

a paper:

THE MIDDLE WAY OF RICHARD HOOKER

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PREFACE

The purpose of this paper is to explore briefly the life and works of The Anglican Church Father Richard Hooker and his contributions to The Christian Faith.

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ABSTRACT

Richard Hooker was a clergyman and theologian who lived and served in difficult times in England. The nation had lived through tumultuous conflict between Protestants and Catholics under King Henry VIII and then Queen Mary. Under Queen Elizabeth, however, Hooker worked to bring forth mighty contributions to the formation of “The Middle Way” of Anglicanism, which brought peace again to the nation, stability again to The Church and fellowship again between fellow Christians within the realm.

Hooker is remembered as the supreme apologist for the Elizabethan Settlement between Church and state in his time and place. He is remembered for steering a Middle Way of reasonable and faithful Christianity between the divided Church of his day. He is remembered for his contributions to forming an English Episcopal form of Church government. He is remembered for reforming The Church to give the laity greater access to The Sacraments and involvement in worship. He is remembered for having a gracious and conciliatory spirit in an age of great bitterness, strife and division within The Church. And he is remembered for setting the groundwork for loving and Biblical ecumenicalism which remains the path of all orthodox ecumenicalism within The Church today.

And through all these things, Hooker was a clergyman and theologian who showed that one could both hold fast to orthodox Christian doctrine and practice, while holding fast also to loving others as CHRIST loves The Church. So Hooker applied the truths of II TIMOTHY 3:16-17 to the reform of The Church of his day: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of GOD, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of GOD may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”¹ At the same time, Hooker kept, and called all Christians to keep, The Lord’s Commandment in JOHN 13:34-35, “A new Commandment I give you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another!”²

DEDICATION

O LORD, that Christian men might dwell together in peace, concord and unity within The Church on earth, that we would not wait to seek this until we enter The Church in Heaven!

EPIGRAPH

PSALM 133:1 – “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” [KJV]

¹ 1, KJV, II TIMOTHY 3:16-17.

² 1, KJV, JOHN 13:34-35.

I. INTRODUCTION

Richard Hooker lived from about 1554 - 1600 AD. He studied at Oxford and became a Professor of Hebrew in 1579 AD.³ He was appointed “Master of The Temple in London” in 1585 AD by Queen Elizabeth, following which he became a parish Priest and Rector, giving him opportunity to expound his views on what now greatly characterizes traditional Anglican theology. And thanks be to GOD that such a man was raised up by the arm of The LORD for such times! Hooker was, as we shall see, a man who sought to walk after our Lord JESUS CHRIST, as the prophet Samuel declared of David in I SAMUEL 13:14, “...The LORD hath sought him a man after His own heart, and The LORD hath commanded him to be captain over His people...!”⁴

II. THE ELIZABETHAN SETTLEMENT

First, Hooker is “renowned as the supreme apologist of the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559” AD, which limited The Crown’s ability to arbitrarily interfere with the institutions of The English Church and encouraged a uniform form of worship therein.⁵ King Henry VIII had appropriated for himself through The Supremacy Act supreme headship over The Church in England. In doing so, he had often employed a heavy hand in Church business. Queen Elizabeth I set limits and created channels that reduced the Crown’s control over the English Church. So while the Sovereign of England remains to this day official governor- not head - of The Church of England, his “governship of the Church... remain distinct from those of the state.”⁶ This set an example for a reasonable, but not total, separation between Church and state in Anglicanism.

Further, the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559 AD brought about increased toleration of differences between Christians, seeking the middle way of worship advocated by Hooker that came to mark Anglicanism. “Religious uniformity through the enforced use of the [revised] 1552 AD Book of Common Prayer” was part of this Settlement, which allowed the majority of English people to worship together in peace and harmony.⁷

Thus are traditional Anglicans worldwide blessed with the rich uniformity of worship through use of the Book of Common Prayer. For within this accord we see the bringing forth of The Words of ISAIAH 52:7, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy GOD reigneth!”⁸

³ 2, LRW, page 103.

⁴ 1, KJV, I SAMUEL 13:14.

⁵ 2, LRW, page 103.

⁶ 3, SOA, page 17.

⁷ 3, SOA, page 500.

⁸ 1, KJV, ISAIAH 52:7.

III. THE MIDDLE WAY

Second, Hooker helped Anglicanism of his age steer a middle way between Puritan and Roman Catholic extremes. For this was an age when England was experiencing deep religious tension and strife, which often translated into violent political and social persecutions of alternately Protestants and Catholics.

Militant Puritan reformers held to the principle that only The Bible should determine Church practices: nothing in the English Church should be done unless it had “the express warrant of GOD’s Word.”⁹ Radical Puritans took this “Regulatory Principle” to extremes, calling for the elimination of anything even remotely connected to The Roman Catholic Church. Thus they sought to purge “sacramental theology, liturgical vestments, ceremonial customs, naming Churches after saints, use of written prayers, feast days, and the office of bishop” from the English Church.¹⁰

Militant Roman Catholics on the other hand called for renewed absolute obedience to The Pope, a return of the English Church to Roman Catholicism and a retention of all former Catholic practices. Like their opposite Puritan radicals, zealous Catholic agitators had no patience for any of their countrymen who disagreed with them. Both groups were willing to go to extremes to have their way and brought much strife to the land and people as a result.

It was men like Hooker who offered a middle ground, setting the stage for Anglicanism’s “Via Media,” between these two extremes to base English Christian worship and life upon. So Hooker opposed a return to Papal authority and full restoration of all Catholic practices in the English Church. But he also opposed the extremes of Puritanism. Hooker held to a 4-fold foundation common upon which to understand The Faith: “The Bible [i.e. Special Revelation], the works of nature [i.e., General Revelation], human experience... [i.e., particularly tradition] and reason.”¹¹

Thus traditional Anglicanism today rests its Faith upon the Via Media and The Bible, tradition and reason. For Hooker saw the danger of anger, bitterness, strife and division within The Body of CHRIST on earth, and GOD equipped him and placed him into the breach to stop the flow of man’s wrath against man! So Hooker echoes in his words and works the wisdom of Saint James in JAMES 1:19-21, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of GOD. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and ...[overflow of wickedness¹²], and receive with meekness The engrafted Word, which is able to save your souls!”¹³

⁹ 4, GC, page 23.

¹⁰ 4, GC, page 22.

¹¹ 4, GC, page 24.

¹² 5, NKJV, JAMES 1:21. The New KJV substitutes the words “overflow of wickedness” for the KJV “superfluity of naughtiness.”

¹³ 1, KJV, JAMES 1:19-21.

IV. THE EPISCOPAL FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Third, Hooker is known for his monumental work on the episcopal form of Church government, “Of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity,” which might better have been titled, “How to Build and Run a National Church.”¹⁴ Having broken from the Roman Catholic Church, the English Church needed to adopt a form of Church government that preserved what was effective from its Catholic history, while also establishing a functioning Church system whose head was the Sovereign of the English nation. Hooker’s work was instrumental in accomplishing this.

Hooker realized that there are indeed areas of life on which The Bible is nearly or completely silent. Two such areas he identified as Church government and Church ceremony. Hooker cautioned The English Church against sudden radical purging of The Church of centuries of Church traditions. Hooker “urged that... [corrupted ancient Church practices] not be discarded, but restored to their original use and retained for the good of The Church.”¹⁵ Thus, traditional Anglicanism worldwide today retains an episcopal form of Church government, while at the same time realizing that other branches of CHRIST’s Churches may employ other forms, as a form well suited for the building up of the saints, the rescuing of the perishing and ministering to the suffering.

Here we may recount The Words of Saint Jude in JUDE 1:20-25, “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the HOLY GHOST, Keep yourselves in the love of GOD, looking for the mercy of our Lord JESUS CHRIST unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before The Presence of His Glory with exceeding joy, To The only wise GOD our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen!”¹⁶

V. ACTIVE LAITY PARTICIPATION IN WORSHIP

Fourth, Hooker stressed the importance the Christian layman’s participation in celebration of The Sacraments, which he defined in part as “that mutual inward hold which CHRIST hath of us and we of Him...” His reasoning is this: 1) “GOD the Father loves GOD The Son” forever; 2) GOD The “Son has joined Himself to human flesh” in The Incarnation; 3) When men confess CHRIST as their Lord and Saviour, “we too participate in that [Divine] love;” 4) Thus Christian men become “adopted sons of GOD” and possess “eternal life by participation” in CHRIST.¹⁷

This kind of English Reformation logic helped set the stage for the acceptance of the Book of Common Prayer, in which worship participation in Church services by the laity is marked, broad and aggressive. Thus, traditional Anglicanism today enjoys great involvement of the laity in Church worship, stressing not only Bible reading and

¹⁴ 4, GC, page 22-23.

¹⁵ 4, GC, page 24.

¹⁶ 1, KJV, JUDE 1:20-25.

¹⁷ 4, GC, page 24.

preaching, but also Church-wide active participation in The Holy Sacraments.

And so should all parts of the Body of CHRIST on earth Which truly love The Lord! For, as Saint Paul writes, all Christian men and women are called to partake fully of His Sacraments and the sacramental life in The risen Lord. So we read in I CORINTHIANS 10:16-17, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of The Blood of CHRIST? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of The Body of CHRIST? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread!”¹⁸

VI. A GRACEFUL AND HUMBLE SPIRIT

Fifth, Hooker was a “gracious, conciliatory spirit” in an age of intense personal strife within The Church over what should and should not be. His kindness and Christian love towards those who disagreed with him is most remarkable. “He never questioned the integrity of his opponents, and made clear he regarded them as fellow members of The Body of CHRIST.”¹⁹ He was a charitable Christian in a vicious age who helped set the righteous, toleration and ecumenism common to Anglicanism.: “humility of spirit, looking for the good in one’s opponents and willingly joining hands with them,” but never compromising on The Biblical Truths that are the unmovable foundations of Christianity.²⁰

Perhaps the greatest controversy of this age was the question of the nature of the elements in the Sacrament of Communion and their relationship to our Lord. Hooker’s Christian grace and love is revealed by his apparent silence on the generally strident debate over the nature of The Eucharist between Protestants and Catholics. He observed, “I wish that men would more give themselves to meditate with silence what we have by The Sacrament [of Communion], and less to dispute of the manner how... this Heavenly Food is given for the satisfying of our empty souls, and not for the exercising of our curious and subtle wits!”²¹

Another example of Hooker’s grace was his Christian love, not just for other Christians of all branches of The Body of CHRIST, but also for unsaved men, for he advocated that Christians pray for the salvation of all men. This is an age when extreme Catholics no doubt prayed for the eternal damnation of heretic non-Catholics and extreme Puritans no doubt prayed for the eternal damnation of worshippers of “Popery.”

Hooker urged that “‘He which believeth [in CHRIST] already is [saved];’ and ‘he which believeth not as yet may be the child of GOD.’ It becometh not us during life altogether to condemn any man, seeing that... there is hope of every man’s forgiveness, the possibility of whose repentance is not yet cut off by death. ...[Hooker’s Christian

¹⁸ 1, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 10:16-17.

¹⁹ 4, GC, page 25.

²⁰ 4, GC, page 25.

²¹ 4, GC, page 25.

charity calls us to] ‘hopeth all things,’ [and] prayeth also for all men.”²² Thus, traditional Anglicanism continues its tradition of grace and humility of spirit before GOD and men.

Here is Hooker’s humble and loving soul, given him by the hand of The Almighty, that he might remind Christian men of what GOD calls them to walk in before Him: As the prophet says in MICAH 6:8, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth The LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy GOD!”²³ for Hooker saw and modeled in pious Christian service to his Lord, his Church and his fellow man what Saint Paul declares in EPHESIANS 2:8-10, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of GOD: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in CHRIST JESUS unto good works, which GOD hath before ordained that we should walk in them!”²⁴

VII. CHARITABLE AND BIBLICALLY-CORRECT ECUMENICALISM

Sixth, Hooker demonstrates what charitable and Biblically-correct ecumenicalism should be. This was due to his grace and charity towards Christians not of his own tradition and his reasonable middle way of faith steered between extremes of Puritanism and Catholicism. Hooker’s spirit of ecumenicalism is contained in the term he coined called “‘the essence of Christianity’ ... [which is] the GOD-given unity of the visible Church in the profession of one Lord, one faith and one baptism.”²⁵

Thus, traditional Anglicanism holds on to the Biblically ordained essentials of Christian faith and worship in its distinctive forms, while at the same time welcomes Christian brethren of other Church denominations who hold to Hooker’s “essence of Christianity” to worship with them. For does not Saint Paul write in GALATIANS 3:26-28, “For ye are all the children of GOD by faith in CHRIST JESUS. For as many of you as have been baptized into CHRIST have put on CHRIST. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in CHRIST JESUS!”²⁶

VIII. THE LEGACY OF RICHARD HOOKER

We may see Richard Hooker’s contributions to The Christian Faith every time we worship at a Bible-believing and CHRIST-centered Church. All Protestant Christians are directly or indirectly joyfully influenced by the Anglican Book of Common Prayer - in which Hooker played a vital role in bringing forth. The Christian worship produced by the Book of Common Prayer lifts us closer to our Lord JESUS CHRIST, and is a reflection in part of the loving soul of Hooker. We are to be thankful for the

²² 2, LRW, page 109.

²³ 1, KJV, MICAH 6:8.

²⁴ 1, KJV, EPHESIANS 2:8-10.

²⁵ 3, SOA, page 266

²⁶ 1, KJV, GALATIANS 3:26-28.

ecumenicalism that embraces Christians of many denominations, while also insisting on maintaining the “essence of Christianity,” which is not open to compromise! We may happily give due honour and respect to our Deacons, Priests and Bishops who endeavor to teach us to be GOD-fearing and effective followers of CHRIST!

Here also is the heritage of Richard Hooker: We may be thankful for a manner of Christian worship in which the laity participate in so deeply! We may give thanks to The Almighty for the open Communion of Churches of The Anglican Way which remain true to CHRIST and The Scriptures across the world! Even if we are not of the Anglican Way, we who have searched our hearts for secret sins and repented of them may receive both symbols of the body and blood of our Blessed Saviour at Communion! We may give thanks for the true Christian traditions of grace and fellowship with which we are blessed, and which is modeled so well by the life of Richard Hooker! We may pray that the same Christian grace and fellowship may be seen more and more each day both in ourselves and throughout all The Body of CHRIST on earth!

And through all these things, Hooker was a clergyman and theologian who showed that one could both hold fast to orthodox Christian doctrine and practice, while holding fast also to loving others as CHRIST loves The Church. So Hooker applied the truths of II TIMOTHY 3:16-17 to the reform of The Church of his day: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of GOD, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of GOD may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”²⁷ At the same time, Hooker kept, and called all Christians to keep, The Lord’s Commandment in JOHN 13:34-35, “A new Commandment I give you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another!”²⁸

And here as well is the legacy of Richard Hooker: we may give thanks for the deeper understanding we have been given through this man as to the universal nature of The Church victorious across time and space! And we may take courage in living and speaking The Word of GOD to family, friends and strangers with charity and love, knowing that it is The LORD alone Who judges the souls of men and Who alone saves the souls of sinners! The mission given to Hooker by The Lord may be summed up then in the Divinely inspired Words of King David as in PSALM 133:1, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”²⁹ In The Name of GOD The Father, and The Son, and The Holy Ghost. AMEN!

²⁷ 1, KJV, II TIMOTHY 3:16-17.

²⁸ 1, KJV, JOHN 13:34-35.

²⁹ 1, KJV, PSALM 133:1.

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