English contingency of Reformed thinkers he opposed. Although Hooker himself had Calvinistic leanings, he believed that if left unattended, the way his reform-minded critics interpreted and applied the biblical text to contemporary concerns remained troublesome. In this regard, Hooker’s Lawes remains his most consistent and

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72 Ranall Ingalls in “Richard Hooker as Interpreter of the Reformed Doctrine of Sola Scriptura,” Anglican and Episcopal History, 77, no. 4 (December, 2008), 367 correctly emphasizes, “Hooker’s context, however was different [from Calvin], his adversaries were fellow Protestants rather than Roman Catholics.”

73 Secor, Richard Hooker: Prophet, 197
formidable apologetic for these mounting concerns. Furthermore, these political and religious issues had a significant impact on Hooker’s thinking, his biblical exegesis and his larger hermeneutical program.\textsuperscript{74}

In addition, there existed a growing number of voices claiming the Reformation had yet to reach its intended vision, as Andrew Foster states,

Many foreign Protestants, like Calvin’s successor, Theodore Beza, criticized England’s retention of bishops. Calvinism was the dominant brand of theology in the English Church at this stage, but there was obviously still quite a gulf when it came to organization and discipline.\textsuperscript{75}

As a result, Hooker’s apologetic targeted many who believed that the Bible did not justify the Episcopal polity of England. Criticisms grew to a fevered pitch when one’s polity brought questions about hermeneutical methodology, and even the questioning of one’s state of salvation. Most significant for our study is the debate relating to developed in Geneva. At the head of Hooker’s hermeneutical challenges lay a practical and applied reading of the Bible, coming from Strasbourg and Geneva, that insisted that the long established Episcopal structure, as found in England, was unbiblical and worse sinful.\textsuperscript{76}

Before investigating some salient voices that shaped the Puritan theological agenda it is worth mentioning briefly an academic discussion which continues to explore whether Hooker is better suited as a defender of the Magisterial Protestant definition of \textit{sola scriptura} over and against his reformed critics in England, or rather, whether Hooker is

\textsuperscript{74} For an important focus on soteriology, Hooker and the Henrican Reign, see Corneliu C. Simut, \textit{The Doctrine of Salvation in the Sermons of Richard Hooker} (Berlin: Walter de Gruyer, 2005).

\textsuperscript{75} Andrew Foster, \textit{The Church of England (1570-164)} (London: Longman, 1994), 33.

\textsuperscript{76} Thomas Cartwright is still considered the champion of this view. See Thomas Cartwright, \textit{A Full and Plaine Declaration of Ecclesiasticall Discipline out off the Word and off the Declininge off the Churche off England from the Same} (Heidelberg: Michael Schirat), Sig.a.2. In it Cartwright states, “Any actions perceived merely to be not contrary to the Word of God did not, for them [Puritans], bear the imprimatur of divine approval. Thus, for the Puritans, to perform any actions not directed immediately by Scripture was sinful and could not be tolerated”.

attempting to propose a freshly nuanced definition of scriptural authority, which stretched their ideas, in hopes of providing a hermeneutical approach to the Bible that was more appropriate to the needs prevalent in England. While continuous mention of this debate will be interspersed throughout this dissertation, it is worth stating that I believe Hooker’s hermeneutics, as will be elaborated herein, reveal somewhat of a new take on the role and authority of scripture. This will be argued by an attentiveness to his hermeneutical approach and exegetical subtlety.

**Defining Moments & Hooker’s Critics**

While the impetus for a Puritan vision stemmed from interactions with Genevan expressions of the Reformation, other important events have become symbolic of this theological rift within the English Reformation. Within Hooker’s English context there surfaced a customary form of Reformed Calvinism, which rallied in disagreement against Hooker’s theological underpinning. In our discussion thus far we have used the terms Puritan and Radical Calvinist for such individuals, yet there are other important terms used. For the most part, these terms will be used interchangeably in the present research.

Atkinson, prefers the term “Disciplinarians” when referring to Hooker’s primary critics, which points to the reformed developments specially associated with Theodore Beza (1519 – 1605), who believed that congregational discipline, especially in the form

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77 Kirby and Atkinson are two of the leading proponents against any position that situates Hooker as the voice of a brewing *via media* in England. They remain convinced that such a perspective is anachronistic. My goal is to celebrate the strengths in Kirby’s assessment while suggesting that Hooker is, at the same time, proposing a new way forward based on the challenges of his English context. Kirby writes, “A great deal of work remains to be done in stripping away the distortion of Hooker’s thought through the lens of an Anglicanism not yet invented.” See Kirby, *Richard Hooker, Reformer*, 28.

championed by his predecessor John Calvin, was to be an essential mark of the church, in addition to scripture and sacraments listed in the Augsburg Confession and the Thirty-Nine Articles. Brydon’s insights are useful as an alternative way of coalescing these diverse terms toward a coherent understanding, he writes:

When Hooker talks about Puritans he is referring to the lineal descendants of those Protestants who had chosen exile during Mary’s reign, and had returned to England assuming that the revival of the Edwardian Church was but a first step towards a more thorough reform.

It will remain significant for the scope of this dissertation to hold these realities in mind when trying to determine what the thoughtful, yet committed, Reformers sought to accomplish in returning to England and attempting to correct some of Hooker’s theological ideas.

Building on Beza, much of what the Puritans proposed found its trajectory in the tradition of Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603). These ardent Reformers believed that God’s vision for his church was to be grounded on the distinct eldership model they believed was endorsed in scripture. In approaching this model of ecclesial governance and focusing on its exegetical thinness Hooker writes,

But for as much as no forme of Church-politie is thought by them to be lawfull, or to be of God, unlesse God be so the author of it, that it be also set downe in Scripture; they should tell us plainly, whether their meaning be, that it must be there set downe in whole or in part. For if wholly, let them shewe what one forme of politie ever was so.

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80 Brydon, The Evolving Reputation, 8.
82 Lawes III.2.1; 1:207.21-24.
As part of the larger scope of this dissertation suggests, the issues for Hooker come back to the theme of biblical hermeneutics. What is the proper meaning found in the text, and who can propose to have achieved or arrived at it? Having said that, in no way can Hooker’s opponents be seen as not caring about proper hermeneutics; instead their position seems to be that their scriptural interpretation on such matters results in one clear definition that all churches should embrace. Hooker’s suggestion, already announced by Archbishop Whitgift, holds that the Bible does not ‘tell us plainely’ what the church’s polity should consist of, and that a certain amount of flexibility should be allotted for positions that were correctly seen as *adiaphora*.\(^{83}\)

One work of significant influence in sealing the emerging identity of Puritans was *The Admonition to the Parliament* of 1572. With an aggressive appeal for further reforms to rid the English church of relics associated with Roman Catholicism, this work came to be seen as the decisive Presbyterian and Calvinistic manifesto, thus gaining considerable notoriety.\(^{84}\) Wilcox and Field authored this work and proposed a vision of England, which, in a sense, minimized the ecclesiastical authority of the monarch and put ecclesial jurisdiction in the Elders. Moreover, as John Craig remarks, “Not only had the Admonitioners directly attacked the English episcopate, their advocacy of ‘discipline’ exposed a fault-line between radical Presbyterians and more moderate Puritans.”\(^{85}\)

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\(^{83}\) According to Norris, Hooker’s views on episcopal authority vacillate. In one sense he believed that episcopacy was grounded in the apostolic mandate, on the other hand he rendered it authoritative based on the consensus of ‘divine approbation afterwards’. See Norris, “Episcopacy” in *The Study of Anglicanism*, 339-340. Chapter five of this dissertation will shed more light on the theme of *adiaphora* as it influenced Hooker’s thoughts.

\(^{84}\) John Fields and Thomas Wilcox, *Admonition to Parliament*, eds. The Rev. W. H. Frere, M.A. and The Rev. C. E. Douglas (1572). “In trustworthiness of statement it compares very favorably with documents of its class; and it is singularly free from the distortion and recklessness which has often characterized puritan polemic” 24.

What readers will find important is how many biblical references are found in this work. Its authors believe that what they are presenting is a thorough approach to understanding the Bible, and hence necessary in dealing with their ecclesial challenges. Daniel Eppley adds “… the controversy is best understood as being not essentially about the extent of biblical authority but rather as being a controversy between different interpretations of what the Bible requires of Christians.”86 This observation wonderfully captures the hermeneutical problems resident beneath Hooker’s astute polemic.

The most commanding perspective available in deciphering the complexities within the Puritan camp is the work of Collinson. Defining Puritans as ‘the hotter sort of Protestants’, 87 Collinson has been invaluable in reminding readers of the dangers of using broad generalization when dealing with such a complex religious community. While moderate Calvinists, as Hooker himself might be called, uniformly embraced a renewed approach to justification by faith88 with a strong return to the principle of sola scriptura in doing so, issues related to biblical interpretation and exegetical correctness would not subside. The discrepancy around a right hermeneutical approach ran deep. In emphasizing such issues Kirby recaps, “In his debate with Archbishop John Whitgift (1530-1604) earlier in the 1570s, Cartwright had argued that the dictum sola scriptura constituted a universal rule of human action and that whatever is not done in accord with God’s revealed written word is sinful.”89 It is worth noting Collinson’s observation that, “In the Lawes, and

especially in the Fifth Book, Hooker refers incessantly to the opposition as ‘them’ and ‘they’ almost always turns out to be Thomas Cartwright.”

The full impact of this debate confronts Hooker in the shape of a disorderly relationship with Walter Travers (1548 –1635). It is agreed upon, by significant scholarly consensus, that Hooker’s interactions with Travers provide an incubation period in which his theological apologia for the Church of England was shaped but I would like to suggest it was also a place where fresh hermeneutical themes and their incubation took place. Specifically, Hooker’s appointment to the Temple Church (1585) caused considerable tension with Travers who believed himself to be a more senior and favored minister of the influential community with the right to succeed as Master. Shuger writes, “…at stake in the dispute between Hooker and Travers was the distinctive Protestant understanding of faith as certainty: the certainty of one’s own salvation…” While the issues here related specifically to the issue of Christian assurance, it should be clear that this, once again, found its roots in one’s hermeneutical lens. Travers’ complaints concerning Hooker are summarized in his work entitled A Supplication made to the Privy Counsel. A central concern for Travers rested on Hooker’s theological vision as it stemmed from his sermons. These personal and pastoral tensions were exacerbated when Travers appealed for stern correction of Hooker’s theological leanings. For Travers, Hooker’s tone and rhetoric was not sufficiently anti-Catholic. The radical Calvinists were convinced that if the popish

93 Considering the theme of ecclesial discipline loomed large for Puritans, it is not unrelated that Hooker, according to Travers, should be corrected and held accountable, i.e., “disciplined”.
remnants could be obliterated from the liturgical life of the English people, God’s favour would flow. Travers took matters into his own hand and “accused Hooker to the Privy Council [for] setting forth the agreement of the Church of Rome with us, as if we had consented in the greatest and weightiest points, and differed only in certain small matters.” To Travers, and other extreme Protestants, Hooker did not present a pure enough brand of their Reformation preaching, and hence required disciplining, or reprimanding.

Hooker’s Emerging Response

Hooker’s response to Travers sought to emphasize a defense of the unity and diversity the English theological tradition, while staying anchored to the catholicity of the ‘universal’ Christian church and important Protestant ideals. As part of his dedication for the fifth book in the Lawes, he provides readers with his outlook on the state of the problem: “These fervent reprehenders of things established by publike authorite are always confident and bolde spirited men. By their confidence for the most part riseth from too much credit given to their owne wits, for which cause they are seldom free from error.” Aware of the strong and bold forces of such voices, Hooker’s remarks demonstrate how he came to define the so-called Puritans. Considering them “fervent reprehenders” confident enough to attack public authorities, Hooker believes that a key error to their theological position was an undue trust in their own biblical interpretations.

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94 Travers, Supplication (see above).
95 Lawes V, Ded ; 2:.2.4-7.
In this regard, Hooker’s writings make him one of the most significant historical figures to tackle the theological and political tensions by returning to the question of hermeneutics. Hooker positioned himself as a thoughtful supporter of the political framework of the English church. In so doing, he addressed theological complexities inherent in the broader Reformation ethos. Consequently, I believe Haugaard is right in reminding us that, “In England, as a settlement of religion emerged under Elizabeth’s rule, the church did not fall easily into the continental Protestant categories”\(^96\) (emphasis mine). Neither did Hooker.

To the above points it is worth adding the considerable lack of consistent theological voice in Hooker’s English context. As we have noted, Hillerdal noted, “Germany had Luther, Switzerland had Zwingli and Calvin; England had no one comparable to these great Reformers in position of power…“\(^97\) suggesting that Hooker’s writings provided a much needed apologetic prowess in light of the many non-English Reformation influences. Thus for Hooker, presenting a biblically grounded approach to both political jurisdiction and ecclesial authority was paramount in guiding the lives of faithful believers. Accordingly, Hooker’s context became the impetus for crucial theological dialogue, making him one of the most influential thinkers of the sixteenth century.

\(^96\) Haugaard adds, “The national body, reflecting earlier stages of Reformation under Henry and Edward, firmly embraced Protestant understandings of justification by grace through faith as well as the authority and the nurturing importance of the vernacular Bible, but in contrast to continental Protestant churches, their common liturgy carried more legal weight and parochial influence than their confessional formulary, and they retained traditional catholic orders of Episcopal ministry and government.” Haugaard, “The Scriptural Hermeneutics,” in The Sacred History, 166.

\(^97\) Hillerdal, Reason and Revelation, 9.
As mentioned, the research that follows is specifically concerned with the theme of biblical interpretation and Hooker’s developing hermeneutics as it emerged in his dealings with the theological voices of his day. I would suggest that, except for a few writers, Hooker’s exegetical expressions and hermeneutical concerns have lacked the attention of the majority of scholars exploring the sixteenth century.\(^98\) Additionally, due to the cataclysmic shift sparked by Luther’s theological inquiry, Hooker’s milieu struggled to provide clarity around issues of ecclesial and biblical authority. Luther’s insistence on the authority of the Bible, and his view that it could stand as the supreme authority on matters of faith, became a point of contention. While these matters would draw Hooker to craft his own response, he also concluded that biblical interpretation required more mental assent. As he eloquently stated in a sermon, “Yet behold, even they that are wisest amongst us living, compared with the Prophets, seem no otherwise to talke of God, then as if the children which are carried in armes should speake of the greatest matters of state.”\(^99\) In other words, for Hooker, a grounded exegete should not confuse his or her theological meanderings with the much deeper truths found in the scriptures themselves.

Disagreement over the role and authority of scripture remained inarticulate, thus increasing the challenges for anyone attempting to use the Bible and apply its teaching to their context. In this regard, Hooker would make considerable efforts exploring the role of biblical authority in hopes of shedding light on questions raised by the numerous interpretative voices of his day. What could the diversity of interpretation mean? How were decisions on such important matters to be made? Could a fallible and sinful human person discern the biblical truth provided by a holy and omniscient God, who was believed to be

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\(^98\) Most recent, see Joyce, Richard Hooker.

the unique source, in some sense, of the biblical revelation? These inquiries, which Hooker and his contemporaries were forced to grapple with, came to shape much of sixteenth century theological landscape and large parts of Hooker’s seminal work *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie.*

*Hooker and the Underpinnings of Reform*

Having shown that Hooker and his contemporaries were involved in diverse intrigues over political perplexities and theological tensions, it is important to anchor such issues to the theme of scriptural authority as it relates to the hermeneutical development of Hooker’s thoughts. Noting Luther’s influence in this debate, the remainder of this chapter will introduce some of the relevant aspects that fostered the complexities related to *sola scriptura* and Hooker’s contribution. As Hooker pondered the many issues needing attention, he would return to the Bible when formulating his responses.

Especially pertinent is Hooker’s use of Old Testament narratives to explain his own sixteenth century predicament. Affirming God’s providential hand at work, Hooker believed that his mounting challenges were comparable to the historical challenges God’s people, as described in the Bible, had faced. Finding an incident in the Book of Judges applicable, he writes,

…as By the sword of God and Gedeon, was sometime the crie of the people of Israel, so it might be at this day the joyfull song of innumerable multitudes, yea that Embleme of some estates and Dominions in the world, and (which must be eternally confest even with teares of thankfulnesse) the true inscription stile or title of all Churches as yet standing within this Realme, By the goodness of almightie God and his servant Elizabeth we are.

100 *Lawes, V. Ded 10; 2:7.21-28.*
As this quotation illustrates, Hooker’s vast knowledge of biblical narratives, and their application, reveals an exegetical prowess in responding to the political minefields of his day. In addition, Hooker finds ways to see God still at work in the riotous problems of his time. ‘By sword of God and Gedeon’ was the rally cry of Israel during a season of distress. In recalling these important biblical moments, Hooker shows his readers the importance of recognizing that God’s hand was still at work in the struggles of their historical moment, and that current events could be understood in the light of biblical narratives. Interestingly, out of the numerous stories of bloodshed in the Book of Judges, I think it noteworthy that Hooker refers to one such story where God’s will is done in proclaiming the truth of his power, and the obedience of his servant Gideon, without the need for bloodshed, which gives us, perhaps, a glimpse of Hooker’s hope for the debate. 

Hooker’s nuanced return to the Bible seems effortless when reading his work, as he skillfully addresses the struggles of reform by embracing the biblical text as a primary source of meaning and direction. Furthermore, Hooker recognized that within a competing system of ideas those who disagreed with him should do likewise. A consistent return to the Bible needed to be a priority if the debate at hand was to move forward. With frustrated precision, Hooker notes that the Puritan contingent, specifically when stating their most prized theological model of reformed Church discipline, lacked biblical backing.

But let necessary collection be made requisite, and we may boldly deny that of all those things which at this day are with so great necessitie urged upon this Church under the name of reformed Church discipline, there is any one which their books hitherto have made manifest to be conteynd in the scripture.

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101 In relation to leading biblical expositors of the Reformation, a quick perusal of the list of commentaries shows that neither Luther nor Calvin provide commentaries on the Book of Judges.

Thus, for Hooker, until the Puritans could demonstrate it clearly came from the scripture, their positions need not be embraced by the English church as universals mandated by God.

A reforming church must find its bearing in a thoughtful exposition of scripture. This would remain a foundational ideal for Hooker’s hermeneutical scheme. But, in addition to this truth, some other pertinent theological themes also came to enter Hooker’s thinking. The impetus of Luther’s vision and the larger Reformation tradition would add considerable complexity to Hooker’s context, creating new challenges to be addressed.

McGrath provides a key distinction on how the Reformers defined *sola scriptura*.

The Reformers grounded the authority of Scripture in its relation to the Word of God. For some, that relation was an absolute identity: Scripture was (emphasis his) the Word of God. For others, the relation was slightly nuanced: Scripture contained the Word of God.¹⁰³

As will be argued in this dissertation, Hooker’s approach would come to emphasize that the Scriptures contain the Word of God. This nuance, firmly rooted in these sixteenth century debates, would make a significant difference as to how theologians like Hooker approached hermeneutical practice. If some matters were not to be deduced from the Bible, then perhaps other gifts from God (i.e. Wisdom and Reason) were also essential in the overall scheme. Elaborating on such themes will, I believe, position Hooker as a distinguishable and seminal contributor to this debate.

Additionally, the Church of England inherited a trajectory stemming from Luther’s questions pertaining to ecclesial authority. Luther’s personal crisis led to his assertion, often termed *sola scriptura*, but which should be regarded as a concern for the *priority* of

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scripture over popes, kings and councils. This priority had far-reaching implications for civil magistrates, as well as theological leaders. Aware of a multitude of voices relating to scriptural authority, Luther emphatically positioned the conversation related to sola scriptura within the realities of faith alone (sola fide). This simple equation proposed a new way of dealing with the religious regulations often associated with the Roman Catholic framework of the day. With this renewed awakening to scriptural authority came a host of new challenges that were foundational to the issues of biblical interpretations and ecclesial concerns in which Hooker was entrenched.

One such concern involved an experiential dynamic, which for Luther was pivotal in ascertaining a correct hermeneutical interpretation and the role of the biblical priority. Commenting on Luther, Victor Shepherd writes, “unless Jesus Christ moves among us as the teacher of Scripture…what we find in Scripture will be only ourselves, our own opinions and aspirations and misunderstandings concerning God, ourselves, and the world.” Thus, one might quickly surmise how divergent interpretations could cause the questioning of one’s very salvation, and or allegiance to Jesus. If the exegesis of one text fostered two different interpretations might one of the interpreters be lacking in ‘personal’ spiritual fervency, or at worst, an inauthentic encounter with Jesus? Could this reality render one party involved suspect? These and other similar points of unease shaped the

104 Before the Emperor at Worms in April 1521, Luther appealed to “scripture or plain reason”: Nisi convictus fuero testimoniis scriptuarum aut ratione evidente (nam neque Papae neque conciliis solis credo, cum constet eos et errasse sepius et sibiipsis contradixisse), victus sum scripturis a me adductis et capta conscientia in verbis dei … WA 7.838 “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (emphasis mine) (for I will not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God.” Luther at the Diet of Worms [1521]. In Luther’s Works, vol. 32:112. The passage is often cited to show Luther’s adherence to a sola scriptura position; this interpretation ignores the reference to “plain reason”. Luther, like Hooker, might better be identified with the prima scriptura position.

hermeneutical landscape associated with the Reformation shift and underlying Hookerian challenges.

Hooker matured in a world wherein Luther’s reforming ideals were in effect, and thought of reverting to the old way of thinking remained increasing impossible. Actually, as we have seen, many were not convinced that the proposed solutions of Luther and other Reformers were aggressive enough. In fact, this was at heart of a more radical agenda that attempted to move matters of reform forward vigorously, with the Church of England providing the loudest champions of this robust and radical cry for reform. Euan Cameron provides an enlightening note about the visionary ideals of the Reformation in stating, “The Reformers claimed to be restoring, or rediscovering, a form of teaching and a manner of worship that had existed and had been lost.”  

As the title of this work suggests, the Reformation’s insistence on sola scriptura was anything but a simple solution to the Roman Catholic theological and ecclesiastical program. The proposed idea that the Bible could stand as the sole authority on matters of faith and practice needed much clarification and qualification. At the outset of the Lawes, Hooker’s own concerns are revealed. It was his estimation that the misuse of scripture had

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107 While not the intended focus of this project, it is noteworthy to add that Luther could not have anticipated a renewal movement, which would bring to the fore questions concerning the very issue of historiography, and how to reread history in light of the vision of sola scriptura.
enabled one ‘that goeth about to perswade a multitude, that they are not so well governed as they ought to be…’.”\textsuperscript{108} As I will further suggest, for Hooker this erroneous ‘misuse of scripture’ stemmed from an incorrect understanding of the role and purpose of the Bible and a lack of wisdom related to the Reformation rallying cry of \textit{sola scriptura}.

Using the church as an example, Hooker states: “Churches receive \textit{as everything else} their chief perfection from the end whereunto they serve”\textsuperscript{109} (emphasis mine). In the same way, Hooker will argue that the Bible finds its chief perfection when used for its intended purpose, and for Hooker, that purpose was more than just winning theological debates through proof texts. While this theme will be explored thoroughly in chapter four of this work, it suffices to state that Hooker’s proposed solution was not only an end, but also a transformative interaction with God himself. As he writes, “...the worde of God outwardlie administred (his spirit inwardlie concurringe therewith) converteth, edifieth, and saveth soules.”\textsuperscript{110} In a sense, for Hooker soteriological concerns were never far from his hermeneutical endeavors: the Bible was not primarily a theological weapon to be searched for supporting texts; it was at the heart of human transformation in salvation, a means of grace.

Keeping in mind the many factions present in this debate, it is evident that Hooker, as well as his colleagues, believed that a hermeneutical approach with a focus on practical application was essential. Thus the only way forward was a correct approach to dealing with the root of the problem: the authority of scripture and hermeneutics. McGrath, once again, is helpful in this regard, observing,

\textsuperscript{108} Lawes I.1.1; 1:56.7-12.  
\textsuperscript{109} Lawes V.16.1; 2:60:18-19  
\textsuperscript{110} Lawes V.21.5; 2:87:10-12. See below for a discussion of the internal witness of the Holy Spirit.
It will be obvious that the power struggles within early Protestantism concerned the question of who had the authority to interpret Scripture. Whoever was recognized as possessing that authority was *de facto* in control of the ideology — and hence the social and political views — of the various factions of the Reformation.\(^{111}\)

Here we find a deeper point of connection in the rival Protestant factions. While there was agreement that a return to a proper interpretation of the Bible was needed, another crucial imperative lay with *who* was a recognized authority. This insight manifests itself in Hooker’s approach to two specific ideologies which led to certain theological conclusions that did not help in developing an intelligent and sustainable biblical hermeneutic.

After Luther, the other most prominent reformer of the magisterial tradition was John Calvin (1509-1564).\(^{112}\) While his work and thinking around biblical hermeneutics will be dispersed through this thesis, it is helpful to mention him briefly at this stage. As noted earlier, the Reformed brand of Protestantism, according to Hooker, had come to be clearly equated with Calvin and his Continental followers.\(^{113}\) The divergent ideal on the Continent, and Calvin’s popularity, competed with what Hooker, and others, believed was needed for the prospering of the English ecclesial context. It became evident to Hooker that a Calvinistic bias had come to shape the debate and thus, as the *Dublin Fragments* reveal, Hooker challenges his critic,

Read my writings with the same minde you reade Mr. Calvines writings, beare yourself as unpartiall in the one as in the other; imagine him to speake that which I

\(^{111}\) McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 164.

\(^{112}\) We should not completely ignore the importance, in England and elsewhere, of the Zurich Reformers, Zwingli and Bullinger, whose works were used and admired, and of Peter Martyr and Martin Bucer who resided in England during a particularly important period. For one of the most authoritative works on John Calvin see François Wendel, *Calvin*. (London: Collins, 1965).

\(^{113}\) According to the work of Peter Marshal, “John Calvin and the English Catholics, c.1565-1640,” *The Historical Journal* 53, no. 4 (2010): 849-870. This popularity was not just a Protestant phenomenon, but also evident among English Catholics.
doe, lay aside your unindifferent minde, change but your spectacles, and I assure myself, that all will be cleerelie true….”114

Hooker knows all too well that some of his readers are suspicious and cannot seem to interact with ideas that are not clearly affirmed by Calvin, even if his own thoughts are not that far removed from what Calvin may have said, and even though he admired Calvin most for his biblical commentaries.115 This challenge would follow Hooker for most of his career, especially once he found himself leading the prominent Temple community: Calvin was a great man, but uncritical and unconditional loyalty led to bad conclusions on important English matters.

It is my suggestion that Hooker, although respectful of Calvin’s ideas, moved the conversation in a direction that caused the question of biblical authority, and especially the theme of *sola scriptura*, to be redefined. Moreover, his work and exegetical perceptiveness will insist that the Bible, if interpreted correctly, should stir readers toward a fresh paradigm which, when anchored in the love of God, can guide the church through the most difficult challenges. As he lucidly elucidates, “To seeke Reformation of evill lawes is a commendable endeavour, but for us the more necessarie is a spedie redresse of our selves. Wee have on all sides lost much of our first fervencie toward God….” Thus we must return to a seminal conversation, which leads to both correction and critiques of certain perspectives believing that something much greater should remain in focus throughout the process.

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115 Preface 2.8; FLE 1.10.28-33.
Revelation and Biblical Sufficiency

In addition to the challenges mentioned above, Luther and the Magisterial Reformers added a renewed focus as it related to the Bible as God’s revelation. Its logical implications suggest that if the church is corrupt it can in no way be reliable in recognizing the biblical canon’s authority. Thus, explaining how the Bible is God’s revelation and not the Church’s book is the next point Reformers needed to address. The larger context, especially for Hooker, is spelled out by Voak in remarking, “Since, for the Reformed, Christian doctrine is founded on Holy Scripture, and the Church has no authority to authenticate Scripture, this means that the Church has no principal authority itself in matters of doctrine.” Consequently, correct doctrinal positions were to flow directly from the pages of scripture making hermeneutics vital. To lack the clarity and certainty on a specific doctrinal matter was no longer an issue of the Church’s weakness or sinfulness, but a critique against the nature of God’s process of self-revelation.

Embracing the Bible as God’s revelation was not specifically a Protestant tenet. The church universal was convinced that the Bible be regarded as God’s very word. However the challenges that surfaced in the middle of the sixteenth century brought forth the need to revisit such a position. Grislis remarks how this impacted Hooker’s thinking: “Hooker demanded that the texts be classified according to their genre. The same text

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116 The Thirty Nine Articles (1571) emphasized that the sufficiency of scripture be upheld for doctrinal matters “necessary for salvation”. See Article VI, Entitled Of the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation. There was no claim, in this article, that scripture was sufficient for other matters of teaching or for Christian action, individual or corporate.


obviously does not speak of all the complex dimensions of faith!” 119 For Hooker, the fact that the Bible contained many genres of writing required a nuanced approach to understanding the Bible as revelation, and how these were to be understood was not always clear. For example, a parable is different from an historical narrative found in certain sections of the *Tanakh*. Particularly the multifaceted nature of the biblical revelation should not lead readers to mistakenly embrace every word as if commanded by God. In fact, Hillerdal points out how “Hooker, in spite of his general view on the lawfulness of God and on the Scripture as ‘the divine law’, frankly denies that all passages of the Bible are to be read as laws or statutes.”120

Hooker’s distinctive appeal to scripture’s revelatory nature and its limited reach are in tension for his own hermeneutical project, leading him to believe that his critics asserted a view of the Bible’s authority that misconstrued the very nature of scripture, and thus lacked a balanced approach. As noted earlier, for Hooker the Bible ‘contains’ the word of God and to push it any further carried things to an erroneous end. At its core, the danger with the Puritan understanding of the Bible is that it stretched its authority toward a form of bibliolatry. McGrade observes, “Although Hooker cites that Bible throughout *Lawes* [Book] I, he does not present it as the Bible, that is, as uniquely authoritative divine revelation, until chapter 11, two thirds of the way through.”121 This reminder is not meant to suggest that Hooker wants to hide his love for scripture, but rather to demonstrate that his approach to the Bible as an instrument of revelation is both subtle and important.

Moreover, Hooker’s commitment to the Bible as revelatory is rooted in its sufficiency, as it

was intended. This is seen in the title of Book I of the Lawes, “The sufficiency of Scripture unto the end for which it was instituted.”¹²²

For his developing hermeneutical scheme, Hooker will seek to situate the themes of biblical revelation and scriptural sufficiency as points of reference that can be trusted because of what is revealed in the narratives of scripture. Particularly in Book II of the Lawes, Hooker notes how Jesus himself provides a most helpful way to think about such issues, stating that Jesus says, “‘Though ye believe not me, believe my works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me and I in him’ (John 10:38). Does not such a formulation make it clear that our Saviour pointed out other grounds for belief than Scripture only?”¹²³ For Hooker, a proper interpretation of Jesus’ words points to a view of scriptural authority anchored in something much broader than the Bible. Consequently, if sola scriptura implied a complete knowledge of God’s revelation, new problems were soon to emerge. Not only did this not align with Hooker’s hermeneutical approach, it also seemed to neglect the need for both the role of the church’s wisdom and the use of reason to help shape the interpretative conclusion of the biblical text, especially if those interpretations needed correction.

The Bible demonstrated that sola scriptura needed to be grounded in a renewed sense of God’s trustworthy self-revelation, rather than a view that forced the Bible to be omni-competent. As noted above, the diverse attempts to understand the Bible as revelation, and the nuances therein, remained a significant point of contention. In addition, readers who were serious about studying the Bible had already learned that although God

¹²³ Lawes II.4.1; 1:152.5-9.
wanted to reveal himself through the Bible, he left us with a multifaceted book that required skilled interpreters who are fallible themselves. As Grislis carefully points out,

Hooker recognizes that a mere appeal — be it to reason or to Scripture — does not automatically produce truth. There is simply no theological method, however correct, that can itself ensure its own infallibly. Even when the best method is most judiciously employed, it yields, at the very best, only the highest probability that can be humanly achieved and is never beyond further debate.\(^{124}\)

Accordingly, to state that the Bible was God’s revelation was essential, but not enough to fix the challenges Hooker knew the church was facing.

When trying to distinguish between the complex aspects of the Bible, Hooker surmised, “Although the scripture of God therefore be stored with infinite varietie of matter in all kinds, although it abound with all sorts of laws…the principal intent of scripture is to deliver the laws of duties supernaturall.”\(^{125}\) In this one clear statement, Hooker highlights the obstacles that make the hermeneutical task so difficult. In so doing, he also anchors the issue in the Bible’s ‘principal intent’: providing ‘the laws of duties supernaturall’ which should not be doubted. In this sense, Hooker reveals an understanding of revelation with considerable precision. One of the challenges is the task of understanding the ‘infinite varietie’ and ‘all sorts of laws’. Nevertheless, this challenge should not negate the principal intent of the Bible. For Hooker then, sola scriptura meant the Bible’s unique authority on certain matters that he terms ‘duties supernaturall’. Hence, in holding to the centrality of this point one must be just as honest about lingering limitations found in the text and the drawbacks of a sinful interpreter.


\(^{125}\) Lawes, 1.14.1; 1:124.29-32.
Interestingly, Calvin will also address the issue of scriptural authority and its sufficiency. In exploring some of the divisive questions related to scriptural authority and ecclesial tensions Calvin pushes for a radical pneumatological approach which, he believes, should appease those questioning or doubting how the Bible finds its authority. Calvin’s underlying concern is with those who still strongly affirmed the role of the church and her intricate relationships as it related to biblical authority:

As to the question, How shall we be persuaded that it [the Bible] came from God without recurring to a decree of the church? It is just the same as if it were asked, How shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Scripture bears upon the face of it as clear evidence of its truth, as white and black do of their color, sweet and bitter of their taste.\footnote{John Calvin, \textit{Institutes of the Christian Religion}, trans. Henry Beveridge, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), Book 1. 7.2.}

Here Calvin pushes the theme of perspicuity—to use Arminius’ later term—beyond sheer clarity in the task of hermeneutics, but also believes in complete clarity, with evidence, as it relates to the Bible as canon. While Calvin does not point to a specific biblical text in this regard, he believes his readers should notice the ‘clear evidence’ of this truth. However, if God used such clarity with the Bible, making it unquestionable to those still struggling with such issues, why was not the same clarity evident in the process of interpretation?

One of the most important biblical references about the canon, and its unique purpose in matters of faith, is found in Paul writing to his protégée Timothy.\footnote{It is notable that in Book 1 of the \textit{Lawes} (1.14.1–4) Hooker made the following passage a significant part of his argument on scriptural sufficiency.} By way of encouragement he stated, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be
thoroughly equipped for every good work.” The biblical text is pivotal for all who were serious about embracing the authority of the Bible for a life of faith. Years earlier, St. Augustine preached in the Faustus Basilica exhorting his listeners,

The scriptures are holy, they are truthful, they are blameless. Every divinely inspired scripture is useful for teaching, for reproving, for exhortation, for doctrine (2 Tm 3:16). So we have no grounds at all for blaming scripture if we happen to deviate in any way because we haven’t understood it. When we do understand it, we are right. But when we are wrong because we haven’t understood it, we leave it in the right. When we have gone wrong, we don’t make the scripture wrong, but it continues to stand up straight and right, so that we may return to it for correction.

While Augustine will be examined in more depth later on in this dissertation, it is helpful to show this brief example of how he admitted the challenges inherent in discovering the right understanding, instead of the wrong one, in no way minimized the beauty and uprightness of the text. Hooker will pick up on the same themes when commenting on the Bible’s perfect reliability (sufficiency), notwithstanding its ambiguities and limitations.

In his own inquiring it remains significant that Hooker never references those verses in 2 Timothy 3:14-17 which state that all scripture is God-breathed, though he comes very close. While the above passage is never referenced in full, he selects verse 15b as his focus. In book I of the Lawes we find the larger context for Hooker’s use of this passage,

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128 2 Timothy 3:16,17. (NIV)
130 The text reads as follows “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NIV).
The mayne drift of the whole newe Testament is that which Saint John setteth downe as the purpose of his owne historie, ‘These things are written, the yee might believe that Jesus is Christ the Sonne of God, and that in believing yee might have life through his name.’ The drift of the old that which the Apostle mentioneth to Timothie, ‘The holie Scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation’\textsuperscript{131} (emphasis mine).

It is safe to assume that Hooker would have read the whole of chapter 3 of 2 Timothy, and felt that it was not necessary to reference verses 16 and 17, since his main argument for the Bible’s authority is its overarching narrative as referenced above. Subsequently, Hooker wants his readers to remember that the ‘holie scriptures’ are about wisdom and salvation, not about the other challenges many were focusing on. Therefore, Hooker’s referencing verse 15 reveals a crucial aspect of his bibliology. For Hooker, the Scriptures are holie and thus have a unique ability to guide readers, making them wise. The wisdom that Hooker is referring to is clearly soteriological. Hence, at the outset of the Lawes Hooker carefully presents some key ideas that he will emphasize more clearly in Book II. It seems that Hooker intentionally avoids using verses 16 and 17 lest they deter readers from the more important point at issue, which is indispensable for Hooker, salvation.

To emphasize the text beyond verse 15, would have moved the focus toward emphasizing the Bible itself rather than the purpose of the Bible. This is not Hooker’s concern since he is aware that outside of the soteriological vision scripture contains numerous texts that will be difficult to interpret and may actually seem contradictory. Grislis provides a salient point in this regard when he notes that “...while Hooker was deeply concerned about scriptural clarity and the best available precision, he was also

\textsuperscript{131} Lawes 1.14.4; While Atkinson, 96, and Grislis highlight Hooker’s use of this text, their dialogue seems to miss the point I’ve tried to make: The Articles of Religion do not mention the inspiration of scripture either.
aware that misunderstanding was sometimes inevitable.”\textsuperscript{132} Thus, for Hooker the focus on the role of the Bible and its place in the larger narrative needs to remain simple. God is saving his people and the Bible, in its entirety, points to that overarching narrative with complete clarity.

\textit{Concluding Thoughts}

The magisterial Reformers’ insistence that the authority of the Bible, over and above all other authorities, could provide clarity for reforming the church was admirable, yet simplistic. As theologians such as Hooker sought a nuanced and more careful articulation of \textit{sola scriptura}, there emerged numerous hermeneutical challenges, which formed the backdrop to the many disagreements of the sixteenth century ecclesial tradition. Hence, the dilemmas over correct interpretation quickly revealed Christianity’s love-hate relationships with hermeneutics. One might think that the incarnation, the human ‘enfleshment’ of God drawing near to his people, would in some ways have prevented such problems, and enhanced a fallible human dimension to the interpretation of scripture: if God’s word had taken on human weakness, should God’s word be thought to be immune from human fallibility?

Instead, the challenges that underlay the Reformation in Europe exposed significant tensions that were invigorated within Hooker’s English context. Many have attempted to pinpoint the essence of the Protestant Reformation, but its multilayered reality makes such a task superfluous. Nevertheless, it is safe to suggest that hermeneutics, and it ensuing

challenges and questions, remains extremely high on the scale of definitive subjects of the Reformation period.

As noted, it did not take long for the challenge of biblical interpretation to surface. Within years of the Lutheran Reformation, which was mostly contained in the German-speaking region, other significant figures were beginning to question Luther’s interpretation of certain biblical passages. This dynamic would be multiplied as the availability of the Bible became more prevalent in diverse geographical locations. Consequently, the second generation of Reformation leaders, especially John Calvin, would leave their stamp on the importance of biblical interpretation and ecclesial authority.

Approximately 50 years ago, Hillerdal suggested that, for Hooker, the way forward lay in a delicate intertwining of both reason and revelation. While this work will be examined in more detail later, it is an important reminder that Hooker believed the solution to such tensions was not simplistic. Instead, his proposed solution would come to hold many of these themes in tension. Furthermore, Hooker seeks to point his readers back to scripture when exploring these very tensions, and provides a biblical example of how reason does not necessarily negate the importance of the Bible as revelation.

Referencing Luke’s gospel, Hooker remarked how the disciples thought it appropriate, following biblical precedent, to call fire down from heaven because of their disgust with the Samaritans’ lack of belief. ‘When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”’ (Luke 9:51-56) Jesus rebukes them and continues on to his intended destination, Jerusalem. For

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Hooker, reason, as purposed in God’s laws, was minimized by the question of James and John, who acted deplorably foolish. Most significant are Hooker’s closing comments on his interpretation of this text: “in doing evil, [which is what the apostles wanted to do], we prefer a less good before a greater, the greatness whereof is by reason investigable, and may be known.”\textsuperscript{134} For Hooker, the biblical text as God’s revelation reveals ways that reason can be used to understand the God-honoring way to live.

This text seems to emphasize a point of contention between how revelation and reason were explored in the brewing reformed tradition. For example, Calvin, at the outset of his \textit{Institutes} states, “There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity…. God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty.”\textsuperscript{135} For Calvin, this natural instinct was made helpless by the impact of the fall, and thus sin’s destructive power was unleashed. In explaining this reality he writes,

In vain for us, therefore, does creation exhibit so many bright lamps lighted up to show forth the glory of its Author. Though they beam up us from every quarter, they are altogether insufficient of themselves to lead us into the right path. Some sparks, undoubtedly, they do throw out; but these are quenched before they can give forth brighter effulgence.\textsuperscript{136}

While Hooker is keenly aware of sin’s destructive nature, he tends to leave room for God’s ideal to still be discernible, disagreeing with Calvin therein. For him, because of God’s grace, sin has not made it impossible for reason and revelation to work together. Moreover, as Hillerdal notes, “All kinds of Calvinists in England had the idea in common

\textsuperscript{134} Lawes 1.7.7; 1:181.8-10.  
\textsuperscript{135} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, I.III.I.  
\textsuperscript{136} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 1. 14.
that revelation has provided the true knowledge of God, which cannot be reconciled with
the ideas of natural reason nor its very way of argumentation.”

Conversely, Hooker also dealt with those within the Roman Catholic Church who,
he believed, had come to minimize the role of the Bible as revelatory and thus ignored it on
many important fronts. One place where this is brought to the fore is in Hooker’s *First
Sermon on St. Jude*. Convinced that the eschatological and prophetic forth-telling nature of
scripture should in some sense accentuate its revelatory nature, he notes, “Touching the
manner, how men by the spirit of prophecie in holy Scripture have spoken and written of
things to come…God himself was their instructour, he himself taught them….“ For
Hooker, the writings found in scripture should clearly be seen as coming from God through
his servants.

Hooker’s sermon is an affront to Roman Catholics who seem to minimize the
authority of the Bible, causing some to have their faith weakened. More importantly, for
Hooker, some Catholics were in the process of claiming their authority solely on title and
not the living out of what he calls “the covenant of salt which is the Scripture.” This
biblical phrase suggesting a covenant of salt is a reference found only three times in
scripture, and is never used as reference to describe the Bible; yet Hooker does just that
in connection to his thoughts on the revelatory nature of scripture. It seems that Hooker is
trying to suggest that just as the covenants God made with his people were founded on the

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138 Hooker, “Jude,” 1.3; 5:15.6-18.
139 *Jude*, 1.15; 5:31.4-6.
140 2 Chronicles 3:15 are the reference that Hooker uses. It is also found in Numbers 18:19 &
Leviticus 2:13.
certainty and reliability of his word, so were his words in comparison to the Roman Catholics who were so thoroughly misguided.

In hopes of properly situating Hooker, the first chapter began with an exploration of some specific features of the English Reformation and its dominant personalities, to distinguish Hooker’s fellow Reformers, and his colleagues’ adamant expression about Hooker’s erring ways. These Puritans aggressively proposed a view of biblical authority that Hooker felt required highlighting as faulty. Hooker was convinced that the proposed hermeneutical paradigm suggested by these disciplinarians was an affront to the English monarchy, and the importance of the jurisdiction inherent in the political authorities of England. In so doing, he emphatically points out his intended outcome in stating,

Wherein our endeavour is not so much to overthrowe them with whome wee contend, as to yeeld them just and reasonable causes of those thinges, which, for want of due consideration heretofore, they misconceived, accusinge Lawes for mens oversights, imputing evels grown through peronsall defectes unto that which is not evell, framinge to some soares unholsome plasters, and applyinge other some where no soare is.\textsuperscript{141}

Whether Hooker underestimated the work required in this task is not clear, yet it is clear from his writing that his desire to provide ‘just and reasonable causes’ would be a long process requiring a robust explanation about his own hermeneutical method. In developing these themes, Hooker will approach the great voices of the past as a way of rooting his arguments in the broader Christian tradition.

With this in mind, chapter two will seek to follow Hooker’s thinking as he formulates a response to these concerns. If the magisterial Reformers agreed on anything it was that

\textsuperscript{141} Lawes V. 1.1.; 2:16.18-24.
the most authoritative voice for Christian theological reflection was that of St. Augustine. As reading Hooker will show, it was the Bishop of Hippo who also penned the most important work on biblical hermeneutics to be known at the time, *De Doctrina Christiana*. Accordingly, the next chapter will move the conversation to Augustine’s influence on Hooker, and some of the other prominent minds of the Middle Ages whose work formed aspects of Hooker’s thinking on the issue of biblical interpretation.
PART ONE

CHAPTER 2 — Hooker and the Hermeneutical Tradition

Introduction:

Although careful attention to hermeneutics is not novel within the larger Christian tradition, the theological challenges related to biblical interpretation that arose during the sixteenth century Reformation brought to prominence renewed and urgent concerns around correct interpretation. Moreover, the turmoil of the sixteenth century saw the emergence of a new focus on the principles of biblical interpretation itself. Anthony Thiselton has noted that, “In the face of Erasmus’ hesitancy about whether biblical interpretation remained too problematic and complex to allow any basis for action, in 1525 Martin Luther asserted its ‘clarity’.”

Thus, the tensions over biblical clarity and complexity became centrally related to hermeneutics. In this light, Luther and Erasmus remain symptomatic of a time when the issue of interpretive clarity and its achievability stirred contention, primarily, as addressed earlier, stemming from the Reformation conviction expressed in the phrase sola scriptura.

To begin, it will be helpful to provide a working definition of hermeneutics as it relates to Hooker’s thinking. Although Hooker and his contemporaries never used the term hermeneutics, he is aware of the task and its relation to biblical interpretation. In addition, he understands the challenges he must reflect on as part of his own approach. Accordingly, we will examine specific interactions with his interlocutors, the Puritans, who had

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significant influence in shaping his approach to biblical interpretation. Following that, I will suggest that Hooker’s thinking was shaped by some leading voices in the larger Christian hermeneutical tradition.\textsuperscript{143} Firstly, I will attempt to provide a coherent examination of some important shifts in relation to biblical interpretation that emerged in the late medieval era, in particular, the thinking of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and certain Thomistic leanings were appropriated by Hooker for his own approach to the Bible.

Kirby, in exploring similar themes, emphasizes the significance of recognizing a school of thought within Hookerian studies which affirms the Thomist dictum ‘grace comes not to destroy nature but to fulfill it, to perfect it’ as having a significant influence on Hooker’s approach to biblical interpretation.\textsuperscript{144} This excursus will seek to listen anew to the Thomistic influences in Hooker’s thought, and comment on how they shaped his hermeneutical outlook, with a focus on issues primarily dealing with Hooker’s views on revelation, reason and biblical authority. In elaborating on these insights within the pre-Reformation era, readers will come to identify how the evolution of Hooker’s exegetical framework found roots both in Thomistic scholasticism and Renaissance humanism.\textsuperscript{145}


These two formative movements and their return ad fontes played a significant role on Hooker’s overarching hermeneutical scheme.

Another key feature of this second chapter will be to illustrate how Hooker’s thoughts on biblical interpretation intersect with the historical past. With a keen focus on the Patristic era it will be the goal here to connect Hooker’s ideas with an important patristic voice as it relates to hermeneutics: Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Augustine remains unmatched as an ecclesial thinker, important for his perspective on numerous themes, including his thoughts on biblical interpretation. After a brief reflection on Augustine’s religious journey I will examine his influence on Hooker’s thinking, and how his watershed work on hermeneutics, De Doctrina Christiana,146 came to shape Hooker’s developing paradigm. It bears mentioning that De Doctrina Christiana was a work that carried significant clout during the Middle Ages, and thus would have been part of Hooker’s theological maturity. As Evans writes, “in De Doctrina Christiana, Augustine tackled several questions which were urgent in his time but which turned out to be important later too.”147

Augustine was pivotal in the reforming impetus led by the Magisterial Reformers. It has often been surmised that much of the Reformation tension was built on a debate between Augustine’s view of the church over and against Augustine’s view of grace. McGrath, commenting on these types of sixteenth-century issues observes,

In an age that witnessed a general revival of Augustinian studies, this new interest in Augustine must be regarded as an aspect of the Renaissance in general, rather

146 Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana, Gen. Ed. Henry Chadwick, ed. and trans. R.P.H.Green (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). All references will be from this work unless otherwise noted.
than as a feature peculiar to the Reformers. What was unquestionably new, however, is the use to which the Reformers put Augustine.\textsuperscript{148}

Importantly, this reference emphasizes Augustine’s vast influence, and formative role, in shaping the theological outlook of many reform thinkers including Hooker. Consequently, this second chapter will explore Hooker’s voice, as well as his indebtedness to preceding theological thinkers whose formative acumen concerning scriptural interpretation and biblical authority remained essential.

*Hermeneutics Defined*

Hooker does not provide a systematic theory of hermeneutics. Nevertheless, his use of specific hermeneutical principles in approaching the biblical text is lucidly visible. While four key hermeneutical themes will be the focus of a later chapter, it is important here to define a working definition of hermeneutics that remains consistent with the sixteenth century ethos. Specific to Hooker, Grislis reminds us:

> There is simply no theological method, however correct, that can itself ensure its own infallibility. Even when the best method is most judiciously employed, it yields, at the very best, only the highest probability that can be humanly achieved and is never beyond further debate.\textsuperscript{149}

Nonetheless, although Christians believed that God’s primary method of revealing himself was in human form (Hebrews 1.1-2), both the patristic and medieval periods celebrated ways to ascertain God’s will through revelation as found in the Bible. Chadwick offers an appropriate caution: “Ability to read and write has never been a prerequisite for faith and

\textsuperscript{148} McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 209.
\textsuperscript{149} Grislis, ‘The Hermeneutical Problem’, *Studies in Richard Hooker*, 179.
Thus, a textually centered approach was a move beyond the sheer experiential practices of the earliest days of the Christian faith.

Furthermore, the gospels reveal that the apostles came to the realization that they needed to re-interpret the Hebrew Bible through their conviction that Jesus really was the long awaited Messiah of Israel. Thus, hermeneutical practice quickly became another formative aspect of the nascent Christian community, who would return to the great narratives of the Scriptures in light of their experiences and claims that Jesus Christ had been resurrected. In exploring the earliest biblical testimonies Hooker writes,

The testimonies of God are true, the testimonies of God are perfect, and the testimonies of God are all sufficient unto that end for which they were given. Therefore accordingly we do receive them, we do not thinke that in them God hath omitted anything needful unto his purpose.  

Hooker remained acutely aware that he, as an interpreter of the biblical text, was dealing with testimonies of God, which he believed to be true and perfect.

Readers will find how Hooker expresses that his approach to hermeneutics is built on the Bible’s perfection. Hooker makes it a priority to define the Bible’s main purpose: to point people to the salvific way of Jesus. This is why it is perfect. In this regard, hermeneutics for Hooker is always teleological: it id pointed to the end of human salvation. As he states,

The mayne drift of the whole New Testament is that which Saint John setteth down as the purpose of his own history, These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is Christ the Son of God, and that in believing ye might have life through

151 Lawes II.8.5; 1:189.2-8.
his name (John 20.31). The drift of the old that which the Apostle mentioneth to Timothy, ‘The holy scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation.’ (2 Timothy 3.14) So that the general end both of old and new is one, the difference between them consisting in this, that the old did make wise by teaching salvation through Christ that should come, the new by teaching that Christ the Saviour is come, and that Jesus whom the Jews did crucify, and whom God did raise again from the dead is he.\textsuperscript{152}

Hence the larger goal of God’s intended vision for the Bible is what should shape one’s approach to the text. Consequently, if the end gets distorted or misconceived, so does one’s hermeneutical approach. This will be become part of Hooker critique of his Puritan contemporaries.

Another helpful point for defining Hooker’s view of hermeneutics is highlighted in an early sermon. Preaching on the book of Jude he writes, “God, which lightened thus the eyes of their [the Prophets] understanding giving them knowledge by unusuall and extraordinarie meanes, did also miraculously himself frame and fashion their wordes and writings….”\textsuperscript{153} It was formative for Hooker’s outlook that God spoke in such a way that his servants could understand and transmit their knowledge of His redemptive activity to future generations. In this sense, hermeneutics for Hooker should lead to a clearer sense of one’s ability to understand and accomplish God’s will. Yet, an important nuance in his approach is to steer clear of any method of interpretation that was so rigid and doctrinal that it clouded the reality that God has an expansive and beautiful salvific will for his people, and the Church of England.

For Hooker, developing an articulate approach to hermeneutics seemed more urgent than providing succinct theological definitions on these matters. The goal of his

\textsuperscript{152} Lawes I.14.4; 1:128.4-14.
\textsuperscript{153} Hooker, First Sermon on Jude, 4; 5:15.26-29.
hermeneutical method, if we can call it that, was to establish careful and sensitive interpretative outcomes. This raised Hooker’s awareness of the need for a multifaceted, rather than overly simplistic, approach to hermeneutics. In this regard, Hooker attempted to provide a view of biblical interpretation that left room for multiple renderings. This position is clearly illustrated in light of his dealings with that of his Puritan counterparts. Aware of their approach to biblical authority and scripture interpretation, he highlights their insistence on specific theological pillars that they aggressively sought to impose on others. In England, one of those issues was related to church discipline. While Luther and Calvin encouraged the need for discipline, it was the Puritan tradition, following Theodore Beza, that felt committed to its being a mark of the true church. Hooker, commenting on the Puritan position states,

But your Reformation which are of the Cleargie...seemeth to aime at a broader marke. Ye think that he which will perfectly reforme, must bring the form of church-discipline unto the state which then it was at. A thing neither possible, nor certain, nor absolutely convenient.”

Subsequently, Hooker continues to explore this point in more detail suggesting that some of the things clearly done in scripture are not ‘needefull’ and thus should be reconsidered. This is one of the most fundamental insights to defining Hooker’s hermeneutics vis-à-vis that of some of his contemporaries. As seen above, Hooker holds that a proper hermeneutic, although concerned with God’s actions in the past, should not lend itself to the discovering of some ecclesial ceremony, etched in a literal reading of the biblical narrative, which reinforces private exegetical practices. Hooker’s concern was that the emphasis on ‘discipline’ was not seen in the literal reading of text. This approach to the

154 Lawes, Pref. 4.4; I:22.1-5.
Bible made hermeneutics a type of mystery game where the winner is the one who ascertains the singular, right interpretation that fits a preconceived practice.

In the case of discipline, the fact that it was highly admired in Calvin’s Geneva was not a problem for Hooker; but when one favored theologian decides and defines the right interpretation and application for all churches, problems would soon emerge. Hooker was keen to recognize that this type of hermeneutical practice led to an outcome that “we should esteeme of any man above that which behoveth.”\textsuperscript{155} It is my suggestion that here, Hooker is referencing the Pauline warning of the early church that pinned one celebrated leader against another.\textsuperscript{156} Hooker proposed an approach to biblical interpretation that required careful discernment, which sought to listen to respected voices within the Christian tradition, but also take into consideration the local context of the interpreter. Therefore, he argued that one should not be seeking a strict return to what the early church supposedly did, without considering the larger ecclesial conversation and contextual realities. As will explored in chapter four, this is an essential underlying theme of how Hooker came to define his approach to biblical interpretation.

Egil Grislis provides some thoughtful perspectives as they relate to Hooker’s view of biblical authority and interpretation. In so doing he has suggested how Hooker’s approach to the hermeneutical process “invites further discussion and nurtures a climate of deliberation with seriousness and diligence.”\textsuperscript{157} My reading of Hooker demonstrates and confirms Grislis’ suggestion, while also revealing that Hooker believed one should define

\textsuperscript{155} Lawes, Pref. 4.8; I:27.9.
\textsuperscript{156} What I mean is this: One of you says, “I follow Paul”; another, “I follow Apollos”; another, “I follow Cephas”; still another, “I follow Christ.” 1 Corinthians 1:12.
the practice of biblical hermeneutics in a way that leaves room for diverse points of view to emerge, considering they did not directly impact orthodox teachings. Moreover, it was Hooker’s vision to develop an exegetical approach “universal” enough that it could also include some of the views held by erroneous Roman Catholics. This was so evident in his thinking that it is precisely what Travers recognized as suspicious in Hooker’s theological approach, and remains essential in situating Hooker beyond Continental Reformers.158

For Hooker, the above tensions are expounded when readers realize that it is the communal expression of the church interpreting the Bible, and not the Bible itself, that has shaped many of the doctrinal positions now deemed authoritative. By way of examples Hooker remarks,

For our beliefe in the Trinitie, the Coeternitie of the Sonne of God with his Father, the proceeding of the Spirit from the Father and the Sonne, the dutie of baptizing infants, these with such other principall points, the necessitie whereof is by none denied, are not withstanding in scripture no where to be found by expresse literall mention, only deduced they are out of scripture by collection.159

Thus, for Hooker a proper biblical hermeneutic carries an inherent communal and potentially universal dimension. As seen in the quote above, this approach was crucial since it fostered the resolution of the numerous difficult theological questions related to revelation and doctrine as the Christian creeds attest.

It may help to return briefly to the theme of revelation in Hooker’s writing, and to see how it may aid in defining the hermeneutical approach for Hooker. At the outset of Book I of the Lawes, Hooker provides readers with an overarching narrative of how God’s

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159 Lawes I.14.2: I:126.18-21. Article 6 did open the door to “derived from” as well as “found in” scripture with respect to matters “necessary to salvation”. It did not specify the limits of this “collection”.
self-revelation can be understood through the transmission of God’s story to following generations. He writes,

In the first age of the world God gave lawes unto our fathers, and by reason of the number of their daies their memories served in stead of bookes... After that the lives of men were shortned, meanes more durable to preserve the laws of God from oblivion and corruption grewe in use, not without precise direction from God himself.\textsuperscript{160}

For Hooker, God’s way of communicating remains consistent with humankind’s intended purpose and the epoch in which it is given. The initial approach, termed the first age,\textsuperscript{161} demonstrates how God had determined to convey his will and how transmitting that revelation rested upon memorization.

From the outset of his thinking, Hooker proposes a view of God’s revelatory purpose which is reliable yet inherently dynamic. Hence, hermeneutics begins with believing that the reliability of the text rests in God, and that the ordered model of laws given affirms God’s grandeur and faithfulness, even if one does not have the biblical text at one’s disposal. The preservation of those laws, according to Hooker, eventually required a written record. In this process, it is important to note that God’s involvement in this written process did not minimize the challenges of interpretation of the written record. Hooker and others were acutely aware of how difficult this issue remained when trying to understand God’s will. In this light, the communicative aspect of revelation is coupled with the interpretative or hermeneutical aspect of human investigation.

\textsuperscript{160}Lawes 1.13.1; I:122.7-16. This is not different from Calvin’s own account. Calvin held that initially materials in the Scriptures, had been passed down orally, “over a long succession of years” before being put into writing.” See William J. Bouwsma, John Calvin: a Sixteenth-Century Portrait (New York: Oxford, 1988), 119-124.

\textsuperscript{161}Perhaps this is referring to the times of Abraham and Joseph before Moses, the key figure in putting God’s commands down on tablets.
Returning to his Puritan contemporaries in Book II of the *Lawes*, Hooker explores how an extreme interpretation of *sola scriptura* contributes to certain overstatements found in their arguments, noting,

> For whereas God hath left sundry kindes of laws unto men, and by all those laws the actions of men are in some sort directed; they [Hooker’s adversaries] hold that one onely lawe, the scripture, must be the rule to direct in all things, even so farre as to the taking up of a rush or strawe.162

The opposition that Hooker encountered seemed to contradict the larger epistemic order he saw as foundational to his hermeneutical method. While Hooker embraced scripture’s authority, he quickly focused on those who posited a similar authority on their personal interpretation.

While Hooker will embrace the essential beauty of God’s expansive self-revelation, he also posited the fact that the process of biblical hermeneutics required a certain amount of critical thinking and careful discernment lest one’s method led to an aggrandizing of mere opinions, causing strife rather than godliness. As he remarks,

> Most sure it is, that when mens affections doe frame their opinions, they are in defense of error more earnest a great deale, then (for the most part) sound believers in the maintenance of truth apprehended according to the nature of that evidence which scripture yeeldeth: which being in some things plaine… in some things… more darke and doubtfull….163

> Albeit essential for Hooker to see the larger God-given narrative from which to interpret the text, he does not believe that this necessarily makes the interpretation process any easier. Plain and simple sin always lurks beneath the surface.

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162 *Lawes* II, 1.2; I: 145.10-15.

163 *Lawes* Preface, 3:10; I: 17.29-32
As a result, Hooker will insist that a proper understanding of biblical hermeneutics cannot be related to a simple or brief statement. As demonstrated, his approach to biblical hermeneutics found root in affirming the authority of scriptures, and celebrating the collective voice of the Christian church on many doctrinal issues not easily deduced through a simplistic reading of the Bible. McGrath remarks, “[d]uring the later Middle Ages, increasing emphasis came to be placed upon the role of the church as interpreter of Scripture. The authority of Scripture was guaranteed by the authority of its interpreter — the Church.” 164 This truth is helpful in situating Hooker’s developing approach.

The Middle Ages and the Hermeneutical Task

Pre-sixteenth century theological tradition remains a formative aspect of Hooker’s thinking when addressing the themes explored in this dissertation. Many of the complexities inherent in dealing with the correct interpretation of the biblical text, and emerging doctrinal disputes stemmed from struggles in the medieval era. An important aspect of hermeneutics not discussed thus far, and often celebrated in the Middle Ages, was allegory. As Bainton explains,

The allegory so dear to the Middle Ages, Luther almost entirely left behind. One could hardly expect him not to see in the Good Samaritan the figure of Christ, but in the case of turning water into wine he did not in medieval fashion equate the water with the Old Testament and the wine with the New…. 165

Specifically pertinent to Hooker, was the way allegory often lent itself to enforcing private interpretations that were not wholly reinforced in the broader biblical text. As he writes, “There is nothing more dangerous than this licentious and deluding art, which changeth the

meaning of words as alchemy doth or would do the substance of metals, maketh of anything that it listeth and bringeth in the end all truth to nothing.”\footnote{Lawes V.59.2; 2:259.5-8.} While Hooker does not state that allegory should be left behind, he was keenly aware of its dangers. Hooker steered clear of using allegorical interpretations, but as will be demonstrated, he does not always concern himself with the literal context as a primary resort.

We have seen how, for Hooker, hermeneutics should consist of characteristics which first embrace the larger voice of the church when dealing with the text. As a result, a rigid reading without room for contextual variations in the text, especially on matters of indifference, should be corrected. God’s approach is that he makes everything clear as it relates to the intended purpose of things created. This applies also to the biblical text, given to us to direct us to the perfect gift of salvation. This issue rests at the core of Hooker’s hermeneutical method and his larger overarching theological program. It is with these building blocks in place that a look at the medieval legacy and its impact on Hooker’s thinking becomes significant.

As it relates to biblical authority and scriptural interpretation the Middle Ages brought a renewed focus to certain discrepancies related to the understanding of the text. Textual errors in Jerome’s long-admired Vulgate created ripe soil for a new conversation about hermeneutics. As Evans posits, “[I]n the reformer’s view, this misapplication and misunderstanding [of the biblical text] had become a serious problem in the course of the Middle Ages.”\footnote{Evans, \textit{The Language and Logic of the Bible}, 21.} This season of instability caused numerous thinkers to seek new solutions to the lack of certainty they were experiencing. Diverse schools of thought attempted to posit new ways of resolving the anxiety by investigating more deeply the epistemological
concerns of the day: What could one truly know about life, reality and most of all God? Furthermore, what was the best approach to confidently affirming such knowledge claims?

The medieval ethos, and its impact on the role of biblical authority, was heightened at a Council of Florence in 1441. An outcome of this gathering was a deeper reflection on the far-reaching issues related to *sola scriptura*. Accordingly, Evans observes,

“Does the Bible contain everything necessary to salvation?” was a question on the agenda at the Council of Florence. The idea that the ‘church and scripture’ or ‘tradition and Scripture’ should be seen as complementary or as rivals, but anyway as distinct authorities rather than as a whole, emerged in the late Middle Ages.\(^{168}\)

Abelard’s work, *Sic and Non*, highlighted numerous apparent contradictions found within the biblical texts, causing many to wonder about proper interpretation and left much desire for clarity. It was this dynamic of the late Middle Ages that created the theological soil in which sixteenth century concerns and doubts would flourish.

Of particular import for this discussion are Aquinas’ insights, and the way in which they came to shape Hooker’s theological paradigm and hermeneutical approach. Aquinas had provided an account of core doctrine, the “*necessarium fidei*”\(^{169}\) that prefigures the doctrines “necessary to salvation” referred to in Article 6 of the Church of England, that is, those things “necessary to salvation” are those opinions about God, Christ and the Spirit found in Scripture taken literally, the *regula fidei*. These doctrines, Aquinas makes clear, may be found in scripture taken figuratively, but they are always found, somewhere in scripture, as interpreted literally.

In addition to Aquinas’ exegetical model it has been recognized that, in all probability, Aquinas’ discussion on the role of faith and reason was seminal for Hooker’s...

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\(^{168}\) Evans, *The Roots of the Reformation*, 179.

\(^{169}\) Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.1.10 ad 1: “nothing *necessary to faith* is contained under the spiritual sense which is not elsewhere put forward by the Scripture in its literal sense.”
thinking on biblical interpretation. For Aquinas, because both faith and reason are gifts from God, they should not be seen as polar opposites. Instead they were meant to work together, assisting individuals toward the greater good. In this sense, all truth comes from God. Hooker’s own exploration of such issues reads similarly:

we have endeavoured to make it appear, how in the nature of reason itself there is no impediment, but that the selfsame Spirit, which revealeth the things that God hath set down in his law, may also be thought to aid and direct men in finding out by the light of reason what laws are expedient to be made for the guiding of his Church, over and besides them that are in Scripture.

The ‘light of reason’, an important aspect of Hooker’s developing hermeneutical lens, is firmly grounded in a Thomistic approach to ascertaining knowledge of God’s ways. For Hooker, reason can shed light on matters previously darkened by sinful ignorance or confusion, and this is distinguishable by all humankind. Neelands provides a helpful reminder noting that, “For Hooker, as for Thomas, grace not only perfects nature, it presupposes nature, and Scripture presupposes reason.”

Grislis also adds an important note on how Hooker’s approach to biblical thinking anchored within the Thomistic framework is misunderstood, and thus lends itself to an anachronistic reading of other themes, asserting,

Hooker’s Thomistic ontology served well to distinguish between the two divine realms: nature and supernature, that is reason and revelation. Providentially sustained complementariness assured the distinctiveness of both. Wherever this

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170 See Peter Munz, The Place of Hooker in the History of Thought (Routledge & Paul, 1952). Here we read an assessment of how reason is so prominent in Hooker’s thinking it actually becomes problematic.  
171 Lawes III.8.18; 1:235.6-11.  
central orientation of Hooker’s thought is overlooked, the temptation seems to arise to dislodge Hooker from his religious framework.173

In this passage, Grislis sheds light on the importance of this tension in Hooker’s thinking and how crucial it is to understanding the larger themes in Hooker’s work.

In addition, Thomistic emphasis on harmony between reason and faith finds fruition in Hooker’s larger picture of laws, as expounded in Book I of the Lawes. For Hooker there is a “reasonableness” that can be detected because of God’s embedding his own orderliness into the created order, and in the laws we can deduce from creation. Thus, he has constituted into his non-human creation stimulus to knowledge, although limited, to help his creation. Hooker writes,

> But that wee may at the length conclude this fyrst generall introduction unto nature and originall birth as of all other lawes, so likewise of those which the sacred Scripture conteyneth, concerning the author whereof, even infidels have confessed, that he can neyther erre nor deceive.174

Thus, for Hooker, it was God’s intended plan to reveal lawes both in creation and scriptures, and those he calls infidels, that is, unbelievers, can ascertain those God-given laws without having to read the Bible.

Hooker’s critics deduced otherwise, and thus believed that sinful disobedience rendered reason helpless in many regards, including the ability for one to reflect on a divine being as the creator of ordered laws. According to Hooker this erroneous position inadvertently made the Bible a type of ‘catch all’ book as it related to matters of knowledge. If the Bible was embraced as the one and solely reliable place to understand God’s larger vision, then cultural differences, or matters indifferent, were raised to the

174 Lawes I.15.4, 1:123.21-25.
place of highest authority cluttering what Hooker believed was God’s intended, perfect use of the Bible: to point people to salvation.

The Thomistic positions related to reason and authority were part of large and diverse streams of thought which were the breeding ground from which the Reformation would emerge. As assessed by his contemporaries, Hooker attempted to work through his philosophical questions in light of Reformation ideals. For some, his conclusions seemed ‘unprotestant’. A particular group of the authors penned a work entitled, *A Christian Letter* (1599), which compared Hooker’s writing with the Church of England’s Articles of Religion. Their claim was that they had the most accurate assessment, and that Hooker’s optimistic view of reason led to one’s use of “free will”.

Neelands elaborates on these concerns, stating that “[t]he emergence of sin, in both angels and human beings is therefore a contingent consequence of God’s providence: it was not necessitated, but it came through a voluntary choice, in the exercise of the gift of liberty, which God’s permissive will allowed”.

Prior to *A Christian Letter*, the distinguished Walter Travers (1548–1635), was insistent that Hooker’s thoughts were overly dependent on medieval forms of thought. Both Travers and the authors of the *Letter* were also disconcerted by Hooker’s use of Aristotelian logic and scholastic themes they associated with the medieval papacy. Moreover, they contended that Hooker’s appreciation of many medieval thinkers lent itself

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175 Lawes, I.7.6; 1:79.27-30.
176 Neelands. ‘Predestination.’ in *A Companion*, ed. Torrance Kirby, (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 185-219. Also, as Hooker writes, “Choice there is not unlesse the thing which we take be so in our power that we might have refused and left it.” Lawes, 1.7.2; 1:77.29,30.
to other significant problems. They highlighted these themes most emphatically in their attack on Hooker, stating,

Reason is highlie sett up against holie scripture, and reading against preaching; the church of Rome favourablie admitted to bee of the house of God; Calvin with the reformed churches full of faults; and most of all they which indevoured to be most removed from conformitie with the church of Rome; Almost all the principall pointes of our English creede, greatlie shaken and contradicted.\textsuperscript{178}

Thus, it is short-sighted to attempt an understanding the Lawes, while at the same time ignoring the influence of some of the prominent concepts he inherited from the late Middle Ages.

Although shaped by Aquinas and other theological voices of the Middles Ages, what seems to be ignored by many who continue to study Hooker and his views on reason is his use of reason. Hooker weaves a reasonable explanation of important biblical texts when describing one’s relationship to God, demonstrating how this can be ascertained by carefully expounding the biblical text. This lacuna, I believe, has caused many to underappreciate Hooker’s interaction with the biblical narratives in developing his views on reason. In illustrating his view, he points to a God who is himself reasonable and ordered in his actions. He returns to the words of Jesus in the gospel of John, “God therefore is a law both to himselfe, and to all other things besides. To himself he is a law in all those things, whereof our Saviour speakeith, saying, ‘My Father worketh as yet, so do I. God worketh nothing without cause.’”\textsuperscript{179} For Hooker, the pattern of God’s rationality is modeled by Jesus who is clear and ordered in his mission. Continuing on, he adds, “The generall end of Gods externall working, is the exercise of his most glorious and most abundant vertue: Which abundance doth shew it selfe in varietie, and for that cause this varieite is oftentimes

\textsuperscript{178} Christian Letter 4:67.1-6.
\textsuperscript{179} Lawes I.2.3; 1:60.18-20.
in scripture exprest by the name of riches.”180 Hence, the importance of the great hermeneutical tradition being discussed in this chapter should not eclipse Hooker’s own exegetical developments in interacting with the biblical text.181

There remains an ongoing debate within Hookerian studies, due to his heightened hopefulness about the abilities of human reason, as to whether Hooker’s approach embraced and supported humanist and scholastic ideals. In addition, should these views cement him as a “forerunner” to the via media tradition which caused him to chart a reforming expression in England that differed from the other magisterial ones? Gibbs, Porter and Neelands are some of the leading voices who continue to propose that Hooker’s appreciation of the natural law tradition and the role of reason situates Hooker in some tension with the classical magisterial framework.182 Gibbs goes as far as stating, “It is Hooker who retains the rightful claim to be the first to give this complex and highly dialectical via media way of doing theology its most coherent and systematic expression.”183

Contrarily, Kirby and Atkinson continue to propose that Hooker’s perspective *is* consistent with Luther’s view on natural law, as well as Calvin’s, and thus sternly oppose any position which may align Hooker with the values of the via media tradition. Atkinson is convinced that Hooker’s own claim is that he is defending the Reformation positions

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180 *Laws* I.2.4; 1.61.6-9. Here we see biblical references such as Ephesians 1.7, Philippians 4:19, Colossians 2:3, Romans 11:33, Proverbs 16:4, which have all shaped Hooker’s thoughts as seen in this section.

181 See Neelands on Thomas Aquinas who had shown the superiority of Scripture over reason in the opening question of the *Summa Theologiae*.


183 Gibbs goes as far as stating, “It is Hooker who retains the rightful claim to be the first to give this complex and highly dialectical via media way of doing theology its most coherent and systematic expression.” See Lee Gibbs, “Richard Hooker’s Via Media Doctrine of Scripture and Tradition”, 228.
against the radical Reformed extremists who penned *A Christian Letter*.\(^{184}\) In this vein Atkinson claims that “the continental Reformers were unanimous in their rejection of medieval scholasticism because it had become corrupted by a dependence upon Aristotle.”\(^{185}\) While this can be agreed upon, Hooker does not always feel the same reluctance in appropriating medieval themes into his theological schema. Atkinson’s argument is based on what he believes was a misinterpretation of Hooker by the anonymous author. Simply put, Atkinson and Kirby believe that Hooker’s critics have misunderstood him, and are thus misguided in their interpretation of his theological predilections. Therefore their accusation should be seen as polemical ‘lies’, rather than substantive and honest reflections of Hooker’s thoughts. With the deepest respect, it seems that this approach remains too simplistic since, as some of Hooker’s writings show, he actually affirmed some of the things he was being accused of. Specifically, Hooker was insistent that reason had an essential revelatory place in our understanding God and our ability to truly understand the Bible.\(^{186}\)

What is perhaps the underlying contention here is the issue of theological clarity. For Hooker, reason and its impact on biblical understanding never implied the type of certainty prevalent among some other Reformers of his day. The conviction that scripture was perspicuous was the underpinning of Luther’s and Calvin’s movement especially on doctrinal matters. This helped to push the theological trajectory of the Reformation away for the hierarchal voices of the Roman Catholic Church and back to the biblical text.

\(^{184}\) Atkinson, *Richard Hooker and Authority*, 1.

\(^{185}\) *Ibid*, 4.

\(^{186}\) Hooker also points to Augustine, whom we will discuss later in this chapter, as an advocate for his understanding of reason. He writes “To refuse the conduct of the light of nature, saith Saint Augustine, is not folly alone but accompanied with impietie…Out of the precepts of the lawe of nature as out of certain common and undemonstrable principles, mans reason doth necessarily proceede unto certain more particular determinations.” *Lawes* 3.9.2; I.236, 37.20-24.
Atkinson proposes that depending on which of Luther’s writings one chooses there are parts of the reformer’s writings that seem to embrace reason’s limited role and others in which that is not the case. One of the ways some believe this issue can be resolved is to see “reason” as the ability to understand the there is a creator; but that only a supernatural imputation of faith can move one to the place of understanding their need for a God as “redeemer”. Kirby writes that, “Accordingly to Luther, God rules through the Gospel as redeemer and through the law as creator”.

While Hooker’s writing aligns with the above points, there is also something in his theological development to suggest that reason, because it is a gift from God, provides humanity with an interpretative lens which not only leaves one enamored with the created order, but instills a vision to seek for something beyond, another of God’s mercies which stirs individuals with the notion that a redeemer is available and needed. For Hooker it seems inconsistent that a God who “can have no shew or cullor of mutabilities”, and who sent his Son to proclaim his goodness, never allows the use of reason to point people to their need for a redeemer.

It seems that the strict lines that divide God between creator and redeemer in Luther’s thinking are not as hard and fast in Hooker’s approach. Once again, it was Hooker’s engagement with the biblical text that fostered this tension. In his reading of Acts 17:28, Hooker remarks that those who do not know God as redeemer are encouraged, through the reasonableness of poets, to consider that ‘in him wee live, move and are.”

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187 Atkinson, *Richard Hooker and Authority*, 20. Here we are introduced to the important two Kingdoms.
189 *Lawes*, I.3.4.; I.67.16-18.
Thus, the one who has created all things is present and available not only for a rational dialogue about physics, but also for a relational interaction guided by reason and faith. Hooker comments on how humans can grow in their knowledge of God by seeking to grow in the knowledge of God. He writes: “Education and instruction are the meanes, the one by use, the other by precept to make our natural faculty of reason, both the better and the sooner able to judge rightly between truth and error, good and evil.”\textsuperscript{190} This pursuit, in Hooker’s theological orientation, is undeniably a fresh sanguine expression of promise which would inform his hermeneutical approach vis-à-vis the more pessimistic outlook of reason’s usefulness within the broader Reformation tradition.

Once again, Hooker posits that one’s approach to biblical interpretation must embrace this gift of reason and a proper use of it to exegete certain texts. Although this theme will be explored in more detail in chapter 4, Hooker’s use of Deuteronomy 30:19 to emphasize how God’s demands on his people require their use reason and freewill, is noteworthy.\textsuperscript{191} Consequently, Hooker’s approach to biblical interpretation, although he was conscious of the fall of humankind, paints a picture of a God who invites Moses, his servant, to use reason in discerning issues for his own context. Emphasizing the type of knowledge reason can offer, he states that God, speaking through Moses, tells the people, “Beholde sayth Moses, I have set before you this day good and evil, life and death...Choose life, that is to say, the thinges that tend unto life, them choose.”\textsuperscript{192}

\textsuperscript{190} Lawes, 1.6.5; 1:76. 20–24. Also, Hooker will state, “Goodnesse is seene with the eye of the understanding. And the light of that eye, is reason.” Lawes, 1.7.2; 1:78.3.4.

\textsuperscript{191} Another example of how Hooker’s thinking differed from other Reformers who aggressively argued that the will of a person was bound, and totally helpless on making God-honoring decisions. See Luther’s Works, The Freedom of a Christian (vol. 31); Bondage of the Will. (vol. 33).

\textsuperscript{192} Lawes, 1.7.2; 1:78. 6-10.
For Hooker, reason can point individuals to God’s best for them, but it does require God’s enlivened spirit to assist the sinful will in the pursuit of that God-giving vision. Hence, his positive view never minimizes the need for God’s grace, and he continues to demonstrate how the Bible emphasizes the importance of reason. For example, in Book I, Hooker develops an attack against an idolatry that makes us blind to our errors, astutely returning to the prophet Isaiah. Hooker writes, “And this cause [being idolatry] is mentioned by the prophet Esay [Isaiah], speaking of the ignorance of idolators, who see not how the manifest law of reason condemneth their grosse iniquitie and sin.”

This is a foundational insight, since for Hooker, reason, when guided by God, has the ability to reveal sin and bring correction. While for many this correcting feature is specifically attributed to the Bible alone, Hooker makes it a characteristic of reason’s use in the hermeneutical process as well.

At the onset of this second chapter it has been important to explore ideas, which because of their strength in shaping the theological landscape of the medieval world, came to inform Hooker’s thinking about biblical interpretation. Specially, it was essential to elaborate on Aquinas and the ways Hooker melded his thoughts into his brewing Reformation vision. Subsequently, it has also been helpful to investigate Hooker’s thoughts on reason, and its efficacy for his developing hermeneutics. Although the Reformation’s adamant commitment to sola scriptura proposed a solution to the theological impasse of the late medieval period, this return to the authority of the Bible came with inherent challenges. Hooker’s expansive paradigm embraced the use of reason in hopes of dealing with these challenges, while demonstrating an ability to discern how God’s glory is

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193 Lawes 1.8.11; 1:93.1-5.
accentuated when reason recognizes God’s handiwork both in scripture, and through God’s lawful and ordered creation.\textsuperscript{194}

It was not only his careful reading of the Bible which reinforced this theme in Hooker’s overarching theological worldview, but his interactions with other trusted theologians. One that had a formative impact on Hooker’s understanding of how reason informed the hermeneutical process was St. Augustine. Ingalls writes: “It is helpful to recall that Hooker’s description of the nature of original sin as a kind of sloth with respect to reason is substantially Augustinian.”\textsuperscript{195} It is around this type of theological inquiry that his own contemporaries, and especially his detractors, found considerable fodder for criticism of him. As a way of dealing with the critiques, Hooker demonstrates his commitment to the larger Christian theological tradition by anchoring his hermeneutical paradigm within the foundational ideas of St. Augustine.

\textit{Saint Augustine and his Hermeneutical Legacy}

Turning now to Augustine, a thinker that was the subject of much attention in the sixteenth century, and, as one author posits, “traces of his influence can be found everywhere.”\textsuperscript{196} Augustine, an experienced \textit{viator} of the Christian tradition, had his writings and theological acumen celebrated by numerous authorities of both the Middle Ages and the Reformation era. In addition, his tumultuous life led to numerous tensions

\textsuperscript{194} “When everything that is said and done, is said and done in accordance with God’s Word, then the glory of Christ and God will be done to all eternity.” \textit{Luther’s Works}, 5:291-301. In this sense, Hooker’s vision and Luther’s approach stand on similar footing.

\textsuperscript{195} Ranall, Ingalls, ‘Sin and Grace’, \textit{A Companion to Richard Hooker}, 179.

that would stretch his theological framework. Consequently, situating Augustine within his own context is a helpful starting point. As one author remarks,

To appreciate the hermeneutical attitude of Augustine, one has to be aware of two facts: His attitude underwent a certain change during his life...[and] in his later life he became increasingly interested in the literal meaning of the Bible, but he never abandoned the spiritual one.\footnote{Karla Pollmann, ‘Hermeneutical Presuppostitions,’ in Augustine Through the Ages, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, MI. and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1999), 426-429,426. Neelands notes a key shift in Augustine’s thinking as it relates to predestination when he writes, “Although Augustine initially accounted for election because of foreseen faith, he later came to see that it was entirely favour, liberality and grace that determined the act of the will of God to elect some and justice that determined the act of the will of God to condemn those not chosen.” David Neelands, ‘Predestination’, in A Companion, 200.}

After exploring some of Augustine’s pivotal life changes, it will be our focus to highlight some of the salient aspects of his hermeneutical influence. In this regard, it is my hope, to avoid anachronistic tendencies to read Augustine through strict confessional lenses often characterized by the Reformation shift. In exploring some challenges that pre-dated the Reformation, we will examine how Augustine’s return to the Catholic Church brought renewed attention to the theme of hermeneutics pertinent to Hooker and other Magisterial Reformers.\footnote{Calvin, Institutes. 2.8.54. Calvin also makes reference at this point to De Doctrina.}

This exploration of Augustine’s ideas and his theological perspective concerning biblical interpretation formed an invaluable resource to Hooker in attempting to tackle the struggles of his day. Following in the Reformation tradition, Hooker borrowed and massaged Augustine’s thoughts into his own developing scheme,\footnote{McGrade remarks of Hooker’s 852 patristic references that Augustine dominates all other patristic authors. See A.S. McGrade, “Classical, Patristic and Medieval Sources,” in A Companion to Richard Hooker, ed. Torrance, Kirby (Brill: 2008), 52.} helping reinforce his commitment to authority of the patristic voices of the Church.\footnote{See William Haugaard, “Renaissance Patristic Scholarship and Theology in Sixteenth-Century England,” Sixteenth Century Journal 10 no. 3 (Autumn, 1979): 37–60.} The use of St. Augustine’s thoughts was a polemical device prevalent during the Reformation period. Calvin felt it
necessary to counter the use of Augustine, weakening the Calvinist approach to biblical authority. It became an essential characteristic of the Reformation tradition to show how the need for reform was not novel, but truly part of the great apostolic heritage grounded in the patristic tradition. In 1517 Luther, as expounded by Hendrix, stated “Our theology and St. Augustine are progressing well, and with God’s help rule at our university. Aristotle is gradually falling from his throne, and his final doom is only a matter of time.”

Originality was equated with divergence from the great virtues and practices of antiquity, and so it remained an essential challenge of the earliest Reformers to anchor the dissent against the Roman Catholic Church within the larger Christian story. For this reason, Hooker himself will return to the great patristic voices. As McGrade points out, patristic references exemplify his vast knowledge of the early Christian theological tradition. Moreover, as Ingalls observed, Hooker’s appropriating of Augustine seems primarily located in the soteriological debates of the time. While noteworthy, I believe there remain aspects of Augustine’s insight on biblical interpretation that impact Hooker’s views which can be easily overlooked. Hence, the focus of this latter section of chapter two will comment on Hooker’s use of Augustine as it pertained to the theme of hermeneutics.

Although Hooker will reference Augustine only sparingly, this reticence has not stopped scholars from observing Hooker’s indebtedness to the great western doctor. Kirby remarks: “In his classically ‘reformed’ formulation of the doctrine of justification by faith

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201 Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 1,7.3.
202 Scott Hendrix, ‘Luther’ in *Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*. 39-56, 41
203 “Patristic sources are...dominant when Hooker presents the history of a devotional practice as context for assessing its current value, for example, the chapters on liturgical reading of Scripture, the litany, the Athanasian creed and *gloria Patri*, the sign of the cross in baptism, and public fast.” McGrade, “Classical, Patristic, and Medieval Sources,” in *A Companion*, 68.
alone, Hooker embraces a thoroughly Augustinian ontology, psychology and theological anthropology.  

Furthermore, Thompson notes that Hooker’s political theology was a byproduct of reading Augustine,

Hooker’s theory of society and government may be described in very general terms…as an attempt to reconcile Aristotle’s concept of the state as a natural institution with the traditional Augustinian doctrine of the church that government is a consequence of the Fall.

These observations reaffirm the need to locate Hooker’s thoughts within the rich theological legacy of the early church, while appreciating his use of these sources for challenges of his milieu. It is clear that as a major voice within the early English Reformation, Hooker would have wrestled with the ideas of his predecessors while rearticulating the best of those ideas for his present situation. In so doing, he adapted important themes related to biblical authority and scriptural interpretation in a way that would meet the needs of his day.

One of the most important aspects of Augustine’s impact on Hooker’s hermeneutics revolves around De Doctrina Christiana, Augustine’s most authoritative work on biblical interpretation. Highlighting a pastoral aspect that would have guided Hooker’s thinking, O’Donnell remarks that De Doctrina is “the first book he tried to write shortly after his ordination…a manual prescribing how to do the thing that he was doing but finding difficult: scriptural interpretation.”

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205 Kirby, Richard Hooker, Reformer and Platonist, 33.
While Hooker cites this work only once,\textsuperscript{208} it is clear that Augustine’s influence on his theological approach to biblical interpretation was far-reaching. In the reference mentioned above, Hooker points to Augustine’s thoughts concerning the tension between the particular changing mores of the church over and against the universal rule to love God and neighbor. For Hooker, Augustine’s views are helpful in his developing conversation with the Puritans, a group who believed that all details of ecclesial life needed to be found in the Bible.

What is noteworthy about Augustine’s comments is that they are a reiteration of important thoughts from the scripture as expounded in Ephesians 4. Accordingly, the views developed in \textit{De Doctrina} stemmed from Augustine’s experience as an orator and Bible preacher, which would be an incredible help for Hooker. This also coincides with similar challenges resident in Hooker’s journey as Bible teacher. Vickers states, “As an ordained Church of England priest Hooker was confronted with rhetoric not only as a mode of reading and composing secular literature, but as an aid to reading the Bible and as a central discipline in preaching.”\textsuperscript{209}

In his later years, Augustine asserted that, “The man who fears God seeks diligently in Holy Scripture for knowledge of His will.”\textsuperscript{210} Hooker, in a similar vein, must return to the Bible with diligence to discern the will of God for his community and the broader concerns of the English Church. As Ingalls keenly notes, “For Augustine as for Hooker, the

\textsuperscript{208} \textit{Lawes}, I.8.10;1:91.5-11. A reference to \textit{De Doctrina} Book III.14.52.

\textsuperscript{209} Brian Vickers, ‘Public and Private Rhetoric,’ \textit{Richard Hooker and the Construction of Christian Community}, Edited by Arthur Stephen McGrade. (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1997), vol. 165, 98. Following such thoughts Vickers points to the fact that it was Augustine’s use and endorsement of classical rhetorical as a hermeneutical aid in book IV of \textit{De Doctrina}, which also helped Hooker’s apology.

\textsuperscript{210} \textit{De Doctrina Christiana}, Book III,1.1.
purpose of human reason is to discern the ‘best’ interpretation which could assist the ecclesial dilemmas one faced.” For Hooker, in particular, this brought to the fore his struggle concerning ecclesial polity. The Episcopal framework of the English church was clearly under attack by Puritan contemporaries. It was their hermeneutical methodology that Hooker has in mind when he writes, “Deceived greatly they are therefore, who think that all they whose names are cited amongst the favourers of this cause [being Eldership], are on any such verdict agreed”. This insight points to Hooker’s need to return to the Bible, and to appropriate writers such as Augustine whose wisdom garnered formative appeal. Readers should appreciate that Augustine’s own hermeneutical development was multifaceted. From the commencement of his religious journey his interactions with Manichaeism caused him to experience specific disagreement on the interpretation of the same biblical texts. Here Augustine found himself embroiled in a battle over the role of canonicity and the authority of the church. While Hooker will not face this type of tension, he does address, as we have seen, how to formulate a robust view of biblical canonicity.

Other formidable foes to the development of Augustine’s thoughts were the schismatics known as the Donatists. Although they did not profess a different creed from Augustine and his church, they were completely separated from its community. I think it noteworthy that Augustine attempted to model an admirable approach to biblical authority, which crossed dissenting theological lines in his applause of a significant Donatist thinker and his hermeneutical shrewdness. In De Doctrina Christiana Augustine demonstrates

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211 Ranall Ingalls. ‘Sin and Grace’ A Companion, 173.
212 Lawes Pref. 4.6. 1:25.25-30.
213 See St. Augustine. Against the Donatists. Chapter 9.12. Porter remarks that even during the pivotal 1570 debate between Whitgift and Cartwright one of the issues raised was “the relationship of the Puritans to the Donatists and the Cathari.” Hooker, the Tudor Constitution, and the Via Media in Essays, 98.
considerable agreement with Tyconius, a Donatist scholar and preacher, who left an
indelible mark on Augustine’s hermeneutical development. Perhaps it is a similar openness
to difference of opinion that helped Hooker accept Roman Catholics, who, although in
error, should not be demonized when their attempts at proper theological reflection is
evident.

The issues mentioned above remain relevant in helping readers understand the
larger goal of highlighting prominent aspects of Augustine’s hermeneutical journey and
Hooker’s attempts to appropriate these ideas for his use. As demonstrated in Book III of the
Lawes, Hooker buffers his argument with a comment from Augustine, addressing the
tension between ecclesial practices stated in scripture and those developed by the church.
He writes, “For in these things whereof the scripture appointeth no certaintie, the use of the
people of God or the ordinances of our Fathers must serve for a law.”214 As noted,
Augustine and Hooker both understood that scripture was not the only guide in shaping the
ecclesial practices of the church. In this light, sola scriptura could not be seen as all
encompassing when managing different aspects of ecclesial life. Augustine’s embrace of
scripture as authoritative emerged slowly in the earliest recollections he stated,

When I first read those Scriptures…they seemed to me unworthy to be compared
with the majesty of Cicero. My conceit was repelled by their simplicity, and I had
not the mind to penetrate into their depths. They were indeed of a nature to grow in
Your little ones. But I could not bear to be a little one; I was only swollen with
pride, but to myself I seemed a very big man.215

214 Lawes, 3.11.15; 1:262. 5-10. Compare the references to Augustine as a guide to ceremonies and
the number of the sacraments, Letters LIV and LV. Replies to Questions of Januarius, in the Preface to the
Book of Common Prayer, and in Article 26 of the Forty-Two Articles 1553. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,
series one, vol. 1, p. 415.
215 Augustine. Confessions 3.5.9.
The ancient world regarded the prose and rhetoric of esteemed Roman writers, such as Cicero, as the standard of excellence.\textsuperscript{216} Augustine was no exception, thus his honesty should not come as a surprise. Yet, he would soon find himself convinced that when it comes to the Bible, one’s attitude in approaching the text is a precondition to embracing its truth. This self discovery is encapsulated by Augustine’s remarks that, “There are certain rules for interpreting the scriptures which, as I am well aware, can usefully be passed on to those with an appetite for such study.”\textsuperscript{217} A predisposition for study, and the rules for interpretation, are part of Augustine’s earliest explorations on hermeneutics.

A shift in Augustine’s approach to scripture can be located with his recommitment to the Catholic faith. This is worth noting since Augustine was aware of how ecclesiology and bibliology shape each other, thus prohibiting our inclination to read Augustine through the lens of an individualistic modern approach to scriptural interpretation. As a minister of the word of God, he found a renewed vision for what the Bible could teach people.\textsuperscript{218} This was a remarkable shift from his previously mentioned position during his days as a Manichean when he was convinced that the scriptures were filled with arcane and unsound principles. Here, Hooker’s thoughts align, since he also believed that one’s ecclesiology informs one’s approach to the Bible.

Consequently, because of his newfound love in the Christian scriptures, Augustine will emphasize the importance of preaching and apologetics. Again readers will find a similarity between Hooker and Augustine’s approach here. Both found themselves, albeit

\textsuperscript{216} Grislis explores such issues in ‘Calvin’s Use of Cicero in the Institutes’ 1:1-5 - A Case Study in Theological Method. (Gutersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1971), 62.
\textsuperscript{217} \textit{De Doctrina}, Pref. 1.
\textsuperscript{218} La Bonnardiere, in \textit{Augustine and the Bible} observes “It is not accidental that he loved to cite the following words ‘Preach the word, be urgent in season and out (2 Tim 4:2)....” Anne-Marie La Bonnardiere, ‘Augustine, Minister of the Word of God,’ in \textit{Augustine and the Bible}, ed. and trans. Pamela Bright (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 245.
differing in some respects using the Bible to formulate responses for the challenges and
against dissenters of their day: Hooker defending the authority of the Elizabethan structure,
and Augustine that of the Latin Catholic Church. For Hooker, Augustine’s vision of the
church, and his heightened awareness of biblical interpretation, stand at the center of his
own theological project, holding both medieval themes and patristic concerns in mind as he
develops his views. Perhaps, Diarmaid MacCulloch’s observation captures these cogent
ideas best when he states,

When Martin Luther and other theologians in his generation recalled the Church to
Augustine’s soteriology, western Christians would have to decide for themselves
which aspect of his thought mattered more: his emphasis on obedience to the
Catholic Church or his discussion of salvation.²¹⁹

For Hooker hermeneutical challenges never obliterated the former, but with a consistent
thoughtfulness about appropriate approach to the authority of scripture.

Hooker’s interaction with Augustine remains multi-dimensional and subtle, even
when Hooker does not quote Augustine directly; his ideas and approaches have shaped
aspects of Hooker’s thoughts. This is evident in the area of biblical hermeneutics. As
noted earlier, it was as a new Bishop of Hippo that Augustine penned the beginning of the
most influential work on hermeneutics in the Western Christian tradition, De Doctrina
Christiana. This is a theological work of constant and enduring influence for those
concerned about biblical interpretation. Having taught rhetoric, Augustine now found
himself as a newly appointed bishop who required a view of biblical hermeneutics that
drew readers into a larger narrative, one that approached preaching with an imagination of
beauty of God as creator and the depth of biblical exegesis. Accordingly, Augustine

²¹⁹ Diarmaid MacCulloch, Reformation: Europe’s House Divided 1490-1700, (Penguin Books Ltd,
2004), 111.
proposed an expositional approach to biblical interpretation, based on his pagan
predecessors, which remained consistent into the Reformation period, and specifically
pertinent for Hooker’s context. As he recounts in his Confessions, Augustine would
experience hearing the scriptures expounded from a new perspective. What he once
regarded as lacking real intellectual vigor, would now stir his heart anew. He explained,

So I came to Milan, to the bishop and devout servant of God, Ambrose, famed
among the best men of the whole world, whose eloquence did him most powerfully
minister to…. For all unknowing I was brought by God to him, that knowing I
should be brought by him to God.\textsuperscript{220}

It was the sophisticated biblical interpretation of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, which
combined a persuasive style of preaching and an appeal to neo-platonic tendencies that
reinvigorated Augustine’s thinking. Subsequently, Augustine came to appreciate the
importance of hermeneutics since it had enabled his own conversion.

The art of hearing a text expounded in a new way, and the role of the preacher in
that regard, remains a crucial aspect of the hermeneutical enterprise. For Augustine,
figurative interpretation led him to embrace the Catholic faith and the authority of the
church, as well as the need for the community of faith to shape one’s understanding of the
Bible as the word of God. Illustrating his point he writes, “for those who exult in their
divine gift and boast that they understand and interpret the sacred books without
rules…they nevertheless learned even the alphabet with human help.”\textsuperscript{221} Hence, the
communal dynamic in the act of biblical interpretation is closely linked to soteriology in
Augustine’s framework.

\textsuperscript{220} Confessions 5.13.23.
\textsuperscript{221} De Doctrina, Pref.7
The voice of the church played a role in the process of salvation and the scriptural understanding of that journey was a tension that even the great magisterial thinkers could not ignore. Hooker pushed this idea in exploring how a proper biblical interpretation shows that even pagans can recognize aspects of God’s soteriological plan due to grace-led reason. For Hooker, these realities informed his reading of the Acts of the Apostles and his understanding of the church’s divine mandate. Therefore concerns about the theological precision over ecclesial governance were secondary to communal Christian love. Moreover, even pagans could recognize the moral imperatives lived out by those who claimed to follow Jesus.222 This hermeneutical emphasis of Hooker’s sought to encourage his readers to avoid a type of myopic approach to biblical interpretation that ignored the voice of church. For Hooker, this was often a turn toward a pride that asserted that one’s own divinely inspired interpretation of the text trumped all others.

_Apologists: Hooker & Augustine_

Hooker and Augustine both found themselves defending important theological outlooks of their respective church communities, and while they should not be characterized as two _different_ churches, they definitely have their own unique historical underpinnings. To his surprise, Augustine’s vocational role as pastor came with deep struggles. He found himself, as would Hooker, leading the charge against diverse approaches to biblical interpretation. In the process of preparing for this new task, Augustine’s _De Doctrina_ was crafted and his insights on biblical hermeneutics came to the

222 _Lawes_, II.2.3; 1:149.30-150.15.
fore. Wilken, in highlighting Augustine’s new found responsibility as bishop explains: “In a revealing aside in a sermon preached on the anniversary of his ordination, Augustine said ‘I nourish you with what nourishes me; I offer to you what I live on myself.’”\(^{223}\) Hooker’s struggles at the Temple would also highlight the need for an apologetic that held both the authority of scripture and the strength of the monarchy firmly in line.

In his critique of those attacking the Church of England, and her continued use of ceremonies not explicitly detailed in the scriptures, Hooker substantiated his apology by returning to Augustine in his defense, writing,

> Notwithstanding till such thinges be abolished, what exception can there be taken against the judgement of S. Augustine who saith, that, ‘Of things harmelesse whatsover there is, which the whole Church doth observe throughout the world; to argue for any mans immunitie from observing the same, it were a point of most insolent madness.’\(^{224}\)

It was evident that Hooker believed that Augustine’s influence and authority were of pertinent use to him. For Hooker, Augustine’s approach to ecclesial matters left room for both contextual realities and wisdom where the scriptures remained vague or all together silent.

Augustine wrote to St. Jerome as both a sign of respect and acknowledgment of his hermeneutical prowess. In affirming Jerome’s gifts he states, “If I have some small capacity in this field I use it in the service of the people…. Whenever I attempt to study scripture more diligently than the instruction of the people who listen to me demands, my ecclesial duties prevent me.”\(^{225}\) It was the challenge of being the bishop of Hippo that

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caused Augustine to find opportunity to develop himself as a preacher of the Scriptures. The depths of the Scriptures had been illuminated to him years before his call to preach, a considerable challenge in the early years of embracing the Catholic faith.226

Augustine’s classical education within the world of antiquity had not prepared him adequately for the style and literary genre he found in the Christian Scriptures. He introduces readers to a pivotal shift in his thinking in book 5 of the *Confessions* when noting,

> I began to see that the Catholic faith, for which I had thought nothing could be said in the face of the Manichean objections, could be maintained on reasonable grounds: this especially after I had heard explained figuratively passages of the Old Testament which had been a cause of death for me when taken literally. Many passages of these books were expounded in a spiritual sense.227

Early in his theological journey Augustine was enamored with Manichaeism. For approximately nine years he remained committed to their view of biblical interpretation, and thus was drawn further away from the Catholic faith of his mother and her church. Yet, when Faustus, the Manichaean bishop, could not thoroughly respond to his theological queries, he found himself questioning the role and authority of the Bible. As he recalls above, the prerequisite to his reengagement with Christianity and the Bible’s wisdom was a hermeneutical conversion, apparently stimulated by his contact with St. Ambrose. This gave Augustine a fresh way of reading and understanding the Bible, which would remain a pillar of his theological agenda. It was this move that allowed Augustine to approach the Scriptures humbly and open to its authority as God’s word.

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226 But should you meet with a person not believing the gospel, how would you reply to him were he to say, I do not believe? For my part, I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the Catholic Church. *Against the Epistle of Manichaeus*, i, 4, *NPNF*, 1st ser., iv, 131.

227 *Confessions*, 5.14.24
Augustine’s recommitment to the Catholic faith awoke a stream of criticism against the deficiencies of the Manichean approach to the Bible. Long before the Reformation era Augustine saw it as an essential practice of the Christian tradition to return to the Bible as a tool for correcting misguided opinions. Hooker’s vision relied on a similar approach in dealing with his contemporary critics. Here, readers should recall that the Puritans themselves believed that they alone were being faithful to the biblical text, a “sola mea”. This exemplified one of the recurring complexities that sola scriptura would cause: people of good will would differ on the interpretation of Scripture and on the principles of interpretation. For Augustine, it was the Manichean staple to confuse and lure less astute thinkers by confounding the truth of the Scriptures. As he remarked,

…the sect of the Manichees uses fraudulent, not honest, means with the unlearned to get them to set parts of the scriptures above the whole, the new above the old; they pick out sentences which they try to show contradict each other, in order to take in the unlearned.”

Biblical interpretation was a foundational component in Augustine’s apology against the Manichees and his return to the Christian faith. Both aspects came to dominate his thoughts and writing, making him an incomparable voice of theological authority on the theme of hermeneutics. In addition, Augustine saw to it that he provide readers with a proper schema by which to understand the depth of biblical interpretation, the high points of his thoughts on this matter are exhibited in De Doctrina Christiana which remains the most important work on Christian hermeneutics within the Western Christian tradition.

As mentioned earlier, Hooker’s polemic prowess can be clearly observed in his apology of the Elizabethan Church. In 1572, the publication of An Admonition to

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Parliament, made clear that the growing number of “aggressive” reform-minded Protestants found a renewed sense of courage in speaking out against the pro-Elizabethan Reformers such as Hooker. Their vision was to correct papal errors in the English church in hopes of aligning the Church of England with continental Reformation ideals, particularly those in found in Geneva. Its authors Thomas Wilcox (1549 – 1608) and John Field (1545–1588) remarked,

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…either we must have ministry to God and a right government of his church, according to the scriptures set up ‘both which we lack’ or else there can be no right religion.

Hooker was convinced that this caricature of the manner in which the authority of the church and the interpretation of the Bible melded together, was both erroneous and dangerous. In his defense, he reminds his reader that this proposed view of scriptural interpretation not only bordered on a type of simplistic primitivism, but also ignored the places in scripture where one finds matters requiring complex reasoning and discernment to comprehend. In this sense a Puritan approach to sola scriptura minimized the authority of what was actually found in scripture. Hooker’s thinking lucidly shines forth when stating, “what was used in the Apostles times, the scripture fullie declareth not, so that making their times the rule and canon of Church politie, ye make a rule which being not possible to be fully knowne, is as impossible to be kept.” Hence, Hooker believed that those critiquing his views, and those of the Church of England, missed the important hermeneutical reminder that the Bible was not an exhaustive book of rules. This is made clear to Hooker

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229 Lake remarks how the ideal position being argued for was the Calvinistic Geneva Model of church governance. See Lake, Anglicans and Puritans, 3.
231 Lawes, Preface 4.4.
by the fact that the Bible does not highlight every issue that transpired in the early church. Consequently, anyone who missed this important dynamic of biblical interpretation is apt to make compounding errors. It would remain essential for Hooker, that Godly wisdom, which shaped one’s approach to biblical interpretation, could be deduced from many avenues. This theme is clearly similar to Augustine’s developing thoughts when he asserts, “Whatever the subject called history reveals about the train of past events is of the greatest assistance in interpreting the holy books, even if learnt outside the church as part of primary education.”

**Augustine’s Hermeneutical Legacy: De Doctrina Christiana**

Emerging from Augustine’s expounding of the biblical text and his own pastoral challenges, *De Doctrina* remains a watershed text on biblical interpretation, guiding future debates on scriptural exegesis. Assuming that there would be independent access to classical rhetoric, he did not repeat what was found in Cicero and Quintilian but Theodosius’ reforms closed the rhetorical schools, which meant that classical rhetoric survived principally in Augustine and the church. It is notable that all biblical theologians who wondered how best to interpret the Bible returned to Augustine’s thoughts as a point of reference. This would continue into the Reformation period. It has been observed that one of the leading Reformation schools of thought associated with “such great preachers as Strasbourg’s Johann Geiler von Kaysersberg and Basel’s Johann Heynlin von Stein [had]

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232 De Doctrina, 2.42.105.
233 Augustine wrote the first part of this work (books i-iii) by 397, yet found himself taking a thirty-year hiatus before returning to complete Book III and add Book IV. This subheading is not meant to imply that it’s only in *De Doctrina* that we read of Augustine’s hermeneutical approach.
given themselves to a careful study of the classical patristic preaching manuals such as Augustine’s *De Doctrina Christiana*.” 234 Augustine’s ability to articulate the numerous layers of meaning in the biblical text, the reminder of numerical signs, figurative illustrations, even the use of music, 235 for better understanding the text, presented readers with a imaginative exposition of what true preaching and biblical exegesis could achieve.

Two prominent themes that surfaced at different junctures in Hooker’s writing remain foundational for his ongoing interaction with the Puritans and his continual commitment to biblical thinking. Firstly, Augustine’s focus on what I would call ‘interpretative ambiguity’ shaped Hooker’s approach to biblical interpretation. A central thrust of Hooker’s *Lawes* and Augustine’s *De Doctrina* is the assertion that God’s will is not always as easy to discern as some suggest. Hooker will find affinity with Augustine’s thoughts and will seek to incorporate similar hermeneutical examples when dealing with his own unique ecclesial challenges. A second exegetical characteristic pertinent to Hooker, as developed in Augustine, is what I have termed: ‘exegetical limitation’. Here Augustine and Hooker embrace the grandeur of the biblical canon that is a reflection of their expansive view of God and the grandeur of his very nature. Although aspects of this theme will be explored in more depth in part II of this dissertation, it is notable that Augustine’s thinking had such a penetrating influence in Hooker’s developing ideas. It is significant that this approach to hermeneutics does not view limitations in interpretation as

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235 Augustine writes, “Many passages are also made inaccessible and opaque by an ignorance of music.” *De Doctrina*, Book II. 26. 66.
a sign of weakness or feeble faith, but reminds readers that the text should be heard within the boundaries of the rule of faith and the larger thrust of the canon.236

The tensions that Hooker sought to address were far reaching and for some of his ‘radical’ contemporaries what Hooker proposed seemed insufficient. Nonetheless, Hooker forces readers to avoid the temptations of making the Bible say more than God intended it to say. In a similar fashion, Augustine posited that one ought to root their exegetical approach in something much larger than just doctrinal precision,

The science of reasoning is of very great service in searching into and unraveling all sorts of questions that come up in Scripture, only in the use of it we must guard against the love of wrangling, and the childish vanity of entrapping an adversary.237 For Augustine, as for Hooker, reason can be of significant service when trying to discern the meaning of truth. Having considered this, the trappings of that same reason might move one to arrogance, or worse, lose focus on the essential matter of one’s dependence on God’s grace in the use of their reason.238

**Interpretative Ambiguity**

While in some ways obvious, it is still worth mentioning that a central underpinning of *De Doctrina* is the fact that the Bible, although the Word of God contains sections which remain difficult, if not impossible, to understand and interpret with certainty. This is one of the main reasons that Augustine penned his work. In emphasizing this matter Augustine

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236 *De Doctrina*, “Where, however, the ambiguity cannot be cleared up, either by the rule of faith or by the context, there is nothing to hinder us to point the sentence according to any method we choose of those that suggest themselves.” III.2.5

237 *De Doctrina* II.31,48

will encourage those serious about dealing with such problems to consider the tools, or rules, that have guided his own hermeneutical inquiries. Hooker, in similar fashion, will spend a significant section of Book II of the *Lawes* working through his own guiding principles.

At the outset of book three Augustine mentions guidelines to help in dealing with the ambiguities found in the text. First, he explores the issues of punctuation; he makes a suggestion that it may be helpful to read the biblical text aloud to hear the syllables more carefully. Another is the importance of recognizing the metaphorical use of words. For Augustine the need for different approaches is reminiscent of the fact that the biblical text, although God’s very word, still has areas that are ambiguous to understand and thus challenging to interpret. As Williams points out, “Augustine is, moreover, at least intermittently mindful that he is reading the scriptures in Latin translation, and translation complicates the story even further.”

Hooker, impacted by Augustine’s return to the scriptures, notes: “Saint Augustine was resolute in points of Christianitie to credit none, how godly and learned soever he were, unless he confirmed his sentence by the scriptures, or by some reason not contrarie to them.” Hooker believed that Augustine had demonstrated that both what is in scripture and what is properly discerned by the light of reason without contradiction, should be given room as authoritative since there were continuous bouts with texts that remained ambiguous. This, for both Hooker and Augustine, was a reminder that there would be points in the task of interpretation when clarity would not be so evident.

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In shaping a ‘proper’ interpretive approach Augustine explores a passage in Acts 2 that deals with speaking in other languages. Augustine cautions his readers to consider it a serious error when tempted to interpret this text in a way that renders the advice of other learned teachers superfluous, as if the truth of the text were easily discernible. Instead, as it relates to biblical interpretation, it would be nonsensical to see this as a rule for exegetical study. Thus, he writes,

Now, then, suppose we advise all our brethren not to teach their children any of these things, because on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit the apostles immediately began to speak the language of every race; and warn everyone who has not had a like experience that he need not consider himself a Christian, or may at least doubt whether he has yet received the Holy Spirit?241

Augustine states emphatically how foolish it would be to leave one’s children untrained because somehow the Holy Spirit will give them the language they need. Moreover, he adds how easy it is to affirm the position as a way of minimizing the role of the preacher as interpreter of God’s word for the lofty ideal of ‘personal’ spiritual guidance.

Hooker dealt with a similar hermeneutical challenge, those who thought their position on biblical interpretation was correct because it was based solely on spiritual illumination. Specifically, Hooker is dealing with those arguing that an Elder-led model of church leadership should be the only governing polity for true Bible-believing Christians. This argument, Hooker states, is not consistent with what we see in the Bible or the history of the early church as depicted in the Acts of the Apostles. So then why has this argument become so persistent and now problematic? Hooker believed, as did Augustine that it is an erroneous understanding of biblical interpretation that conjures up a distorted view of the function of Holy Spirit. This was grounded on a faulty understanding of sola scriptura for

241 De Doctrina, Preface.
Hooker, noting how there are those who claim “that it is the special illumination of the holy Ghost, whereby they discerne those things in the word, which others reading yet discerne them not.”

Arriving at a correct interpretation of the biblical text, and realizing when such interpretation was perhaps unavailable, was the real point of contention, the question that draws Augustine and Hooker into the vortex of linguistic limitation and interpretive paradoxes: some passages are difficult to interpret. The challenges therein caused Hooker frustration when some, especially his opponents, claimed to have a lucid interpretation to specific truths by stretching the text to fit their theological preferences. The struggles related to proper interpretation of a text were aggrandized by the medieval scholastic tradition, and the ease with which some thinkers just deferred to the authority of men rather than the revelation found in the Bible. Hooker stands in somewhat of a conundrum since he believed strongly in following the authority of one’s predecessors, yet knew that could not be the only guiding factor.

Exegetical Limitation

In his closing remarks of his Preface, Hooker suggests that one of the greatest examples of St. Augustine remains his humble posture in revisiting his own writings, and admitting the need for correction in The Retractions, stating,

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242 Lawes Pref. 3.10.
243 Lawes I.14.2
244 Lawes I.10.8.
Amongst so manie so huge volumes as the infinite paynes of Saint Augustine have brought foorth, what one hath gotten him greater love, commendacion and honor, then the booke wherein hee carfullie collecteth his owne oversights, and sincerely condemneth them.²⁴⁵

His goal was to encourage his critics, in the great Augustinian method, to admit that they too might struggle to fully understand some of the deeper meanings of certain difficult texts, and in so doing, consider revisiting certain theological positions.²⁴⁶ While it is doubtful this approach worked, it was insights like these that continued to inform Hooker’s response in mediating the challenges of his day.

For Augustine, the attitude and spiritual posture of the interpreter is crucial. Not only must one bring faith to the conversation, but also an individual who wanted to hear from God through his word must first and foremost have a deep desire for Christian love, which for Augustine and for Hooker supersedes certainty in interpretation. Augustine notes: “So anyone who thinks that he has understood the divine scriptures or any part of them, but cannot by his understanding build up this double love of God and neighbor, has not yet succeeded in understanding them.”²⁴⁷ Similarly, Hooker believes that the Bible instructs Christians to put love and care for one’s brother at the forefront of theological differences. With the biblical texts of Saint Paul in mind, Hooker writes that, as it pertains to ceremonial disagreements, one should keep in mind the biblical rule, ‘that in those things

²⁴⁵ Lawes Pref. 9.2; 1:52,4-9.
²⁴⁶ Augustine actually goes as far as to say “It is a wonderful and beneficial thing that the Holy Spirit organized the holy scripture so as to satisfy hunger by means of its plainer passages and remove boredom by means of its obscurer ones.” De Doctrina, 2.14.
²⁴⁷ De Doctrina Book 2.85.
from which without hurt we may lawfully absteine, we should frame the usage of our libertie with regard to the weakness and imbecillitie of our bretheren..."248

For both Hooker and Augustine the theological challenge and the use of the biblical text in responding to such issues caused them to think deeply about what hermeneutics and biblical interpretation could achieve. While every attempt to avoid misinterpretation could be taken, it may still be that one’s reading could lead to error. Hooker explores this reality in addressing how God is, in some way, still glorified with a limited or a misleading reading of the text. Hence, exegetical limitations in no way minimized the grandeur of God or the beauty of his word.

Anchoring his thoughts on 1 Peter 2:12, Hooker asserts that, unlike his Puritan counterparts who proposed hermeneutical certitude, God was glorified in one’s hermeneutical efforts and ensuing practices laudable by God when he states that,

As long as that which Christians did was good, and no way subject unto just reproof; their vertuous conversation was a mean to worke the Heathens conversation unto Christ. Seeing therefore this had beene a thing altogether impossible, but that infidels themselves did discerne...when believers did well, and when otherwise...it followeth that some thinges wherein God is glorifyed, may be some other way knowne, then onely by the sacred Scripture...249

Thus, according to the Bible and its governing narrative, God can chose to allow some things, if done in Christian piety, to point even heathens toward God’s glory-filled nature. Especially for Hooker, the tension emerged with those who, in some sense, made the Bible and God synonymous. Thus, for Hooker’s hermeneutical development an overestimation of what God intended by the use of the Bible needed correcting. In his concluding thought to

248 Lawes, 4.12.6;1:323.35-324.1-3.
249 Lawes II, 2.3; 1:149-150
Book II Hooker asserts, as we have seen, “…lest in attributing unto scripture more then can have, the incredibillitie of that do cause even those thinges which indeed it hath most abundantly to be less reverendly esteemed.250

Any serious reader of the Bible soon came in contact with the exegetical limitations Hooker and Augustine often explored. These challenges garnered differing responses. For Hooker’s critics, exegetical limits seem to imply a ‘weakening’ of the great witness of God in the Bible. As for Hooker and Augustine, this need not be the case. What this aspect of theological learning revealed was God’s continuous desire to explore matters communally. Augustine makes this point by highlighting an episode in Moses’ life:

Is it not true that God spoke with Moses, and yet Moses accepted advice about guiding and governing such a great people from his father-in-law, a man actually of another race, with an abundance of foresight and an absence of pride. He was well aware that true counsel, from whatever mind it might come, should be ascribed not to man but to the unchangeable God who is the truth. 251

In no way is Augustine, or Hooker, minimizing the importance of biblical teaching and/or preaching. Instead, in exploring the biblical text, they continue to discern that God, in his own Word, reveals different methods by which he reveals his will, all of which lead to his glorification as the source of truth.

It was the goal of De Doctrina to provide directions on managing the interpretive process and subsequently to encourage readers and teachers to develop a proper hermeneutical approach to interpreting the Bible. While Augustine’s thoughts are celebrated throughout Christian history, the goal here has been to show that he also has a unique influence on Hooker’s developing theology as it related to sola scriptura and the

250 Lawes II. 8.7; 1:191-192.
251 De Doctrina, Pref. 15.
larger task of interpretation. The issues of biblical interpretation, as readers might recall, were often related to authority and the larger ecclesial polity issues. In turn, Augustine is clear in his approach to address the issue of ecclesial authority and the need for communal interaction as part of the hermeneutical process. Relating to biblical authority he writes, “In the matter of canonical scriptures he should follow the authority of as many catholic scriptures as possible... He will apply this principle to the canonical scriptures: to prefer those accepted by all catholic churches to those which some do not accept.”

It is with this same argument that Hooker will ask his own critics to reconsider their position on both discipline and the Genevan model of church. Furthermore, Hooker’s intent to push his readers to listen and explore the broader voice of the church was thoroughly Augustinian. While not specifically an issue of biblical canonicity, Hooker believes that his critics were not listening to the larger Christian perspective. His most forceful remark is how his Puritan counterparts are willing to ignore Augustine himself, when he writes, “And therefore whereas S. Augustine affirmeth that those thinges which the whole Church of Christ doth hold, may well bee thought to be Apostolicall although they bee not found written, this his judgement they utterly condemne.”

Conclusion

Hooker believed that Augustine’s voice of authority and his unique influence in the area of hermeneutics, might assist him in both counteracting his erring contemporaries, and in developing his own hermeneutical method. While I have argued that the latter was

252 *De Doctrina*, Book 2, 24.25.
253 *Lawes* 3.10.6; 1:244, 5-25.
254 *Lawes* 4.2.2; 1:277. 24-27.
thoroughly the case, the former requires a more careful look at the Puritan’s approach. It remains consistently clear that Hooker’s next steps would be formed by his deep commitment to the Church of England. Robert Kugler states that for Augustine, “Scripture is in a dialectical relationship with the Church in so far as the Church is the result of the Scripture’s story, and as such, though being to some extent a product of Scripture, also is normative of the meaning derived from Scriptures.”255 This reality would continue to inform Hooker’s own views concerning *sola scriptura*, ecclesial authority and biblical interpretation. In so doing, his insights remain a forceful stance within the larger sixteenth century debate.

While Hooker’s thinking was thoroughly shaped by the Reformation tradition, his approach to the Bible was also informed by foundational themes that predated the rise of Luther’s strife with the Church. The late medieval era, as explored, laid the groundwork concerning the authority of the Bible and developing aspects of the Protestant outcry. Evans is correct in positing that “the changes of the late Middle Ages in the way the Bible was interpreted did not altogether supersede the old approach but they altered the emphasis and threw new light on the whole enterprise.”256

As part of the themes of this chapter it was also applicable to provide a brief survey of Hooker’s thoughts on reason and their similitude to leading voices of the Middle Ages. In so doing, one is forced to situate his thoughts as both shaped by the continental Reformers yet leaning, in some regard, toward Thomistic ideals. As Ingalls remarks,

Hooker’s optimism is unlike that of the great Christian thinkers of the high Middle Ages and the Renaissance and closer to Augustine insofar as he insists that all


human capacities to know, will and accomplish what is good depend on ‘common grace’. None can be attributed to unaided nature.\textsuperscript{257}

This remains an important ongoing debate in Hookerian studies, which, I believe, should be informed by how Hooker used the Bible.

While it remains difficult to categorize Hooker as fitting neatly into one philosophical school of thought, it is sufficiently evident from his writings that diverse ideas shaped his theological leanings. Thompson observes, “Hooker’s outstanding characteristic as a thinker is his eclecticism.”\textsuperscript{258} Nonetheless, as it relates to his approach on biblical hermeneutics, and other important theological themes, Augustine remains preeminent. This chapter has attempted to posit some salient points in this regard, demonstrating not only Hooker’s admiration for Augustine’s thinking about biblical interpretation, but Augustine’s use of the Bible in crafting his theological arguments.

Accordingly, Hooker highlights his appreciation for Augustine’s influence in ending Book VI of his Lawes with Augustine’s thoughts on Psalm 138: “I therefore end with St. Augustins conclusion: Lord in thy booke and volume of lyfe all shall be written, as well the least of thy Saints as the cheifest: Lett not therefore the unperfect fear, Lett them only proceed and goe forwarde.”\textsuperscript{259} In like fashion we move forward to more carefully explore Hooker’s use of scripture, and his commitment to an intellectually vibrant hermeneutic.

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\textsuperscript{257} Ranall Ingalls, ‘Sin and Grace’, A Companion, 158.


\textsuperscript{259} Lawes 6.6.18; 3:103.15-20.
PART II: Expounding the Biblical Text

*Introduction: Approaching the Biblical Text*

Building on the discussions in part one, the following chapters will focus more clearly on *how* Hooker interprets and applies the biblical text to his unique context. In this regard, the interface between Hooker’s apologetic style and theological emphasis on the Bible will demonstrate that he is strategic in his hermeneutical approach even though he is not necessarily systematic. It will become apparent that the many vicissitudes of his English context shaped an ethos from which his hermeneutical position developed. Hence, the following chapters will seek to elaborate on the tensions Hooker experienced, and how those important interactions formed his theological vision of biblical interpretations. Accordingly, I will suggest that Hooker understood the importance of anchoring his proposed model of laws, and his careful defense of ecclesial polity, on a vigorous and nuanced approach to hermeneutics.

While detailed studies of Hooker’s approach and use of scripture remain scarce, some writers have nonetheless highlighted their importance. Hillerdal recognized that Hooker, “clearly saw that the points at issue were the first principles, how the Bible should be read and interpreted.”260 Echoing this, part two of this dissertation will examine some of the diverse passages of scripture, which Hooker utilized in developing his unique apology of the English ecclesiastical tradition. As will be explained, he interpreted and utilized biblical passages that he believed were pertinent both for shaping his own theological

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worldview, as well as inviting his noted opponents to reconsider their own perspectives. Subsequently, he articulated a defense of the Church, which, he believed, would strengthen the theological stability of the Church of England, and provide clarity on important principles related to biblical interpretation. The next few chapters will draw needed attention to the manner in which Hooker’s unique method highlighted the disagreement within the reformed tradition emerging in England. His critics imposed a brief but stringent evaluation of his writing meant to cause doubt apropos his position as a trusted theologian of the English tradition and in effect demonstrated his sophisticated thinking as it related to hermeneutics and the larger Reformation tradition.

Part II of this dissertation will also make considerable reference as to how Hooker’s high regard for the scriptures never eclipsed his deep appreciation for natural reason and its grace-filled potential. In fact, he was ever aware that an underlying tension between him and his critics was his commitment to seeing the use of reason shape and refine the hermeneutical process. An example of how Hooker addressed this issue is by exposing, in a reasonable way, how some positions held by his critics were themselves grounded on a reasonable approach. Perhaps, one of the most succinct articulations of the incongruity is seen when Hooker writes,

The one waye they cannot as much pretende, that all the partes of their owne discipline are in scripture; and the other way their mouthes are stopped, when they would pleade against all other formes besides their owne: seeing the generall principles are such as doe not particularly prescribe any one, but sundrie may equally be consonant unto the general axiomes of the Scripture.\(^{261}\)

Illuminating a foundational theme of his opponents, Hooker reminds them that their conclusions about ecclesial discipline, as it emerged in the Reformed tradition, were not

\(^{261}\) Lawes III.2.1;1:208.2-6.
literally expounded in the Bible. Hooker’s argument is clear: when their approach is tested biblically, inconsistencies emerge.

It seemed surprising to Hooker that his counterparts could not see this. Simply put, reason reveals that while some ecclesial practices (i.e. discipline) are preferred by some, the Bible does not explicitly reveal how these theological principles should be embodied. Hooker does not condone the importance of ‘discipline’, but wants his readers to understand that the challenges related to *sola scriptura* require a more sensitive exploration of the truth of scripture, highlighting the need for trusted ecclesial voices in discerning appropriate methods of interpretation. In this light, Hooker will argue that reason, and continued dialogue, need to remain an essential aspect of establishing what wise and God-honoring decisions may look like.

Given these tensions, the following chapters will also show how Hooker’s hermeneutical decisions brought about a commitment to addressing other errors he noticed in the Puritans. Specifically, he felt it important to show that some of their arguments were not grounded in the biblical text. As mentioned earlier, both Hooker and his Reformed contemporaries claimed the Bible as their authority, yet they differed on issues related to biblical interpretation. Nevertheless the argument that will be advanced by Hooker is that differences in hermeneutics, while always requiring discussion, should not lead to division. Therefore the ensuing discussion will bring to the surface some of the salient weaknesses and challenges of biblical hermeneutics in a post-Reformation age.262

At the core of the issue being explored was an underlying thrust that proposed a revision to the liturgical practices of the English Church. A strong reformed contingency

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262 Hillerdal reminds us how Hooker “was violently fighting all tendencies to regard the Scriptures as the self-evident illuminative word of God which does not need reason for its proper understanding and interpretation.” Hillerdal, *Reason and Revelation*, 23.
believed that a return to the Bible meant a removal of ecclesial practices associated with the Roman Catholic Church. While Hooker’s deep commitment to the Church of England cannot be understated, his distance from the Roman Catholic Church was coherent, yet not disproportionate. Hence the area of church polity would continue to be a point of contention with Hooker’s Puritan peers. In opposition to Hooker, they believed that disagreement about ecclesial governance was synonymous with devaluing the authority of the Bible. What will be clear in the following chapters is how Hooker’s contemporaries could not understand his adroitness when holding in tension the paradox of reason and revelation in addressing such issues.263

These types of concerns frame a large part of the backdrop of Hooker’s vision and his hermeneutical feats. It is the goal of the following chapters to demonstrate, and emphasize, how Hooker’s exposition of scripture both situated his theological outlook within the larger Reformation ideals, and gave him liberty to push the boundaries in certain ways. As Kirby observed,

It must be acknowledged that there is some degree of difficulty in reconciling the authority of the natural law with the core assumptions of Reformation soteriology and scriptural hermeneutics. …. Hooker’s advocating of natural law to defend the constitution of the Elizabethan Church met with strong opposition from some of his contemporaries.264

In exploring such matters the next few chapters will highlight how, to these contemporaries, Hooker’s thoughts were, in some sense, not Protestant enough.

As scholars have shown, this approach to understanding and interpreting Hooker’s views should be carefully examined since he, in many ways, consciously aligned with the

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263 "There are but two waies whereby the spirit leadeth men into all truth: the one extraordinarie, the other common; the one belonging but unto some few, the other extending it selfe unto all that are of God; the one that which we call by a speciall divine excellency Revelation, the other Reason." Lawes ‘Preface’, 3:10; 1:17.15-19.
theological positions held by magisterial thinkers. There also remains a certain malaise in demonstrating how Hooker stands distinct from the Continental tradition. In this light, I will suggest that his hermeneutics situates him outside the lines of confessional positions, highlighting an approach to biblical theology, which was, in some sense, ecumenical. Accordingly, it was Hooker’s diverse English context that forced him to grapple with theological diversity, and consider how that diversity might co-exist alongside a deep appreciation for the biblical text.

It remains extremely pertinent to understand how Hooker positions himself as a distinguished thinker in a world of disordered allegiances. Allowing for a personal\textsuperscript{265} application of the Bible, he quickly moves through diverse needs of his ecclesial context while exploring ways in which the Bible informs and corrects the challenges and needs of the future. In applying fluid exegetical dexterity, Hooker was keenly aware that some matters required a historical explanation that never lost sight of the role of reason, tempered wisdom and the broader voice of the church. As he writes,

\begin{quote}
Be it a matter of the one kind or of the other, what Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto is whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these the voice of the Church succeedeth. That which the Church by her ecclesiastical authority shall probably think and define to be true or good, must in congruity of reason overrule all other inferior judgments whatsoever.\textsuperscript{266}
\end{quote}

While scripture remained authoritative, Hooker believed that God provided his people with other avenues of discernment. Therefore Hooker will take advantage of all of them. In

\textsuperscript{265} Specifically avoiding the modernistic values of individualism, I believe “personal” remains more consistent for the Reformers, and Hooker believed the Bible could address one’s concerns.

\textsuperscript{266} Lawes V.8.2; 2:38.7-14.
revealing this reality it will be helpful to provide a more detailed look at the following chapters.

Chapter 3: Hooker’s Use of the Bible & Exegetical Approach

In commencement, chapter three will assess how Hooker anchored his approach to governing laws to his reading of scripture. As a result, Hooker was convinced that all of God’s creation should be seen in alignment with many of the principles found in scripture. Hooker will emphasize that this truth led to the logical conclusion that those who do not read the Bible are still able to ponder, although in a limited fashion, the deeper metaphysical questions of a creator. For Hooker, God’s orderliness evidenced by his laws are “the sacred image of his wisdome.”267 I have attempted to illustrate, albeit briefly, some of Hooker’s learning as it relates to biblical inspiration and the benefits of having the “divine laws” written down. Both of these issues remained an important part of the underlying framework for Hooker’s larger hermeneutical explorations.

Another significant part of this third chapter is Hooker’s address of salient biblical texts, which he believed provided scriptural supports in shaping a significant part of Book II of the Lawes. These biblical texts, as interpreted by Hooker, were key scriptural passages, which had been used by Cartwright, a Puritan divine, in forming and solidifying his vision of what a Puritan hermeneutic should entail. Accordingly, this chapter will delve into Hooker’s critique of this approach to interpretation and its apparent weaknesses. In addition, readers will experience Hooker’s ability to deconstruct his opponents’ approach to scripture, while at the same time affirming the importance and reliability of the Bible. In this light, Hooker demonstrates that one’s hermeneutical approach, if left unattended, could

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267 Lawes V.81.16; 2:497.27.
easily stray toward error. In this regard, Hooker’s own exegesis required careful reflection: thus he draws to the surface the ideas of a communal corrective that should be instilled in a developing a proper approach to biblical interpretation.

The idea that the broader church community should inform one’s reading and understanding of the Bible is a return to Hooker’s grand vision of how laws are to operate. For Hooker that larger communal picture was God’s creative narrative. Since all belong to God, both human and non-human creatures, God’s grace provides laws to help us live in line with his providentially intended desires. For Hooker, these governing laws reveal both the strengths and weaknesses of human nature. Accordingly, one of the goals is to show how Hooker’s hermeneutics is shaped by this larger vision of what God has revealed of himself. With Paul’s letter to the Romans in mind, Hooker writes,

Men do both, as the Apostle teacheth, yea, those men which have no written lawe of God to show what is good or evill, carrie written in their hearts the universal lawe of mankind, the law of reason, whereby they judge as by rule which God hath given unto all men for that purpose.268

In his creation God instilled in every heart a governing law, guided by reason, to ascertain good and evil. This, according to Hooker, should not be minimized even when addressing the very real and devastating role of sin. Consequently, Hooker remained convinced that different types of laws were put in place by God, not to stifle or control his creation, but to provide boundaries for their flourishing. While some argue that this metaphysical rendition of interpreting reality is associated with a Thomistic pattern,

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268 Lawes I.16.5; 1:138.32-139.3.
Hooker’s writings reveal his overarching commitment to the biblical text in strengthening his position.269

For Hooker it is essential that one’s hermeneutics should be, as much as possible, God honoring. This required careful attention to Scripture’s multifaceted forms as part of the interpretation process. As he notes, “Hereupon it growtheth that everie booke of holie scripture doth take out of all kinds of truth, natural, historicall, forreine, supernaturall, so much as the matter handled requireth.” Moreover, Hooker will come to propose that a simplistic view of the Bible, one that is only about God’s word and which somehow eliminates the difficult work of listening to context or developing new ways of understanding and applying the Bible’s teaching, lends itself to creating interpretive biases which ultimately are not God honoring. Thus, chapter three will seek to highlight these types of ideas in Hooker’s writings.

Chapter 4: Significant Themes in Hooker’s Hermeneutical Schema

The fourth chapter is intended to be the apex of this project. It is my intended contribution to ongoing Hookerian scholarship that what makes Hooker such a significant thinker is his ability to move between important guiding themes, allowing him to honor the authority of scripture, adhere to ecclesial dynamics which took shape in the Articles of Religion, and expound a view of the Bible that allows for changes when necessary. Specifically, I will propose that four themes stand out as important guideposts that amplify Hooker’s expositional knowledge. The themes are as follows, The Paradox of Reason and

269 “A number there are, who thinke they cannot admire as they ought the power and authority of the word of God, if in things divine they should attribute any force to mans reason. For which cause they never use reason so willinglie as to disgrace reason.” Lawes, III.8.4;1:221.25–28.
Consensus; The Holy Spirit and the Role of Wisdom; A Hermeneutic of Humility; ‘Perfect’ Revelation and Contextualized Interpretation. In addition, it is part of my argument that Hooker, while not a biblical theologian, was constantly aware of the need to have an articulate way of reading and understanding that Bible which defended practices of the English Church, corrected ongoing critiques, and reminded readers that God, although revealed in the scriptures, could not be contained by them.

The Bible is a gift from God that helps its readers understand, with enough clarity, that God is faithful in drawing humanity to himself in a manner that makes sense to our fallen human state. Accordingly, the themes explored in the fourth chapter will allow readers to appreciate Hooker’s thinking about reason and revelation and how these issues intersect within the important work of biblical hermeneutics. More importantly, Hooker’s hermeneutics is grounded by his view that the Holy Spirit remains at work and present with the interpreter. It seems vital to Hooker to accentuate a characteristic of that Spirit: unity in the midst of disagreement. Even when addressing the errors of the Roman Catholic Church he finds ways to weave the important biblical reminder when stating,

For even as the Apostle doth saie of Israell, that they are in one respect enimi; but in an other beloved of God: In like sort with Rome we dare not communicate concerning sundrie hir grosse and greevous abominations, yet touching those maine partes of Christian truth wherein they constantlie still persist, we gladly acknowledge them to be of the familie of Jesus Christ....

It is remarkable how Hooker is able to take a complex biblical text, in which Paul addresses the mystery of Israel’s important and sovereign place in God’s salvific outcome, and apply it as a way to respect the Roman Catholic Church for her role in the larger history of the faith.

While addressing these tense theological disagreements, this chapter will bring to readers attention another important way the themes that emerged from Hooker’s reading of the Bible rooted an approach to scripture that informed the political situation of the Church of England. Succinctly, Williams obverses that, “Throughout the Lawes, Hooker assumes that communities of reasoning beings have the right to determine the shape of their political life; and indeed, because of our fallen state, they have the duty to find an effective form of executive power for the restraint of vice.” These ongoing challenges aggrandized the need for hermeneutical themes that others can both deduce and apply as they attempted to understand Biblical truths with depth and a focus on true Christian unity.

As mentioned, Hooker’s opponents, although deeply committed to biblical interpretation, were convinced the Bible required only one form of ecclesial polity, which must be adhered to by all ‘true’ Reformers. It was precisely this type of hermeneutics that, for Hooker, rendered scripture a book about exactitudes which, in some cases, seemed to set hindrances keeping God’s church from advancing in a healthier, less divisive, way. Hooker’s hermeneutics sought to set in place a vision of scripture which forced all interpreters, himself included, to set polemical difference to the periphery and seek God’s guiding presence, lest one become proud and forget the limitations of sinful humanity. Subsequently, any approach to hermeneutics that is only concerned with theological debates, which reduces scripture to a text used for winning arguments rather than a divinely inspired interaction with a loving God who is leading the church, requires careful correction.

In exploring the four hermeneutical themes it will become evident that Hooker, both as a defender of the church of England and also as a student of scripture, seeks to remind his readers of the work of the Holy Spirit who inspires interpretation, as well as the text to be interpreted, lest the book that was formed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit fail to inspire. For Hooker, those led by God’s spirit should always seek to live as children of God and align their lives appropriately. As he writes, “Such as are led by the spirite of God they are the sonnes [and daughters] of God.”

It is Hooker’s assertion that while readers bring questions to the text, the Holy Spirit provides appropriate wisdom when the answers one is looking for are not easily deduced through the reading or preaching of scripture. This does not mean that Hooker promotes private revelation that contradicts the Bible or the teaching of the Church, but rather that he understand that a historical epoch may provide insights into practice that do not fully apply in all contexts.

Another key theme of this chapter relates to context. Hooker was ardently aware that his English context differed somewhat from the other expressions of the Reformation, particularly with respect to polity and corporate practice. The rich ecclesial history of England needed a more nuanced approach to biblical hermeneutics, and Hooker would provide just that. At the outset of Book VII of the Lawes Hooker provides an apology for Episcopal polity while maintaining his commitment to the larger rule of the monarch.

Having said that, Hooker was also aware of correcting, by the use of scripture and reason, a naive acceptance of ecclesial laws, which specific forms of church polity may infer. As

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273 Lawes III.9.3; 1:238.20. Here Hooker expands his argument about the role of the Church and her unique responsibility to set laws that align with the those set down in scripture, and natural reason. For Hooker this biblical text, Romans 8:14, reminds readers of the need for the Spirit’s leading in this regard. It is also noteworthy that Hooker calls Paul “the blessed Apostle” accentuating the importance of his voice of authority among those first followers of Jesus.

274 Hooker holds that at times one might have to not uphold yet not overthrow certain matters. Lawes III.I.12. 1:204.19-24.
Collinson observed, “No other apologist for the Elizabethan status quo chose to be as
critical as Hooker of the institution he was supposed to be defending.”275 Thus, for Hooker,
allegiance to common life never meant mindless acceptance of mistakes and inadequacies
of that life. Instead, a regular reengagement with the biblical text was a part of his role as a
leader.

Readers of this chapter should come to appreciate that sola scriptura, as articulated
and addressed in Hooker’s milieu, brought new and pertinent questions to the surface.
These questions shaped Hooker’s perspective, as well as his desire to interpret the Bible
properly. Hooker sought to hold in tension the perfection of Biblical revelation, as God’s
essential guide for all things related to salvation, and its God-intended limitations.
Hooker’s hermeneutics sought to strengthen the faith and thinking of readers in reminding
them of the reliability of the scriptures because God, as the author, remains a faithful and
loving God who desires what is best for his followers.

For Hooker a biblical hermeneutics, which is primarily concerned with a defensive
theological posture seeking certain assurances, may not be helpful in guiding readers or the
church in addressing future complexities. Therefore, it is my proposal that Hooker’s
writings reveal an ethos which both highlights the challenges of sola scriptura, especially if
defined improperly, and also invites readers to a more expansive and inviting view of God
who is present in both the scriptures and one’s present reality. Hence, any attempt at
understanding Hooker’s hermeneutics that minimizes or ignores the value of the themes

275 Patrick Collinson, “Hooker and the Elizabethan Establishment”, in Arthur McGrade, Richard
Hooker and the Construction of Christian Community, 149-81,171.
advanced in chapter four, I believe, misses the important contribution of Hooker’s theological legacy.

Chapter 5: Hooker’s Influence & Continuing Dialogue

In a recapitulation of the entire work, the final chapter of this project will posit that Hooker’s ardent commitment to the scriptures, although theological and polemically rigorous, was also shaped by his dedication to pastoral concerns. As MacCulloch reminds, “much of Hooker’s career, after some years as an Oxford don, was likewise spent in rural parishes.” To miss this very important contextual reality of Hooker’s hermeneutical development is to fail to understand Hooker completely. Since his opponents sought to draw him into the arena of theological disputes, readers may be tempted to miss a lacuna in Hookerian studies that fails to take seriously his commitment to his *vocatio* as pastor.

A passion for the Bible, and a commitment to providing a proper and theologically consistent approach to interpretation, consists of principles that were worked out and distilled in sermons for the sake of his congregation. While only ten of his sermons survive, they suffice to demonstrate his considerable ability to address pastoral concerns in a way that holds high the power of scripture both to inform, and to guide his listeners in the Christian life. Forte, on addressing Hooker as a preacher, notes that his sermons “work powerfully to uncover the hidden causes of spiritual despair and to instill hope in the

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promise of salvation.” In this light, this last chapter will attempt to show how Hooker’s biblical precepts should remind readers that he be understood as a man of faith.

For Hooker, hermeneutics that take the Bible seriously require attentiveness tasked with encouraging listeners. Listeners were not solely to be reminded of ecclesial disagreement and pending disunity. In fact, Hooker’s approach sought to highlight that “all power is given unto edification, none to the overthrow and destruction of the Church.” Accordingly, the goal of this last chapter will be to show how Hooker’s hermeneutics, in addition to being theologically robust, also draw readers on a journey toward imagining a world where God’s Word, when read and preached in love, could strengthen one’s Christian journey.

Additionally, this last chapter will highlight an area of Hooker’s thinking that some may find lacked sufficient exploration. In articulating his views on the Bible, Hooker regularly returned to the issue of matters indifferent: adiaphora. The goal here was to differentiate between issues of serious importance that are determined, most often related to salvation, and matters not so important which can be left to personal conscience, if they are not previously determined by a community decision. While a helpful distinction, and a common approach to handling theological disparity, Hooker’s desire to refocus and broaden this issue does leave some questions unanswered. My observation will be that it is not entirely clear whether issues of indifference could, or should, ever be resolved, or whether it was part of God’s plan to have Christians disagree on matters that led to considerable tension.

278 Lawes VIII.7.7; 3:420.15,16.
One particular example shows Hooker setting his focus on differences related to war and the pacifist stance held by Anabaptists. On pondering the biblical accounts of the Old Testament Hooker states, “Tell the Anabaptists which holdeth the use of the sword unlawful for a Christian man, that God himself did allow his people to make wars; they have their answer round and ready, Those antient wars were figures of the spiritual wars of Christ.” In sharp tone, Hooker seems to suggest that those who hold to a pacifist position should reconsider whether they are reading the Bible properly. What is not clear is whether this is an issue of *adiaphora*. Both the Anabaptist position and Hooker’s may be held as matters indifferent. In other words, can this not be left to the individual, and to those in authority, as Article 27 claimed? Once again, it is my estimation that this area of Hooker’s thinking is difficult to fit within his larger hermeneutical concerns. Struggles such as these emphasized that disagreements concerning what actually constituted *adiaphorous* issues should not lead to the assumption that because something is indifferent, it is inessential or unimportant.

As the title of this final chapter suggests, Hooker’s influence and hermeneutical acumen should remain at the forefront of the continuing dialogue related to sixteenth century theology, specifically matters related to *sola scriptura*. In addition to instilling renewed curiosity in the area of hermeneutics, the goal of this dissertation is to advance Hooker’s distinctive position in the English Reformation, and his desire to contextualize Protestant values for his polyvalent English context, making him an important theological candidate for the ongoing ecclesial challenges still addressed today. While readers may be surprised to find Hooker’s exegetical approach to interpretation filled with wisdom for

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279 Lawes, VII. 6.7. 3:174, 6-9.
280 S.W. Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (London, 1978), 53f, on the Anglican use of *adiaphora* generally, as leading to indifference in doctrinal matters.
addressing present, pertinent theological quandaries, his expositional knowledge
demonstrates a desire to use scripture to stretch his readers to grow in their inclusivity of
divergent ideas. This attribute of Christian maturity, at least for Hooker, requires both a
rootedness in the Bible and a proper approach to biblical interpretation.
CHAPTER 3 — Hooker’s Use of the Bible & Exegetical Approach

Introduction

This chapter sets out the distinctive features of Hooker’s frequent reference to the Bible, and the exegetical approach implicit and explicit in this use, and in doing so indicates a new perspective on Hooker’s hermeneutics.

Before exploring Hooker’s use of the scriptures it may be helpful to mention how the Bible fits into the larger theological schema that Hooker embraced. Hooker believed the Bible belonged within a larger, God-given system of laws, which were pre-ordained from the beginning. According to Hooker the recognition of these God-given lawes, in all their diversity, should be seen as God’s own glorification, since he himself is the author of all laws and human obedience his due.281 This ordered way in which God’s presence is experienced is an overarching theme for Hooker’s view of the Bible. As Neelands observes, “Law was not to be considered negative in the historical present and positive in the eschatological future… for Hooker, law is always primarily of positive value, and it is eminently reasonable, or ought to be.” 282

Hooker’s work in Book I of the Lawes introduced a longstanding conversation about how he perceived God’s ordering of the world, and the role of the Bible in that regard. Four key aspects worth highlighting in this introduction are, firstly, that Hooker’s paradigm of laws is thoroughly formed by his reading of Scripture. Importantly, Hooker

281 Lawes, Book II.2.2 ; 1:149.18,19. “Nor is there any law of God, whereunto he doth not accompt our obedience his glorie.” Also see I.2.4.

believes that what he proposes is utterly biblical and ingrained in his overarching hermeneutical approach. In expounding this larger grand narrative in detail, we will take a brief look at what I have entitled “Scriptural Validation of the Lawes”.⁴⁻²⁸³ It is important to mention that, for Hooker, God’s love is exemplified in his gift of an ordered world, in appreciating his laws one might develop a deeper love of the lawgiver. For Hooker, “This super naturall way had God in himselfe prepared before all worldes.”⁴⁻²⁸⁴ Hence, Hooker believed in a loving God with a sovereign plan that continues to unfold.

Secondly, Hooker spent one chapter exploring the benefit of having God’s laws in written form. It will be helpful to examine what Hooker emphasizes as the benefits of this, and how they might fit into his hermeneutical trajectory. While the Bible remains his primary reference point, his view is that some laws are also evident by the ordered way in which God decided to govern the world. As part of his larger plan, Hooker found it necessary to comment on the importance of, and advantages to, having the Bible in written form. Drawing on the example of Moses and the Gospel of John, Hooker will emphasize that having the divine lawes written should help steer away for errors formed by an over insistence on traditionalism. Consequently, Hooker will find himself at the core of the brewing debate between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and their concerns relating to issues of authority.

Thirdly, it is worth returning to some important tensions as they emerged between Hooker and Walter Travers; both were passionate about the Bible, yet they were opposed

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²⁸³ As demonstrated in part I of this dissertation, it is also evident that other themes shaped Hooker’s larger framework, but I think it is significant that he continued to think biblically about these issues. See Kirby, “The Neoplatonic Logic of Richard Hooker’s Generic Division of Law”. Renaissance and Reformation (January 1998), 22. 4.

²⁸⁴ Lawes, 1.11.6; 1:118.23-25.
on how best to understand the use of scripture as it pertains to ecclesial matters. Entitled ‘Critics and the Dynamics of Tension’, this section will illustrate how Hooker’s exegetical practices were informed by relationships with particular contemporaries, which Hooker carefully navigated. Secor describes the distinct points of tension which emerged after Hooker’s appointment at the Temple noting that “[a]t first there was some public grumbling from the Middle Temple benches during services when he used the prescribed prayers, knelt at communion, prayed for bishops, and preached anything but strict Calvinist doctrine.”

A fourth, and final, aspect of Hooker’s growing theological hermeneutics is shown in his comments on how the human authorial role and the divine intersect as they relate to verbal inspiration. The theological understanding of biblical authority often requires reflecting on how the role of the Holy Spirit and the autonomy of the human writers overlap. For Hooker and the Reformers, in particular, this theme brought to the fore issues of clarity and concerns regarding the Bible’s trustworthiness. As will be noted, it is in this regard that Hooker’s developing views position him beyond the traditional magisterial approach to this issue. Calvin’s position will be specifically noted, since his Puritan contemporaries would have found his works authoritative in this regard.

After having explored these four aspects in Hooker’s rationale for both the use of scripture and its reliability, we will turn to Hooker’s detailed critique of fellow Puritans and their theology of the Bible. In so doing, both Hooker’s vast knowledge of the scriptures and his passion for the Church of England will be apparent. Moreover, his acuity, I will suggest, rests in his ability to recognize the dangers of an approach to the principle of sola

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scriptura, which limits other aspects of God’s multifaceted approach to displaying his glory, revealing his grace and accomplishing his will. As part of this discussion, I will argue that Hooker’s versatility with the biblical text not only implicitly critiques his fellow Reformers, but also invites them to expand their vision of what God is truly like.

The most consistent aspect of Hooker’s assessment is detailed in Book II of the Lawes. Accordingly, we will examine in detail what Hooker says about the Puritans’ approach to the Bible and why, he believes, their views must be deemed flawed. In addition, this section will demonstrate Hooker’s multi-dimensional use of scripture, as well as the tone of urgency that shapes his own hermeneutical proposal. Lastly, readers will be introduced to specific points of emphasis I have defined as ‘lenses of interpretation’.

Scriptural Validation of the Lawes

At the onset of his monumental work on ecclesiastical polity, Hooker begins an elaborate articulation on the orderliness of the world and how the laws that govern it flow from God’s guiding presence. It is Hooker’s position that all order emanates from God’s essence. He writes, “The being of God is a kinde of lawe to his working: for that perfection which God is, giveth perfection to that he doth.”286 For Hooker, perfection does not mean God removes himself from his created order, but instead he reveals attributes of who he is throughout the world. Therefore, Hooker suggests, those who are attentive to

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286 Lawes, I.2.2;1:59.5-6.
such realities can detect God’s ordered activity in this world and, more importantly, both believers and non-believers alike can understand godly actions.  

Hooker stresses that this way of understanding the world is not simply a principle of common human reason or classical philosophy; instead he demonstrates that this worldview is in line with what the Bible teaches. Exegetically, Hooker shows that Jesus, as the incarnate Son, was the great example of God working in the world. In so doing he references Jesus’ “spirit of truth” from John 16, and expounds how the Trinitarian realities, which order the Godhead, are also at work in the world. As he shows, it is in these biblical references that readers will find the interpersonal dynamism of Father, Son and Spirit.

This biblical citation was used by Hooker to remind readers that God’s very nature follows an intended pattern flowing from his very being as the ordered and loving Trinitarian creator. This, he believes, should instill hope considering that “everything is well done, because the world is ruled by so good a guide, as transgreseth not his owne law, then which nothing can be more absolute, perfect and just.” Here again readers should not be surprised to find two biblical citations combined: one from Hebrews and the other from 2 Timothy. Both texts emphasize God’s faithfulness to his people based on his promises. As some have also noted, for Hooker, this is the same biblical construct that

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287 Hooker believed that this was evident even to “the verie Heathens themselves.” Lawes I.2.3; 1:59.31.

288 “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you.” John 16:13-15 (NIV)

289 Lawes 1.2.6. 1:62.18-20.

290 Hebrews 6:17; 2 Tim. 2:13.
shapes his view of Christian assurance.\textsuperscript{291} While the theme of Christian assurance is not the focus here, Hooker is aware that the critiques being leveled against him, and the polity of the English church, seek to cause credible doubts about the Christian journey. Accordingly Hooker writes, “Behold therefore we offer the lawes whereby we live unto the generall triall and judgement of the whole world, hartely beseeching Almighty God, whome wee desire to serve according to his owne will.”\textsuperscript{292}

A more in-depth look at his writings also demonstrates that Hooker developed his biblical paradigm by examining both the Old and the New Testament. Referencing the creation narrative, Hooker explores how God’s laws are evident in the first few chapters of Genesis.\textsuperscript{293} It is significant to Hooker that God, when reflecting on man’s lonely state in the garden, lucidly states, ‘\textit{non est bonum}', an example of how scripture points to creation and its need for laws based on God’s way of dealing with his creations. In this sense, God’s laws are to be seen as \textit{bonum}. As noted by Neelands, Hooker sees a positive dynamic at play that explains how the goodness of God’s laws work within the created order. Consequently, Hooker believed that the Bible revealed the need and importance of different types of laws, derived from reason and revelation, directing people to the larger panoramic picture of a divine lawfulness\textsuperscript{294} that human reason could point to, but which must also be given in scripture.

Continuing on with the Old Testament, Hooker notes how “Moses in describing the worke of creation, attributeth speech unto God...[to] shew that God did then institute a law

\textsuperscript{292} Lawes 1.1.3.;1:58.5-8.
\textsuperscript{293}Genesis 2:18. Lawes 1.2.3;1:60.25-30.
\textsuperscript{294} The title of one chapter of Book I is “Wherefore God hath by Scripture further made known such supernatural laws, as do serve for man’s direction.”
natural to be observed by creatures.” Such statements demonstrate how his worldview has been thoroughly shaped by his reading of scripture. Therefore, what he hopes to show is not just a fanciful picture of how he thinks or would like the world to work, but an affirmation coupled with the very words of scripture, which reveal how God intended things to function. Furthermore, the laws that govern God’s creation are diverse depending on whom they were created for: laws that control heavenly beings, flow from the celestial law.

Expounding Psalm 104, Hooker observes, “He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.” In this reference to God’s angelic hosts, Hooker asserts that God’s laws govern his whole creation, including the angels, their abilities and activity. Hooker also adds that all angelic beings are moved by three influences: First, the love of God’s beauty; second, the adoration of God’s greatness; and lastly, the imitation of God’s actions. Although these angelic beings are given guidelines for fulfilling God’s plans, it is important to note these beings are not forced to obey God, but are rather invited to participate in the great unfolding narrative of redemption.

By explaining such issues, Hooker shows that God’s laws should be understood as guidelines of grace rather than forceful rules, stating that the angelic rebellion “hath beene through the voluntary breach of that lawe” which was set in place to govern them. Here it must be noted that there remains a serious difficulty in reconciling the voluntary actions of

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295 Lawes 1.3.2; 1:65. 4-6. Hooker also references Psalm 19:5 and later on Acts 17:28. Both passages added to his overarching picture that the Laws he discussed are mentioned in the scriptures.
296 See Lawes 1.4.1. 1:69.21-25.
297 Found in both Psalm 104:4 and Hebrews 1:7
the angels with a deterministic trajectory often correlated with the Reformed position. Hooker’s limited explanation suggests that pride was the original sin in this regard. 298

It bears mentioning that Calvin provides an interpretation of Psalm 104 which sits in stark contrast to Hooker’s. Hooker expounds how the multitudes of divine servants 299 are at the disposal of God, and at their core “desire to resemble him in goodness”, acting freely according to the nature God gives them. 300 Hence, Hooker’s essential focus is goodness as the essence, to which the angels respond freely. Calvin, on the other hand, interprets the text as a answer to those who cannot handle the horrible implications of a God that, by shear force, causes certain things to happen providentially. Calvin responds to those who struggle with his view of God’s judgemental causation by stating,

In no way could it be true that ‘he maketh the clouds his chariot, and walketh upon the wings of the wind’ (Ps 104:3,4), did he not at pleasure drive the clouds and winds and therein manifest the special presence of his power. In like manner, we are elsewhere taught, that whenever the sea is raised into a storm, its billows attest the special presence of God. ‘He commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves….’ 301

Calvin hoped his interpretation would put to rest those who still felt that in no way could it be true that God would, in his nature, will such atrocities. The angels and nature do not obey God freely and naturally, but under compulsion.

298 His only comment is that it must have been a self-reflexive act that caused the disruption on the favourable conditions God has put in place. He states that “a reflex of their understanding upon themselves” led to pride. It seems that pride was not there before, but instead a sense of narcissism led to pride. Lawes 1.4.3; 1:72.5-8.

299 A weakness of his thought here is that Hooker fails to articulate how sin and pride would enter this angelic sphere filled with ‘no uncomfortable passions to worke upon, but all joy.” Lawes 1.16.7

300 Lawes 1.4.1.; 1:70.9-12.

301 John Calvin, Institutes of Christian Religion, Book 1.16.7 Calvin here is also thinking of Psalm 107.
It is important to note that Hooker’s use of the Bible seemed fundamentally more nuanced when commenting on some of these difficult texts. As illustrated above, his focus remained in line with the larger purpose of interpreting the Bible as God’s story in which all creation is invited to play its part. The need to reinforce a theological deterministic position, as may be seen in some of Calvin’s readings of the Bible, is less of a focus for Hooker. Moreover, Hooker’s ‘sensitive’ hermeneutics focused on something quite different from Calvin’s, revealing a broader approach to biblical interpretation. In so doing, Hooker sought to support an alternative perspective which was potentially helpful to the English Protestantism of his day. Accordingly, Hooker leaves room in his biblical reading of the text for the allowance of the role of human knowledge, and its influence on human action.302

For Hooker the diverse laws govern different aspects of God’s creation. No matter the laws, all flow from the eternal law, which comes from God, hence their clear purpose and efficacy. In returning to the biblical text for his explanation, Hooker reminds his readers that his views concerning God’s laws, and thus God’s ways, are biblically grounded yet detectable by reason, revealing in Hooker’s hermeneutics a view of God that invited human participation governed within divine boundaries. It is within this framework that Hooker addresses the reality of human sinfulness and disobedience. Although called to obey God’s laws, humankind found itself disregarding the laws of God, and thus suffering the consequences. As Bouwsma observes,

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302 Hooker took the next few sections of book 1, specifically sections 6 and 7, to adumbrate the importance of knowledge and will as essential “fountaines of humaine action”. Lawes 1.7.2 ; 1:78.1-25. C.S. Lewis went as far as stating that Hookers invitation of human participation seems to minimize the debilitating aspect of sinful depravity. See C.S. Lewis, Poetry and Prose in the Sixteenth Century (Oxford 1954), 461.
Hooker emphasized the freedom of the will to ascend from sensual to spiritual existence — though presumably also to descend to lower levels of being — in passages that fit badly with his general orthodoxy on the helplessness of fallen humanity and the necessity of grace.\textsuperscript{303}

It is clarifications such as these that justify of Hooker’s, apparently, less than systematic way of appropriating the biblical text: human beings are helpless and need grace, yet in some sense God allows them to choose his ways freely and thoughtfully. While he clearly believed that scripture was intended to help people live in the light of Christ’s work on the Cross, this reality required that people have the option to freely choose to leave their selfish ways behind. It is these tensions and theological appropriations, which stirred fellow radical Reformers to wonder about his hermeneutical intentions and theological allegiances.\textsuperscript{304}

Having explored how the Bible informs the development and understanding of God’s vision for governing creation, Hooker will turn his attention to the ‘divine lawes’, Hooker’s term for God’s revelation as found in scripture. What is important for our purpose is to understand that for Hooker, although the Bible provides God’s divine law, this does not negate the human task of discovery in discerning what God is trying to say in his divine law; hence the importance and challenge of hermeneutics. For Hooker, as we will now see, the encouraging note is that God, in his wisdom and timing, has provided the divine laws in writing for the benefit of humankind.

\textsuperscript{303} William J. Bouwsma. ‘Hooker in European Cultural History’. in Richard Hooker and the Construction of Christian community, 50. See Lawes II.8.1.

\textsuperscript{304} See Kirby, ‘Reason and Law’, A Companion to Richard Hooker, 261.
‘The Benefite of having divine laws written’

In Chapter 13 of Book I of the Lawes, Hooker commits himself to exploring the benefits of having the word of God, known as the ‘divine laws’, in written form. It is important to see this chapter in light of his previous reflections that supernatural laws do not omit the need for natural laws. Without much clarity, Hooker provides a subtle note about “men’s lives being shortened” as the impetus for the recording of the divine laws in written form. “First therefore of Moyses it is said, that he ‘wrote all the words of God;’ not by his own private motion and devise: ‘for God taketh this act to him selfe, I have written.’”

Hooker’s thinking here is shaped by Exodus 24; in verse 4 we read, “Then Moses carefully wrote down all the LORD’s instructions.” In harmony with such a text, Hooker will reference the prophets, the Evangelist John and Augustine, to signify to his readers that, when dealing with the Bible, he has the utmost reverence for that writing, and God’s lead in instructing the writers.

Tucked into this argument is the reminder that “writing bee not that which addeth authorite and strength thereunto.” Thus, the authority of the biblical text stems not from the fact that it is written, but the fact that it has been proclaimed, experienced, lived out and embodied as authoritative by the people of God. Hence, Hooker carefully asserts the textual benefits of the Bible, while at the same time anchoring his thoughts on the oral tradition, which has authority before it is written down. In so doing, Hooker stresses that the kerygma must be seen as an essential part of the authority of scriptures, lest one minimize the ‘divine’ oral tradition, which preceded the writing of divine law.

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305 Lawes 1.13.1; 1:122.16-20.  
306 N.I.V.  
307 Lawes 1.13.1; 1:122.25-29.
In addition to his examination of these issues in Book I, Hooker returns to the oral aspect of the divine law in his argument in Book V of the *Lawes*, highlighting that in hearing the word of God, even if not preached or fully expounded, God’s word is at work. Hooker’s preferred category here is ‘testimony’. Again citing the example of Moses, and following a similar pattern as above, he states,

Moses and the Prophets, Christ and his Apostles were in theire times all preachers of God’s truth; some by worde, some by writinge, some by both. This they did partelie as faithfull *witnesses*, [emphasis his]...The Church as a witnesse preacheth here meere revealed truth by reading publiquely the sacred scripture. 308

Although the Reformation was a critique of the church, for Hooker the church can still be a point of authority for matters of faith and doctrine. Nevertheless, the church as witness is the glue that grips people to the truth when hearing the scripture read.

I suggest that Hooker’s expansive interpretative method sees these themes as underlying the larger redemptive narrative of the Bible as a whole. Thus Hooker has no difficulty weaving themes of diverse books together into his larger argument. Specifically in book I, Hooker demonstrates the ease with which his understanding of an Exodus narrative can be better understood through the lens of the minor prophet Hosea: underscoring the benefits of having the divine law written down. Correspondingly, Hooker states Hosea 8:12 to affirm that whenever God’s people were given laws it was God who was providing them: “I have written for him the great things of My law, But they were considered a strange thing.”309 Hooker’s exegesis of the Prophet Hosea emphasizes God’s role in the giving of the divine laws for the sake of his people. In this sense, Hooker saw

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309 NKJV, Hosea 8:12.
the whole Old Testament as a grand narrative from which one can come to understand and embrace God’s law-giving nature as a gift to be celebrated.

It is notable that Hooker entirely ignores the larger context of the Hosea passage, specifically the repeated disloyalty of the covenant people, strikingly utilizing a negative prophetic utterance to reinforce a positive aspect of God’s nature. The whole of chapter 8 in Hosea is about the apostasy of Israel due to their minimizing of God’s law and making excuses for their disobedience. Yet Hooker draws out positive implications about the beauty of the law, and the fact that it comes directly from God, without dealing with the disobedience that might otherwise be seen as the principal message.

Whether he intends his audience — in the sense of those he is debating with, not those he expects will agree with him already — to reread or rethink the larger implication of the prophet is not clear. Nonetheless it is profound that Hooker’s reading and interpretation of this biblical passage was concerned with emphasizing his own theological point, which would hopefully provide strength to his overarching worldview, as well as address questions found in the advanced Calvinist camp.

Interestingly, Calvin’s commentary on Hosea focused on the context with precision. Acting in the tradition of Augustine, all Reformers commended focus on the intent of the text when possible and clear. Greef states, “Calvin upheld the notion in his sermons, lectures, and commentaries that an exegete, when interpreting the Bible, needed to follow
that which the author meant to say.” Calvin’s commentary on Hosea 8 gives readers a picture of what Hosea, as the author, postulates:

Hence the Prophet now declares, that all the superstitions, which then prevailed among the people of Israel, were condemned before God; for they obeyed not the law, but had spurious and perverted modes of worship, which they had invented for themselves.

While both Hooker and Calvin acknowledge that the law was to provide a boundary marker for God’s people, Calvin’s exegetical leanings were toward condemnation of sinfulness while Hooker’s was towards grace. Hooker’s critics often touted this as a concern claiming to follow the magisterial tradition. Hence, examples such as these force us to recognize Hooker as respecting the continental Reformation tradition, while at the same time allowing his hermeneutical approach to push some ideas further.

One of the benefits Hooker will address brings our attention to issues particular to the Roman Catholic tradition. Hooker’s thinking as it relates to the benefits of ‘having divine lawes written’ gives him an opportunity to point out concerns related to the Roman Catholic error which “pleade for the auctorite of Tradition” with the same strength and authority as the scriptures themselves. For Hooker, God’s divine laws stand in a completely different category since, “What hazard the truth is in when it passeth through the hands of report, how maimed and deformed it becommeth.” Hence, one of the benefits of having

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312 “the Law was integral part of the Covenant, of which it was the seal and warrant that God had not turned away from man.” Francois Wendel, Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought, 196.

313 Lawes 1.13.2.; 1:123.9.

314 Lawes 1.13.2; 1:123.15-17.
God’s laws written is that it can be a continual source from which to correct the “truths” which pass through the hands of men.

The principal benefit of God’s word being written down for Hooker is that readers could have a stable point of verification of God’s ways long considered both authoritative and universal, instead of the unstable means of oral transmission. Another key aspect was that although traditions are helpful, they could change if not measured according to the divine law as written in the Bible. This remains a point of concern for Hooker. Thus he is clear that Roman Catholics who give undue authority to inherited traditions of man, rather than the Word of God written, should be corrected. He states emphatically: “How miserable had the state of the Church of God bene long ere this, if wanting the sacred scripture we have no record of his lawes, but only the memorie of man receyving the same by report and relation from his predecessors?”

At the close of this 13th chapter, Hooker summarizes the great benefit of having the divine law in written form: that we can learn of its perfect place in God’s purposes, and of the vast diversity with which God has chosen to reveal himself to his people. As he states, “all the venerable bookes of scripture, all those sacred tomes and volumes of holie write, they are with such perfection framed.” This gift of the scriptures, although paramount and part of how Hooker understands sola scriptura, brought the very real need for interpreters who could discern the best way to understand God’s will to reap the benefits and blessings in life and in ecclesial practices. At the heart of what Hooker advanced is that the Bible was ordained by God, is his own words, and is available in written form now. In

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315 Lawes, 1.13.2; also see Jude 1.7.
316 Lawes, 1.13.3; 1:124.20-23.
the hermeneutical dilemmas that ensued, Hooker takes advantage of the written text to enlighten and admonish those who continue to attack his views and the structure of the English Church.

_Scripture, Critics and the Dynamics of Tension_

Walter Travers (1548 – 1635), following in the legacy of Thomas Cartwright, became a chief critic of Hooker’s views, insisting his Reformed version of Protestantism remained most faithful to the biblical text. Published in 1612 but apparently composed at the time of the crisis at the Temple in about 1584, his address to the Privy Council protesting his removal from the Temple, made clear his displeasure with Hooker and his theological position. Addressing his concerns about “Mr. Hooker,” as he called him, he writes, “According to which determination, whereas he had taught certaine things concerning predestination otherwise then the word of God doth, as it is understood by all churches professing the gospel.” Travers’ note points to how doctrinal orthodoxy, in this case on the subject of predestination, became an important measurement of whether one truly interpreted the words of scripture, and in his estimation, Hooker’s hermeneutics did not live up to the reformed standard he was proposing. In this regard, Travers directs us to a considerable point of contention that, once again, helps to shed light on Hooker’s approach.

Hooker was not overly concerned with aligning his exegetical approach to conform to specific doctrinal positions the leading Reformers of his day deemed paramount. Consequently, Hooker had personally experienced how Travers’ variety of reformed

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Calvinism could become most divisive. In reflecting on this tension he writes: “we are accused as men that will not have Christ Jesus rule over them, but have wilfully cast his statutes behind their backs, hating to be reformed, and made subject unto the sceptre of his discipline.” Keenly aware of how his differing views and approach to the Bible bolstered these attacks, Hooker sought to defend his proposal as firmly biblical, and much more in tune with the institutional vision needed for the flourishing of the Church of England. Hence, the issues of biblical interpretation would come to shape the backdrop of this debate.

It thus became part of Hooker’s central argument of the Lawes to defend, not only the Elizabethan jurisdiction, but also his own position on biblical authority and his exegetical views. As he states: “[T]he lawes of the Church, whereby for so many ages together we have beene guided in the exercise of Christian religion, and the service of the true God, our rites, customes, and orders of Ecclesiaticall governement are called in question….” And so, the apology he sets out to pen contains underlying tensions that cannot be reduced to disagreement about theological positions, and in some ways, becomes personal and the consequences are costly.

Having said that, Hooker invites readers to understand that his primary role is not to malign or distort the progress of God’s Reformation in England, but to provide biblical clarity and address accusations. Subsequently, he seems amiable in his desire to come to an

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319 *Lawes* 1.1.3; I:58.2-5.
320 *Lawes* 1.1.3; I:57.32-35.
agreement with those advocating further reform.321 Commenting on the urgency and context of the Lawes Kirby suggests that, “It is the apologetical intent of the Lawes to demonstrate beyond doubt that the entire edifice of the Elizabethan Settlement is grounded upon the mutually acknowledged principles of reformed doctrinal orthodoxy.”322 While Kirby’s attempt to situate Hooker properly is well placed and his general thesis correct, I believe his desire to see Hooker fit within a reformed doctrinal orthodoxy misses the more significant reality, which has been demonstrated. For Hooker the prime concern is to ground his thoughts on the principles of scripture itself, and not on some of the distinctive Reformed leanings found therein. As has been noted, it is in a closer look at Hooker’s hermeneutical approach that this truth comes to the surface.

One of most significant examples concerning the tension between Hooker’s theological points of emphasis, and that of his Reformed contemporaries, relates to the role of the church in how one comes to embrace the Bible as authoritative. In this regard, Hooker is thoroughly Augustinian; as argued in chapter 2. Augustine’s influence on Hooker is multivalent and noticeable. Specifically, for Augustine and Hooker, the role of the church remains indispensable in creating a fertile framework for trusting in the authority of the Bible. While all of the above points concerning ‘the benefits of the Bible in written form’ remain profitable, Hooker’s distinctive contribution to this debate is his heightened view that both reason and the church play a pivotal role in framing, and solidifying, his position on biblical authority. This was not always welcomed by other authoritative perspectives of his day.

321 “Thinke not that ye reade the words of one, who bendeth him selfe as an adversarie against the truth which ye have already embraced; but the words of one, who desireth even to embrace together with you the selfie same truth…”Preface. I.3; I:3:1-6
In differing fashion, Calvin’s position set out to minimize the role of the church, and other reasonable opinions, as it related to biblical authority. As he writes,

…the testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to his own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who spoke by the mouth of the prophets, must penetrate our hearts, in order to convince us that they faithfully delivered the message with which they were divinely entrusted.\(^\text{323}\)

Calvin’s emphasis is clearly pneumatological, putting the emphasis primarily on individuals and their personal alignment with the Spirit’s prompting as essential to embracing the scriptures as authoritative. Calvin is, in fact, against the church being involved in any way with the affirmation of the Bible as authoritative. As part of this respected reformed position, it was God’s Holy Spirit that confirmed things in an individual’s spirit. This was the method by which one was assured, and convinced, of the trustworthiness of the Bible. For Calvin, those whose experience led to doubts and uncertainty in this regard, have not had their minds enlightened, and are like those “tossed to and fro in a sea of doubts.”\(^\text{324}\) In opposition, Hooker’s emphasis is on the stability available through the voice of the church, especially in moments of doubt.

Consequently, the church’s role as it relates to understanding the issue of biblical authority should not be minimized. Instead, moments of doubt should be calmed by the accentuation of God’s faithfulness throughout many generations. Keeping the focus on the communal component of this process positions Hooker on a very different path when compared with Calvin and the leading Reformers. Grislis, observing similar patterns, states that “…when Hooker’s thought seems less than exact, the reader is well advised to withhold

\(^{323}\) Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, Bk 1.7.4.
\(^{324}\) \textit{Ibid.}
judgment: Hooker may simply wish not to close out options he would find valuable in another context,”

defying critics who wanted Hooker to fit neatly into their proposed Protestant framework.

Hooker’s views on the Bible and issues of doctrine also seem to leave room for Roman Catholics who were open to correcting errors in their theological systems. For Travers, this position was too irenic. Accordingly, Travers’ biblical interpretation points to two texts which demonstrate that, based on the authority of the Bible, Roman Catholics, due to their superstitious ways, ‘could not be said to be saved.’

Travers states that he was irate to hear Hooker, in his own sermon, imply that “Church or Rome may be saved by such a faith in Christ, as they had, with a generall repentance of all their errors.”

Travers’ *Supplication* illustrates one of the dynamic tensions and disagreements between Hooker and his fellow Protestants: his not aligning himself with the generally agreed upon positions of the Reformed divines. Thus, while salvation should stir one’s desire for correct teaching, the primary focus should remain on claiming faith in Christ.

Travers had posited that salvation finds its assurance and foundation in correct doctrine, which the Roman Catholic Church, according to him, did not uphold. Neelands carefully observes that, for Hooker, this aggressive Reformed stance on correct doctrine actually led to more doubt and often moved a person further from a correct view of a

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326 Supplication, 14. Two scriptures that Travers claimed for his position were Apoc. 18.4, Gal. 5:2-4.


328 In 1574 Travers’ work, *Full and Plain Declaration of Ecclesiastical Discipline*, moved the issue of correct doctrine to imposing the ideas of correct polity. See also Richard Hooker, “Master Hooker’s Answere to the Supplication that Master Travers made to the Counsell,” *FLE* 5:211-257.
loving God, or the possibly of seeking a correct doctrine. Providing commentary on Hooker’s sermon he writes,

In *Certaintie and Perpetuitie*, Hooker repeats emphatically the spiritual importance of recognizing the subjective fallibility and weakness of mental certainty in matters of faith. The assumption of perfect assurance is a presumptuous assertion that the human being has already achieved glory.\(^\text{329}\)

Thus for Hooker, God’s grace left room for points of error, making it possible that even Roman Catholics living in error could, in a sense, be considered as part of God’s elect. In fact, this could be treated as the whole theme of the *Discourse of Justification*: only denying the foundation will put one outside the framework of salvation; erroneously adding something to the foundation (as Roman Catholics were supposed to do), did not, in itself, lead to the judgement of God. So long as the “Foundation” was not denied, salvation is in Christ.\(^\text{330}\) It was disagreements such as this that came to distinguish Hooker’s thinking from many other Reformers of his day.

Finally, this generosity put him in opposition to Travers’ position concerning ecclesial polity. Adamant that the Church of England move to a Presbyterian organizational model, Travers and his Puritan contemporaries found deep disagreement with Hooker’s interpretation. In response to Travers’ comments on “ecclesial discipline” Hooker summarizes,

The plaine intent of the booke of ecclesiastical discipline is to shewe, that men may not devise lawes of Church government, but are bound for ever to use and to execute only those, which God him selfe hath already devised and delievered in the scripture.\(^\text{331}\)

\(^{329}\) Neelands, *Richard Hooker and Assurance*, 103.


\(^{331}\) *Lawes*, III.7.4; I:218.31-35.
These tensions continued to emerge as scripture was interpreted within the scope of larger Reformation ideals. For Hooker, any approach to the Bible that did not make room for God’s guiding presence, or allow for change and diversity in biblical interpretation, could not be helpful. What was at stake was the need to reassert the joys of God’s revelation in Scripture, without privileging doctrinal peculiarities as part of one’s larger hermeneutical scheme of assurance of salvation. Hooker’s hermeneutics emphasized a picture of God as intimately connected with his church, minimizing any fears related to hermeneutical differences or possible points of divergence. Thus God’s presence and ongoing interaction with his people find their culmination in a authentic biblical theology. As Hill explains,

> The historical participation of God in the creating of human texts thus underwrites human history as ontologically real and worthy of our trust. Conversely, the textualization of that history facilitates and underwrites the work of later continuators, interpreters, commentators, and—one may say—of editors. It is in this sense that God is the ‘author’ of Holy Scripture.332

This insight grounds much of Hooker’s ongoing tension with some other paradigms at work in his approach to the Bible and his hermeneutics.

*The Intricacies of Verbal Inspiration*

In addition to an expansive articulation of God’s laws, and their affirmation strongly rooted in Scripture, Hooker uses the last few chapters of Book I to point readers toward the theme of verbal inspiration333 as it relates to the Bible. He notes that God’s causality is seen in different types of texts when, Moses, the prophets, St. John and the

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333 Hooker does not much use the vocabulary of “inspiration”, which did not figure in the English Articles. But he certainly understood that God “caused all scripture to be written for our sakes” as the *Prayer Book* said in the Collect for the Second Sunday of Advent Service.
other disciples wrote by God’s command. As noted earlier, it is Hooker’s view that the Holy Spirit was at work in bringing God’s words through a process where we now reap the benefits of having it in written form. Having said that, inspiration for Hooker, is not relegated solely to the canonsed written product of the Bible, but also to its subsequent oral delivery and interpretation by its hearers.

Hooker’s views on God’s causality have been intensely debated, and those debates have continued to produce considerable disagreements. Most recently Atkinson explored the issues and deduced: “Hooker’s confidence in Scripture as ‘the strongest proof of all’ however, rests on a thorough-going doctrine of verbal inspiration.” Whether it is the “strongest proof” can be debated, but Atkinson is correct in noting that God’s coercive causality does shape Hooker’s developing approach to scripture.

As part of his developing argument Atkinson proceeds to point out some of the inconsistencies in the work of Egil Grislis, and his views on Hooker’s approach to biblical inspiration. According to Grislis, Hooker suggests that some sections in scripture, specifically Job 42:3, are to be interpreted as implications that the writers, although inspired, were not consumed in some spiritual state allowing them to fully comprehend what they are writing about. For Grislis, it seems important to defend the fact that God does not inspire docta ignorantia. The controversial realities therein may be stated as follows: in using human authors does God leave room for the possible mishaps related to verbal inspiration, or does the Holy Spirit’s role in the inspiration efface all errors? Grislis’ point

\[334\] Lawes I.13.1; 1:122.14-16.
\[335\] Atkinson, Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, 94.
\[336\] Atkinson, 95.
\[337\] “You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” Job 42:3 (NIV)
is best understood in his balanced statement: “Divine inspiration, seen as the creative work of God, was indeed perfect yet necessarily personal.”338 What remains unclear is whether the personal component actually interferes with the textual realities. If so, the Reformers believed this put the whole of the biblical canon in question, and thus the whole paradigm of biblical authority would collapse.

As a rebuttal to the above points, Atkinson demonstrates that if some texts are inspired and some are not, then you would soon be dealing with the difficulty of a canon within the canon. In fact, Atkinson believes that if Hooker were thinking in this way he would have pointed it out. Both Atkinson and Grislis are thoughtful and helpful in their remarks. Their points reveal that Hooker’s approach concerning biblical inspiration was not as lucid as some might like or suggest.

With that in mind, it is helpful to remember that Hooker does provide a most memorable example of what he believed happened in the process of “inspiration”. For Hooker’s views we turn to his *Sermons on St. Jude*. By using the imagery of musical instruments Hooker comments on how God,

so oft as he employed them in this heavenly work, they neither spake, nor wrote any word of their own, but uttered syllable by syllable as the spirit put it into their mouths, no otherwise than the Harp or the Lute doth give a sound according to the discretion of his hands that holdeth and striketh it with skill. The difference is only this. An instrument whether it be a pipe or a harp maketh a distinction in the times and sounds, which distinction is well perceived of the hearer, the instrument itself understanding not what is piped or harped.” 339

339 *Jude*, 1.4; 5:17.5-15.
This insight suggests that the inspired authors “maketh a distinction in the times and sounds”; yet they never cease being in the hands of God. Here is the personal component Grislis believes should not be lost. Actually, it seems that in this regard, Grislis’ point finds considerable strength.

Having said that, this need not mean that those sections of scripture are any less “inspired”. As Hooker emphasized that “[t]he testimonies of God are true, the testimonies of God are perfect, the testimonies of God are all sufficient unto that end for which they were geven. Therefore accordingly we do receive them.”340 It seems that for Hooker, the language of inspiration carried deep significance, even for those passages or genres of scripture that were of lesser importance or lacked sufficient clarity, as the sufficiency of scripture related to the “end for which they were given”, that is, that we might believe and in believing be saved.341

Grislis is careful to note that in Hooker’s overall scheme there remained examples of biblical authors whose finite humanity is not superseded in the act of writing scripture, and hence this entails a dialectical tension between inspiration and fallibility.342 Joyce, building on Atkinson’s concerns, remarks that Grislis’ comments add considerable complexity to what Hooker’s works were trying to do. Is he then suggesting that the authority of scripture is not based on its being inspired but on something else? As she denotes: “Grislis posits a distinction between two levels of scripture in Hooker, ‘ uninspired’ and ‘inspired’.”343 Although Joyce and Atkinson provide important points for

340 Lawes II.8.5; 1:189.2-5.
343 A.J. Joyce, Hooker and Anglican Moral Theology, 108.
discussion, it remains clear that Grislis is trying to hold in tension Hooker’s constant emphasis on the reliability of the Bible as God’s Word as well as the challenges inherent in involving human authors.

The theme of biblical inspiration, however complex, remained an important part of Hooker’s theology of scripture. Perhaps the most contentious point on this issue is found in one of his sermons. He writes,

...prophesies, although they contain nothing which is not profitable for our instruction, yet as one star differeth from another in glory, so every word of prophecy hath a treasure of matter in it, but all matter are not of like importance, as all treasures are not of equal price. The chief and principal matter of prophecy is the promise of righteousness, peace, holiness, glory, victory, immortality unto every soul which believeth, that Jesus is Christ, of the Jew first, and of the Gentile.\textsuperscript{344}

The fact that Hooker emphasizes that “all treasures are not of equal price” is not to imply that some scriptures are of less importance or less “inspired”. To Hooker they are all treasures, but must be understood contextually. In understanding the context, readers can then distinguish which part of God’s word, in this case prophecy, can be applicable to one’s life. This requires careful discernment lest one try to force all texts, because they are inspired, to be used for contemporary dealings. As referenced above, Hooker believed that even prophecy should be seen as having a telos, a clear purpose, ‘the chief and principal matter of prophecy,’ and this was to return readers to the promise of God’s handiwork in redeeming every soul.\textsuperscript{345} It seems unlikely that Hooker denied God’s causality, or

\textsuperscript{344} 1 Jude, FLE 5:17. 5-9.
\textsuperscript{345} As has been noted, the fact that Hooker emphasized every soul, once again distances him from some of the theological leanings of the Calvinist school, which emphasized exclusive election, not the universal salvific will.
inspiration, to any part of scripture, but there could always be errors of interpretation, since interpreters are not infallible, thus making correct hermeneutics of the highest importance:

And after much travail, and much pains, when we open our lips to speak of the wonderful works of God, our tongues do alter within our mouths, yea many times we disgrace the dreadful mysteries of our faith and grieve the spirit of our hearers by words unsavoury, and unseemly speeches…. Yea behold, even they that are wisest amongst us living, compared with the Prophets, seem no otherwise talk of God, then as if the children which are carried in arms should speak of the greatest matters of state.346

By identifying four key areas pertinent to Hooker’s understanding of the authority and importance of the Bible, I have attempted to show the unique path that Hooker carved out for his views. While firmly rooted within the larger Protestant ethos of his day, Hooker never allowed readers to forget the multifaceted lens required when interpreting the beautiful, divinely inspired text. Although some of these issues remain difficult to fully comprehend, Hooker’s commitment to biblical authority does not waver and his views that the Scriptures are trustworthy and divinely ordained should not be overlooked. It is this larger framework that allows for a more thoughtful understanding of how Hooker addressed some of the practical hermeneutical challenges found within his pastoral context.

Book II – Problems, ‘Proofes’ and Hermeneutical Clarity

Book II of Hooker’s Lawes provides some of the most systematic examples of his use of scripture in attempting to deal with accusations related to biblical authority. While there is no doubt that Hooker held to the doctrine of the primacy of scripture, what remained in question was how Hooker envisioned this doctrine being applied in the context

346 FLE, 1 Jude, 4; 5:16:4-11.
of a maturing and hardening English Reformation. Although, the above points are key aspects to Hooker hermeneutical thoughts, they did not always provide consistent clarity. In this light, we now turn to the importance of scriptural exegesis and some salient examples of how Hooker interprets specific texts as a method of correcting and highlighting the problems, imbedded in the views of his Puritan counterparts. In so doing, Hooker offers a renewed commitment to biblical authority without being unbiblical, and stretching the text further than needed.\(^{347}\)

**The Root of the Problem**

Hooker sets out to cogently explore a way of interpreting scripture that made room for God’s diverse methods, while at the same time addressing the concerns and exegetical mishandlings he believed were at the heart of the issue. As discussed above, Hooker was deeply committed to the authority of scripture and its special place in forming what we would call patterns of orthopraxy, which shaped both personal and ecclesial life. Nevertheless, he was dismayed by the position on scriptural authority that had taken shape among prominent Puritans of his day, which minimized the fluidity needed in hermeneutics to address new and changing concerns. Believing it to be erroneous, Hooker aggressively addressed matters that, if left unattended, would continue to weaken the ecclesiastical structure of the Church of England. Moreover it will become clear that, for Hooker, an ill-considered approach to hermeneutics clouded one’s ability to experience the power of God.

\(^{347}\) We cannot say the authority of scripture “alone” (i.e., *sola scriptura*, since he acknowledges the authority of God-given human reason, and of the church as well, but these must give place to the authority of scripture. We might term this position, *prima scriptura*, as some modern Lutherans do. Scripture is perfect (“sufficient”), Hooker insists, but “for the end to which it was instituted” *Lawes I*, 14 see title of this section.
in a life of obedience. In addition, this section will show that if the Lawes is solely characterized as a work of apology, Hooker’s impressive deconstruction of the Puritan approach can be missed as insignificant. Hooker is clearly on the offensive in this section.

In discussing some examples found in Book II, it is paramount to notice Hooker’s exegetical attempts in light of the larger Reformation problems. Sola Scriptura, as embraced by some of Hooker’s contemporaries, came to mean that only in the strict obedience of every word of scripture, and only in scripture, could one find guidance in decision making for matters of faith and practice. This view rendered scripture omni-competent making it authoritative for all doctrine and all right action. Simply put, an attribute once associated primarily with God was now transferred to the biblical text. Nonetheless, the Church of England held that for core doctrine alone (“matters necessary for salvation”) scripture was to be the only authority. However to the Puritans, to read beyond what was clearly stated in the Bible weakened the commitment to sola scriptura. In this light, Hooker proposed a hermeneutical solution best understood as prima scriptura. While Hooker never used this term, he does provide readers with a hermeneutical lens which, I argue, anchored his approach to biblical interpretation on the principal of ‘scripture first’ but not ‘alone’.

The title of Book II might help illustrate the discussion, “Concerning their first position who urge Reformation in the Church of England: Namely, That Scripture is the onely rule [emphasis mine] of all things which in this life may be done [emphasis mine] by

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348 Lawes II. 2.1; 1:149.10-20.
349 Hooker’s depicted this as the seed at the root of the problems he was dealing with. Lawes II.1.2; 1:145.6-8.
men,” a remarkable title with two points of significance for our cause. Hooker’s opposition is characterized as those who endorse ‘scripture onely’, sola scriptura. Hooker clearly delineates between himself and those who see the scripture as the ‘onely’ rule. For Hooker this is not a position endorsed by the scriptures since God points to numerous places wherein humankind can, by other rules and laws, come to an appreciation of grace, goodness and God’s overarching love. Furthermore, it goes beyond the doctrinal decisions of the Church of England in Article 6, which claims unique authority for scripture only in core doctrine, those things “necessary for salvation” and not for every form of ecclesial action.

Before exploring the texts that demonstrate this principle, Hooker, as part of this carefully-titled section, mentions that his intended audience not only believe how a person should live their lives but that ‘what may be done’ has to be strictly determined in the scriptures. On numerous occasions Hooker set out to show that this approach to biblical interpretation is not only foolish and impossible, but is not what the Bible itself suggests. Moreover, this enlarging method of interpretation would soon render the other plentiful ways of God’s instruction, which Hooker believed were evidenced in scripture, superfluous and irrelevant.

Despite these concerns Hooker was succinct when explaining that the root problem is characterized by some contemporaries’ desire to “enlarge” the text beyond its intended purpose.\textsuperscript{351} As he states, the present hermeneutical drift of his critics is that they seek “to enlarge the necessarie use of the word of God; which desire hath begotten an error

\textsuperscript{351} Lawes, II.1.2.; 1:145. 6-8.
enlarging it further then (as we are perswaded) soundnes of truth will beare.”\textsuperscript{352} For Hooker, this is the root cause of the problem shaping the larger scope of their hermeneutical lens. Furthermore, the challenge of this approach was that it was not found in scripture; hence the rest of Book II will carry with it an underlying apologetic against this position.

In his response, Hooker shares two words of admonition. After identifying these so-called “enlargers” he states that they should not seek to “extend” the biblical text and not try to be “exact” on every action. The reason: “God hath left sundry kindes of lawes unto men, and by all [emphasis mine] those lawes the actions of men are in some sort directed.”\textsuperscript{353} For Hooker, one’s hermeneutic must situate itself within the larger redemptive narrative of God. Hence, all laws play a special role in how God has decided to reveal himself and communicate and care for his creation.

As part of his proposed solution, Hooker examines four biblical texts that were supposed to provide scriptural ‘proofe’, as he calls it, toward reconsidering the dangers of unreflectively extending, or in every action exacting, ideas that are not found in the Bible. Joyce, on discussing moral theology and biblical exegesis reminds us that,


Hooker points out that scripture does not tell us everything that we might wish to know about the apostolic period, and goes on to introduce the notion that there was historical development even within that time.\textsuperscript{[H]ence any simplistic appeal to an apostolic precedent is likely to be both inexact and unsatisfactory.\textsuperscript{354}

\textsuperscript{352} Article 6 had included “nor may be proved thereby”, that is, from that which “Scripture does plainly declare” to include such things as the vocabulary of the Trinity, though not its truth; but Travers and others had argued beyond the reasonable limits of such direct proof, from references to practical functions in the early church to divinely mandated order. Lawes II.1.2

\textsuperscript{353} Lawes, 1.1.2; 1:145.10-13.

\textsuperscript{354} Joyce, Richard Hooker & Anglican Moral Theology, 129.
Thus, to ignore his exegetical reproof renders one guilty of pushing the authority of scripture outside God’s intended range. This is more than an apology; it is a key moment in the legacy of Hooker’s theological force and fortitude. For Hooker, returning to the text itself, and demonstrating a biblical hermeneutical approach as is depicted from the Bible would address this obstinate denial. Having said that, Hooker’s critics believed that their textual interpretation was valid, and thus felt the need to correct Hooker. While many have agreed that ‘reason’ plays a considerable part in Hooker’s epistemological explorations, his primary audience remained suspicious about the use of reason in such matters; although they did value reason in areas outside the church, its institutions and its doctrine.

‘Proofe’ and an Overarching Hermeneutical Lens. 355

As part of his explanation Hooker takes readers on a journey of biblical ‘proofes’ with the hope of clarifying that his goal is to distinguish, “which is of God we defend, to the uttermost of that habilitie which he hath given: that which is otherwise, let it wither even in the roote from whence it hath sprong.”356 He has already taken steps, as part of Book I of the Lawes, to provide a robust picture of his epistemological and cosmological views of how God’s plan might be evidenced through such systems of ordered laws. Subsequently, it was his goal to explore an “internal” set of governing principles which are also shaped by hermeneutical approach. Hence, Hooker’s hope was that his biblical exposition would assist and guide individuals in being faithful when trying to appropriate and interpret the Bible, as well as correct any misunderstandings.

355 Hooker’s introduction to the Second Book of the Lawes begins with biblical proofs to reinforce his view of the Bible and his larger polemic against his Puritan critics. Atkinson carefully emphasizes, “In Hooker’s hands Scripture becomes the basis for the ‘strongest proof of all’”. 92.
356 Lawes II:1.1; 1:144.12-15.
Historically, this was no easy task. In fact, following in the Reformation tradition, tensions over proper interpretation and scriptural reliability continuously appeared. Nevertheless, Evans observes that, “[f]ollowing Augustine and Gregory, mediaeval authors had usually striven to see discrepancies in the text as evidences that God adapts himself to men in their limited and confused understanding.”

From this perspective, Hooker’s less rigid approach relative to his critics may fit him within the broader mediaeval ethos.

In Book II, Hooker will show how God invites readers of scripture to explore a multilayered approach to interpretation, which is malleable in addressing the changing landscape of his Reformation context. Hooker, subsequent to addressing the roots and dangers of a type of biblical omniscience, turns his attention to discrepancies in a type of reading of scriptures that limits God’s method of teaching his people. In detailing his concern for a more helpful exposition of the biblical text, Hooker demonstrated his literary versatility for interpretation through his grasp of the larger biblical narratives, and the diversity in thinking required to grapple with the Bible’s many genres. In so doing, his primary focus remained the challenge of how sola scriptura, if not carefully defined, ran the risk of minimizing how God decided to use the Biblical text. Hence, those who wish to “enlarge” the Bible, to say more than God intended it to say, are settling in a very dangerous theological space.

Hooker restates the problem by adding a renewed interest in the larger political underpinnings of his critics’ position:

By means whereof having found this the head theoreme of all their discourses, who pleade for the change of Ecclesiasticall government in England, namely, That the Scripture of God is in such sort the rule of humaine actions, that simply

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357 Evans, The Language and Logic of the Bible. 15.
whatsoever we doe, and are not by it directed thereunto, the same is sinne; we hold it necessarie that the proofes hereof be weighed.\textsuperscript{358}

Here Hooker ardently reveals that much more is at stake than had previously been expressed. Elaborating on the hermeneutical problem, he reminds readers how those who propose enlarging the text, if left unattended, seem to be developing an argument that would flourish into a political attack on the ecclesiastical structure of the church. Moreover, according to his interlocutors, those who do not stand with this radical reformed position are living in sinful disobedience.

Thus, Hooker refocuses his attention on interpreting Proverbs 2:9\textsuperscript{359} stating, “[m]y soone, if thou receive my wordes etc. Then thou shalt understand justice, and judgement, and equitie and every good way.”\textsuperscript{360} The point of contention is with those who read the words “and every good way” to imply that God’s words reveals everything that one must do.

For Hooker, this type of reading is both overly literalistic, implying and imposing a type of limitation on God who reveals himself as expansive and innovative in his approaches with his creation. In addition, the scriptures provide multiple examples of God’s interactions with his people, all of which should be seen as good. To demonstrate his concern Hooker, seeks to re-interpret this text with the underlying theme of wisdom as depicted in the life of those, who according to the Bible, did not have the ‘Word’ of God in the same way Post-Reformation Christians did.

\textsuperscript{358} Lawes II.1.3. Commenting on Romans 10:20 “whatever is not of faith is sin.” I:146.23-28.
\textsuperscript{359} Cartwright had interpreted some of these texts to reinforce his position, which the Puritans embraced as biblical.
\textsuperscript{360} Hooker’s version as expressed at the beginning of Book II.1.3; I:146.1-5.
To miss this multilayered approach to interpreting the text is to neglect God’s broader method of interacting with humankind. For Hooker, this is a ‘dis-graceful’ limiting of God’s gracious self-revelation: “We may not so in any one special kind admire her that we disgrace her in any other, but let all her wayes be according unto their place and degree adored.”

Consequently, to ‘disgrace’ wisdom (God personified) is not a helpful approach when dealing with the beauty and expansiveness of the Bible, and God’s intended purpose for its use in hermeneutical interpretations. For Hooker, a grace-filled approach gave ease in understanding other important overarching themes within the text.

The first passage Hooker sets out to explore is found in Proverbs 2:9. According to Hooker, Solomon is the author and he states, “[m]y soone, if thou receive my wordes etc. then though shalt understand justice, and judgement, and equite, and every good way.” In expounding this passage, Hooker elaborates that text such as these invite readers to embrace all scripture as a window to God’s creative goodness. In so doing, his exegesis is noteworthy as Hooker suggests that God’s presence and guidance were clearly available to Adam at creation, the Patriarchs who had yet to experience the receiving of the law, David as king who encouraged others in new ways, and finally Solomon who is the author of the Proverbs.

As a result, the temptation to isolate the reading of any scriptural text from this larger biblical picture is to misinterpret its true meaning and miss understanding God’s

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361 Lawes 1.1.4; 1:148. 4-6.
362 Lawes II.1.2; 1:146.5-8.
363 Lawes II.1.4; 1:147.5-12.
providential provision throughout the ages.\footnote{Having examined these Old Testament examples, Hooker also turned to the New Testament, pointing to Paul’s writing in 2 Timothy 3:16 as well.} For Hooker this is ‘prooфе’ that God’s word, understood properly, remains first in its place of authority, yet it should also be embraced as expansive in its reach. This first text sets the stage for Hooker to hone in on two larger characteristics of a hermeneutic that is both rigorous in dealing with his present day challenges, and yet not overly systematic that it fails in its ability to encourage and inspire the average listener.

In making this point Hooker states, “To teach men therefore wisedome professeth, and to teach them every good way: but not every good way by one way of teaching.”\footnote{Lawes II. 1.4; I:146.21-22.} The ways in which the Bible shapes readers are numerous, but are always anchored in God’s wisdom. As he explained, wisdom is to be seen as a personification of God’s Spirit at work, among other ways, through the Bible:

Some things she openeth by the sacred books of Scripture: some things by the glorious works of nature: with some things she inspireth them from above by spiritual influence, in some things she leadeth and trayneth them onely by wordly experience and practise.\footnote{Lawes II. 1.4; I:148.1-4.}

Hooker grounds his approach to interpreting God’s will in the world as a return to God’s overarching presence of his lawgiving nature. Because of his numerous laws, God has chosen to reveal himself by using different authoritative sources he deemed worthy of using.

Furthermore, in Augustinian fashion, Hooker presents readers with his view of God, as a guide to eternal wisdom. In his Con
ditions, Augustine, on reflecting on his own need
for guiding wisdom, noted that, “[s]uddenly all the vanity I had hoped in I saw as worthless, and with an incredible intensity of desire I longed after immortal wisdom. I had begun that journey upwards by which I was to return to You.” Thus what Hooker was developing herein should not to be attacked as a new idea, insomuch as one of most trusted doctors of the Church has already demonstrated it. This method, Hooker believed, was a reminder of a God who is relationally engaged with his people, and thus modifies his communicative approach based on his desired outcome in the lives of his people. While Chapter 4 of this dissertation will elaborate on this as a hermeneutical theme in Hooker’s writings, we have here a snapshot of Hooker’s high view of Scripture and his expensive view of God’s interactive presence. As he reminds his readers, the consequences of not embracing this hermeneutics is clear: “We may not so in any one speciall kind admire her wisdom that we disgrace her in any other, but let all her ways be according unto their place and degree adored.”

As a way of expanding on the above points, Hooker will return to other pertinent biblical texts which were often seen as key sources used against his own position. Hooker wants his readers to be careful that they don’t miss larger and more influential biblical themes in these passages in their attention to immediate concerns and debates. It is in this approach that Hooker, the Bible expositor, shines through, and his concern for hermeneutical clarity comes to the fore. For Hooker, scriptural authority and one’s understanding of sola scriptura should not lend itself toward hermeneutical methods that minimize or negate God’s presence and wisdom in the life of his people. Accordingly,

367 Augustine, Confessions 3.4.7.
368 Lawes II.1.4. I:148.4-6.
Hooker will highlight two important points that his Puritan contemporaries seemed to ignore when interpreting these texts.

*The Goodness of God*

The first of these hermeneutical motifs emphasizes God’s goodness in the process of understanding the biblical text. Hooker’s exegetical insight will show that those whose hermeneutical approach is concerned primarily with enlarging the text, and highlighting its exactness, lend themselves to a type of reading which minimizes the joy of seeing “God’s goodness” in every aspect of life. As the “third scripture proofe” shows, Paul’s First letter to Timothy seeks to point readers toward this reality. Focusing his attention to chapter four, verse five, he observes, “And that which S. Paul sayde of meates and drinkes that they are sanctified unto us by the word of God, the same is to be understood of all things els whatsoever we have the use of.”  

It was Hooker’s intention to use this text to emphasize that God’s guiding parameters, as related to dietary laws found within the Jewish tradition, were never meant to squelch or minimize God’s overarching desire that his whole creation be enjoyed. In fact, when this happens what is meant for good, quickly becomes used for persuasive political maneuvering. Moreover, Hooker added that “the Gospel by not making many thinges uncleane, as the lawe did, hath sanctified those thinges generally to all, which particularlie each man unto himself must sanctifie by a reverend and holie use.” In this light, Hooker reminds readers of the promises inherent in the Gospel, which frees us from

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369 *Lawes* I.2.3; I:150. 20.
370 *Lawes* I.3.1; I:151.8-11.
the law but yet points to a way of living which celebrates God’s goodness. At its height, God’s goodness is meant to shine through those who use God’s word within the span of its intended purpose.

In short, application of the biblical text was extremely important to Hooker. If a text was read poorly, or myopically, it could easily distort one’s ability to understand the life of worship as something more than just strict biblical regulations. Hooker went to great lengths in other sections of the Lawes to explore how worship and biblical guidance ought be thoughtfully woven together. In so doing, he finds a way to celebrate both the teachings of scripture, and the distinctive approaches that the Church of England had come to embrace as fruitfully obliging the spiritual life. The scriptures are God’s gift for informing religious practices, and thus one’s appropriation of them must find root in a proper interpretation.

As an example, one issue that caused considerable distress among his critics was Hooker’s hermeneutics as it related to the issue of forms of prayer. Hooker’s theological reflection on the role of prayer sought to point people to God’s intervening goodness, by demonstrating how to understand important biblical narratives. Hence, for Hooker, forms and approaches may be modified to help instill patterns of godly devotion. In this way, prayer was to shape the interior life and enliven people’s vision of God’s goodness. Accordingly he writes, “[F]or which cause wee see that the most comfortable visitations, which God hath sent men from above, have taken especiallie the tymes of prayer as theire

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371 Lawes, V.25.1; II:113.20.
372 Lawes, V.6.2; II:33.31-34. “Duties of religion performed by the whole societies of men, ought to have in them accordinge to our power a sensible excellencie, correspondent to the majestie of him whome we worship.”
most naturall opportunities.” The biblical texts that instructed Hooker’s thoughts here are noteworthy.

A passage from the Old Testament book of Daniel is combined with a passage from the New Testament found in Acts, 10. In both texts God’s angelic messengers intersect with humans who take seriously the practice of prayer. This may seem rudimentary yet it is foundational. The Bible points to examples showing that when people pray, God intervenes by the use of heavenly messengers. Thus, a well patterned prayer life is meant to stir one’s desire to hear from a God whose faithfulness and love cause him to be attentive to his people. While Hooker does not elaborate on this here, it would have been helpful to see him explore more extensively the uniqueness of the Acts texts. Cornelius, still not a believer of Jesus as Messiah, prays and experiences God’s grace and divine intervention. That God listens to those who have yet to fully embrace his work in Christ is a reminder of God’s common grace—grace given to all—which in other instances is more firmly developed in Hooker’s hermeneutical approach. Thus, God’s goodness abounds and his blessing is available to all.

Returning to the ecclesiastical issues, the Bible and one’s exegesis should seek to develop and maintain liturgical practices that point people to God’s faithfulness throughout the ages. Similarly, his litmus test for proper interpretation seems to be whether people are reminded of God’s goodness after having expounded the text. This was Hooker’s main desire as challenged by those who were attacking the practices of the Church of England. Hooker believed these practices were clearly trustworthy in their ability to point people to God, but the critics were concerned rather with whether they were sufficiently reformed or

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373 Lawes V. 23.1; 2:111.19-23.
biblical rather than faithful. Focusing on interpretative disagreements, he writes how the Admonitioners, as he calls them, attack the Church of England by stating that

many things in it [form of prayer] they say are amiss, many instances they give of things in our common prayer not agreeable as they pretend with the word of God. It hath in theire eye too great affinitie with the forme of the Church of Rome; it differeth too much from that which Churches elsewhere reformed allowe and observe....

While Hooker’s theological concerns are informed by his reading of scripture, the Puritans felt that such practices were to be curtailed as they encouraged the droning devotion often associated with the Roman Catholic habits. In this light, Hooker emphasizes how confessional ire comes with a blinding arrogance that easily misses that larger vision and purpose of God’s word, which at times could actually find their greatest exegetical clarity in those we disagree with.  

Hermeneutics and God’s Glorification

In addition to his insistent polemic concerning God’s goodness, Hooker tries to correct those who believed his hermeneutical perspective on the expansiveness of God’s ways was sheer sinfulness. For Hooker, this approach brought to the surface a type of hermeneutical pride that suggested that doctrinal correctness led to minimizing the reality of sinfulness in the interpreter, raising the stakes in numerous ways. Grislis’ work on the theme of sin is informative in this regard. He keenly observes that “[t]he problem is obvious: the infallible text is subject to the interpreter’s finitude and potential fallibility.

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374 Lawes, V.1.27.1; II:119. 20-24.
375 “Where Rome keepesth that which is ancienster and better; others whome we much more affect leavinge it for newer, and changinge it for worse, we had rather followe the perfections of them whome we like not, then in defectes resemble them whome we love.” Lawes V.28.1; II:121. 24-27.
And the presence of sin always threatens. That is, sinful interpreters may mistake the intended meaning, as those interpreters, being sinful, cannot themselves be infallible, though the text contains no errors. The issues of sin and God’s glorification were intractably connected in the writings of the Reformers.

The theme of God’s glorification was extremely relevant since the Magisterial Reformers saw it as a central to attack the language of the meritorious living of the Catholic Church. For Calvin, glorification carried with it negative implications for humanity. In one sense our sinful posture of helpless depravity, as articulated in Calvin’s theology, left the glory of God to overpower any work attempted by individuals. As Bouwsma articulates: “[T]here is also a negative corollary of the glorification of God: the humiliation of man. ‘God does not receive his full due,’ for Calvin, ‘until all mortals are reduced to nothing.’” In this light, God’s glorification as understood by the continental Reformers seems slightly different from glorification, as Hooker’s exegesis will identify it. Hooker, on returning to his polemical response concerning the issues of enlarging the use of the Bible, will provide an exegetical explanation. Turing to First Corinthians 10:31. A passage that at the outset states ‘the word of God directeth a man in all his actions.’ In this light, the Puritans who embraced this passage overemphasized this point, and thus Hooker, as part of his corrective, must provide a different interpretation, shrewdly moving his readers to the topic of God’s glorification as the nucleus of the text.

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In approaching this text Hooker directs readers to two voices of highest authority: Paul the author of Corinthians and Peter the earliest follower of Jesus. In addition to the Corinthians text, Hooker quoted from 1 Peter 2:12, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” Both passages address the fact that the Bible encourages a way of living that is both acceptable and God honoring. All Christians agreed upon this, but the real point of contention was how to respond to issues where the Bible was not explicitly clear. Specifically, in this case, the issue of eating or drinking anything that was dedicated to pagan idols.

Hooker demonstrated that, at least in his estimation, the Bible emphasized that God is glorified when those who are not believers (i.e. Cornelius) see God’s glory modeled in the lives of believers. In this light Hooker points out the way “unbelievers” can recognize something of God’s presence by the moral actions and attitude of those who believe. Here we see how, for Hooker, moral life intersects the hermeneutical task. God has made it so that some acts of obedience when they glorify God, are discernible by those who do not yet believe, possibly confirmed by the light of reason.

Joyce’s research on moral theology and biblical interpretation in Hooker’s writings demonstrates that Hooker was working through different categories as he interpreted certain texts. Of his interpretative use of 1 Peter, Joyce emphasizes: “Hooker... describes a...category of good actions: those that, while not necessary for salvation...are nevertheless

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379 NIV.
380 See Lawes II.8.3; 1:188.2-7.
honoured and rewarded by God.” Considering the theological tension over the issue of human depravity, Hooker distances himself from fellow magisterial Reformers when he accentuates that God might even be glorified by heathens. Moreover, Hooker adds a passionately persuasive tone, rather than expressing his thoughts as if they made no difference on account of election: the hearers may turn, give glory to God, and live, a view that embraces providence without determinism.

The argument that one sins if one does not live in strict obedience to only the exact words found in scripture seems inconsistent with what Hooker believed the Bible actually taught. If his readers care one iota about the glorification of God, should they not ask themselves what obedience looks like when the scriptures do not explicitly explain what one must do? Keeping the full scriptural passage in mind Hooker will mention vs. 33 of chapter 10 in writing,

He sayth of himselfe, I do in all things please all men, seeking not mine owne commoditie but rather the good of many, that they may be saved. Shall it hereupon be thought that S. Paule did not move eyther hand or foot, but with expresse intent even thereby to further the common salvation of men?

Here again, Hooker’s hermeneutics lean toward an outlook concerned with those who still do not believe. All mankind were part of Paul’s purview, thus a proper reading of scripture should continue with this adage. When this happens the larger telos of scripture, the “salvation of men”, remains firmly in sight, as does God’s glorification as the only one who draws individuals to obeying him.

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381 Joyce, Richard Hooker and Moral Theology, 135. See Lawes II.8.4; 1:188.7-10. Joyce remarks that this is the third category in the model she has observed. In the Chapter entitled “The Nature and Authority of Scripture” she argues for the importance of these key categories: Hooker’s awareness of context, his attention to different genres of books within the Bible and their impact on authority, historical development within the scripture, revisiting early church practices that no longer apply and the importance of authorial intention when trying to understand the text, 127.

382 Lawes II.2.1; 1:148.24-28.
Hooker goes to great lengths to solidify an important part of his argument: the interlocking way that one’s hermeneutic either celebrated God’s glorification or gets lost in scholastic niceties. Hooker wanted to remind readers, and his critics, that God’s glorification is intricately connected to evangelistic possibilities. Hence when Christians commit to living good lives, this glorifies God, and in so doing, other who have yet to believe, may also be drawn to understand God’s redemptive nature. Accordingly, Hooker posits: “As long as that which Christians did was good, and no way subject unto just reproofe; their vertuous conversation was a mean to worke the Heathens conversion unto Christ.”383 One of the biblical texts that informed this outlook was Romans 2:23,24.384 For Hooker the opposite of seeking God’s glorification can actually feed a form of blasphemy.

Hooker concludes his section on proofs with a final look at Romans 14:23. The focus here is an aggressive insistence by his Puritan critics, which emphasized that “whatsoever is not faith is sinne”.385 While Hooker’s concern was the dangers of putting one’s faith in the wrong things, he believed that those attacking him were missing an essential point of Paul’s focus in Romans. God’s name being abused due to a lack of proper faith and correct scriptural reflection leading to a God-honoring life, is just as sinful. Here, the issue of faith finds fruition for Hooker’s exegesis and larger theological concerns.

Part of Hooker’s larger concern is to correct those who defined Christian assurance primarily as a debate about correct doctrine. This approach, according to Hooker, minimized the need to continually have faith in God as a precursor to embracing the

383 Lawes II. 2.3; 1:150, 2-4
384 “You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” Romans 2:23.
385 Lawes II.4.1; 1:151.18-22.
authority of the Bible. If one’s faith is not fully in Christ, then no eloquent harangue will alleviate the tension that emerges in the dialectic of biblical interpretation. This truth creates in Hooker’s writing a freedom to examine the text and acknowledge both challenges and discrepancies. In Book V Hooker highlights the point:

the Evangelist St. Luke\textsuperscript{386} saith the store of the fish which they tooke was such that the net they tooke it in brake, (emphasis his) and the shippes which they loaded therewith sunke; St. John\textsuperscript{387} recording the like miracle saith, that albeit the fishes in number were so manie, yeat the net with so greate a waight was \textit{not broken}.\textsuperscript{388}

For Hooker, the textual discrepancies are not addressed as a priority. (In one the nets break, in another they hold firm) Instead, with his own hermeneutical lens he focuses on the aspect of God’s abundant provision and miraculous presence among his disciples. Hence, when the miraculous events are seen as part of larger biblical narrative, so that scholastic debates about details take second place, a nuanced approach to scriptural authority remains possible.

In exploring the realities of textual criticism, and the discrepancies that awaited any serious reader of the biblical text, Hooker’s view embracing the Bible as God’s word need not be seen as a form of idolatry, pushing the authority and allegiance to Christ as secondary. Instead, Hooker’s position was that the Bible came with limitations also, while, our sinfulness must limit full understanding of God’s ways. Nevertheless, God, in his abundant grace, has bestowed the knowledge of what is necessary for salvation, and the point made by the discordant gospels was the same in reality. We accept and can give glory

\textsuperscript{386} Luke 5:6.7
\textsuperscript{387} John 21:11
\textsuperscript{388} Lawes V. 19.2; 2:69.11-16.
to God if we are not distracted by the superficial contradictions, if our minds remain focused on his goodness and glorification.

It is clear that for Hooker the process of interpretation is not for the faint of heart, but nonetheless God’s Word can penetrate the darkest situations. Hooker believed this so seriously that he suggested just reading the Bible, if preaching is not possible, could shed light on the most difficult of situations. As he states: “[W]e marvaile... when so little is attributed unto the readinge of canonical scripture it selfe, that now it hath growne to be a question, whether the word of God be anie ordinarie meane to save the soules of men.”389 For Hooker, while preaching is of utmost importance, the reading of God’s word carries with it special authority to touch those listening, raising one’s attention to the idea of “saving souls”.

As has been shown, his focus on numerous levels remains interested in persuasion and weary of those who see the text just though a confessional lens, which is often ‘self-centered’ and can easily miss the larger redemptive plan. Thankfully, Hooker’s hermeneutics are able to hold together his polemical position with an eye toward those who have yet to believe. A recent comment from former Archbishop Rowan Williams reflects a similar train of thought, providing a contemporary reminder of the kind of approach to the Bible that Hooker so carefully attempts to highlight through his own hermeneutical outlook:

But Christian salvation comes from incorporation into the life of Christ the eternal Son, who has shared his life with us through the incarnation; it is not a matter of

389 Lawes V 21.1; II:83. 21-24. Once again, Hooker’s evangelistic and soteriological emphasis emerges.
adherence to a form of words, even inspired and inerrant words. The Bible is true but not a substitute for the living Truth, which is Christ’s person.\textsuperscript{390}

The goal of chapter 3 has been to show the distinctive features of Hooker’s frequent reference to the Bible, and the exegetical approach implicit and explicit in this use, and in doing so to suggest a new perspective on Hooker’s hermeneutics. This will be an important factor in understanding the hermeneutical themes that will be developed in the next chapter, Hooker’s foundational framework in dealing with specific disputes about details will be examined.

\textsuperscript{390}Rowan, Williams. \textit{The Richard Hooker Lecture - Richard Hooker (c1554-1600): The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity Revisited}, October 2005, A lecture by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams delivered at The Temple Church. Online.
CHAPTER 4: Significant Themes in Hooker’s Hermeneutical Schema

Introduction

The themes addressed in this chapter flow from the way that Hooker applied and interpreted the Bible to address the pressing theological concerns of his day. While Hooker’s approach to hermeneutics is not explicitly systematic, he nevertheless, remained careful, strategic and, at times, methodical while interpreting the Bible. In expanding on this reality, this chapter will examine four themes related to Hooker’s hermeneutical approach. As guides, these themes are significant for understanding what Hooker believed the purpose of the Bible was and how best to interpret it. Hooker readily conceded that the Bible is made up of many books intended to deal with particular situations and audiences. At the outset of the Lawes he notes that “many things needful for explication, many for application unto particular occasions, such as providence of God from time to time hath taken to have the several bookes of his holie ordinance written.” From this viewpoint, the Bible’s diversity points to God’s many purposes in self-communication. In addition, when the Bible is understood as a book encompassing diversity of purpose, readers are more apt to see God at work in their respective, particular contexts.

Thus, Hooker’s larger apology is strengthened when readers understand his interpretative vision, and how it fits within these four hermeneutical themes. While these themes are not meant to be exhaustive, time and again they demonstrate, Hooker’s keen ability to hold hermeneutical ideas in tension. In addition, these themes added to Hooker’s arsenal of correctives to counter the accusations leveled against him by critics.

391 Lawes I.13.3; 1:124.5-8.
Each of the four themes discussed below demonstrate that Hooker’s outlook and approach to biblical interpretation sought to remain thoroughly biblical. In his insistence that God’s grace is essential, and scriptural revelation is required by human beings, he acknowledges humankind’s role as essential in God’s redemptive work. In retaining this place for the human, Hooker returns to the biblical text, writing,

David, to shew that grace is needefull, maketh his prayer unto God saying, *Sett thou O Lord a watch before the doore of my lipps*, and to teach how needefull our travail is to that end, he elsewhere useth exhortation *Refraine thou thy tongue from evill, and thy lipps that they speake noe guile*. Salomon respecting the use of our labour giveth counsell, *Keepe thy heart with all the custodie and care that may be*.  

Hence, as most of his contemporaries, Hooker understood that to deal with the challenges prevalent within the English church of his day required returning to the crucial role of the Bible in addressing the issues.

Differing factions expressed polarizing opinions on how the Reformation should find expression in England, and Hooker found himself justifying the magisterial settlement for the sake of humanity’s flourishing in England. In this light, the scriptures, made up of ‘severall bookes’, required a wise posture that held in tension God’s providence and day-to-day ecclesial complexities. Hooker’s continual dialogue within his unique context brought him back to God’s Word in Scripture. As MacCulloch notes, “Central to his argument was a careful sifting of the ways in which scripture should be used as an

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393 For Hooker it was a focus on providence without predestination. His commitment to this reality is clearly seen in his interpretation of David’s encounters with Saul as found in 1 Sam. 23:11.12. He writes “that the foresight which God hath of all things prooveth not his foreappointment of all things which are foreseen, because he foreseeth as well what might bee and is not, as what is or shall be.” Dublin Fragments, 4:130. 29-33.
authority for Christian life and practice, and the ways in which it should not.” This insight once again highlights Hooker’s robust commitment to scriptural authority, and how these concerns formed foundational aspects of Hooker’s hermeneutical ethos.

*Introducing the Four Themes*

The first theme is “the Paradox of Reason and Consensus”. As the title suggests, it was part of Hooker’s vision to see reasonable dialogue inform the hermeneutical process, yet reasonable people clearly do not always come to a consensus. He believed this would help to draw out a God-honoring consensus especially when examining challenging biblical texts that led to diverse interpretations. Current scholarship on this issue has led to numerous points of debate, notably the issue of Hooker’s overt commitment to the use of reason as a reliable tool in understanding and interpreting numerous sections of scripture. While aspects of this theme have been the focus of previous chapters, the essential point here is that Hooker understood that reason and consensus (both limited by human sinful impairment) shaped a paradoxical center: God’s word cannot be fully heard unless human beings engage with what is written using their God-given reason in dialogue and debate.

Since reason is *not* always helpful in arriving at points of agreement, I have opted to use the term ‘paradox’ to describe it as it seems most fitting in this Hookerian approach. Both Hooker’s insistence on the use of reason, and his valuing of consensus, formed a type of paradoxical paradigm in approaching the text, and that the scriptures should not eliminate the need to use reason appropriately. In addition, significant sections of Book V

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395 “Hooker’s understanding of concepts such as ‘reason’ belong to a pre-Enlightenment era, and thus cannot be assumed to cohere in all respects with our own.” See A.J. Joyce, *Richard Hooker & Anglican Moral Theology*, 10
of his Lawes emphasize the assistance of reason in the forming of many ecclesial practices of the English Church as both expedient and necessary. In this light he writes, “...let us particularlie waigh and examine in everie of them [practices of ministers] first how farre forth they are reprovable by reasons and maximes of common right.” In such matters, Hooker insisted that a certain ‘reasonableness’ be adopted when arguments arise.

The hope, at least for Hooker, was that readers, including his critics, would embrace a larger vision of Christian unity, which held in tension the importance of biblical authority and human frailty as part of the hermeneutical process. This tension highlights that the use of reason, from Hooker’s perspective, required regular reengagement with the biblical text. We will examine how Hooker’s hermeneutics attempted to underscore how reason was trustworthy in understanding certain texts, and part how of its reliability is that it could help shape an agreed upon consensus. This hermeneutical approach was not to be interpreted as a sign of degrading the authority of scripture. Instead, it could be seen as a way of elevating God’s greatness, recognizing our inability to fully grasp him by private interpretation, without the interaction of the Christian community.

In addition to its use in the discipline of hermeneutics, reason also played a prominent role in Hooker’s apologetic on ecclesial polity. Almasy notably observes that Hooker’s position within the rich lineage of thinkers tackling the tension of ecclesial practices made him aware “that the work of Whitgift and others, and indeed his own defense, rested on the wisdom of learned men and the rationality of consensual

\[\text{Lawes V.8.1; 2: 472.18-20.}\]
authority.”

Hence, reason and consensus were essential to numerous areas of his theological vision. The subsequent political challenges, coupled with his concern for a thoughtful approach to biblical hermeneutics, would become a hallmark of his interpretation of scripture and his stance on properly understanding the Bible.

A second theme prevalent in Hooker’s writings, complementing the first, is the concern for a pneumatological assumption when approaching the biblical text. That is, that the Spirit of God is active in interpreting the Bible, as well as in its composition. Entitled "The Holy Spirit and the Role of Wisdom" this theme focuses on what I believe is a lacuna within Hooker studies. As will be discussed, for Hooker, it is in this enlivened relationship between reader/interpreter and God’s spiritual guidance, that wisdom theology takes shape. In exploring Book II of the Lawes, readers will notice the theological nuance of this theme in Hooker's overarching approach to biblical interpretation. Furthermore, this theme will point to some of the influential voices that preceded Hooker in shaping the ethos of the English Reformation.

The third theme to be explored is Hooker’s emphasis on humility when dealing with biblical interpretation. Called “A Hermeneutic of Humility,” this section will examine how, according to Hooker, a robust biblical hermeneutic must take into account the limited range of the biblical text, as well as the interpreter’s fragility in the hermeneutical process — neither text nor interpreter is omni-competent, and the interpreter is not infallible. For


398 Book II of the Lawes, Hooker developed a robust argument against Cartwright’s use of four scriptural texts by heightening the role of wisdom when approaching and appropriating the scriptures.

399 See Cranmer’s "Preface" to the Second Printing of the Great Bible in 1540, when he follows John Chrysostom in interpreting the story of Philip helping the Ethiopian Eunuch in the Book of Acts. Long before there was a discussion of the inspiration of scripture in confessional texts in England, *The Westminster Confession* of 1647, there was a clear declaration of the inspired character of interpretation.
Hooker it is vital to understand that humility can be an important way of strengthening the role of spiritual authority. Since Christ, in serving and dying for humanity, modeled humility, should not his servants do the same? Hooker wonderfully reminds readers that spiritual authority is not only helpful in shaping correct doctrine, but that should have its focus on God’s governing laws as found in scripture and in so doing help point listeners toward the good that awaits one eternally, stating,

I therefore conclude, that spirituall authoritie, is a power, which Christ hath given to bee used over them, which are subject unto it, for the eternall good of their soules, according to his owne most sacred lawes, and the wholesome positive constitutions of his Church.\footnote{Lawes VI.2.2. 3:5.28-22.}

Anchored in Christ’s own authority, Hooker provided a countertype to contemporary voices who believed the text provided a complete and precise outcome as part of the interpretation process, and made room for a human role in determining “the constitutions of his Church”. This approach to biblical hermeneutics could easily push Christ aside rather than hold him at the center of all matters related to authority. Furthermore, this ‘humble’ posture in expounding the biblical text was not to be seen as a sign of weakness, or a doubting of God’s sovereign handiwork; instead, it is meant to help readers focus their attention on God’s faithfulness. In this light, Hooker’s thoughtful exegesis both celebrates the need for wisdom and the use of reason as seen in themes one and two. Consequently, Scripture points to, and leaves room for, reason, which at times, points one to the need to seek God’s wisdom.

Lastly, readers will encounter Hooker’s most difficult challenge: How does the Bible as God’s revelation address changing contextual issues? This fourth theme entitled
“Perfect’ Revelation and Contextualized Interpretation,” can perhaps be seen as the bedrock of Hooker’s hermeneutical aim. As has been discussed, the core of this dissertation has addressed how Hooker’s understanding of sola scriptura required a delicate approach to biblical interpretation. For Hooker, the Bible was to be understood as perfect since it fulfilled God’s intended purpose. The tensions as to what biblical perfection and scriptural authority entailed caused considerable strife with Hooker’s contemporaries. Therefore Hooker demonstrated that the assumption of omni-competence in interpretation could lead to imposing certain theological leanings, which would harm the church and God’s people rather than see them flourish.

*The Paradox of Reason and Consensus*

The first hermeneutical theme, which shaped Hooker’s approach to the Bible, brings together two separate ideas that caused significant tension during the sixteenth century. The ecclesial and political ambiguities that surfaced in England illuminated theological tension within the reforming camps when these separate ideas were pushed to extremes — would it to be the individual teacher or the community? Yet, the diversity of voices, all claiming exclusive authority, made it essential to seek an approach to biblical interpretation that left room for diverging views. One of Hooker’s unique contributions was a desire for a ‘reasonable’ approach, and in seeking a ‘reasonable’ approach, a renewed interest in the role of reason as related to hermeneutics. In dealing with such issues, Hooker’s contribution is not only the importance of reason, but also the added role of consensus in deducing important hermeneutical decisions. For Hooker the authority of the individual’s estimation of scripture itself is linked to the importance of consensus. As he
writes, echoing Augustine, "And by experience we all know, that the first outward motive leading men so to esteeme of the scripture is the authority of God’s Church." 401

Hooker’s perspective suggests that God’s desire was to see his creation learn to listen to his Spirit in decision-making, and in so doing its consensus could be regarded as trustworthy. As part of this process both reason and dialogue were foundational and thus essential for ongoing interpretation, biblical teaching and direction. Nevertheless, it is worth bearing in mind that the Reformation had brought with it a suspicion related to the use of ‘reason’. Shepherd provides a necessary distinction in stating, “Though never anti-rational, the Reformers were anti-rationalistic. To be rational is simply to possess and exercise the faculty of reason, but rationalism is the belief that by reason [alone] we gain access to ultimate reality.”402 Albeit consistent with the Reformers, Hooker’s comments on reason seemed to push both the importance of, and the need for, reason in dealing with matters of faith and hermeneutics.403

Considering the many tensions that arose during the Reformation, Hooker’s critics were concerned that his views, especially his celebration of the role of reason, might be overly reliant on the sources and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, theologians, and scholastic tradition. Martin Luther, an erstwhile professor of philosophy, notoriously railed: “Reason is the greatest enemy that faith has; it never comes to the aid of spiritual things,

403 Robert Faulkner also observes, “The Christian soul makes its own way to God, according to Hooker’s reformed teaching, and must search out the path. The search is conducted by reason, according to Hooker’s revision of reformed teaching…….” 83. See Richard Hooker and the Politics of a Christian England (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).
but more frequently than not struggles against the divine Word, treating with contempt all that emanates from God."\(^{404}\)

While Hooker was not the first Reformer to endorse or reference scholastic sources, he did postulate more boldly than many that their thoughts were significant for understanding the Bible, and gaining a more complete knowledge of God’s revelation as found in the Scriptures. Hooker writes that it is part of the church’s mandate to work out, in reasonable fashion, changes that pertain to ecclesial life. Specifically addressing the issues of polity, Hooker asserts that, “the Church hath authoritie to make canons, lawes, and decrees, even as we reade that in the Apostles times it did.”\(^{405}\) With a focus on biblical text of Acts chapter 15 Hooker delves into addressing the paradoxical tension. Commenting on issues at ‘The Council of Jerusalem’ Hooker remarks that the church, from its inception, learned how to welcome the need for reasonable dialogue concerning difficult hermeneutical decisions. Specifically, was the Hebrew tradition fully obsolete following the resurrection, and how might the Gentiles be engrafted into the family of God? For Hooker, a serious exegete could see that it was the use of reasoned discernment and consensus, which helped the church move past these difficult points of contention. Hence it was the Apostles themselves who modeled the vary thing Hooker was now claiming for the Church of England.

Furthermore, in Book II of the *Lawes*, Hooker points to the importance of reason and free will as a prerequisite to understanding Jesus’ comment, "Could ye not watch with me for one hour?" found the gospel of Matthew. For Hooker, this rhetorical question


\(^{405}\) *Lawes* III.10.7; 1:245.2-4.
implies the need for the voluntary obedience and, as he states, “if it be well done, must needs be done with deliberate consideration of the some reasonable cause wherefore we rather should do it than not.”

Luther, fulminating against reason as used by Aristotle and the scholastics, was insistent that reason, especially as used in the philosophical schools of his day, moved people further away from the sufficiency of the gospel. This approach remained the underlying position for those who would attack Hooker, arguing that it was this very approach which led the Roman Catholic Church to become an apostate in need of reform. For Luther, reason and natural law (cognitio legalis) were held in tension. God given, they were primarily seen as a tool by which God would one day hold all the non-elect without excuse before God’s judgment, as they could have ‘reasoned’ their way toward the belief that there is a God. Since, as created beings, they had enough reason to know that God was the creator, they would one day be held accountable for not believing in him. This approach is often characterized as knowing God as creator, but not as redeemer.

One of the most controversial, yet essential, aspects of Hooker’s approach to the Bible would remain formative in understanding the depth of biblical truths. Numerous disputes stemmed from the fact that some of Hooker’s contemporaries believed reason was

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406 Lawes II.8.1; I:186. 23-26.
407 Yet Luther recognized the authority of reason in theological matters, although this is often ignored, thus his famous and primary declaration of the primacy of Scripture, at the Diet of Worms in 1521: “Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason [ratione evidente] (for I will not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God.” Luther at the Diet of Worms [1521]. Luther’s Works, vol. 32:112. The passage is often cited to show Luther’s adherence to a sola scriptura position; this interpretation ignores the reference to “plain reason”.

not reliable due to sin’s devastating impact on every aspect of the human person.408

Nevertheless Neelands observed that, “[f]or Hooker, Scripture and reason are not in conflict, since both have their source in God.”409 This insight played a pivotal role in Hooker’s interpretation of the Bible since he believed that, with considerable discussion, reason could point the individual toward biblical truths even without the Bible. Hooker believed the Bible itself confirmed this reality. Once again in Book II, Hooker presents three biblical texts410 to illustrate how reason helps people discern certain types of universal biblical truths, confirming that “[i]n actions of this sort the very light of Nature alone may discover that which is so far forth in the sight of God allowable.”411

Unfortunately, Hooker does not clarify how reason, at times, fails to lead those in dialogue toward full agreement: even when using grace-guided reason as a tool of interpretation, disagreement and theological disputes still occur. As some may believe, if one is reasonable in one's interpretation, would not more people see, understand and agree on the exact meaning of a text? This conundrum accentuates an important aspect of Hooker’s hermeneutical competence, which highlights how the ability to reason does not necessarily avoid theological disagreements over interpretation. For Hooker disagreement over ‘things indifferent’ need to remain fluid, even if left unresolved.412 Consequently,
Hooker stated that “[t]he choice is left to our owne discretion, except a principall bond of some higher dutie remove the indifferencie that such things have in themeselves.”

Exploring the idea of the ‘principal bond of higher dutie’ Hooker turned to the biblical figure Ananias to provide a trope for how, in personal choice, the tension of reason and consensus coalesce.

The broader context of this narrative is found in chapter four of Acts: “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.” This is to be understood as a season of consensus for the early church. In this regard, Hooker shows that Ananias decides, without coercion, to make a promise — a ‘bond of higher duty’ — to sell some of his land and give the proceeds to the apostles. Here Hooker’s hermeneutics leads him to deduce that he was free to not do this “till his sollemne vow and promise unto God had strictly binded him on onely way.” Ananias makes a vow to bind himself and as the story unfolds his lack of obedience costs him dearly. But for Hooker, because God does not prescribe every action for his creation, the consensus of leaders as modeled in scripture nonetheless provides room for both reason, and the paradoxes of personal choice, to be explored. Interpreting the text in this way reinforces Hooker’s position that the Bible is not a magical book of incantations to be followed mechanically, but an invitation to participate freely and reasonably in the living body of which Jesus is the head. This remained a significant point

reverendly esteemed. Lawes., II. 8.7; 1:191.12-19. Thomas Aquinas emphasized not only the importance of reason but also how revelation was a gift of God. He writes, “because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors...in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation” Summa Theologiae I.1.1.

413 Lawes II.4.4; 1:154.17-19.
414 Acts 4:32. NIV
415 Lawes II.4.4; 1:154. 20-22.
of tension with Hooker’s critics who believed that the Bible was to be read much less creatively. Accordingly, as it relates to Hooker’s hermeneutical framework, reasonable dialogue does not necessarily diminish the tension of the debate; it might even exacerbate it. Nevertheless, for Hooker, the discussion and struggle for the best, and most reasoned decision, is found in honoring the ’spiritual’ consensus and applying one’s own reason appropriately.

Scholars continue to debate whether Hooker’s position on the use of reason was itself reasonable, Hillerdal claims that “[t]here can be no doubt that Hooker, in spite of his own eagerness to stress the use of reason, ends up with a turn to irrationalism.” This sharp critique highlights how difficult it is to understand the larger role of reason in Hooker’s theological vision, but I suggest that Hillerdal misses the paradox mentioned above. In Hooker’s hermeneutics, he in no way proposes that reason’s role is to make all things rational. Instead, Hooker sees reason as a gift that guides the church’s interpretative lens and provides room for the individual to discern what God may require of them as they engage with a changing world. This in no way guarantees a reasonable and rationally tight knit approach, hence the need for consensus.

Hillerdal, in providing some important insights relating to Hooker’s understanding of both reason and revelation, reminds readers that Hooker’s thoughts on these issues pre-dated, yet in some ways anticipated the faith and reason debates of the eighteenth century, and thus were pioneering in nature. Accordingly, Hillerdal writes: “Hooker tried to demonstrate that a harmonic cooperation is quite possible between the laws pertaining to

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revelation and those set forth in the natural law or by man’s reason.”417 Whether Hooker achieved this admirable goal remains a point of contention among scholars, yet I think it noteworthy that Hillerdal shows how Hooker finds his theology of reason grounded in the biblical text itself. As he remarks, “Hooker makes an attempt to use the authority of Jesus himself, as witness for his cause. Jesus and his apostles argued, by the use of reason, in order to clarify and prove their points.”418 If Jesus himself used reason in his interactions, should we not as well embrace this gift as necessary for our dealings with issues relating to the faith?

The most aggressive direct attack on Hooker’s views surfaced in an anonymous letter proposing a radical Calvinistic approach to ecclesiastical concerns, including biblical interpretation. As part of the academic analysis some have suggested that the misreading of Hooker’s position on reason and the biblical authority begins with the marred reputation the authors of this, A Christian Letter, bestowed on him. 419 Published two years before Hooker’s death, this letter contains numerous disparaging comments against him. As Neelands observed, “Hooker apparently identified six of the twenty-one supposed errors listed by the anonymous authors as related to predestination and to positions relating to the doctrine of grace which underlay his views on predestination.”420

418 Hillerdal, Reason and Revelation in Richard Hooker, 79. Hilerdal refers to Lawes II.4.1; 1:152.5-15.
419 The complete text, together with Hooker’s marginal annotations, is reprinted in FLE. vol. IV, ed. John Booty (1982), pp. 1-79.
Specifically, they state that their complaints against Hooker stem from their reading of his works, and their concern for the church against those who may come as wolves in sheep’s clothing. They note,

> We have made choyce therefore of a few principal things, which trouble manie godlie minded Christians, who advisedlie read over your bookes, that by the sincere answering and upright clearings of them, you might satisfie us all, both in them and in all the rest, and free your selfe from all suspition of falshoode or treacherie, and make us able to give a reason of defence unto all such as stumble at your writings.\textsuperscript{421}

This comment clearly indicates that the writers of this letter are not only reading Hooker’s books, but take them seriously, believing that they are ‘godlie minded Christians’ who have taken it upon themselves to keep Hooker accountable. In addition, whether true or not, they note that others stumble at his writings.

Part of their argument states that on comparing Hooker’s thoughts to the \textit{Articles of Religion} (1562, 1571) they find numerous points which they feel require more clarity.

While the goal of this dissertation is not to address all the points, points three and four bear strongly on the issues of biblical authority. As a point of disputation they state,

> Where you seeme unto us, that although you exclude traditions as a part of supernatural truth, yet you infer that the light of nature teacheth some knowledge naturall which is necessarie to salvation, that the Scripture is a supplement and making perfect of that knowledge.\textsuperscript{422}

It seems clear that the authors of this letter notice how Hooker’s hermeneutics pushed the way one interpreted Christian doctrine, as described in the Articles of Religion, emphasizing the unique role of the natural light of reason. Hooker, however, makes clear that Scripture, while not a supplement, does at times point to laws that may be ascertained

\textsuperscript{421} \textit{A Christian Letter} IV:9.3-10. Referred to as ACL from this point on.  
\textsuperscript{422} ACL, IV:11.20-24.
by the use of reason. It seems that the true point of contention between Hooker and his contemporaries was what constituted what was ‘necessary for salvation’.

For Hooker, clarity on ecclesial polity and doctrinal poignancy as it related to the Reformed tradition, were not seen as defining markers in relation to salvation. Therefore, these types of questions should not to be slotted into the category of issues ‘necessary for salvation’, that is, according to Article VI, to be found in Scripture or derived from it. Moreover, to do so was to ignore the need for dialogue, consensus and the unique role of reason. Atkinson notes that it was Hooker’s use of reason that was a principal point of contention with the authors of this letter, stating, “this is not only the charge made against Hooker by the anonymous authors of A Christian Letter; it has become the common staple of most Hooker scholarship ever since. “By noting that it is a ‘charge made against Hooker,’ Atkinson implies that these authors seem to embellish or accentuate something that is not necessarily a fault. Simply put, because these authors did not like Hooker, readers should be suspicious of what they state. Kirby also suggests that making too much of this letter has led some to see Hooker through a distorted light.423 Gibbs, however, has argued that Kirby is part of “a certain group of scholars who constitute what may now well be regarded as a new school of Hooker interpretation.”424 In one sense, Kirby’s interpretation of the situation suggests that we have a better understanding of Hooker than did his contemporary detractors. While it is helpful to recall that these critics and anonymous authors were not truly listening to Hooker’s apologetic, it is misleading to

423 Atkinson, Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition and Reason, 1. Both Atkinson and Kirby suggest that an understanding of ‘two kingdoms,” as explored in Hooker’s Doctrine, would help in understanding Hooker’s position. See Kirby, Richard Hooker Reformer and Platonist, 45-51.

ignore them, and fail to see that some of their accusations against Hooker were fairly accurate. In countering such views, it might be just as plausible to put forward that these authors did notice some considerable points of emphasis in Hooker’s theological legacy which, when taken to their logical conclusion, pushed Hooker beyond the reformed orthodoxy of his day. I propose that it is highly probable that Hooker’s approach to reason, as we will explore in this first theme, is one of those areas of concern.

While this is a noteworthy and intriguing observation, I would suggest that it is unhelpful to view this Letter with an overt posture of suspicion. Although clearly filled with details common to sixteenth century polemic, to view it as just another work of occasional apologetic may cause us to misunderstand some of the important themes of Hooker’s hermeneutics. Perhaps these writers were accurate in their portrayal of certain of Hooker’s thoughts. Perhaps they, through their own polemical reading of Hooker, correctly sensed he was pushing the boundaries of certain agreed upon views. In this regard, Hooker seems to be pushing back, as by his own reasoned interpretation, many of the matters discussed were not necessary for salvation, and thus should be met with a fluid, open posture that addressed the needs of a changing context.

Furthermore, the authors of A Christian Letter must have understood that their criticism would meet an informed audience, ready and competent to judge their complaints about Mr. Hooker. Did they just make it up and hope no one would notice? Or, are their comments about Hooker significant and trustworthy in understanding Hooker’s own voice in the changing English Reformation landscape, I would argue that this landscape needs to

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425 This seems to be the consistent rebuttal by Kirby, Atkinson and others who view the attacks found in A Christian Letter as unreliable in their assessment of Hooker’s theological paradigm.
be considered seriously, and that this document must be seen as both reliable, and helpful, in deducing what Hooker was trying to say about the Reformation and the church of his day. To minimize this polemical document as simply undependable seems rather unfounded.

With these concerns in focus, I want to suggest that Hooker’s hermeneutics reveals a dynamic interchange between his Protestant heritage, and its relationship to the role of reason in interpreting the Scripture. In his desire to see reason appropriately used in interpreting scripture, and his pointing to the universal role of reason in decision-making, Hooker’s thoughts must be taken seriously. Whether this pushes him outside the so called Continental tradition of the Reformation may well remain a lively scholarly debate, I believe that Atkinson’s points are noteworthy — Hooker is within the Reformation standards with respect to reason — and his assessment of Hooker’s debate with the Puritans\textsuperscript{426} of his day remains valid.

Key principles of biblical interpretation were a focal point of the deep disagreements between Hooker and a segment of the more radical Calvinist community of his time. As Hooker argued: “Of things necessary to all men’s salvation…they are in Scripture plain and easy to be understood.”\textsuperscript{427} It seems clear that, for Hooker, further hermeneutical reasoning is not needed on things ‘necessary for salvation’ since they can easily be understood in a literal sense. On the other hand, reason and consensus take center stage on matters of ecclesial life, biblical interpretation and theological elaboration, matters

\textsuperscript{426} Atkinson uses Puritan and Disciplinarian interchangeably. Also, Chadwick’s reminder remains formative. He writes: “Puritan was an adjective first used in the fifteen-sixties as a term of abuse. It soon came to mean precise, over-strict, over-severe, failing to make allowances.” See Chadwick, \textit{The Reformation}, 175.

\textsuperscript{427} \textit{Lawes} V.22.14; II:102.25-27.
not “necessary for salvation, and this should be a hallmark of a community that takes scriptural authority seriously.”

At the heart of this struggle was the assumption of some of Hooker’s contemporaries, which extended ‘strictly literal’ biblical interpretation outside the area of things necessary to salvation as a pre-requisite to God-honoring reform. Hooker dubbed this ‘the seeds’ from which all other complexities and disagreements stem. For Hooker, these seeds lacked proper prospective on God’s ordered picture of laws. He characterizes this hermeneutic by stating, “[f]or whereas God hath left sundry kinds of laws unto men, and by all those laws the actions of men are in some sort directed; they hold that one only law, the Scripture, must be the rule to direct in all things....”

This assumption of universal literal biblical interpretation was the central theme Hooker felt needed correcting — God has given other laws, including nature and reason, which are meant to guide the decisions of human beings. I want to argue that Hooker quickly grasped what was at stake if this approach gained sufficient momentum. Not only was it a distorted view of God’s Word; but also it was a type of hermeneutical paradigm that renders all of God’s other laws unnecessary, or even deceptive. In addition, this approach to reading the Bible would render the use of reason superfluous, ignoring a gift of God.

Instead, Hooker’s vision of biblical interpretation remained aware of a changing, expansive view of the church, wherein loyalty to scripture need not diminish the beauty of

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428 “Be it a matter of the one kind or of the other, what Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place of credit and obedience is due; the next whereunto is whatsoever any man can necessarily conclude by force of reason; after these the voice of the Church succeedeth.” Lawes V.8.2 ; II:39.7-10.
429 Lawes II.1.2; 1:145.2.
430 Lawes II.1.2; 1:145.10-12.
the ecclesial structures of the English Protestant tradition, or any other tradition. Hooker notes that those espousing this hermeneutic also, “...having found this the head theorem of all their discourses, who plead for the change of ecclesiastical government in England...”

In this regard, reason and ecclesial consensus was foundational to Hooker’s approach. A reasonable interpretative lens allowed scripture to address the changing, and necessary, defense of the Church of England. Hooker understood this hermeneutical theme to be based on the role of reason as evident in biblical narratives, and thus should be trusted to guide the Christian community in discerning and expounding the biblical text, even during changing times.

A final example of how this first theme is expressed in Hooker’s hermeneutical approach is found in Book II of the *Lawes*, with reference to two *Johannine* texts. Hooker uses these texts to point out how thoughtful reasoning is needed in some cases in order to believe. Interpreting Thomas’ post-resurrection moment of doubt, Hooker emphasizes that for Thomas, ‘blind faith’ was not enough to cause him to believe that Jesus was now alive. This was not to be seen as a sign that Thomas was less of a disciple in any way, but that even as a disciple he needed reality to be grounded in ‘verifiable’ reason. The authoritative witness of his fellow disciples was not enough either. As the biblical text shows, Thomas was not satisfied with blind faith or the voice of the church, “Except I see in his hands the print of the nayles, and put my finger in them, I will not beleev.”

Hooker’s interpretation of this narrative is that a demonstrative, reasoned position is necessary at times, and, moreover, this position is biblical. To deny such a truth by an over dependence

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431 Including some found in the Roman Catholic Church.
432 *Lawes* II.1.3; 1:146.23-25.
433 *Lawes* Book II; 1:143-192.
434 John 20:25 (Hooker’s version)
on verbal revelation, or a hermeneutical scheme concerned solely with perspicuity (to use a word later made current by Arminians), was a method that flew in the face of the authority of the Bible. This use of reason in Hooker’s biblical hermeneutics is encapsulated when he writes,

I hope we shall not seeme althogether unnecessarily to doubt the soundnesse of their opinion, who thinke simply that nothing but onely the worde of God, can give us assurance in any thing wee are to doe...Finally we all believe that the Scriptures of God are sacred, and that they have proceeded from God; our selves we assure that we doe right well in so beleeving. 435

Hooker is keenly aware that some may still choose to equate Scripture’s sacred status with overt clarity in interpretation, but he recommend otherwise. In his estimation, this was an example of where the Bible presupposes, and thus embraces, the use of reason, which never loses its special place in God’s unfolding paradigm of redemption.

Hooker adds to his thoughts on how scripture, at diverse points, lends itself to the importance of using reason in understanding what is being taught, remarking, “For to this and no other purpose are ment those parables which our Savior in the gospel hath concerning mixture of vice and virtue, light with darknes, truth with error, as well as openlie knowne and seene as a cunninglie cloked mixture.” 436 For Hooker, it is in understanding the truth of Jesus’ parables, and their implications, that one embraces their emphasis on Christian unity, and identifies the vice prevalent in the church — Augustine’s

435 Lawes II. 4.2; 1:152, 153. 25-20.
436 Lawes V: 68.6; 2:352.1-4.
notion of mixed church.\textsuperscript{437} In addition, Hooker believes that Jesus’ words are applicable to his situation wherein disunity was rampant.

In concluding the observation around this first hermeneutical theme, Hooker’s passion for the scriptures are best understood as a tension between statements in the \textit{regula fidei}, those core statements found expressed literally in Scripture, which are necessary to faith, and thus, salvation, and which were shaped by the church’s consensus,\textsuperscript{438} and the use of reason as an essential part of the process of scriptural interpretation. The paradox is that reason, although needed and a God-given gift, still has limitations. Grislis elucidates how this paradoxical approach to reason, faith and biblical understanding might be one of the most salient differences between Hooker and his radical Calvinist counterparts, noting, “Hooker differed significantly from the Puritans by his explicit reliance on reason and consequently on tradition endorsed by a learned ecclesial consensus.”\textsuperscript{439}

In this sense, reason helped move readers to consider the consensus of other writers on the issues. There will be times, according to Hooker, when the Bible remains unclear on issues not relating to salvation, and thus the consensus of the Christian community, and ensuing tradition, need be considered for guidance, especially when controversies of

\textsuperscript{437} See Frederick Van Fleteren & Joseph C. Schnaubelt, eds., \textit{Augustine: Biblical Exegete} (New York: Peter Lang – International Academic Publishers, 2004), 105. See Augustine’s sermon 23. In his exposition of Matthew 13, “Jesus and the parable of the Sower” Augustine’s view of the mystery of the wheat and the tares allowed, for the time being, to grow together. He states “Ye see tares among the wheat, we see evil Christians among the good; and ye wish to root up the evil ones: be quiet, it is not the time of harvest. That time will come, may it only find you wheat! Why do ye vex yourselves? Why bear impatiently the mixture of the evil with the good? In the field they may be with you, but they will not be so in the barn.” Online edition- http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf106.pdf, 709.

\textsuperscript{438} Augustine addressed a similar position when stating: “Those [books] which are accepted by the whole of catholic churches will be placed before those writings which some churches do not accept...there are certain books which are accepted by the majority of churches and some others which are accepted by important churches, in these cases I deem that both must be given the same authority.” Augustine, \textit{On Christian Doctrine}, 2.8.12.

teaching emerge. Both of these ideas seem paradoxical: If one were about to understand something by reason, why then would consensus be needed? This room for the possibility of extra-biblical knowledge, as it related to biblical interpretation, did not sit well with the evolved Calvinist tradition.

As part of his theological development, Hooker demonstrated that biblical interpretation required nuance, patience and, at times, imaginative expression. Beginning in Book I of the Lawes, Hooker speculates on the role and nature of the angels without real biblical support, claiming that “the rule of ghostly or immaterial natures, as spirits and Angels, is their intuitive intellectual judgment concerning the amiable beautie and high goodness of that object, which with unspeakable joy and delight, doth set them on worke,” though these views are not obvious in scripture. It is part of Hooker’s overarching scheme that this metaphysical elaboration is reasonable.

The apostle S. Paul having speech concerning the Heathen saith of them, They are a law unto themselves. His meaning is, that by force of the light of reason, wherewith God illuminateth every one which commeth into the world, men being inabled to know truth from falsehood, and good from evil, do thereby learne in many things what the will of God is.

Shaped by his interpretation of Romans 2:14, Hooker accentuates the role of reason as something evident even in the lives of ‘heathens’. This acerbated the tension with his contemporaries, and thus earned him considerable rebuke. Nevertheless, he did not let off that reason is, in some instances, reliable for both learning the will of God and discerning truth from falsehood. In this regard, God has provided a guide, the author of the scriptures,

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440Lawes 1.8.4; 1:84.85. 25-3.
441Lawes 1.8.3; 1:84.7-10.
to assist readers on this journey. To disagree with this position was to be ignorant of the whole of the biblical canon, and its multifaceted backdrop.

*The Holy Spirit and the Role of Wisdom*

It is common place to describe God’s ongoing interaction with his people as an essential aspect of the Christian understanding of the role of Holy Spirit. Yet for Hooker, the Spirit’s role was not simply to ensure salvation, but also to help in the discernment and apprehension of biblical insights. This important outlook formed another foundational aspect of Hooker’s hermeneutical approach. As will be discussed, this second theme was shaped by his view of the Holy Spirit, or the Holy Ghost, as he prefers to call him, as the one who ‘set down by his finger’ things in Scripture.\(^ {442} \) Hence, the Spirit’s ongoing guidance remains part of the larger way God’s presence is made available to his people.

Except for a few examples, the role of the Holy Spirit, and general thrust of Hooker’s pneumatology, remains a neglected area of research.\(^ {443} \) Nevertheless, it is impossible to read Hooker’s works, and explore his approach to scripture, without noticing that the Spirit’s formative role in imparting wisdom to those who carefully seek to understand the deep riches is found within the scriptures. Moreover, Hooker’s method of tying the role of the Spirit with biblical interpretation brings to the fore his view of wisdom in discerning texts that are unclear, or lack the kind of clarity the reader was seeking. Thus, God’s Holy Ghost is always linked with the impartation of divine wisdom aligned with the text of scripture, but is not necessarily found directly in the Bible.

\(^{442}\) Lawes 7.11.10; 1:211.16.

An example of how God’s wisdom works can be observed in Hookers’ understanding of the antediluvian narrative in Genesis. Hooker notes that, “The boundes of wisdome are large, and within them much is contayned. Wisedome was Adams instructor in Paradise.” Synonymous with God, wisdom was seen as God’s guiding light even before the scriptures were available. In equating God’s wisdom with his guiding presence, Hooker’s hermeneutics will emphasize that, since God doesn’t change, his wisdom must still be available for deducing important exegetical challenges which are, in some cases, not fully revealed in the biblical text alone.

Once again, aware of the Puritan propensity to assume that the Bible provides clarity on all issues, even those not necessarily pertinent to the salvific process, Hooker proposes a renewed look at the hermeneutics involved. In this light he writes: “There is nothing more dangerous than this licentious and deluding art, which changeth the meaning of words as alchemy doth or would do the substance of metals, maketh of anything that it listeth and bringeth in the end all truth to nothing.” The seriousness of this theological mishap required correction in Hooker’s view, and it was in his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, and the hermeneutical process, that this correction took shape.

Historically, Christianity struggled to unite spiritual direction and biblical interpretation. Those who sense a moving of God’s Holy Spirit are commonly seen as unpredictable and unbiblical in their leanings, since private or emotional interpretations never fare well. For example, reactions to Montanism, as well as more recent outbursts in charismatic circles, such as Luther’s nemesis Müntzer at Mühlhausen who insisted that

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444 Lawes II.1.4; 1:147.5-7.
445 Lawes V.59.2; 2:252.7-11.
446 This Second Century movement in Asia Minor founded by Montanus was rooted in so called Spirit induced prophecies. It was so persuasive that it caused Tertullian, the early church father, eventually to be converted to its ranks.
direct revelation was needed, fuel the narrative that relying on God’s Holy Spirit should be considered suspicious. Nevertheless, what Hooker does in his theological developments remains enduring and foundational to his larger hermeneutical task, and the ensuing challenges the Church of England continues to face. In part, the strength of Hooker’s approach was his consistent sense of theological responsibility to the broader voice of the Church of England.

Returning to Book II of the Lawes, Hooker demonstrated that even those who are led by the Spirit (i.e. Cartwright) could be misguided in their conclusions on certain biblical texts. As the Articles of Religion claimed, men are fallible (“churches have erred”) and the guidance of the Holy Spirit does not automatically confer infallibility. Approximately thirty years ago, Archer, in a terse introduction to Hooker proposed “…that the Apostles … had the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which the Puritans lack”; but this remains a harsh and exaggerated critique. Hooker adapted his own hermeneutical insights instead, inviting his contemporaries to reconsider what they believed about the Holy Spirit, and how God’s wisdom can emerge in the task of exegesis. In this regard he writes: “Whatsoever either men on earth, or the Angels of heaven do know, it is as a drop of that unemptiable fountaine of wisdom, which wisdom hath diversely imparted her treasures unto the world.” Accordingly, for Hooker, the Holy Spirit is always at work informing and infusing God’s people with the wisdom to understand the Bible and empower individuals to live as faithful followers.

\[\text{Lawes II.1.4; 1:14723-26.}\]
In light of Hooker’s vision of God’s laws, and the manner in which they shaped an ordered world, Hooker remains steadfast in his insistence that the scriptures both accentuate the beauty of the created order, and point people to the need for Godly wisdom. Hooker believed that in appreciating and reflecting on God’s orderliness, one could ascertain insights related to wisdom as his thoughtful reflection in the *Dublin Fragments* elucidates:

The lawes of action which he teacheth us, and the lawes which his owne wisdome chooseth to follow, are not the one repugnant to the other. The concealed causes of his secret intents, overthrow not the principles which Nature or Scripture, the true Interpreters of his wisdom, have disclosed to the whole world.  

God’s nature, as revealed in the created order, is established to help produce patterns for a God-honoring life. These principles are a sign of how God’s wisdom shaped his revelatory expression to humanity. In addition, that divine wisdom allowed for human abilities of reason and scriptural interpretation to assist drawing humanity nearer to this loving God.

In exploring this second theme on the role of Spirit-led wisdom in Hooker, it is beneficial to examine some ways the idea of *sapientia* was understood, and passed on to Hooker. Guided by ancient philosophers, pursuit of wisdom in life was of utmost importance; yet for Christians, it became customary to equate wisdom with a typology of Jesus and his work. By the fourth century, Constantine, the Roman Emperor, celebrated the dedicating of a church to Christ as the personification of divine wisdom.  

Kirby, commenting on the importance of wisdom and Hooker’s biblical polemics, perceptively observed that “In the *Lawes* Hooker responds to Cartwright’s four scriptural proofs of this

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448 Hooker, FLE. *Dublin Fragments*, 4:131.32-132.4.  
position with an invocation of wisdom theology." Moreover, Neelands provides an important note on how Hooker’s thoughts on wisdom rested heavily on Aquinas’ influence, noting,

One of Thomas Aquinas’ favorite biblical verses is found in the deuterocanonical writings: Wisdom reacheth from one end to another mightily, and sweetly doth she order all things. It is of significance that this is one of Hooker’s favorite verses as well as a token of the theological consonance between Thomas and Hooker. Consequently, Hooker followed an important legacy of wise thinkers and literature, which he seamlessly wove into his own hermeneutical paradigm.

Clearly these insights on wisdom were drawn from the deep well of the scriptures; as Hooker writes: “by the wisdome of the law of God, David attayned to excell others in understanding; and Salomon likewise to excell David by the selfe same wisdome of God teaching him many thinges besides the law” (emphasis mine). In other words, wisdom’s role is to help God’s servant excel. In this light, Hooker believed that key biblical figures were reminders that God caused aspects of his wisdom, evidenced in the larger narrative of God’s involvement with the world. Thus, Hooker’s exploration and probing of the theme of wisdom finds root in scripture, but is also expanded and developed by the ideas of key thinkers in the pre-Reformation tradition.

Following in his English lineage, Hooker was confident in pointing believers toward the assurances of God’s guiding presence in understanding and interpreting the Bible. This was held in tension with, as mentioned above, the role reason and the collective consensus on certain matters. It must have been reminiscent, to some, of Archbishop

450 Kirby, *Companion to Richard Hooker*, 262.
452 Lawes II.1.4; I:147. 8-10. For Hooker, even those who had the law at their disposal were still led by God to discern his wisdom.
Cranmer (1532-34), who, in the preface to the Great Bible in 1540, referring to St. John Chrysostom’s homily on *The Parable Lazarus and the Rich Man* stated, “If we do not understand the Scripture, we are to try to understand, and the Holy Spirit will assist our diligence.” Cranmer’s encouragement makes clear that not all who read Scripture will have the same result; one must have a godly mind and a desire to listen to the Holy Spirit’s wisdom in the hermeneutical process.

This historical legacy comes to fruition in Hooker’s passionate appeal for the role of bishops, and their unique place in ordering the life of the church. For Hooker, this approach to polity was also informed by his commitment to the role of the Holy Spirit in imparting wisdom for devising practices that both align with scripture and can assist the local church. As he writes,

...no doubt but being established by them [The Apostles] on whom the Holy Ghost was powred in so abundant measure for the ordering of Christ’s Church, it had either Divine appointment beforehand, or Divine approbation afterwards, and is in that respect to be acknowledged the Ordinance of God... Therefore, Hooker’s larger apology for Episcopal authority and other ecclesial ordinances was shaped by the Spirit’s leading. These truths, now in the scriptures, should be embraced in such a fashion, and respected with reverence, before proposing the changes some were suggesting. For Hooker, God’s Holy Spirit continued to guide the church in the leadership of ecclesial matters, and this divine wisdom not only provided clarity, but reminded readers of their dependence, albeit fallible, on godly wisdom as part of the hermeneutical process.

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453 Thomas Cranmer, Preface to the Great Bible, 1540 in Parker Society Cranmer volume notes, “Briefely to the readying of the scripture none canne be enemies, but that eyther be so sycke that they love not to heare of any medicine: or els that be so ignoraunte, that they knowe not scripture to be the most healthfull medicyne.” See online reference - http://orderofcenturions.org/documents/cranmerpreface.html

454 *Lawes* 7.5.2. III:161.11-15.
Connecting one’s reading and understanding of scripture with the work of the Holy Spirit was a continuous part of Hooker’s larger exegetical program. His thinking on this issue fell in line with the great fathers of the church whose legacy he inherited. St. Augustine, still one of the most influential thinkers in this regard, had already wonderfully married the themes that Augustine attempted to assimilate in *De Doctrina*, when stating,

> Accordingly the Holy Spirit has, with admirable wisdom and care for our welfare, so arranged the Holy Scriptures as by the plainer passages to satisfy our hunger, and by the more obscure to stimulate our appetite. For almost nothing is dug out of those obscure passages which may not be found set forth in the plainest language elsewhere.\(^{455}\)

For Augustine, as for Hooker, the Holy Spirit has given godly wisdom to us so that we may understand God speaking through the scriptures. In this practice, because of his divine care, the listeners are spiritually quenched, or drawn toward seeking God at a deeper level. This important explanation comes to bear on Hooker’s thinking when dealing with the controversies related to reading versus preaching from the Bible.

His radical Calvinist counterparts were adamant that the act of preaching was, in some sense, essential. While Hooker does not deny the importance of preaching, he believes that the reading of God’s Word without preaching must be recognized as having the same use and authority, since it is the same Holy Spirit at work in both instances. After numerous examples of patristic writers who exemplify the beauty of the Scriptures being read, Hooker returned to his primary audience, those who hold that the practice of preaching is more sacred than the reading of Scripture, and accordingly wrote,

> The publique reading of the Apocrypha they condemne altogether as a thinge effectuall unto evell; the bare reading in like sorte of whatsoever, yea even of

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\(^{455}\) Augustine, *De Doctrina*, II.6.8
scriptures themselves, they mislike, as a thinge uneffectuall to doe that good, which we are perswaded may growe by it.456

Here Hooker implies that the Apocrypha, while not a canonized text, should not as such to be defined as evil. For his contemporaries they were, in part, symbolic of the Roman Catholic errors. What seems to be more troublesome is how public reading of ‘scripture themselves’, was also frowned upon. Lack of due respect for the deuterocanonical writings is tantamount to neglecting to read the Holy Scriptures themselves.

In opposition to such views, Hooker reasserted the need for more distinction between elevated views of preaching and a high regard for the Scriptures. While both are necessary and important for doctrine they are different, and for Hooker, a weakness of the Puritans’ treatment of such issues led to a minimizing the role of the Spirit. For Hooker, the Spirit imparts wisdom through the hearing and public reading of scripture because the Bible is the primary method that God has decided to work through. Put simply, by his Spirit God uses the Bible. In accordance with this truth, one must never lose perspective on why the Bible has been given to us: namely for our salvation. Since the role of the Holy Spirit is to convince and lead one to repentance, it remains the role of Holy Spirit to lead readers and listeners to the truths necessary for salvation. As Hooker noted,

For which cause in this present question we are, when we name the worde of God, always to meane the scripture onlie,[his emphasis]. The ende of the word of God is to save, and therefore we terme it the word of life. The waie for all men (emphasis mine) to be saved is by knowledge of that truth which the worde hath taught... Wherefore the ignorant it saveth not, they which live by the worde must knowe it. And beinge it selfe the instrument which God hath purposelie framed, thereby to worke the knowledge of salvation.457

456 *Lawes* V.21.1; 1:83.30-34.
457 *Lawes* V.21.3; II:84.22-34.
Accordingly, the scriptures and their God-intended purpose should not be skewed by faulty hermeneutics. To suggest that God’s saving knowledge, as found in scripture, should provide responses for all questions was a serious blind spot of his Puritan counterparts. Hooker believed that to hold to a hermeneutical viewpoint that presupposes that the Bible provides clarity on all matters is, in some sense, to no longer need the Holy Spirit.

A particular point of contention that related to the Holy Spirit centered around how the Spirit gave certainty as to the canon of scripture. Calvin’s influence on Hooker’s critics, and their conviction that Calvin was correct and Hooker’s embracing of how the Spirit used reason seemed dangerous, is worth noting. Often referred to as the ‘testimony’ of the Holy Spirit, chapter seven of book one of Calvin’s *Institutes* addressed the issue with precision. The phrase was found not in the text itself, but in the lengthy title, “The testimony of the Spirit Necessary to Give Full Authority to Scripture. The Impiety of Pretending That the Credibility of Scripture Depends on the Judgment of the Church.” At the core of Calvin’s arguments was a concern that if the Church was seen as the primary authority in affirming the sufficiency of scripture, a principle not explicitly found in Scripture, man’s reasonableness and judgment was given too much authority. For Calvin, this was a deep error, since for him the church and all of its authority must rest under that of the authority of scripture. As Calvin contends, “our conviction of the truth of Scripture must be derived from a higher source than human conjectures, judgments or reasons; namely, the secret testimony of the Spirit.”

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459 Calvin, *Institutes*, Bk I.7.4. Interestingly, Calvin added the word ‘secret’ which is omitted in the title of chapter 7. Later use of the phrase will include the adjective ‘internal’. Neelands has noted that Hooker, “knows of the “inner motive” of the “testimony of the spirit” that others have spoken of, but he interprets that in terms of the engracing of the human reason itself, not an interruption of it, which would not actually be all that helpful: the testimony of the holy spirit is in continuity with reason and the voice of the
While Calvin proposed this theological reality as a supernatural way in which the Spirit assures believers that the Bible remains reliable and authoritative without the need of the Church’s influence, Hooker will extend such thoughts. While the Holy Spirit is essential, could not the same Spirit supernaturally guide one in the reliability of biblical interpretation by the use of reason and the voice of the church, thus including reason and the voice of the Church within the authority of the Spirit? For Hooker, the Holy Spirit was a helpful testimony, assisting reason and the voice of the church, but always in conjunction with these other factors, arriving at other important convictions.

Thus, for Hooker, the testimony of God’s Spirit is important and helpful, but can’t be left alone to assure scriptural authority. In addressing similar concerns, Hooker wrote,

...what the spirit hath taught us: so likewise that even to our own selves it needeth caution and explication how the testimony of the spirit may be discerned, by what means it may be known, lest men think that the spirit of god doth testifie those things which the spirit of error suggesteth.460

Suggesting that although important, the ‘testimony of the spirit’ requires its own type of discernment and validation. This, in his estimation, is best set by the church and the role of grace-guided reason. In this regard, the hope is that errors will be minimized and God’s Word understood and appropriated.

To diminish this reality, is to propose that every person may have a propensity to interpret and affirm their own truth as it comes to them. For Hooker, this is a seriously problematic approach to the Bible. Addressing this issues Hooker wrote,

Wherefore albeit the spirit lead us into all truth and direct us in all goodness, yet because these workings of the spirit in us are so privy and secret, we therefore stand...
on a plainer ground, when we gather by reason from the qualitie of things beleeved or done, that the spirit of God hath directed us in both; then if we settle ourselves to beleev or to do any certaine particular thing, as being moved thereto by the spirit.\

That is, we are wise to remember that it remained pertinent to Hooker’s influence and polemical dealings that wisdom is found primarily in the Scriptures, but not exclusively therein.

A last point I would like to emphasize, as it relates to the Holy Spirit and wisdom, is found in Book V of the Lawes. In his opening dedication, Hooker addresses the importance of wisdom in scriptural interpretation by focusing on a passage in Matthew’s Gospel. Following the saying of Christ, he states that what is required of people is to have ‘the wisedome of Serpents tempered with the innocent meeknesse of doves.’ In Hooker’s interpretation, there is a characteristic of Godly wisdom that differs from mere earthly wisdom, and it is ‘selflessness’. The wisdom of the Spirit leads to a passion and attentiveness which “behoveth that we vigilantly note and prevent by al means those evils whereby the harts of men are lost, which evils for the most part being personall do arme in such sort the adversaries of God and his Church against us.” When God’s spirit is neglected as part of the hermeneutical process, the evangelistic impetus related to the primarily purpose of scripture gets diverted. This comment points to an underlying evangelistic impulse in Hooker’s thinking as it relates to the Spirit and hermeneutics. Incredibly, for Hooker, personal views on diverse matters should remain secondary, and the hearts of the lost should remain in focus throughout the interpretive process.

461 Lawes III. 8.15; I:233.3-9.
462 Matthew 10:16.
463 Lawes Dedication V.9.1. II:6.22
464 Lawes Dedication V.9; II:7. 4-7.
A Hermeneutic of Humility

In her work on virtue, Lisa Fullam, rightly recognizes that “Humility has often been mistaken for self-abasement, especially in the Christian tradition.” A similar mishap is evident in Hooker’s theological journey. I want to suggest that his views on biblical exegesis provide a humble, yet robust and confident, theological contribution to hermeneutics. As will be expressed, this third theme in Hooker’s hermeneutical schema melds both Hooker’s invitation to diverse perspectives on a biblical text, as well as his passion for trusting Scripture in affirming the meta-narrative of an ordered world together. As we have seen, Hooker admired his perceived humility in St. Augustine, who honestly acknowledged his previous writings and the errors found in them.

As mentioned, the Reformation brought with it a number of refined approaches to the Bible, which led to numerous controversies in and of themselves, in addition to the religious controversies these approaches were thought to decide. Being familiar with this history, Hooker sought to present readers with a humble approach, inviting those who disagree with both, respect for the larger mandate of love, and ecclesial unity. Augustine introduced this irenic position: let interpreters disagree as long as all agree that love is the basis.

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466 Lawes Pref. 9.2; 1:52,4-9.
467 For example, Hooker agreed that a Genevan Model of Church governance worked in Geneva and might be a possibility in certain locations, although the Church of England had determined otherwise. This diverse reading of the Bible was not seen as wrong or eisegetical, just not wise or necessary for the Church of England at the time.
468 “Holy Scripture...speaks in such a way as to mock proud readers with its heights, terrify the attentive with its depths, feed great souls with its truth and nourish little ones with sweetness.” St. Augustine, On Literal Reading of Genesis, 5.3.6.
Before examining what I believe to be an important expositional dynamic for understanding Hooker’s developing hermeneutic, it may be helpful to briefly point out that some of his contemporaries did not see humility as his forte. In fact, Almasy posits that the writers of *A Christian Letter* interpreted,

…Hooker’s theological positions as dangerous to the church and contrary to the received theology of the English Reformation. To ‘shew’ Hooker in this negative light is a critical element of the rhetorical strategy of the letter, and that strategy begins with the understanding that Hooker himself, in ‘shewing of him selfe to the world’ through the *Lawes*, was practicing a rhetoric of display or performance that challenged the very foundation of reformist thought.

For these authors, Hooker’s approach to ecclesiastical matters and theological themes were just another opportunity for him to flaunt his philosophical muscles as a form of boasting. Humility is not something they recognized in his approach, unless of course, he was willing to submit to their accusation, shed light on their concerns, and correct discrepancies.

In responding to these allegations, Hooker’s patience seems to have reached its limit, and his condescending remarks that these "certaine English Protestantes" should go “read some good catechisms” might be seen as lacking humility. Moreover, as noted by Gibbs, “his initial responses were visceral and sharp” and he accused the unidentified authors of being raised by godparents who did not care appropriately for their upbringing. Consequently, to analyze Hooker solely on his tone and attitude as it relates to this *Letter*, one might miss the fact that we are dealing with someone who had taken considerable time to focus on the sin of pride in sermon. In addition, it is evident that

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469 ACL- as noted earlier, printed in 1599 by ‘certaine English Protestantes’ concerned that Hooker’s views were not in line with the biblical ideals of the Reformation, specifically the Reformed tradition.


Hooker desired to grow in his approach to scripture and, in doing so, sought appropriate wisdom through the Scriptures.

Calvin, in dealing with the issue of humility, carefully reminded his readers that it is the scriptures that assist an individual in remaining consistent in the virtuous life.

I do not ask, however, that man should voluntarily yield without being convinced, or that, if he has any powers, he should shut his eyes to them, that he may thus be subdued to true humility; but that getting quit of the disease of self-love and ambition…under the blinding influences of which he thinks of himself more highly that he ought to think, he may see himself as he really is, by looking into the faith mirror of Scripture.473

Perhaps Hooker, in attempting to address the tensions of these debates, actually did look into the ‘mirror of scripture’ in dealing with his own internal paradox. In a sermon addressing the issue of pride he stated that, “[t]here is in the hart of every proud man first an error of understanding a vain opinion whereby he thinketh his own excellency and by reason thereof his wourthines of estimation regard and honour to be greater than in truth it is.”474 This, for Hooker, marks an important pastoral reflection that would come to shape his thoughts on biblical interpretation, the life of faith and other themes like assurance, doubt and ecclesiology.

In light of our focus on hermeneutics, it seems fitting to look at Hooker’s use of scripture and his interpretation of some salient passages in a sermon, as mentioned above, dealing with pride. He specifically deals with the dangers of pride in order to encourage humility. Hooker develops his thoughts in this sermon with reference to a passage in book

473 Calvin, Institutes, Book 2, 2,11. Also see Book I.4.1
474 Hooker, "A Learned Sermon of the Nature of Pride". FLE 5:318.17-22
of Habakkuk. In his opening passage Habakkuk states, “[h]is mind swelleth and is not right in him: but the just by his faith shall live.” Touching on the dangers of over-reliance on one’s own thinking, Hooker moved his readers toward the need to find solace in God’s gracious presence as seen in scripture, specifically in the life and message of the prophet.

A focal point in Hooker’s exegetical method is his weaving of both Old and New Testament passages in the development of his argument. His use of the Habakkuk passage is best seen as a springboard to connect similar texts to challenges related to pride. Circuitously, he moves from the Psalms to Job, back to Romans, the Gospel of Luke and the first letter to the Corinthians. Again, his vast knowledge of the biblical text comes to the surface as he attempted to make clear that his insistence on humility was a biblical theme found in diverse books, no matter the genre. Subsequently, Hooker will come to emphasize the need to recognize pride’s ability to cloud one’s judgment.

Pride is not cured but by abating the errour which causeth the mind to swell. Then seing that they swell by misconceipt of their own excellency, for this cause all which tendeth to the beating down of their pride whether it be advertisement from men or from god him selfe chastisement, it then maketh them cease to be proud when it causeth them to see their errour in overesteeming the thing they were proud of.

Hooker used this exploration of the theme of pride to reassert his concern with fellow Puritans who, in a prideful way, saw their approach to biblical interpretation as the only

475 Short version for Habakkuk as it appears in his sermon is ‘ABAC’. See Tractates and Sermons, Folgers Library Edition [FLE].
478 Hooker, A Learned Sermon of the Nature of Pride 5:320.21.
way. Thus, one’s lack of discernment in dealing with pride’s errors quickly infects one’s interpretation of the Bible and understanding of the Christian journey.479

To elucidate this point, Hooker made use of a text from the first letter to the Corinthians, which reinforces an underlying theme he had been trying to address from the outset of the Lawes.480 Within the larger context, Paul invites his readers, specially brothers and sisters in Corinth, to carefully listen to his words and consider his journey. Prior to verse 8, as quoted by Hooker, we read

Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. 481

Readers should connect the reference "Do not go beyond what is written" as a foundational verse anchoring Hooker’s larger agenda against his radical Calvinist counterparts. Hermeneutically, Hooker worked through the themes revealed in these sections. First addressing those who went beyond what was written in scripture, he noted how it is there that pride takes root. Hinting at the inherent dangers when stating that, “[i]t was self centred pride that led the Puritans to appeal to “the special illumination of the Holy Ghost, whereby they discerne those things in the word, which others reading yet discern them not.”482 This point cannot be underestimated since it is essential to Hooker’s theological argument, as well as his hermeneutical explorations.

479 See P.E. Forte. Richard Hooker as Preacher in FLE 5. “the sermons that have come down to us are impressive, exhibiting not only the acuity that distinguishes the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie, but an unusual degree of empathy for the spiritual travail of the Christian believer.” 657.
480 Hooker will quote 1 Cor. 4:8, but I suggest he is working with the full chapter in mind, since it deals with the larger theme that he himself is undergoing with the Puritans.
481 1 Corinthians 4:6- NIV.
482 Lawes ‘Preface’ 3.10; I:17.12-14. Also, Neelands elaborates on similar issues by showing how Hooker showed the weakness of Calvin’s position on the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. See David Neelands, “The Use and Abuse of John Calvin in Richard Hooker’s Defence of the English Church.”
Anyone claiming ‘special’ illumination as a way of not adhering to the larger accountable leadings of the Church and her historical decisions in controversies of faith (Article 20), quickly moved toward a form of Gnostic spiritual authority. As in the patristic era, those who believed in a particular touch of *gnosis* became a dominant threat against the earliest teaching of the church. When addressing theological differences, at least from Hooker’s perspective, those serious about the practice of hermeneutics should resort to a reasonable explanation in their disagreement, lest one abuse Godly authority as a way of defending whatever suits one’s preferred interpretation. Hooker recognized that the ramifications of leaving this matter unattended would be disastrous for the church when he wrote: “This hath bred high tearmes of separation between such and the rest of the world, whereby the one sort are named The bretheren, The godlie, and so forth, the other worldlings, timeservers, pleasers of men not of God, with such like.” For Hooker, one’s hermeneutics has behavioral consequences somatic in nature, relating to the body of Christ.

For Hooker, the illumination of the Spirit, in matter of interpretation, should move brothers and sisters in the body of Christ toward a posture of unity. In fact, to make biblical interpretation solely about the correct letter of the law is to dismiss the need for *living* a spirit-illuminated life that seeks to minimize ‘high tearmes of separation.’ These theological issues cause Hooker to return to the biblical text. As a result he directed his attention to a passage in the letter to the Galatians484, which demonstrates how his reading of the text was coupled with his desire to encourage listeners to consider their way of life. Consequently

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*Perichoresis*, 3-22. For Hooker, the internal witness was not “special” but part of the way God leads us all into truth—through reason and the consensus of our teachers. See remarks in footnote 71.

483 *Lawes* Preface 3.11. 1:18.15-17.

he states, “[a]s things which wee know and delight in are said to dwell in our minds and possess our hearts: So Christ knowing his sheepe and being known of them loving and being loved is not without cause said to be in them and they in him.” Thus, the sign of Christ being formed in one’s heart should influence one’s hermeneutical lens.

Accordingly, I want to suggest that, for Hooker, biblical interpretation, when guided by a posture of humility as evidenced in Christ, seeks and encourages a new kind of behavior reflective of one’s way of life. Corneliu Simut, commenting on pride’s ability as adumbrated in Hooker’s thinking states,

> In fact, the mind of a proud man does not have the ability to overcome the error of evaluating an idea which is not in accordance with real truth. This will immediately cause a behavioral pattern, by which the proud man will see himself as better than others.”

To Hooker, any hermeneutic that is not consistently returning to the theme of humility falls short in many ways, which are externally made evident in one’s way of life.

Thus, mired in quotidian concerns, Hooker revealed the way hermeneutics interfaced diverse issues. At the close of Book VI of the Lawes, Hooker concludes by turning the reader’s attention to Jeremiah 29:13 and Joel 2:12. Both passages, as interpreted by Hooker, point to the urgency of addressing matters with a focus on one’s behavior tending toward one’s heart. Also, both texts emphasize the process of moving toward God as a way of repentance. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Hooker’s interpretation never addressed the common Augustinian notion that humankind, being depraved, could not move toward seeking God alone. Actually, he seems to focus on the

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487 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:13; Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.” Joel 2:12
exact opposite issue. Secondly, for Hooker, his reading accentuates that God is honored by one’s humility in recognizing one’s limitations and yet, although frail, attempting to respond to God. As Hooker wrote,

That which God doth chiefly respect in mens poenitencie, is their hearts, The heart is it which maketh repentance syncere, synceritie that which findeth favour in Gods sight, and the favour of God, that which supplied by gratious acceptation whatsoever may seeme defective in the faithfull, heartie, and true offices of his servants.488

This focus on God’s gracious nature, which is attuned to the weakness of his people and nonetheless invites individuals to repentance, is the larger backdrop of how this hermeneutical theme speaks to the theme of Christian assurance.

Nowhere is the theme of humility more important than in connection with the critical issue of Christian assurance throughout the sixteenth century. As one may assume, humility and the confidence associated with assurance appear at odds with each other. While Hooker embraced the theme of assurance, his contemporaries put an inordinate emphasis on how assurance was to be understood. Thus, there emerged a type of self-aggrandizing interpretation, fitting assurances in certain preachers bolstering prideful influence. Vickers notes, “Hooker dislikes the arrogance implied by the Reformers setting up the preacher as a man equal to God, as if the word of God could only be known through the voice of man.”489 This important note emphasizes that, for Hooker, humility can easily be set aside as secondary in a theological tradition that embraced preaching ‘correct’ doctrines at the expense of letting the text plainly shape the thoughts of the listener.

Most evident, for Hooker, was how some of his Calvinist contemporaries accentuated the Reformed doctrine of Christian assurance in a way that led to unnecessary anxiety in the listener — what will later be called “scruple”. It is noteworthy to show how Malone unites Hooker’s hermeneutics in interpreting a text in the book of Habakkuk as it related to the controversial dynamics present in addressing the theme of Christian assurance. He writes,

The Prophet Habakkuk remained faithful in weakness, though weak in faith. It was the prophet’s faithfulness to the objective credibility of the gospel rather than his reliance upon his subjective appreciation of it which constituted the character and strength of his election assurance.  

Furthermore, the radical Reformed voices arguing for one particular form of church governance over and above other views, fuelled his vision that humility was essential to biblical exegesis in the complex post-Reformation world. Although acknowledging the importance of a sure assurance of faith, Hooker believed the approach taken by some of his Reformed contemporaries lacked the humility required to truly understand this doctrine within the framework of the biblical text. Neelands helpfully remarks,

His [Hooker’s] purpose, however, was not to induce uncertainty, but rather, by being honest about the real subjective uncertainties on matters of faith in the life of growth in grace, to reassure those who did not seem to find in themselves the certainties their more aggressive Reformed neighbors and preachers treated as the only means to discern one’s own state of election to salvation.

Hence, to trust and hope in God while experiencing moments, or even seasons, of doubt was itself part of the way God teaches his children the posture of humility.

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491 David Neelands, ‘Richard Hooker and Assurance’, Emanuel University of Oradea, Perichoresis 7.1 (2009) 93-111, 98. As Neelands points out, hope is what counts and is a solid gift when assurance waivers.
Returning to the scriptures, Hooker attempted to show, by expounding Philippians 2, that a hermeneutic of humility is strengthened when understanding Christ’s own journey of condescension, stating,

The Sonne of God which did first humble him selfe by takinge our flesh upon him, descended afterwardes much lower and became accordinge to the flesh obedient so farre as to suffer death even the death of the crosse for all men because such was his fathers will. The former was an humiliation of deitie; the later an humiliation of manhood. For which cause there followed upon the later an exaltation of that which was humbled.  

Hence, according to Hooker, God the Son modeled the essential role of humility in the Christian life. As part of this third theme, Hooker weaves the theme of Jesus’ passio as a reminder that moments of suffering are quintessential examples of Christian humility.

The application of Philippians 2 remained a lifelong process for Hooker. As part of his journey, Hooker would have to learn and apply the truth of this text to his theological dealings. The challenge was in remaining humble in the midst of difficult debates. As he demonstrated, his larger hermeneutical ideals sought to posit that both humility and hermeneutics must go hand in hand. Whether he always practiced this theme in full remains a point of discussion. Nevertheless, this hermeneutical theme demonstrates that Hooker’s approach to interpretation sought to present the gospel, as personified in the life of Jesus, with a biblical pattern of interpretation inviting readers to trust in the faithfulness of God, as depicted in the grand narrative of God’s dealings with the world and his interactions with his Son.

\[492\text{ Lawes, V.55.8; 2:232.17-22.}\]
‘Perfect’ Revelation and Contextualized Interpretation

The fourth and final theme discussed reveals how Hooker had a pastoral awareness of the ways his context influenced his hermeneutical outcomes based on the proclivities of his day, especially as displayed in the Admonition Controversy. His theological writings demonstrate a vision and appreciation of how local issues and concerns were pertinent to the process of biblical interpretation. For this reason, Hooker was careful not to impose his own model. Moreover, because Hooker believed that the Bible was not always decisive on certain ecclesial questions, the ethos and context of a community play a key role in ascertaining how God may be trying to speak to a particular community. With that in mind, Hooker presented an appreciation of the diversity prevalent in the Catholic Church, while at the same time supporting the uniqueness of his Elizabethan context.

For Hooker, God’s Word, while revelatory in nature, must be carefully applied, taking into serious consideration the different context of the interpreter. Ignoring this reality was tantamount to ignoring the diversity found with the scriptures themselves. Hence, at the core of Hooker’s writing was an inherent frustration with Puritans who argue for an approach to biblical interpretation, which, in some ‘universal’ schema, rendered the need for contextualized conversation obsolete. For Hooker, the most relevant concern was the issue of ecclesial polity. Additionally, understanding Hooker’s context and the brewing Reformation challenges, may spur readers to embrace Hooker’s persuasive approach in
interpreting the Bible that avoids the hazard of relegating Hooker to some political sage with superfluous ideas on jurisdictional leadership.\textsuperscript{493}

As foresaid, Hooker approached the Bible with important underlying commitments to proper biblical sentiment. Hooker’s understanding of the role and use of the Bible clearly did not emerge in a vacuum; rather, it developed as part of larger ecclesial complexities of his day. As Haugaard concisely observes, “[h]e wrote to explain and to defend the Elizabethan church in which he had experienced the Christian religion and learned Christian theology.”\textsuperscript{494} This reminder helps situate Hooker within the larger ecclesiological concerns of the English Reformation from which his thinking and hermeneutical inquiries emerged. As proposed, this closing theme will return to the question of God’s Word as God’s revelation. For Hooker, the Bible remained uniquely authoritative as God’s revelation, but not omni-competent.

To the chagrin of fellow Calvinists, Hooker stated that his context embraced certain practices as helpful and authoritative. Specifically, when addressing the public reading of scripture, he stated:

For with us the readinge of scripture in the church is a parte of our Church litourgie, a special portion of the service which we doe to God, and not an exercise to spend time, when one doth waite for an others comminge, till the assemblie of them that shall afterwarde worship him be complete.\textsuperscript{495}

This practice was not stated somewhere in scripture, nor was it commanded by Jesus, although it was illustrated by him, but for Hooker is was a contextual practice that needed


\textsuperscript{495} Lawes V.19.5; II:144.11-16.
affirming. Moreover, the practice of public reading of scripture was to be seen as being done unto God, even though the Bible did not necessarily mention it.

Consequently, this caused considerable concern for Hooker’s critics, who felt that the order of church worship should be guided only by what was explicitly found in the Bible. As has been shown, Hooker believed that the Bible was essential in many ways, yet his view was that context should play an essential part of interpreting practices, even if they did not explicitly appear in the Bible. Lake remarks on how this issue was particularly important for those living during the sixteenth century, writing that “[t]he whole protestant enterprise was based on the application of the authority of scripture directly to contemporary doctrinal and moral issues.”

In this light, Hooker highlighted how one’s context should be respected while embracing the authority of scripture and discerning reasonable next steps when addressing specific issues. As Hooker expounded the need for contextual realities he was ever mindful that God’s revelation also remain ‘perfect’.

In Book II of the Lawes, Hooker illuminates his position on how one should embrace the authority of scripture as revelation:

Finally, we all believe that the Scriptures of God are sacred, and that they have proceeded from God; ourselves we assure that we do right well in so believing. We have for this point a demonstration sound and infallible. But it is not the word of God which doth or possibly can assure us, that we do well to think it his worde.

The ‘sound’ and ‘infallible’ demonstration pushed Hooker beyond the comfort zone of the leading Reformers of his day. He stated that it is the church ‘visible’, which provides the

496 Peter Lake, Anglicans and Puritans? 15.
497 Lawes 2.4.2; 2:153.13-17.
498 For example, Calvin argued that the internal witness of the Holy Spirit was the validating experience of the Scripture’s authority. Hooker, in opposition, proposed that the solution lay in something external; the voice of the Church and her authority. See Neelands, “The Use and Abuse of John Calvin in
stable assurance. As imagined, this caused his critics to associate his position closely with that held by the Roman Catholic Church.

Nevertheless a few years later, this view caused the anonymous writers of *A Christian Letter* to unleash their barrage of attacks on other matters they felt were ‘unorthodox’ according to their hermeneutical standards. As explored earlier, it is my contention that it seems unwise to minimize the critiques made by these authors who, by proximity alone, seem to have recognized theological novelties in Hooker’s ideas. I suggest that these attacks on Hooker might be fairly accurate, and in this sense, they also point to Hooker’s inability to fit into the orderly continental stream of thinking on matters of how the Bible could be trusted as Revelation.

Nevertheless, the challenges related to how the Bible came to be seen as authoritative did not minimize Hooker’s insistence that it was the ‘revelation’ of God to humankind. Moreover, God’s Word as revelatory did not negate God’s desire to point readers to other reference points of authority. As he writes, “[n]either is it vain that the scripture aboundeth with so great store of laws in this kind.”499 What the authors of *A Christian Letter* observed seems accurate, since Hooker’s version of how the Bible is perfect differed from what these Reformed-minded believers posited. Therefore, the question as to why God’s revelation in scripture did not address all matters related to ecclesiastical life became pertinent to address.

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499 Richard Hooker’s Defense of the English Church,” *Perichoresis*, 12. Neelands clearly explores how Hooker claimed his approach aligned with Calvin on some of these issues, while noting how he was in disagreement with Calvinist contemporaries.

499 *Lawes* 1.12; 1:120.1-3.
In so doing, Hooker’s clearest response brings us back to his judicious concern for context. One of the most controversial issues was the theme of discipline as had been expounded under the Calvinistic scheme in Geneva. Accordingly, what was the role of the ‘perfect’ revelation on matters related to sinfulness in the life of a believer and the discipline that might follow? On this matter Hooker stated, “in these matters of discipline” the authority of Scripture is “more darke and doubtful”, although clear and plain in matters necessary for salvation.

The Puritans insisted that discipline was a vital practice, which they believed was clearly defendable by the use of Scripture. Hooker instead tried to highlight that the discipline was more clearly connected to the Genevan context and Calvin’s leaders. Also, that Scripture was in the slightest sense ‘darke and doubtful’ came as crushing blow for Reformers whose edifice and confidence concerning the Bible’s authority was so often aggrandized. Accordingly, their hermeneutical lens lent itself to seeing revelation as perfectly addressing all matters. In this light, they failed to appreciate, as Hooker did, that some theological concerns were just not stated in scripture, and thus reason and context were helpful, necessary guideposts.

If scriptural revelation meant clarity on all matters, both ecclesial dialogue and thoughtful discernment were superfluous. That is why this debate was more than just an issue of hermeneutics, though for Hooker correct hermeneutics had an irreducible impact on ecclesiological dialogue. Hence, to those who used this approach to impose or suggest

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500 Pref. 3.10; 1:17.
501 In Hooker’s view, the Church of England’s Episcopal structure did not allow, nor need allow, for the application and assimilation of the Presbyterian model of discipline as some were suggesting. It remains a serious point of contention among scholars whether Hooker’s view of revelation fits the accustomed way of the larger magisterial Reformation framework.
that one form of church government was the only perfect and acceptable way of being, he said,

Their common ordinarie practise is to quote by-speeches in some historicall narration or other, and to urge them as if they were written in most exact form of lawe. What is it to adde to the word of God if this be not? What that which the word of God doth but deliver historically, we construe without any warrant as if it were legally meant, and so urge it further than we can prove that it was intended; do we not add to the laws of God, and make them in number seem more than they are? It standeth us upon to be careful in this case. For the sentence of God is heavy against them that wittingly shall presume thus to use Scripture.  

Hooker makes clear that he is ‘heavy against’ this use of Scripture, in the absence of explicit laws. To suggest that one could add or misquote passages in a way to coerce one’s theological opinion on matters not seen as essential, was to add unnecessary pressure to the people of God, and to do a disservice to God’s revelation as revealed in Scripture: if God had intended the system of “discipline” advocated, then God would have made that plainer in Scripture. Countering Hooker’s position was the voice of leading puritan thinker Cartwright in his stating, “I say that the word of God containeth the direction of all things pertaining to the church, yea, of whatsoever things fall into any part of man’s life.”  

The perfection of Scripture, for Hooker, rests in God’s intended purpose for it and not so much in the use made by polemical or theological interpretations that arose, which were addressing matters not necessary for salvation. As Hooker stated,

Yea further, because the things that proceed from him are perfect without any manner of defect or maime; it cannot be but the words of his mouth are absolute,

503 See Atkinson, 88. CF. Thomas Cartwright (Replye to an Answere) cited in Luoma, The Primitive Church, 48.  
504 See the title of chapter 14 of Book I of Lawes: “The sufficiency of Scripture unto the end for which it was instituted.”
and lacking nothing which they should have, for performance of that thing whereunto they tend.\textsuperscript{505}

Thus, something is seen as perfect because God puts his personal touch on its purpose and outcome.

Accordingly, when something or someone is found to fulfill their God-intended purpose they, at least for Hooker, fit the perfect destiny and accomplish God’s glorification. If, as Hooker believes, the primarily goal of the Bible is to point people to the issues necessary for salvation, then in this sense it is perfect. Having said that, the perfection of the Bible does not inhibit how important and delicate the practice of scriptural interpretation remains. Instead, when guided by reason and the larger community, one’s fears of finding the only one ‘perfect’ way of interpreting a passage should be stilled in hope of hearing and seeing the larger ‘more perfect’ understanding which God is intending for one’s specific context. Hooker, with the use of one of his favorite examples, explained,

\begin{quote}
For our beliefe in the Trinitie, the Coeternitie of the Sonne of God with the Father, the proceeding of the Spirit from the Father and the Soon, the dutie of baptizing infants, there with such other principall points, the necessitie whereof is by none denied, are notwithstanding in scripture nowhere to be found by express literall mention, only deduced they are out of scripture by collection.\textsuperscript{506}
\end{quote}

Both God’s personal touch, and his desire to have humankind’s personal hermeneutical participation as co-joined practice, made Hooker’s approach, and this last theme, formidable as related to his approach to biblical hermeneutics. This view holds that readers

\textsuperscript{505} Lawes II.6.1; 1:168.1-5.
\textsuperscript{506} Lawes I.14.2.1:126.16-24. That is, human reason and the church in making decisions on matters of controversy, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may draw, and have drawn, conclusions not in scripture from what is there.
can still call the revelation of God in scripture perfect in encompassing God’s larger
narrative, and yet have differing interpretations, let alone different theological conclusions.

One of the most personal aspects of Hooker’s idea of perfection and the Bible is
found in his view of God’s love for his people. Specifically as it related to *ordo salutis*,
Hooker continually held in view an idea of perfection based on God’s revelation whose
ontology is love, stating,

> There is glorifyinge righteousness of men in the Worlde to comme, and there is a
> justefying and a sanctefyinge righteousness here. The righteousnes wherewith we
> shalbe clothed in the world to comme, is both perfecte and inherente: that whereby
> here we are justified is perfecte but not inherente, that whereby we are sanctified,
> inherent, but not perfect. 507

There is perfect ‘experience’ in faith here because one can be assured of the justified state,
but the fullness of that perfection is not available in the present, temporal state. Formative
here is Hooker’s soteriological position; there are limits to how God brings about
transformation that remains limited, or not in fullness established. This, of course, was a
theme shaped by Hooker’s hermeneutics. Hillerdal, on exploring Hooker’s particular
approach to revelation remarked how “revelation also means that sinful man by the grace
of God gets a new possibility to become righteous and to grow in accordance with the
supernatural laws set forth in the Scriptures.”508

**Conclusion**

In the hermeneutical axioms discussed above I have attempted to show that
Hooker’s hermeneutics, although never in the form of a systematic treatise, followed some

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important theological and literary patterns. At the outset of these themes was the important contextual reality of the English Church struggling to find its way in the changing landscape of sixteenth century polemics and politics. Almost everything seemed up for grabs, and thus chaos threatened. Many solutions and options were duly suggested, but theological disagreement continued to emerge. In this context, Hooker embraced and offered an approach to biblical interpretation that remained fluid, or as McGrade has noted, a study of scripture that was ongoing.

By carefully exploring Hooker’s proposed elucidation, it is my argument that his ideas and approach on returning to the Bible, brought to the fore both the importance of the Reformation ideals, and honored the larger theological landscape and diversities found therein. While not fully appreciated by some of his peers, Hooker’s commitment to a robust hermeneutical method provided a biblical apology for what the Reformation in England could look like. With a keen eye on the importance of Elizabethan authority, Hooker developed a view of scripture, and a way of interpreting it, which did not minimize the need for reform, but instead pointed to the different ways God has, from scripture and reason, brought about reform that glorifies him. This reality is embedded in his approach to the Bible. In Hookerian fashion, Williams has noted, “[t]he Bible shows us people who are

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509 Grislis’ language is more defensive in nature when he writes, “Hooker thought that several guard posts could be offered to enhance the chances for correct interpretation of the Scriptures....” Companion to Richard Hooker, 286.


512 For Hooker, it is important to accentuate that interpretations, no matter how accurate and contextual, and arrive at with the help of the Holy Spirit, are not inspired in the same way the canon is inspired.
governed by the contemplation of divine wisdom without reference to Scripture; paradoxically, it displays its own limits when it relates the virtue and insight of its own characters (who never read it).” ⁵¹³

In closing, perhaps it is helpful to surmise that the issues discussed in the second part of this project are meant to instill considerable curiosity relating to Hooker and his distinctive contribution to the Reformation realities of the sixteenth century. Hooker never lost sight of the biblical image that the Bible is like a sword, and accordingly one should never give it to a child who is unable to wield its power lest they harm themselves and others. As he notes, “[t]he word of God is a twoedged sword, but in the hands of reasonable men; and reason as the weapon that slewe Goliath, if they be as David was, that use it. ⁵¹⁴ While Hooker is aware that David never used a sword to slay Goliath, his application is essential. Hooker made more use of the Bible than those who argued that a particular form of polity was found in it. Accordingly, a grace-filled life is a prerequisite to understanding and wielding the power of God’s grace-filled book: The Bible.

⁵¹⁴ For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Hebrews 4:12; *Lawes* III.8.10; 1:227.7-9.
Chapter 5: Hooker’s Influence and Continuing the Dialogue

Introduction

The outset of this dissertation acknowledged that the majority of Hooker’s contemporaries minimized the significance of his work. It has been the focus of this project to do the exact opposite, in order to elevate the important theological significance of Hooker’s thoughts in relation to biblical hermeneutics, the doctrine of sola scriptura, and ensuing ecclesial challenges emerging in the sixteenth century. Consequently, readers have been invited to consider Hooker’s thoughtfulness around issues pertaining to ecclesial authority, biblical exegesis and his place in the broader Reformation project. In considering this, it emerged that Hooker proposed a view of scriptural authority anchored in the broader, continuing Christian tradition, yet was keenly sensitive to the newer English reforming tradition, and other cultural realities.

The overarching themes of this work are rooted in a renewed interest in Hooker, and his insights concerning the way the changing landscape of the Reformation period was adopted and applied to diverse Christian communities. While Hooker’s writings continue to attract attention, as they should, readers should not forget that few contemporaries understood Hooker’s unique contribution. As MacCulloch remarks, “…at the time [his work] was a damp squib, and only one Puritan writer belatedly bothered to attack it six years later.”515 Nevertheless, it is hoped that the research herein encourages readers to revisit Hooker’s writings with a posture of openness to the way he explored important

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theological questions of his day in hopes of learning and broadening one’s own perspective.

Half a century ago, Clifford Dugmore emphasized the subtle mistake of missing the ethos of the English Reformation, warning readers not to approach this historical epoch “as if they [English Reformers] had no theological training, no knowledge of the Schoolmen or the Fathers and were utterly incapable of thinking for themselves.”516 In like manner, it has been my goal to shed light on how Hooker played an indispensible role in the reforming ethos of the Church of England, which shaped its own vision and provided an inimitable voice within the larger Reformation tradition. In this vein, it has been a central leitmotif of this work to demonstrate that Hooker remains pivotal in this regard, and that his theological vision, as expounded through his biblical hermeneutics, demonstrates any attempt to slot him neatly among Continental Reformers, without recognizing his particular contribution and that of his church to the theological and biblical challenges of the sixteenth century, should be corrected.

While the central thrust of the Reformation can be characterized as a move to clarify what the church should believe about justification, sola fidei517 (articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae), Hooker’s work can be seen as more concerned with the theme of biblical hermeneutics as related to the doctrine of sola scriptura. In particular, it has been noted how his own journey and conversation partners, forced him to make this a priority. As Grislis’ carefully observed,

517 Hooker did not spend much time dealing with the issue of justification itself. See ‘A Learned Discourse of Justification, Workes, and How the Foundation of Faith Is Overthrowne’, Tractates and Sermons, FLE V.83.
In the controversy with Scripture quoting — and misinterpreting — Puritans necessarily demanded that Hooker took hermeneutical concerns seriously. And he did. Yet as he was not writing biblical commentaries, his hermeneutical insights were recorded somewhat sporadically, where the arguments required it, rather than in a fully systematic manner. 518

Interestingly, while the Church of England carefully and precisely used the phrase “justification by only faith” (sola fidei) in the Articles of Religion, the phrase sola scriptura does not appear in any of the formularies; 519 perhaps a reflection that this doctrine, although important, was, from the outset, seen as more fluid, requiring constant attention.

As a result, my aim has been to return to Hooker’s view on such issues by exploring the different ways he appropriated the text, while selectively attempting to correct some of the more extreme exegetical leanings, as revealed in the works of his contemporaries, who elevated and extended their use of scripture to fit their Reformed theological vision.

In part, this closing chapter will provide a brief synopsis of the previous chapters making reference to some of the key themes therein. In addition to some brief observations on what remains lacking from Hooker’s hermeneutical paradigm. While a renewed interest in Hooker’s work is significant, there remain certain aspects of his approach to biblical theology that leave readers wanting. As part of this final chapter I will adumbrate how Hooker’s admirable intention in addressing key theological and hermeneutical questions failed to provide sufficient clarity when commenting on the theme of adiaphora. Perhaps it

519 Although some later commentators tried to find it in Article VI, in a precise and limited sense, concerning those matters “required for salvation”, that is, not all that is within the body of authoritative belief or authorized practice.
is subtle points such as this, which caused the appraisal of the *Lawes* “never [to have] been definitive nor influential in any systematic way.”\(^{520}\)

For Hooker, the freedom or liberties of Christians are never simply *personal*. Hence, future development of individualized interpretations of the Bible, and its implication for moral practices, did not seem as pertinent for Hooker. Instead, he primarily focused on how ecclesial practices were shaped by one’s hermeneutical approach. Moreover, how might one’s geographical location, and differences of local congregations, be embraced while still holding on to a high view of biblical authority? As has been explored, Hooker’s biblical approach to ‘matters indifferent’ might have gained considerable influence were it developed with more emphasis, or at least with some helpful parameters, considering the disunity around liturgical practices and other theological matters.

Lastly, it is the goal of this last chapter to shed light on a slightly different aspect of Hooker’s use of the Bible. While clear that many continue to see the importance of the polemical nature of Hooker’s hermeneutical paradigm, and rightly so, I want to suggest that if left at that, something of relevance to Hooker’s biblical hermeneutics might be missed. In addition to providing an apology of England’s ecclesial-political realities and her reforming tradition, I will suggest that Hooker also saw himself as providing readers with an approach to the Bible that would continue to nurture the souls of listeners. As Forte remarks, “the sermons [of Hooker] that have come down to us are impressive, exhibiting not only that acuity that distinguishes the *Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*, but an unusual

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degree of empathy for the spiritual travail of the Christian believer.” Agreeing with Forte, I would advocate that Hooker attempts to encourage those on the spiritual journey even in key moments throughout his *Lawes*. Albeit subtle, Hooker seems able to turn on a pastoral and spiritual tone at opportune times. This closing chapter will seek to illuminate the ways Hooker’s approach to the Bible was intended to inspire, encourage and strengthen the spiritual journey of fellow Christians.

**Synopsis: Hooker’s Hermeneutical Journey**

To prepare for the themes of this final chapter it seems appropriate to provide a brief précis of the previous chapters. After a brief introduction, the opening chapter began with addressing some of the larger theological and political aspects of the sixteenth century, which shaped an ethos of considerable change. Specifically in England, Hooker’s work brought to the fore questions that sought to guide and situate readers in understanding key hermeneutical issues. In addition, it became urgently clear that he, in addressing Reformation concerns, found himself defining and articulating a fresh way of expressing the Reformation ethos for his fellow Englishman. Hence, it was argued that it was the specific challenges of the English Reformation that gave shape to Hooker’s writing and approach to the Bible.

Furthermore, the first chapter sought to explore Hooker’s primary conversation partners. Albeit limiting, the term ‘Puritans’ was a helpful way to describe and remember a type of radical Calvinist, passionate about reform and, in many ways, in agreement with

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Hooker. Nevertheless, there remained a significant struggle stemming from issues concerning ecclesial authority and biblical understanding. Puritans believed that episcopacy was a form of government, which was not affirmed at its core by the scriptures and thus required correcting lest God’s blessing and furthering of the Reformation be compromised. While the focus of this dissertation has not been to address this ecclesial debate, Hooker’s strong resistance to this argument is developed in Book VII of the Lawes, where he writes, “It was the general received persuasion of the ancient Church world, that Ecclesia est in Episcopo, the outward being of a Church consisteth in the having of a bishop....”

A significant contribution to this conversation consists of the insights in Patrick Collinson’s research and others. Collinson cogently points readers toward a cautious reminder to avoid excluding so called Puritans from those passionate and committed to the Church of England, despite their clearly radical points of emphasis. Puritans may have argued strenuously for various reforms, but most of them were loyal to the Church of England and prepared to conform to its ways. This loyalty remains a significant point of discussion in this debate lest one push Hooker’s critique of this group anachronistically further than needed, and suggest he was more loyal to the Church of England than they were.

The second chapter sought to demonstrate that Hooker borrowed from the great hermeneutical tradition of the past. Like other Reformation scholars, he embraced and deeply respected what the patristic tradition said in relation to biblical interpretation. Therefore, it seemed apposite to link Hooker’s discourses with that of the great bishop of

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523 See most recent work by Patrick Collinson, Richard Bancroft and Elizabethan Anti-Puritanism, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) for formative themes related to this debate.
Hippo, St. Augustine. We explored various ways in which Hooker borrowed Augustinian themes in expounding and shaping his views on biblical interpretation. In addition, Hooker found considerable force in Augustine’s attempts to tackle some of his critics who continued to attack his positions. The research therein suggested that Augustine’s influence provided enduring wisdom for both Hooker, and other sixteenth century thinkers concerned with biblical interpretation.

While not specifically addressed in chapter 2, it is worth noting that an underlying theme of the larger hermeneutical debates related to contextual concerns not addressed in the Bible. Oberman judiciously attests, “In the development from Augustine to Aquinas and into the later Middle Ages, theologians find an increasing number of doctrinal points on which Holy Scripture is silent.” Hence, there was a renewed commitment to exploring what the Bible did address, how the texts of Scripture were to be interpreted, and what was left to the authority of reason and the church.

In addressing those areas on which Scripture is silent, Hooker relied principally upon both reason, and the church’s considered position on specific matters of doctrine. Once again, it was in this light that we turned to Augustine’s ideas on hermeneutics and biblical interpretation as expressed in the De Doctrina Christiana. It was useful to see Hooker’s approach in incorporating important exegetical insights stemming for Augustine’s journey and further research on the importance of biblical interpretation. In developing such issues, Hooker reminds us that Augustine, in dealing his critics, also used

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reason to expose their fallacies.\textsuperscript{525} This idea found biblical foundation in Paul’s letter to Titus.\textsuperscript{526} As Hooker often suggested, reason is an essential part of the hermeneutical task: “When therefore the Apostle requireth habilitie to convict Heretiques, can we thinke he judgeth it a thing lawfull, and not rather needful to use the principall instrument of their conviction, the light of reason?”\textsuperscript{527}

In addition, it remained central to these introductory chapters to state how some leading Reformation voices came to shape and define the theological concept of \textit{sola scriptura}. Specifically, how the authority of the Bible, and its relationship to the church and larger tradition, remained a tense underpinning of the Reformation dialogue. In line with his contemporaries, Hooker embraced the importance of God’s Word and its primacy. Nevertheless, both he and Augustine drew similar conclusions when dealing with difficulties related to \textit{how} to interpret the Bible correctly, as well as the importance of reason, wisdom and the voice of the church in that regard.

Following a brief introduction to Part II, chapters three and four were the core sections of this dissertation. The goal therein was for readers to consider Hooker’s use of certain biblical texts, his exegetical style and his overall understanding of the Bible as God’s Word. Moreover, to make evident that Hooker’s use of the text sought to correct and revisit important questions related to ecclesial practices. As part of the larger vision of this work, I sought to demonstrate that Hooker’s writings, when carefully examined, reveal key

\textsuperscript{525} Lawes, III.8.8; 1:224. 19-26. “Cresconius the heretique complained greatly of S. Augustine, as being too full of logica\texttt{l subtilities.” Also, “They are matters of salvation I think which you handle in this booke. If therefore determinable by scripture, why presse you me so often with human authorities? Why alleage you the Articles of religion as the voice of the Church against me? Why cite you so many commentaries bookes and sermons partly of Bishops partly of others?” A Christian Letter, 3; 4:13.1-6.

\textsuperscript{526} Titus 1:9-11

\textsuperscript{527} Lawes III.8.8; 1.224. 21-27.
hermeneutical themes that shaped his approach to biblical interpretation. As discussed, for Hooker, the Bible as the word of God was essential to understanding key truths related to the soteriological journey, but considerable room was also needed for other pertinent ecclesial standards not lucidly explored in the biblical text.

It is my suggestion that Hooker sought out a hermeneutical excursus in the hope of winning his critics over to a different way of defining and applying the authority of Scriptures and bring consensus to disputed questions of the day. In attempting such a feat, he provided his theological exploration of governing Lawes, and how their intentionality and orderliness points to God’s grandeur, goodness and ultimate glorification. As he so eloquently stated, “[t]he generall end of Gods externall working is the exercise of his most glorious and most abundant virtue: Which abundance doth shew it selfe in varietie.”528 This truth emphasized that the God of the Bible is in the process of using multiple attempts at revealing himself, so that his creation would be drawn into a more meaningful relationship with their creator, and ultimately salvation.

Also, chapter three observed key exegetical leanings by focusing on formative sections in Book II of the Lawes. Here it was essential to introduce the polemics Hooker faced in addressing Cartwright’s previously stated position on similar biblical passages. Doing so demonstrated that Hooker is at his best as he cleverly attacked the critiques of his contemporaries by using themes they also embraced (i.e. God’s glorification). As part of his theological endeavours, Hooker provided his own hermeneutical applications to show that while he also appreciates and values similar biblical texts, he sees different methods of interpretation and application. Accordingly, this remains one of the most daunting tasks of

528 Lawes I.2.4; 1:61.6-8.
biblical hermeneutics. As part of understanding the scope of this challenge, this third chapter identified key components that encompass Hooker’s hermeneutical schema. Firstly, the sheer benefits of having the Bible in written form. Secondly, that the doctrine of verbal inspiration: although important, did not so easily solve the problems. As was discussed, some scholars recognized the possibility of a canon within a canon based on how he emphasizes the use of certain passages. These points sought to provide clarity for Hooker’s way of exploring tensions concerning biblical authority, while accentuating positive points of interest as well.

A secondary aspect of this chapter attempted to show how Hooker, while respecting much of Calvin’s theological legacy, differed considerably on some key exegetical conclusions. Specifically, Hooker showed the necessity of questioning the authority of Calvin on matters related to biblical interpretation in a context where many had come to idolize his work and influence. In precipitating the tension this would create, Hooker moved readers to renew a conversation about authority by setting one’s gaze on more expedient things. As he reminded, “I nothing doubt but that Christian men should much better frame themselves to those heavenly preceptes, which our Lorde and Saviour with so great instancie gave as concerning peace and unite...” Once again, Hooker’s commitment to biblical hermeneutics demonstrated how his ideas were formed and informed by his recalling key biblical texts at opportune times. Accordingly, the above comments flow from his recalling of Christ’s words found in John 14:27 which state, “Peace I leave with


530 Lawes I.10.14; I.110. 9-11.
you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

In demonstrating Hooker’s unique perspective over and above some of the other Reformed thinkers, it has been my purpose to encourage readers to carefully avoid the temptation to locate Hooker neatly within the Continental Reformation tradition.

Accordingly, my suggestion has been that his writings reveal important insights which are not adumbrated in Calvin’s framework and which point to the significance of his contribution to the larger Reformation debate. From the outset of this dissertation, it has been the goal to recognize similarities with the wider Reformation ideals; yet simultaneously situate Hooker within his own ecclesial space rooted in a love for the Bible that was both firmly revelatory, and enlivened with the power of the Holy Spirit’s wisdom to lead to new and fresh insights. This reality, for Hooker, necessitated a strong commitment to the positive aspects of human reason, which, as part of his own hermeneutical ethos, required a rearticulating for the much-needed backbone of the reforming Church of England.

Furthermore, Hooker’s agenda in expounding the biblical text was thoughtfully dedicated to the defence of the Elizabethan settlement, and its commitment to an Episcopal form of church governance. In addressing such issues, Bauckham notes that when “...the quintessentially Anglican theologian Richard Hooker bequeathed this threefold notion of authority [Scripture, tradition, reason] to the Church of England and thence to other

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531 NIV.
532 As Lake remarks “Hooker proceeded to argue for a rather novel view amongst protestants of the interdependence of nature and grace, the relationship between reason and scripture, the church and scripture and finally between the Church of England and the Church of Rome.” Lake, Anglicans and Puritans?, 151.
Anglican churches, the three authorities were conceived as harmonious.\textsuperscript{533} Nevertheless, this reality did not minimize points of contention that led to contemptible attacks on multiple fronts, aggrandizing the need to return to the Bible without being unnecessarily reactionary.

Therefore, Hooker attempted to hold in tension the types of reactionary extremes customary of the time. For Hooker, any reaction to doctrinal inaccuracy required wisdom, patient reflection and correction, or error would creep in. Aware of this much needed pattern, he made a comparison to contemporary medical practice, remarking, “[h]e that will take away extreme heate by setting the body in extremitie of cold, shal undoubtedly remove the disease, but together with it the diseased too.”\textsuperscript{534} Thus, the goal of chapter three was to listen carefully to Hooker’s own struggles in dealing with those he believed were mistakenly ‘enlarging’ the use of the biblical text beyond God’s intended purpose. As part of Hooker’s response to this problem we explored some essential texts that Hooker, in keen exegetical fashion, expounded as part of his own argument. This section of Book II provides one of the strongest, and most consistent, examples of Hooker’s use of the Bible in addressing the complexities related to \textit{sola scriptura}, and its impact on the larger conversation of biblical interpretation.

In turn, the above issues were meant to help prepare readers to see the key facets explored in chapter four. Therein, I proposed that it is essential to Hooker’s efforts in dealing with a certain, strict appropriateness of the doctrine of \textit{sola scriptura}, to envision

\textsuperscript{533} Also see Richard Bauckham, \textit{God and the Crisis of Freedom: Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives}, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 51. Bauckham uses the word “tradition” as a short form for Hooker’s “voice of the church”.

\textsuperscript{534} \textit{Lawses} 4.8.1; 1. 298.21-24.
four overarching hermeneutical themes. At the core of this thesis is the claim that these themes are the mainstay of Hooker’s hermeneutical paradigm. Nonetheless, the importance of these four hermeneutical themes should not lead one to conclude that these are systematic rules Hooker followed to a fault. Instead, they provide readers with some larger categories that help situate Hooker’s thinking and biblical reflection when dealing with the issues of his day, while at the same time embracing the Bible as God’s special revelation. In exploring these four themes it was paramount to the overarching theme of this chapter to demonstrate how Hooker used biblical examples, and important scriptural references, as a constant affirmation that he too believed in the importance of scriptural authority, and the unique place of biblical interpretation.

Coda: Hooker & Possible Shortcomings

It has been a strong position of this dissertation that Hooker is a formative voice within sixteenth century ecclesial concerns in England. It has also been argued that his uses of scripture, and his desire to affirm the authority of God’s revelation within a changing landscape, stand out as both admirable, and theologically discerning. On such points, Grislis has noted that Hooker’s unique contribution should not be overlooked.

Within a church beset by aggression from without and dissent from within he [Hooker] sought to grasp the authentic content preserved in both positions and to meld elements from each into an integral whole, a true theological via media between what had become political antagonists.

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535 The Themes are as follows: i. The Paradox of Reason and Consensus; ii. The Holy Spirit and the Role of Wisdom; iii. A Hermeneutic of Humility; iv. ‘Perfect’ Revelation and Contextualized Interpretation.

536 Egil Grislis, “Introduction to Commentary on Tractates and Sermons” FLE. IV, 629.
Yet, it is also clear that Hooker’s vision and approach never garnered the attention of his contemporaries. One possible reason is that Hooker did not approach this important aspect of his response to the theological challenges in a direct, systematic fashion. As has been discussed, his approach to the Bible was woven throughout his work, and thus readers might find it difficult to connect the salient points. Moreover, Hooker’s view that reason would assist those serious about theological inquiry was not always as consistent as he had hoped or envisioned.

Furthermore, considering that some of his responses carried a sense of urgency, he might not have imagined adding supplementary notes. The tension one finds in Hooker’s thinking might be characterized, as being between what is ‘universal’ and what remains ‘particular’. One example highlighting this reality was Hooker’s concern that the system of ‘discipline’, as expressed by the Puritans, needed correcting, and so wrote,

A verie strange thing sure it were that such a discipline as ye speake of should be taught by Christ and his Apostles in the word of God, and no Church ever found it out, nor received it till this present time; contrarywise, the government against which ye bend your selves be observed everywhere throughout all generations and ages of the Christian world, no Church ever perceiving the word of God to be against it.\footnote{Lawes ‘Preface’. 4.1; 1.21. 23-28.}

While the ‘word of God’ remained Hooker’s point of reference, he posited that when a position was not universally affirmed ‘throughout all generations and ages’ it should fall into a category of theological indifference. When not related to salvific concerns, Hooker proposes an open discussion leaving room for creative disagreement. In this case, the issue was related to the theme of ‘discipline’. In the same vein, at the outset of Book I, he reminded readers that “...still there is doubt how far we are to proceed by collection before
the full and complete measure of things necessarie be made up.\textsuperscript{538} These types of remarks should reaffirm for readers that Hooker believed that numerous issues, especially those not related to salvation, should always be revisited and changed.

The theme of \textit{adiaphora}, (matters indifferent) remains a cornerstone of Hooker’s theological outlook. As has been discussed, for Hooker, Scripture remains uniquely authoritative in revealing all things necessary for salvation; yet, it was not intended to point to all matters of faith and practice. In this light, Hooker believed that all who stretched the use of the text beyond its intended reach, causing matters that may fit well in a particular context to become imposed on others. Hooker expressed this reality when stating that readers should focus on “what Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience is due...”\textsuperscript{539} While admirable, and reminiscent of the Reformation’s conviction about the clarity of a literal understanding of scripture, Hooker never really needed to give in detail what he believed scripture plainly delivered.\textsuperscript{540}

In addition, although Hooker believed that some matters derived both from revelation and from reason, it remains unclear how he understood this double derivation to work in practice. It is significant that without specific reference to the biblical text Hooker visits the idea that Holy Spirit leads us into \textit{all} truth. With John 16:13 in mind, Hooker stated,

\begin{quote}
Wherefore albeit the spirit lead us into all truth and direct us in all goodness, yet because these workings of the spirit in us are so privy and secret, we therefore stand on a plainer ground, when we gather by reason from the qualitie of things believed or done, that the spirit of God hath directed us in both; then if we settle our selves to
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{538} Lawes I.14.2; I.126.25-27.
\textsuperscript{539} Lawes V.8.2; II.39.8-10
\textsuperscript{540} Compare the silence of The Articles of Religion on what exactly are the beliefs “necessary for salvation”, or Thomas’s silence on the \textit{necessaria fidei}. The Homily on reading scripture did provide the beginning of such a list in the Sixteenth Century.
believe or to do any certaine particular thing, as being moved therefore by the spirit.\textsuperscript{541}

Thoughtfully, Hooker connected both the knowing of the truth and the lived expression of goodness, as key to this view of God’s leading; yet, he states that because of the ‘mysterious’ component of the Spirit’s leading readers are wise to return to their use of reason before making a final decision. While it is formative in Hooker’s thinking that even with matters indifferent, both reason and scripture come together, it is not clear how a Spirit who reveals ‘all truth’ would not, with more clarity, point us to what are \textit{adiaphora}, and what are not.

Perhaps a possible response to this shortcoming rests on Hooker’s strong ecclesiological underpinning. Hooker was entrenched in a lengthy and repetitious debate about the true shape of the church, and how ‘spiritual’ and ‘temporal’ authority might be understood in that regard; in such debates there are many matters indifferent, or \textit{adiaphora}. Although it has not been the focus here to discuss whether Hooker is more satisfactory in his ecclesiology than his Puritan counterparts, I have proposed that his reading and interpretation of scripture suggested a fresh way of listening to the voice of God through the consensus of the Church, while utilizing our God-given gift of reason.

Consequently, Hooker reminds his readers that the voice of the church is formative in understanding scriptures, and to diverge too far from that path is to treat matters in themselves indifferent as determined in advance for the church; matters indifferent become otherwise when they are adopted as part of the general consensus of the Church.

\textsuperscript{541} \textit{Lawes} III. 8.15;1. 233. 4-9. Hooker concluded this lengthy note by referencing 1 Peter 3:15 which posits that believers should be ready to give a thoughtful and reasonable explanation to those who ask questions about their faith. Here again, Hooker believed that the role of reason was essential in explaining, or at least pointing non-believers to matters supernatural.
Lastly, as Hooker attempted to work through this important aspect relating biblical authority and scriptural exegesis he added,

Whether God bee the author of lawes by authorizing that power of men whereby they are made, or by delivering them made immediately from selfe, by word onely or in writing also, or howsoever; notwithstanding the authoritie of their maker, their mutabilitie of that end for which they are made both also make them changeable. 542

Here again, Hooker emphasized that God intends there be certain laws and practices that are temporal and thus mutable. Hooker seems adamant in stating that this in no way implies that God is uncertain or unstable, but that we, the law makers, need to tread lightly when affirming specific positions. Having said that, Hooker does not provide a helpful paradigm, which might guide readers to understand the practical ways that his ideas relating to *adiaphora* might work out in practice. Accordingly, a number of criticisms levied against Hooker stem from this important point. Turrell points out that “[t]he crucial source of many of the puritan objections to the prayer book was, as with the surplice, a disagreement over the concept of *adiaphora*, of things indifferent.” 543 The concept of *adiaphora* had been previously used in the Reformation, but had not been moved to the centre stage of authority as it was by Hooker.

Hooker attempted to explore this issue in writing, “[s]o I trust that to mention what the scriptures of God leaveth unto the Churches discretion in some thinges, is not in any thing to impaire the honour which the Church of God yeeldeth to the sacred scriptures perfection.” 544 Hooker realized that it could be misconstrued, that the church’s role in decision-making in matters indifferent may imply that the church adds to the scriptures in

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542 *Lawes* III.10.2; I. 240.27-30. Also helpful is *Lawes* III.8.2. on how reason plays a crucial role in correcting certain interpretations.
544 *Lawes* III.4.1; I.212.26-213.3.
some way. For Hooker, this should not be the case. God, by his ordained will, has left some matters for his church to discern, since he has not revealed all matters in scripture. In relation to the specific history of the English church, it is noteworthy that Verkamp highlights, “first Vestarian controversy” sparked by John Hooper’s reluctance to wear the disputed Episcopal vestments to be consecrated—a reluctance that was overcome by soothing reminders from his allies that these vestments were “matters indifferent,” and a brief stay in the Tower.545

As part of the longstanding debate, Hooker concluded that the church makes decisions within the range of matters indifferent, then those matters are binding on the individual. Neelands has pointed out that, in this case, Hooker and Calvin differ only slightly. If an issue falls within the category of adiaphora Calvin concluded that the individual should decide for or against how to respond.546 Moreover, matters indifferent must remain indifferent, the church should not regulate them, but he is not talking primarily of ceremonies.547

Hooker, in another attempt to clarify this challenging theme, returned to the biblical narrative as found in Romans 16:5, highlighting how the history of the earliest church communities tried to addresses this type of issue. Accordingly, he writes,

But although as Epenetus was the first man in all Achaia, so Corinth had beene the first Church in the whole world that received Christ: the Apostle doth not shew that


546 See Neelands, “Hooker on Scripture, Reason and ‘Tradition’”, 74-94,92; Institutes 3.19.9. In addition, Calvin did later recognize that the church may regulate and enforce the determination of things otherwise indifferent Institutes III, 19, 9 (i, 841f).

547 Institutes III, 19, 9 (i, 841f). Again, also see Neelands, Hooker on Scripture, Reason and ‘Tradition’, 74-94,91-93.
in any kind of things indifferent whatsoever, this should have made their example a law unto all others.\footnote{Lawes IV.13.9; I.334.31.335.2.}

Hooker boldly denounced any attempt to equate authority or priority to the earliest records of Christian history, the notion that the oldest or first recollection be rendered the best for all times. In fact, it was the Puritan view of history that implied that a purist reading was to be ascertained and followed at all cost. As part of Hooker’s argument, he remarked that Paul, an apostle, did not himself attempt to make that type of argument, thus neither should others.\footnote{As Neelands has shown, the “Puritan arguments from the Pauline dictum that ‘whatever is not commanded in Scripture is sin’ would rule out all indifferent matters.” “Hooker on Scripture, Reason and ‘Tradition’”, 74-94,92; Lawes II.4.3}

While the theme concerning hermeneutics and biblical authority should remain seminal aspects of Hooker’s theological importance for historians and serious students of the sixteenth century, readers may struggle to fully ascertain how Hooker imagined these important aspects of his thinking would find root. Consequently, the inconsistencies related to ‘matters indifferent’ leave a lingering lacuna in his thinking, and the overall strength of his hermeneutical endeavours.

\textit{Scripture as Source of Spiritual Sustenance}

As explained at the commencement of this chapter, I would like to conclude this work by exploring a strong conviction that, based on Hooker’s writing, limiting his hermeneutics solely to the task of apologetics actually misses an important part of his larger vision and use of scripture. Therefore, I want to propose that Hooker believed exposition of scripture should, in some very important ways, sustain the spiritual health and
soul of his audience. Grounded in a form of pastoral empathy, Hooker was often compelled to remind his listeners that, “Sundrie are the casualties of this present world, the trials manie and fearfull which wee are subject unto. But in the midst of all, this must be the chiefest ancre unto our souls, the just shall live.” Points of emphasis such as these provide subtle hints at Hooker’s ability to stay attentive to the deeper needs of his listeners, while speaking in a timely fashion to their spiritual challenges.

In On a Learned Sermon, Hooker focused on those who were faint of heart and weary of how God’s justice may, in disdainful manner, impact their own sinfulness. Through his lucid prose and sensitive pastoral awareness, Hooker reinforced the theme of God as Father, over and against fears that equate God’s justice with one who is angry and malicious. Once again, with an eye on the biblical text, Hooker returned to the words of Jesus as found in the Sermon on the Mount, writing,

> It is not with God as it is with men whose titles show rather what they should be then what they are. God will not be termed that which he is not. His name doth show his nature. Were not his affection most fatherlie the appellation of a father would offend him.

Simply put, Hooker wove a view of God and his guiding presence as an exhortation to fellow listeners, which lacked hope as they navigated the complexities of the sixteenth century. In addition, Williams keenly remarks how Hooker’s use of scripture makes evident that the “Christian life is a lot more chaotic than his Puritan adversaries might

551 “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 7:8-12. See Textual Introduction. Tractates and Sermons, V,379.  
believe: Christian laypeople do things without assenting to the heretical doctrines underpinning them in the minds of teachers and theologians.”

A potential relevant reminder of the Bible as a type of spiritual nourishment is found in another of Hooker’s sermons. In *The First Sermon Upon Part of S. Jude* Hooker remarked,

> For when many things are spoken of before the scripture, whereof we see first one thing accomplished, and then another, and so a third, perceive we not plainly, that God doeth nothing else but lead us along by the hand, til he have setled us upon the rocke of an assured hope.

Within a sermon carefully concerned with addressing Roman Catholic errors, Hooker again founds ways to highlight God’s desire to see his children anchored on something much firmer than the struggles of theological discourse. For Hooker, people ought be encouraged to see God as a loving guide in the tempest of life. This itself was to provide a true picture of hope.

Also in his *Lawes*, Hooker provides points of reference that sought to connect readers to the advent of a more joyful season. For Hooker, suffering and pain should in no way lead someone to feel that God’s spiritual guidance had ceased. Instead, one might need to be reminded that there were key moments of spiritual strife, which could also be used by God to shape the faithful. In support of his point Hooker moved to Christ as his example, writing,

> …seeing that as the Author of our Salvation was himselfe consecrated by affliction, so that way which we are to follow him by, is not strewed with rushes but sette with thornes, be it never so hard to learne, wee must learne to suffer with

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patience even that which seemeth almost impossible to be suffered, that in the houre when God shall call us unto our tryall.\textsuperscript{555}

Similar tribulations that awaited his listeners were, as Hooker shows, experienced by Jesus himself, those who follow him should expect no less. For Hooker, God shapes our spiritual journeys by the things one is willing to learn in seasons of suffering.

The Bible was God’s gift to reveal all things necessary for salvation, and at the same time a source of encouragement in the journey of faith. This, according to Hooker’s thoughtful remarks, cannot be denied. Consequently, Hooker’s vision for a vibrant ecclesiological outlook required a structure that met the needs of the people by sustaining a vital, spiritual communion with God who communicates with them. Consequently he remarked,

\begin{quote}
Hereupon we hold that Gods clergie are a state which hath beene and will be, as long as there is a Church upon earth, necessarie by the plaine word of God himselfe; a state whereunto the rest of Gods people must be subject as touching things that appretaine to their soules health.\textsuperscript{556}
\end{quote}

For Hooker, according to the above note, it was essential for God’s governing authority to keep close attention to one’s responsibility in approaching the exegetical task with the goal of expounding the \textit{plaine} word of God in assisting and nurturing of healthy spiritual faith.

Hooker’s desire to highlight the scripture’s use in renewing one’s spiritual vitality was again emphasized in his addressing the sacrament of Holy Communion:

\begin{quote}
Let it therefore be sufficient for me presenting myself at the Lord’s table to know what there I receive from him, without searching or inquiring of the manner of how Christ performeth his promise; let disputes and questions, enemies of piety, abatements of true devotions, and hitherto in this cause but over-patiently heard, let them take their rest; let curious and sharp witted men beat their heads...it is enough
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{555} Tractates and Sermons, “A Remedie Against Sorrow and Feare’ \textit{FLE} 5. 371.22-24.

\textsuperscript{556} Lawes III.11.20; 1.267. 27-31.
that to me which take them they are the body and blood of Christ, his promise in witness hereof sufficeth.... 557

As seen in this passage, Hooker found ways to return readers to a naive experience of Christ that pushed aside, at least momentarily, the deeper tensions of doctrinal speculation and debate. As a way of connecting one’s faith and the larger ecclesial community, Hooker gracefully situated this conversation in the promise of Christ’s death and resurrection.

Hooker’s hermeneutical approach sought to shape the faithful and meld their experience within the larger components of the Christian story. Christologically aware, Hooker paints a vision of the church and the authority of key scriptural narratives, which are reliable whatever the outcome of the larger theological debates. In a last example, it is striking to note how for Hooker, even the narrative of the Hebrew Bible could be used to embolden the faith of his readers and their relation the church, the scriptures and an experience with God’s grace. He noted,

For of sacraments the verie same is true which Salomons wisdom obeserveth in the brazen serpent, He that tourned towards it was not healed by the thinge he sawe, but by thee O savior of all. This is therefore the necessitie of sacraments. That savinge grace which Christ originallie is or hath for the generall good of his whole Church.... 558

Remarkably, Hooker’s biblical exegesis moved through the Wisdom of Solomon narrative by intertwining aspects of the text with his own historical memory. Again, in hopes of encouraging readers, he pointed out the larger role of the church, sacraments and God’s grace available to them.

557 Lawes V.67.12; II. 342.31-343.12-24.
558 Lawes V.57.4; 2: 247.3-7. Wisdom of Solomon 16:7 states, “For the one who turned toward it was saved, not by the thing that was beheld, but by you, the Savior of all.”
Although an underlying concern is to make sure individuals did not give undue authority to the created, brazen serpent, Hooker highlighted the need for the church, and her indispensable role from which the grace and power of Christ flow. By citing an unorthodox method used by God in the Old Testament, Hooker turned the texts, setting his attention on the presence of Christ in the midst of the challenging interworking of the English Church. Far from the historical critical methods of modern biblical studies, Hooker sought to affirm the role of the sacraments while expounding familiar themes in the biblical text, rather than analyzing the larger exegetical challenges of the text. If possible, one might even consider calling this a pietistic or allegorical reading, focusing on God’s grace and the wisdom that Solomon was able to deduce for the narrative.

With great care, Hooker demonstrated that he, at times, found it appropriate to push the text in order to show ‘the bottom of that which may be concluded out of Scripture’ without concern for what others might say, while at the same time maintaining it as part of the orthodox framework. His typological reading therein pushed beyond the literal and stringent. While other examples abound, it should remain pertinent to readers that “... ultimately Hooker remains far more than simply a skillful apologist and a writer of originality and insight. He is also a man of profound Christian faith.”

In summation, it cannot be overstated that Hooker continues to provide a vibrant and helpful approach to how the challenges of the sixteenth century were addressed. In addition, the important hermeneutical insight he proffered offered readers a fresh and expansive picture of a God, one he believed was firmly alive in the Church and the future.

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559 Hooker clearly minimized the original biblical narrative found in the Book of Numbers 21, which clearly states that the serpent bites the people before they can experience healing. With considerable ease, he seemed to make the emphasis of this text the encouragement of the people and the power of Christ, without much concern for the larger context. See also John 3.

reforming ethos. Jaroslav Pelikan, renowned Christian historian, once remarked “the history of theology is the record of how the Church has interpreted the Scriptures.” \(^{561}\) In full agreement, I believe Hooker’s passion for the Bible and his robust theological outlook should continue to be explored as a formative record for how differences related to biblical hermeneutics were essential to English theological tradition.

Therefore, it has been my goal to highlight some of the key underlying themes as they related to Hooker’s hermeneutics while he grappled with the ecclesial challenges of his day. While interpreting the Bible, I believe, he attempted to never lose sight of the many theological concerns, and political challenges, which were personal and had caused him a serious amount of turmoil. Twenty years ago, McAdoo reinforced this point, stating “If there is one single vantage point from which one can have an overall view of Hooker’s theological synthesis I think it must surely be his scriptural exegesis, the principles which he follows in scriptural interpretation.” \(^{562}\) Accordingly, Hooker’s drive in addressing the disagreements around biblical interpretation brought to the fore his deep commitment to ecclesial authority and the English governing structure. To miss this reality is to forfeit the broader vision that his reading of scripture provided.

Mindful of the dangers in misappropriating Hooker’s ideas, I suggest that to leave Hooker in the annals of history without a reengagement with his vigorous hermeneutical vision seems irresponsible. Hence, my hope is that students engaging in new, and similar, questions related to authority, ecclesiology and biblical interpretation in today’s changing landscape will revisit Hooker’s ideas. While in full agreement with Williams when he


states, “...I don’t think Hooker will solve our contemporary problems about authority in the Anglican Church [or any church] in any straightforward way,”\(^6\) I am optimistic that his passion, vision and biblical rootedness remain noteworthy for those serious about addressing the numerous theological challenges of our day.

\(^6\) Rowan Williams, *A Companion to Richard Hooker*, xvi. at the time of writing, 104\(^{\text{th}}\) Archbishop of Canterbury.
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