

# Richard Hooker and Assurance

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**ABSTRACT.** One of the issues in dispute in England in the 1590s was the importance of Christian assurance. This issue figured prominently in the debates leading to the Lambeth Articles of 1595. Richard Hooker developed a position on assurance beginning from a conventional statement of assurance in the early *Sermons Upon S. Judes Epistle* and ending with significant reservations about assurance in the *Learned Sermon on Certaintie and Peperuitie of Faith in the Elect* and the *Dublin Fragments*. His pastoral concern was expressed in the comfort to be derived from recognition that one's faith was weak rather than from experienced assurance that one was elect. Hope for salvation is a good sign as is observation of the exercise of love for the neighbour.

**KEY WORDS:** assurance, doubt, faith, election, salvation

## Introduction

Whether or not tradesmen and gossips in late Elizabethan England could discuss predestination, as Izaak Walton had claimed in his *Life of Mr. Richard Hooker*,<sup>1</sup> the question of assurance was undoubtedly a significant popular pastoral matter, the pastoral edge of the whole Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of God in predestination. To make salvation uncertain or doubtful was tantamount to papistry, as the young William Barrett discovered in Cambridge in 1595.<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith alone was interpreted from the be-

<sup>1</sup> *The Works of Richard Hooker*, 7th edn (Oxford, 1888), 1.36.

<sup>2</sup> See H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1958).

ginning of the Reformation as a “comforting” doctrine, one that could end the “fear” of God’s judgement in the consolation that God in Christ had dealt decisively with human alienation. But Calvin had pushed the logic a little further: for him, assurance and faith go together; where there is no assurance, there is no faith:

Scripture shows that God’s promises are not established unless they are grasped with the full assurance of conscience. Whenever there is doubt or uncertainty, it pronounces them void.<sup>3</sup>

This could mean, for Calvinists, that no one can be considered as justified unless he or she firmly *believes* he or she is justified. There are variations of certainty in the matter, since the certainty varies with the measure of faith given. And, for Calvin, even assured faith is afflicted with doubt: unbelief is sinful, but unbelief can never overcome faith. But the knowledge of faith is more certain and more enduring than sense-knowledge, since it does not arise from the natural human capacity for knowledge, with all the weaknesses of that capacity.<sup>4</sup> In *First Sermon Upon S. Judes Epistle*, Hooker speaks of an infallible internal evidence:

<sup>3</sup> ICR III.13.4 (1539), i, 767. See also III.24.6 (1539 as altered in 1559), ii, 972-3. Calvin elsewhere uses the phrase “assurance of salvation”, as in IV.14.14 (1539), ii, 1290; III.15.title (1559), i, 788. The vocabulary of “assurance” thus is part of Calvin’s account from the beginning, and becomes more firmly entrenched as the *Institutes* developed.

<sup>4</sup> “When we call faith ‘knowledge’ we do not mean comprehension of the sort that is commonly concerned with those things which fall under human sense perception. For faith is so far above sense that man’s mind has to go beyond and rise above itself in order to attain it. Even where the mind has attained it, it does not comprehend what it feels. But while it is persuaded of what it does not grasp, by the very certainty of its persuasion it understands more than if it perceived anything human by its own capacity... The knowledge of faith consists in assurance rather than in comprehension.” ICR III.2.14 (i, 560f). For further texts and an extended discussion of Calvin’s typical position, see Victor A. Shepherd *Nature and Function of Faith* (Macon, 1982), 19-27.

God hath left us infallible evidence, whereby we may at any time give true and righteous sentence upon our selves. We cannot examine the harts of other men, we may our owne... *I trust, beloved, wee knowe that wee are not reprobates*, because our spirit doth bear us record, that the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ is in us... The Lord of his infinite mercy give us hearts plentifully fraught with the treasure of this blessed assurance of faith unto the end.<sup>5</sup>

However, in another sermon, Hooker appears to contradict this contention: the surviving fragments of *A Learned and Comfortable Sermon of the Certaintie and Perpetuitie of Faith in the Elect* seem to take a quite different tack. This sermon attempts to reassure those whose “certainty” and assurance is less than perfect that they should not doubt or despair their state of grace, but treat their very doubts and questionings, their “scruples,” as evidence of the faith that is in them. Hooker goes so far as to claim that a pretending to the “Paradisal joy” of absolute certainty, which the view of some unnamed “others” would attempt to induce in the doubtful, is not only fraudulent, but runs the risk of Pharisaical hypocrisy. Hooker distinguishes “the certainty of evidence” from the “certainty of adherence”, a Thomistic distinction<sup>6</sup> later used, in interpreting the Lambeth Articles, by Lancelot Andrewes:

<sup>5</sup> *First Sermon Upon S. Judes Epistle*, 13, 14 (Folger Library Edition [“FLE”] 5:28.9-16; 30.7-9). It is important perhaps to note that this infallible evidence in the faithful that they are God’s children, this “blessed assurance of faith” is, for Hooker, not indefectible: it can be lost.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas, *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, ad 7. “Certitude can mean two things. The first is firmness of adherence, and with reference to this, faith is more certain than any understanding [of principles] and scientific knowledge. For the first truth, which causes the assent of faith, is a more powerful cause than the light of reason, which causes the assent of understanding or scientific knowledge. The second is the evidence of that to which assent is given. Here, faith does not have certainty, but scientific knowledge and understanding do.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, trans. James V. McGlynn (Chicago, 1953), vol. ii, 212. See also *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 8, *respondeo*, especially “certitude can be looked at in two ways. First, on the part of its cause, and thus a thing which has a more certain cause, is itself more certain.

Certainty of evidence wee call that, when the mind doth assent unto this or that; not because it is true in it selfe, but because the truth therof is cleere, because it is manifest unto us... The other which wee call the certaintie of adherence is when the hart doth cleave and stick unto that which it doth beleeve.<sup>7</sup>

One of a list of erroneous doctrines preached by Master Hooker in the Temple the first of March 1585, and dated March 30, 1585, focused on this distinction:

The assurance of thinges which we beleve by the worde is not so certaine as of that which we perceive by sense. [15]<sup>8</sup>

In this way faith is more certain [than scientific knowledge and the other intellectual virtues], because it is founded on the Divine truth, whereas [they] are based on human reason. Secondly, certitude may be considered on the part of the subject, and thus the more a man's intellect lays hold of a thing, the more certain it is. In this way, faith is less certain, because matters of faith are above the human intellect, whereas objects [of scientific knowledge and the other intellectual virtues] are not. Since, however, a thing is judged simply with regard to its cause, but relatively, with respect to a disposition on the part of the subject, it follows that faith is more certain simply, while the others are more certain relatively, i.e., for us." English Dominican translation (New York, 1947), ii, 1196.

<sup>7</sup> *Certainite* 1 (FLE 5:70.1-4; 70.31-71.1). Compare Lancelot Andrewes' advice to Whitgift on the sixth of the Lambeth Articles. The opinion of the advisers included the note that the certainty here was different from the certainty of evidence; it was not the full and absolute assurance as of the knowledge of first principles; matters of faith were not certain in the same way as matters of evidence and certain knowledge. Nor were they certain in the way such revealed assertions as that Christ died and is the saviour of the world are certain. Lancelot Andrewes, *A Pattern of Catechistical Doctrine and other Minor Works* (Oxford, 1846), 292. Hooker's treatment of the matter of the sixth Lambeth Article will be discussed later.

<sup>8</sup> FLE 5:286.16-17. Compare Strype's third addition to Walton's *Life of Hooker, Works* i, 60, where the words of censure are attributed to Walter Travers himself.

This criticism Travers repeated in his *Supplication to the Privy Counsel*.<sup>9</sup> On the sense of “certainty of adherence,” Travers described Hooker’s views entirely accurately, for in the *Answer to Travers*, Hooker writes:

The nexte thing discovered is an opinion aboute the assurance of mens perswasyon in matters of faith: I have taughte he saith *That the assurance of thinges which we beleeve by the word is not so certeyne as of that we perceyve by sense.* And is it as certeyne? Yea I taughte as he hym self I truste woulde not denye that the thinges which God doth promys in his worde are surer unto us then any thinge we touche handle or see, but are we so sure and certeyne of them? if we be, why doth God so often prove his promises unto us as he doth by argumentes taken from our sensible experiences? We must be surer of the profe then of the thinge proved, otherwise it is no profe. How is it that if tenne men do all looke upon the moone, every one of them knoweth it as certainly to be the moone as another: But many beleevinge one and the same promis all have not one and the same fulnesse of perswasion? Howe falleth it out that men beinge assured of any thinge by sense can be no surer of it then they are, whereas the strongest in faith that lyveth upon the earth hath alwaies neede to labor and stryve, and praie that his assurance concerninge heavenly and spirituall thinges maie growe increase and be augmented?<sup>10</sup>

There had been a shift of emphasis on assurance after Calvin. Calvin himself had insisted that one was never to look to oneself for assurance of salvation, but to Christ, the “mirror of elec-

<sup>9</sup> “Another time upon like occasion of this doctrine of his, that *the assurance of that we beleve by the word, is not so certeyne as of that we perceive by sense,* I both taught the doctrine otherwise, namely, the assurance of faith to be greater, which assureth of thinges both above and contrary to all sense and humane understanding, and delt with him also pryvately upon that point.” *Supplication* (FLE 5:200.5-11). In a manuscript found in Lambeth Palace, a contemporary account of Hooker’s sermon does not deal with assurance, although it does affirm the perseverance of the elect. (FLE 5:274.34-35)

<sup>10</sup> *Master Hookers Answer to the Supplication* 9 (FLE 5:236.20-237.7).

tion," to find there the persuasion that Christ had died for her or him.<sup>11</sup> But Calvin had also spoken of "transitory faith," given to the non-elect.<sup>12</sup> This might raise doubts about treating one's faith as adequate evidence of one's election. And these doubts gave rise, in England, to an "experimental tradition," that pointed to a *reflex act* to give assurance: a "practical syllogism of the Holy Ghost," to allow one to know that "hee is in the number of the elect." And this practical syllogism was interpreted, in the words of 2 Peter 1:10, as "making [one's] calling and election sure." The best known exponent of this "experimental predestination" was Hooker's contemporary, William Perkins, whose works were much admired.<sup>13</sup> Here was, then, in Hooker's *Answer to Travers* evidence of a clear challenge to much later sixteenth century spirituality of "assurance."

By placing the degree of assent of the mind in the continuum of the mind's other degrees of commitment, Hooker established that the matters of faith were not so certain as the axioms of mathematics or the evidence of the senses. This must have seemed to invite "papist insecurity." In fact, Hooker did here what few Reformed writers had done: compare the mind's assent in matters of faith with the mind's assent in ordinary matters. His 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 neighbours and preachers treated as

<sup>11</sup> R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1979), 24-28, 75.

<sup>12</sup> ICR III, 2, 11 (i, 555f). Beza spoke of "ineffectual calling," and Perkins of "temporary faith." For Perkins, a reprobate may be called by God, there are some ineffectual calls and five degrees of faith. See Kendall, 22, 36, 67-76.

<sup>13</sup> Perkins in fact pointed in the last case to the "will or desire to believe," as the final evidence for election. In this, he and Hooker approached each other, since this amounts to *hope*; but Hooker had, as we shall see, taken a different track. For Hooker, as for Thomas and Calvin, the evidence was not "subjective" at all, but "objective."

the only means to discern one's own state of election to salvation.

*Certaintie and Perpetuitie*, although it represents a version of a sermon composed and circulated in manuscript before Hooker came to the Temple,<sup>14</sup> is a fragment of what must have been a substantially longer sermon, and in its current form may have been altered and expanded in the light of the controversy with Travers. Certainly, in its published form, it unhesitatingly describes the certainty of matters of faith *in themselves*, which have greater certainty than other beliefs, although, for the moment at least, less evidence:

That which wee know ether by sense or by most in fallible demonstration is not so certain as the principles articles and conclusions of Christian faith... Of thinges in them selves most certain, except they be also most evident, our persuasion is not so assured as it is of thinges more evident although in themselves they be lesse certayn... The trueth of somethinges is so evident, that no man which heareth them can doubt of them... If it were so in matters of fayth then as all men have equall certaintie of this, so no beleever should be more scripulous and doubtfull then another. But wee find the contrarie.<sup>15</sup>

Matters of faith (such as the Articles of the Creed) are thus certain in themselves, though less than perfectly evident to human beings at present. There is thus a distinction between an objective certainty of truth and the subjective certainty of evidence. But the certainty of adherence, though greater because it is of the heart and not of the mind alone, has also a place in the continuum of subjective natural processes. For it is related to the good, the object of desire, and the human being clings to these matters of faith because of recognizing them as ends. The will and the enlightened appetite ensure the certainty in this case, going beyond the evidence. But such matters are certain as well

<sup>14</sup> *Answer 10* (FLE 237:5.7-10).

<sup>15</sup> *Cert. 1* (FLE 5:69.24-70.14).

because the faith is a gift of God, a grace that does not destroy the nature it elevates, but perfects it:

The reason [that the certainty of adherence is greater than the certainty of evidence] is this: the fayth of a christian man doth apprehend the wordes of the law, the promisses of god, not only as true but also as good, and therefore even then when the evidence which he hath of the trueth is so small that it greaveth him to feele his weaknes in assenting thereunto, yeat is there in him such a sure adharence unto that which he doth but faintly and fearfully beleve that his spirit *having once truly tasted the heavenly sweetnes* thereof all the world is not able quite and cleane to remove him from it but he striveth with him selfe to hope even against hope to beleve even against all reason of beleiving, being settled with Job upon this unmoveable resolution... For why? this lesson remayneth for ever imprinted in his hart, *it is good for me to cleave unto god.*<sup>16</sup>

Since the love of God is a gift to the believer, even the grief of the scrupulous at the weakness of her or his faith is evidence of the griever's faith:

But are they not greeved at ther unbeleefe? they are. Do they not wish it might and also strive that it may be otherwise? wee know they do. Whenc cometh this but from a secret love and liking which they have of those things that are beleaved? No man can love the thinges which in his own opinion are not. And if they thinke those thinges to be, which they show that they love when they desire to beleve them, then must it needs be that by desiring to beleev they prove them selves true beleevers. For without faith no man thinketh that thinges beleaved are. Which argument all the subtlety of infernall powres will never be able to dissolve. The faith therefor of true believers though it have many and grevous dounfals, yeat doth it still continew invincible, it conquereth and

<sup>16</sup> [Psalm 73:28] *Cert.* 1 (FLE 5.71.2-15).

recovereth it selfe in the end. The dangerous conflictes whereunto it is subject are not able to prevail againste it.<sup>17</sup>

The “infallible internal evidence” alluded to in *First Sermon Upon S. Judes Epistle* has seemed to many to be at variance with the arguments of *Certaintie and Perpetuitie* to which Travers so objected, for, at first glance, it seems difficult to reconcile Hooker’s considered opinion that the human being is more certain of the truths of reason and sense than of matters of faith with the view that there is any kind of “infallible” evidence at all. This led earlier editors to doubt the authenticity of the *Sermons Upon S. Judes Epistle*. But these sermons are now known to be as genuine as any other part of Hooker’s works.<sup>18</sup> Is there, in fact, a doctrinal discrepancy between *First Sermon Upon S. Judes Epistle* and *Certaintie and Perpetuitie*?

We have seen that there is a shift in emphasis. *First Sermon Upon S. Judes Epistle* defends the infallibility of faith, presumably against some sort of accusation that the Church of England has apostasized in separating itself from the Church of Rome, as *evidence that one can be Christian in the Church of England*, since its members can recognize their own subjective faith, which could not be of the temporary kind in everyone. *Certaintie and Perpetuitie* deals with the quite different matter of the scruples of the doubtful. Here Hooker does assert, as a principle of pastoral comfort, that *the evidence* for matters of faith, and therefore our reasonable assent to them, is always less than complete and perfect. But he does go on to describe an *infallibility* to this albeit incomplete and imperfect faith. The certainty of matters of faith is not only objective, since it is God who gives faith, and God cannot fail, though all human beings be weak, but in some

<sup>17</sup> *Cert.* 1 (FLE 5:76.7-21). At this point, Hooker came closest to Perkins’ account of assurance through finding in oneself “the will or desire to believe.” Kendall, 22, 65.

<sup>18</sup> John Keble in Editor’s Preface, 27 (*Works* 1.lv); Francis Paget in *Introduction*, 265; C. J. Sisson, *Judicious Marriage* (Cambridge, 1940), 109ff, 140; Laetitia Yeandle in “Textual Introduction” (FLE 5.1-4).

sense subjective as well, since the natural capacity of desire and will aid the evidence of reason, and will not let the good, which is the object of faith, go; those who doubt nevertheless hope. Hooker thus argues, shockingly, for a sort of natural basis for the perseverance of faith in the elect—an infallible and permanent hope beyond a wavering faith. The argument is at considerable variance from the point of view of the Reformed tradition generally, but he does, through this argument, establish the same “infallible internal evidence” he spoke of in *First Sermon Upon S. Judes Epistle*; similarly, in *A Learned Discourse of Justification*, he balanced his further statement with a traditional distinction between the faith of evidence, which the devils possess, and fear, and the faith which justifies.<sup>19</sup> In both cases, Reformed orthodoxy was maintained, but in *Certaintie and Perpetuitie* there is a surprising accompanying argument about the *natural* basis of assurance.<sup>20</sup>

Further, the “infallible internal evidence” of *First Sermon Upon S. Judes Epistle* turns out to be a conclusion based on *observation* though not on a “reflex act” as in Perkins. For the “evidence” we are to look for is evidence of our love of “the brethren,” including presumably our actions on the basis of that love externally and publicly, as the *First Epistle of St John* has it:

*That we have passed from death to life, we knowe it, saith St John, because we love our brethren.* [1 John 3:14]<sup>21</sup>

The argument sounds like those of the Calvinist divines like Perkins, but, if pursued, it leads to a very un-Calvinist conclusion: for the “infallibility” is of the *love* observed, not of our *ob-*

<sup>19</sup> *Justification*, 26 (FLE 5:136.30-137.7).

<sup>20</sup> A similar pastoral observation about fear in the sermon *A Remedie Against Sorrow and Feare* pointed out that *fear* is natural and reasonable, and not sinful, unless it leads to security or despair; rather mourners are to be assured that fear is good in that it should lead, with God’s grace, to trust in God. *Remedie* (FLE 5.374.21-377.21).

<sup>21</sup> 1 Jude 13 (5:28.11-13).

*servation* of the love; *believing* we are “in love and charity” with our neighbour does not mean that we *are*; but *being* so assures us infallibly we are saved. Thus *First Sermon Upon S. Judes Epistle* points ahead to *Certaintie and Perpetuitie*, although the vocabulary looks “across” to a contemporary Calvinist pattern. In both cases, the important thing is the objective *certainty* of God’s gracious gift of love, or of the articles of the Creed, not any reflexive apprehension or observation of anything going on in us at all.

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. The human being has received grace, which gives a confidence (in hope) beyond the evidence of natural “light,” – but this is not angelic light, which must wait for the completion of grace in glorification. The light of nature is perfected by the light of grace by a process that ends in the light of glory:

The Angells and sprites of the righteous in heaven have certaintie most evident of thinges spirituall, but this they have by the light of glorie. That which wee see by the light of grace thought it be in deede more certain yeat is it not to us so evidently certain as that which sense or the light of nature will not suffer a man to doubt of.<sup>22</sup>

In this, perfect certainty would be like the perfect righteousness of the glorified; it would deserve the reward of final justification; it would make Christ’s saving work unnecessary:

Now the minds of all men being so darkned as they are with the foggie damp of originall corruption, it cannot be that any mans

<sup>22</sup> *Cert.* 1 (FLE 5:70.14-19). Compare the perfection of the inherent righteousness of sanctification here in the glorifying righteousness of the world to come in the companion discourse, *Justification* 3 (FLE 5:109.6-11).

hart living should be ether so enlightned in the knowledg or so established in the love of that wherein his salvation standeth as to be perfect, nether doubting nor shrinking at all. If any such were, what doth let why that man should not be justified by his owne in herent righteousnes? for righteousnes inherent being perfect will justifie, and perfect fayth is apart of perfect righteousnes in herent...<sup>23</sup>

But we walk now by faith mixed with mental doubt, though with hearts invincibly directed to their object in hope, and not by the perfect knowledge of the possession of the object of delight. The faith we have is invincible, since it is from God, but to pretend it is perfect is to adopt the posture of the Pharisee, in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-gatherer from Luke 18:9-14, not the imitation of Christ at the point of despair on the Cross in Matthew 27:46:

Better it is some tymes to *goe down into the pit* with him who beholding darknes and bewaling the losse of inward joy and consolation cryeth from the bottome of the lowest hell *my god my god why hast thou forsaken me*, then continually to walke arme in arme with angells, to sit as it were in *Abrahams bosome* and to have no thought no cogitacion but *I thanke my god it is not with me as it is with other men*. No, god wyll have them that shall walke in light to feel now and then what it is to sit in the *shadow of death*. A greeved spirit therefore is no argument of a faithles mind.<sup>24</sup>

Not to recognize the limitations of our current state leads some to despair, if they recognize they have imperfect assurance, and others to presumption, pretending they have no room to grow. At Luke 22:32, Christ prayed that Peter's faith fail not. This text was important in the debates that would take place in Cambridge in 1595. There William Barrett and others argued that the prayer was for Peter alone. Hooker agrees with the position that

<sup>23</sup> *Cert. 1* (FLE 5:71.16-24).

<sup>24</sup> *Cert. 1* (FLE 5:75.10-19). Compare Mark 15:34.

William Whitaker would take and which Calvin had taken:<sup>25</sup> the prayer applies to all of the elect, those written “in the Book of Life.” In the later *Dublin Fragments*, Hooker concentrated on the more telling prayer in John 17:9, 20, which does not speak of faith at all, but of Christ’s prayer for those given to him by God, and held that it indeed applied to the elect and that it was a source of great consolation.<sup>26</sup> But for Hooker, although Christ’s prayer in Luke 22:32 that faith not fail in the elect is a sure guarantee, those who suppose it precludes our intensive labour are wrong:

...this oure safty. No mens condition so sure as oures: the praier of Christ ys more then sufficient, bothe to strengththen usse be we never so weake, and to overthrow all adversarie power, be it never so stronge and potent. His prayer must not exclude oure labour. There thoughtes ar vaine who thinke there wachinge can preserv the citie which god him selfe is not willinge to keepe. And is not

<sup>25</sup> “Now there is no doubt, when Christ prays for all the elect, that he implores for them the same thing as he did for Peter, that their faith may never fail [Luke 22:32]. From this we infer that they are out of danger of falling away because the Son of God, asking that their godliness be kept constant, did not suffer a refusal.” *ICR* III.24.6 (1539 as altered in 1559), ii, 972-3. This was, for the Calvinist tradition, a central text for the doctrine of assurance, and was to be interpreted as applying to all the elect.

<sup>26</sup> *Dublin* 46 (FLE 4:166.22-167.1). This shows Hooker’s clear affirmation of the doctrine of the *final* indefectibility of the elect already apparent in the *Lawes*: “...the scripture [Revelation 7:3, 9:4]... describeth them marked of God in the forehead whome his mercie hath undertaken to keepe from finall confusion and shame. Not that God doth sett any corporall marke on his chosen, but to note that he giveth his elect securitie of preservation from reproach...” V.65.7 (FLE 2:307.11-15). “The first thinge of [Christ’s] so infused into our hartes in this life is the Spirit of Christ, whereupon because the rest of what kinde so ever doe all both necessarilie depende and infallible also ensue...” V.56.11 (FLE 2:243.9-11). “In that prayer for eternall Life which our Saviour knew could not be made without effect, he excepted them for whome he knew his suffrings would be frustrate, and commendeth unto God his owne... That they should be finallie seduced, and cleane drawne away from God, is a thing impossible. Such as utterly depart from them, were never of them.” *Dublin* 46 (FLE 4.166.22-167.1). See Porter, 317.

theres as vaine who thinck that god will kepe the cytie for which they them selves ar not carefull to wach? ...Therefor the assurance of my hope I will labor to kepe as a jewell unto the end and by labor through the gracious mediation of his praier I shall kepe yt.<sup>27</sup>

Hooker's view of the relative degrees of assurance becomes crucial in his polemic in the *Lawes* against the scripturalism of the advocates of presbyterian government. We are convinced of the truths of scripture only by being taught by natural means. The greatest certainty we have is from matters of observation; even in matters divine, we must proportion our assent to the degrees of evidence.<sup>28</sup> There are three levels of reason (as healed by grace), and these levels have a descending strength of conviction: intuitive beholding, strong and invincible demonstration, and the way of greatest probability. But in all matters, the reasonable person proportions (mental) assurance to the evidence.<sup>29</sup> This must involve reason to support and interpret scripture, and not scripture alone.

Hooker alludes in the *Lawes*, to the theme of *Certaintie and Perpetuitie*: a wrong view of assurance leads honest souls to de-

<sup>27</sup> *Cert.* 5 (FLE 5:81.7-82.18). Philip Secor, in paraphrasing this passage, has changed "hope" to "faith", but this attempt to make the passage helpful actually obscures Hooker's point. Philip Secor, *The Sermons of Richard Hooker* (London, 2001), 12. Hope, for Hooker, is the mark of those on the way: "[The grace whereby angels and men] might be exempted from possibilitie of sinning belongeth... to their perfection whoe see God in fulnes of glorie, and not to them, whoe as yet serve him under hope." *Dublin* 28 (FLE 4:136.29-137.2).

<sup>28</sup> *Lawes* II.7.5 (FLE 1:179.8-181.4). Nigel Atkinson has suggested that Hooker relies on a Calvinist notion that the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit guarantees our apprehension of the truths of scripture, but Hooker expressly casts doubt on that view. Nigel Atkinson, *Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Tradition and Reason. Reformed Theologian of the Church of England* (Carlisle, 1997), 108-110; Hooker *Lawes* III.8.15 (FLE 1.232.16-25). See W. David Neelands, "Hooker the Confident non-partisan Reformer", forthcoming.

<sup>29</sup> *Lawes* I.8.5 (FLE 1:85.6-86.23); Preface 3.10 (FLE 1:17.22-18.8).

spair.<sup>30</sup> And this view is related to the whole drift of Book II of the *Lawes*, to vindicate reason, nature and human authority in spiritual matters. For, Hooker argues, unless we are assured by something other than Scripture, we would have no assurance at all.<sup>31</sup> It is trusting in the human testimony of our teachers that leads us to trust Scripture in the first place, the assurance we have in one leading to the assurance we arrive at in the other.<sup>32</sup> And even in interpreting Scripture, we must rely on authority.<sup>33</sup> In other words, consideration of the objective norm of Scripture does not occur isolated from the subjective state of our apprehending it. We come to (mental) belief in the doctrines of the faith in a way precisely commensurate with the way we come to be assured of other things; and we ought to proportion the degree of our assurance in both cases to the degree of the evidence. This does not mean that either Scripture or internal faith is simply “natural” and reasonable: faith cannot fail, and Scripture is perfect for the end for which it was ordained. But both are apprehended as part of a natural process, and to pretend otherwise risks many errors, fanaticism and phariseeism.

The “subjectivism” that is hidden in the disciplinarian argument is not just an epistemological mistake, it is a spiritual problem. For, once the “rule of men’s private spirits” is accepted, all disorder must follow. If this direction is followed, presbyterians turn out to be in the same league with the hated anabaptists.<sup>34</sup> There is a false “subjective principle” behind the Puritan position, whether on assurance or on church discipline,

<sup>30</sup> *Lawes* II.7.5 (FLE 1:180.11-16); see also II.8.6 (FLE 1:190.9-19).

<sup>31</sup> *Lawes* II.4.2 (FLE 1:152.15-153.25).

<sup>32</sup> *Lawes* II.7.3 (FLE 1:177.25-34). On the proportion of the degree of subjective credence to the degree of objective credibility, see W. David Neelands, “Hooker on Scripture, Reason, and ‘Tradition’,” in *Richard Hooker and the Construction of Christian Community* (Tempe, 1997), 79.

<sup>33</sup> *Lawes* II.7.9 (FLE 1:184.24-185.20).

<sup>34</sup> *Lawes* V.10.1 (FLE 2:46.7-47.9).

so that a subjective state is elevated to objective authority.<sup>35</sup> To assert assurance on the public side is as dangerous as to seek it on the spiritual side. Subjective “security” is always dangerous and leads to neglect and a lack of watchfulness: in Christian history, according to Hooker, this is what happened to the orthodox Trinitarians after the Council of Nicaea; they became “secure,” and allowed the Arians to gain ground. “It plainly appeareth that the first thing which weakened them was their securitie.”<sup>36</sup>

The Puritans, not recognizing the natural limitations and weaknesses of the means of grace in the process of natural human history, adopt wrong positions on the “perfection” of the ministers of Christian sacraments. Thomas Cartwright, in objecting to the “usurped jurisdiction” of baptism by a layman, argued that someone so baptized would “lack assurance”; such an administration of the sacrament would be like a stolen seal on a forged document. Hooker rejected the argument. Administering baptism was not like a seal in this respect: “the grace of Baptisme cometh by Donation from God alone.”<sup>37</sup> In fact, the very weakness of the human agents of the sacraments is the warrant for “assurance” that they are more than human acts: “regarde the weaknes which is in us, and they are warrantes for the more securitie of our believe.”<sup>38</sup>

In the *Lawes*, the direct discussion of the “comfortable doctrine of blessed assurance” does not hold the centre of the stage, but the general view is the same as in *Certainitie and Perpetuitie*. We are to make a charitable assumption that we and all others who care about it, are among the elect, and therefore will persevere, but we are not to search for a particular conviction in ourselves:

<sup>35</sup> Egil Grislis, “The Hermeneutical Problem in Richard Hooker,” in W. Speed Hill (ed.), *Studies in Richard Hooker* (Cleveland, 1972), 167ff.

<sup>36</sup> *Lawes* V.42.4 (FLE 2:169.6-7).

<sup>37</sup> *Lawes* V.62.19 (FLE 2:286.2). Cartwright is quoted in 2.285.f.

<sup>38</sup> *Lawes* V.57.2 (FLE 2:245.26-27).

There is in the knowledg both of God and man this certaintie that life and death have dievided betwene them the whole bodie of man kinde. What portion either of the two hath, God him selfe knoweth; for us he hath left no sufficient meanes to comprehend and for that cause neither given any leave to search in particular who are infallible the heires of the kingdom of God, who castawaies. Howbeit concerning the state of all men with whome we live... wee may till the worldes ende, *for the present*, alwaies presume, that *as farre as in us there is power to discerne* what others are, and as farre as any dutie of oures dependeth upon the notize of their condition in respect of God, the safest axiomes for charitie to rest it selfe upon are these, *He which believeth already is;* and *Hee which believeth not as yeat may be the child of God.* It becometh not us *duringe life altogether to condemne any man seinge that* (for any thinge wee knowe) *there is hope of everie mans forgivenes the possibilitie of whose repentance is not yeat cutt of by death.*"<sup>39</sup>

This same view, repeated consistently by Hooker, apparently from before his public quarrel with Travers in 1585, reappears again in his latest composition. At the very end of the *Dublin Fragments*, Hooker re-wrote the Lambeth Articles. His version of them shows how close he was to the advisers of Whitgift at Lambeth. But there is a startling omission. The sixth Lambeth Article had slightly amended Whitaker's draft, by substituting the Pauline phrase "full assurance of faith" for Whitaker's "certainty of faith," but had otherwise repeated the principle of Christian assurance:

The truly faithful man—that is one endowed with justifying faith—is sure by full assurance of faith of the remission of sins and his eternal salvation through Christ.

Hooker could, presumably, have agreed with that. In fact, he had said something apparently stronger in the *Sermons Upon S. Judes Epistle*. Just how he could accommodate this view with his

<sup>39</sup> *Lawes* V.49.2 (FLE 2:203.9-25).

conviction about *uncertainty*, we have seen in examining *Certaintie and Perpetuitie*: in view of the identity of the *giver* of faith, faith is certain; in view of the natural desire for the good, hope once given will not be lost. But to say that everyone to whom *any sort of faith* had been given would persevere, obviously went beyond what Hooker could assert, for “grace sufficient” was clearly offered to all, though “saving grace” was not. There was thus a tension, if not an inconsistency, in the understanding of the articles by Whitgift’s advisers, who on the one hand, when interpreting the seventh Lambeth Article, admitted the possibility that a sufficient grace, and therefore some sort of faith, was offered to all, yet held that only those with effectual grace were elect and would persevere. On the other hand, in accepting the sixth Lambeth Article they appeared to hold that *all* who enjoyed “justifying faith” had assurance of their salvation. Could it be possible to discern one group of the faithful from another? Was “true faith” detectable from the faith of those who had “sufficient” but not “efficacious” grace?<sup>40</sup> The problem led many to deny that there was such a thing as sufficient grace that was not therefore efficacious. But *Hooker boldly answered in the negative*; there is no way of discriminating between faith that will endure and that which will not, and there are both kinds of faith given. He thus qualified the conviction about assurance held by both Whitaker and his supporters and Whitgift and his advisers. And Hooker, in consistency, omitted the sixth Lambeth Article altogether. The theme of *Certaintie and Perpetuitie*, which he clearly held to be important, he boldly attached to the final article. Unchanged from Whitaker’s draft, the ninth Lambeth Article read:

It is not in the will or the power of each and every man to be saved.

<sup>40</sup> As noted earlier, a parallel problem had emerged for Perkins. Kendall, 22, 36, 67-76, cited above.

Hooker apparently interpreted this article as, in effect, rejecting Pelagianism by asserting the absolute need for grace. In some sense, however, it had to be within the natural *will* of the elect (elevated of course by grace) to be saved. This was not the case for “each and every man.” But the important thing, for Hooker, was watchfulness: effort without grace was useless, but grace without effort would be fruitless. His version of the final article involves a significant expansion, for explanation and for balance:

8. And that it is not in everie, noe not in any mans owne meere abilitie, freedome, and power, to be saved, noe mans salvation being possible without grace. VII. Of the necessitie of labor to concurre on our part with the will of God in justifying and sanctifying his elect, that in the end they may be glorified. Howbeit, God is noe favourer of sloath and therefore there can be noe such absolute decree touching mans salvation as on our part includeth noe necessitie of care and travaile, butt shall certainly take effect, whether wee ourselves doe wake or sleepe.<sup>41</sup>

Thus Hooker undercut both Calvin’s account of assurance through faith, and the Beza-Perkins account of the reflexive act that brings assurance. The search for assurance is simply misdirected for Hooker, but God is dependable, and hope in the here and now is all.

Thus even before 1595 and the controversy leading to the Lambeth Articles, Hooker had already parted company with Whitaker, and with Whitgift, and for that matter, with Perkins and the “experimental predestinarians” on the question of “assurance.” For Hooker, there was a paradox on assurance: the best assurance one could have was derived from a recognition of the weakness of one’s faith;<sup>42</sup> perfect assurance was a gift of

<sup>41</sup> *Dublin* 46 (FLE 4:167.10-19).

<sup>42</sup> And perhaps the evidence of our love of our brethren, as in *First Sermon Upon S. Judes Epistle*. See above.

glory; to presume it here in this world turned one into a presumptuous Pharisee.