

Sitting among Richard Hooker's Sermons. Notes on the Three Fragments

JOHN K. STAFFORD

University of Manitoba

ABSTRACT. This paper revisits the extant sermon fragments of Richard Hooker (1554-1600). The sermons exhibit Hooker's characteristic rhetorical and homiletical style. Each sermon is notable for its extensive range of Scripture quotations and allusions which assumes congregations able to interact with their themes. The tight reasoning employed by Hooker is typical of his hermeneutic and homiletical method. Hooker held that pastoral and practical problems of Christian experience were primarily the result of error in reasoning or theology. The remedy for this situation was correct thinking such that right reason will place pastoral problems in correct relation to each other. As in *Remedie* and *Pride*, the *Fragments* consistently exhibit this method. Similarly, Hooker always has Puritan theological sensibilities in view. The *Fragments* reveal Hooker's response to the key Puritan themes of election, grace, assurance, and divine forbearance.

KEY WORDS: Richard Hooker, 16th century, sermons, hermeneutic, Early Modern period

Introduction

The sermons of Richard Hooker continue to attract attention because they offer a dynamic and immediate context for his thought. They also offer a check between polity and praxis—what emerges in defence and polemic is not always what appears on the public stage or in the pulpit. So the sermons can give some insight into Hooker's application of his own thought and method.

The three fragments discussed in this paper, found in the Folger Edition,¹ are pieces from sermons on Matthew 27:46, Hebrews 2:14-15, and Proverbs 3. The sermon on Hebrews 2 is the longest and most developed, and may be very close to complete.² To that extent, it is not really a “fragment” but is conveniently recognised as such. The sermon on Matthew 7:7 was not published until 1678 and is included in Folger as a separate sermon and again, appears virtually complete.³ It is not considered here. The purpose of this paper is to uncover some of the classic themes found in the three fragments and evaluate the particular treatment he gives them.

Fragment 1: Matthew 27:46

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

The words of dereliction so familiar from Holy Week liturgies point most obviously to this context although the occasion of a funeral cannot be conclusively ruled out. However the first day of Lent is possible and also Easter evening on the Saturday. The substance of the fragment as we have it is the nature of dereliction which Hooker clarifies as his first priority. This is completely typical of his sermonic approach—if words and terms are not well understood then all other conclusions built on them are weak. It also enabled him to set the agenda for the

¹ Richard Hooker, “Three Sermon Fragments,” in *Tractates and Sermons*, vol. 5 of *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. Egil Grislis and Laetitia Yeandle, gen. ed. W. Speed Hill (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 399-417.

² Hooker lays out six topics for consideration at the start of the sermon and the Folger text reproduces all six. It may be that a further conclusion has dropped out but as it stands, the sermon does not end especially abruptly. Rather it concludes on a note of pastoral hope and confidence, something most preachers prefer.

³ Hooker’s authorship is disputed. Cf. Richard Hooker, “Tractates and Sermons,” in *Tractates and Sermons*, vol. 5 of *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. Egil Grislis and Laetitia Yeandle, gen. ed. W. Speed Hill (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 380.

sermon by setting up the boundary conditions well ahead of clinching arguments. From this Hooker, in short compass, manages to traverse some key questions of Christology, a basic Christian anthropology, the mystery of suffering, and hints of other favourite topics, fear of death and the loss of assurance though the fragment breaks off before these are developed.

These homiletical moves are like scenes in a play—the transitions are not arbitrary but woven together through Hooker's particular use of Scripture. In his hands Scripture, is not heaped up through tenuous idea associations but remains congruent in his exposition and application of the presenting text. In other words, he is always looking for significance. Good preachers do this—they know the difference between the lecture room and the pulpit—even if Hooker sometimes forgets. Hooker always attempts a coherent theological narrative because coherence speaks to the divine origin of the textual revelation itself—truths which could not be achieved by the unaided mind—the mystery of the Gospel. It is the preacher's task to open up the theological landscape already revealed in the Scriptures but obscured through human "imbecility." Indeed, that is what he considers to be the purpose of Scripture.⁴

The discussion of dereliction and its causes in this fragment is no mere exercise in theological subtlety. We know from the *Remedie*⁵ as well as the *Lawes* more generally, that a serious part of Puritan debate was the question of certainty and assurance of salvation in the life of the believer—that fear was construed to be a symptom of weak faith and therefore called into question

⁴ Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. Preface, Books I to IV*, vol. 1 of *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. Georges Edelelen, gen. ed. W. Speed Hill (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), III.8.14: 1.229.33-230.1.

⁵ Richard Hooker, "A Remedie Against Sorrow and Feare, delivered in a funerall Sermon John 14:27," in *Tractates and Sermons*, vol. 5 of *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. Egil Grislis and Laetitia Yeandle, gen. ed. W. Speed Hill (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 363-77.

the reality of one's election. To be uncertain about the calling and choosing of God's elect was a matter about which each person had to be clear. In the *Remedie*, Hooker goes to great lengths to establish theological criteria by which to bring pastoral comfort in the contemplation of death or suffering—fear, he concludes, is both natural and necessary for it saves us from grave error and catastrophe and is not the sign that our faith is null or inferior. Naturally, the clinching argument is Jesus' own cries of dereliction.

In the first instance however, Hooker discusses the word "dereliction" itself. The experience of it can have a number of causes. First, when a person has been disobedient and rebellious before God. We reap what we sow in other words. Hooker's construal of such "reprobation" is however, extreme. It is not merely universal human waywardness but "utter refusal" reaching into "the everlasting condition" by which all divine appeal to repentance is cast aside. This situation, such as would satisfy a strict Calvinist outlook, involves God's denial of "the grace of his saving mercy, and that forever ..." ⁶ With the ominous, "... and that forever," Hooker understands this to mean people who "... have made themselves vessels incapable of his goodness in that kind."⁷ But he never specifies the identity of such people. In the *Lawes*, in *Pride*, and in the *Sermons on Jude*, "they" can be anyone including, pointedly, Puritans. While his early rhetoric echoes the Calvinistic emphasis on election and the perpetuity of the damned for whom repentance is not possible, Hooker's extreme tone serves as a foil (as usual) because Hooker is not preaching to condemn anyone—his interest is to help his hearers understand that the dereliction of Jesus is the dereliction of all who must, and will, suffer. Thus, the second form of dereliction is that which is found in the trials that beset life in the body. In this, by contrast, "... they which are born of

⁶ Hooker, "Fragments," 399:7ff.

⁷ Hooker, "Fragments," 399:8f.

him, he doth not in that sense foresake."⁸ And of course, it is too obvious to say that Jesus did not experience dereliction of the first kind! Hooker upholds the sovereignty of divine election and now strives to show that it is by no means compromised because of the sensible experience of fear. He does this by examining the sufferings of Christ through the lens of the Scriptures satisfyingly stitched together to form an unassailable picture of God's absolute forbearance and covenant love.

In either case, Hooker makes a distinction between the manifestations of dereliction—"corporall dereliction"⁹ and that which is located in "th'inferiour part of the Soul, ..." ¹⁰ In the first case Hooker has in mind the physical "dilaniation and torture"¹¹ of the body which is the most clear and immediate aspect of suffering associated in Hooker's mind with human nature. In the second, "th'inferiour part of the Soul" is where Hooker considers "fancy and affection dwell."¹² And since Jesus was tormented beyond the sufferings of Job, Hooker is most reticent to speculate upon that part of Jesus' anguish because "between the passionate powers of his soule and whatsoever might refresh them a courtain [is] drawn."¹³ This second order suffering is the most extreme in Hooker's mind because of its ontic situation. So to those suffering, insofar as words can have any effect, the empathy of the preacher is directed:

... doth not this thy mournfull complaint of dereliction cause even almost to feel that thy soul was become now as a scorched heath, wherein no one drop of the moisture of sensible joy was left? But I do foolishly to labour in explicating that which is not explicable; that whereof our fittest esteeme is our very astonished silence.¹⁴

⁸ Hooker, "Fragments," 399:10.

⁹ Hooker, "Fragments," 400:24.

¹⁰ Hooker, "Fragments," 400:29.

¹¹ Hooker, "Fragments," 400:22.

¹² Hooker, "Fragments," 400:29f.

¹³ Hooker, "Fragments," 401:12.

¹⁴ Hooker, "Fragments," 401:13-18.

Hooker's startling capacity to depict the sufferings of Christ at the hands of "the impes of Satan"¹⁵ has, overall, the stamp of one who has some experience in the realm of suffering, at least by observation if not by actual experience. He piles up the language of hopelessness and at the end, observes that "neither God nor Angel nor Man, to ease his [Christ's] heavines with the comfort of their presence at this howre; ..." ¹⁶ was given to Christ. Given the two forms of dereliction identified by Hooker, could his own frustration with his Puritan critics be even faintly related to the "impes of Satan"? Is Hooker dealing with his own soulful anxieties? Since he himself had affirmed that it was impossible to judge the heart of another, his own readiness to draw a veil over the mystery of suffering does bring this fragment to an abrupt but not unsatisfying conclusion in its own right. He really does believe that a rational theological investigation into the sufferings of Jesus will be sufficient grace needed by the believer in such times, and yet he does so without trivialising in any way, the human experience of its effects. Still, one could wish for more at this point. Could Catholics, for example, "not denying the foundations," truly be said to be reprobate? And the political cartoon of public suffering for truth?—does the question of proportional retribution not arise? On this, Hooker is silent yet his silence is telling, and a presumed Puritan readership is not excluded.

Fragment 2: Hebrews 2:14-15

That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, ...

This is the longest of the fragments and appears to be complete.¹⁷ The theme of death and fear is again explored in this

¹⁵ Hooker, "Fragments," 400:17.

¹⁶ Hooker, "Fragments," 400:10f.

¹⁷ Hooker says he intends to expand six points and by the end of the fragment, that is what he has done.

fragment and although an exposition of Hebrews 2 the starting point is Leviticus 25 and a discussion of the concept of Jubilee. His sermonic strategy initially suggests an oblique argument because the initial move to Leviticus 25 is quite unexpected unless the emphasis on Israelite religious tradition in Hebrews has simply opened up such an array of themes that the preacher could have selected a large number that spoke to the idea of servitude. Hence the connection of "bondage" in Hebrews 2 with Old Testament precepts concerning temporal bondage and servitude. Even if this stretches the exegesis, Hooker applies such a wide range of texts overall, if one fails to convince, others might. And further, in a congregation with Puritan sympathies he would surely not be outdone in his facility with the biblical texts. The Elizabethan lectionary does not suggest a liturgical link. Hooker's sermonic strategy now becomes clear. "... they were all in the yeare of Jubilye restored unto that state of perfect liberty; so that no man might chalenge or charge them for anything past. Which Jubilyes were types and figures of a Jubily that was to come."¹⁸ This establishes the hermeneutical framework—typology—what was historically the case really amounted to the long end of a telescope. But then Hooker moves immediately to Daniel 9 and the edict of Cyrus which supplies a basis for this reasoning, that is, Daniel uses the idea of Jubilee to describe the redemption and restoration of Israel.¹⁹ Daniel 9 itself is initially taken up with an extensive act of confession through a re-presentation of Israel's history.

Following this excursus into Daniel 9, Hooker quickly leads the reader/listener into Isaiah 53, Revelation 5, Luke 4 and John 8. His point is to establish that human need presupposes confession of actual guilt for which there is a remedy. In Hooker's view, wilful failure to acknowledge this condition is a form of bondage and being universal, hard for many to recognise. So

¹⁸ Hooker, "Fragments," 402:16ff.

¹⁹ Hooker does this by a process of numerology to achieve 10 Jubilees between the edict and the time of Christ—70 weeks of years.

now the problem has been identified—"Pride," as we might expect: "Behold a servitude, from which none but the sonne can deliver you. He it is that must *make you free*. Joh. 8."²⁰ It is, in fact, an extended commentary on the Hebrews 2 text which speaks to the human fear of death and its universality—our total bondage and servitude. In very short compass, Hooker has moved from problem, its description, to its solution. Scripture interpreting Scripture in the best reformed tradition.

Having established the problem, Hooker now begins to "crumble" the texts through the six points as follows:

1. how Christ defeated Satan.
2. the benefits of our deliverance.
3. the extent of our deliverance.
4. the nature and extent of our bondage ("thraldome").
5. our fear of death.
6. the continuance of fear, and its complete extent throughout our lives.

We can see immediately how comprehensive Hooker intends to be in this sermon. At the outset, this sermon is remarkable for its human sympathies and emphasis on *Christus Victor*. It is a theological sermon like all Hooker's sermons. Rich in rhetorical texture and intertextuality; filled with memorable and powerful images crafted with rhetorical design. Yet what is striking, more subjectively, is the absence of patronising tone—Hooker never talks down to his listeners while constantly keeping the heart of the human problem in sight, always seeking a theological and kerygmatic response. In other words, the Gospel is life and so, as he expands his first point, Hooker begins where he must: "The very centre of Christian believe, the life and soul of the Gospell of Christ doth rest in this, that by ignominye, honour and glory is obtained; power vanquished by imbecillity;

²⁰ Hooker, "Fragments," 403:27.

and by death salvation purchased."²¹ The mystery of death in God's wisdom, is made apparent by his use of R. Moses and a discussion of Jewish messianic ideals. The problem is this: within the scope of such ideals why was Jesus' death a necessity? Could salvation not be equally obtained without it through the exercise of God's "bare authority"?²² How does Hooker answer is own question?

He does so indirectly, by setting up an equation. To ask about the necessity of a cause, is also to ask about the nature of its effect. Now the effect is much easier to grasp than the cause, so this becomes Hooker's new starting point. We, the guilty, are delivered from death perfectly by the intercessions of Christ. *Our* condition is defined by divine wrath; *Christ's* condition is defined by the highest honour and integrity of divine promise. Christ's honour was combined with our humiliation—this sounds very similar to Hooker's notion in *Pride* where he considers God's actions in terms of a physician—the more difficult the disease, the more radical the surgery required.²³ And so in the central mystery of Christian worship, the Eucharist, "... the face of death might most lively appear in it."²⁴ What argues for the efficacy of Christ's death is morally located in his infinite love, goodness, grace and mercy, and rationally perfected in relation to the depth of the human situation.²⁵ The Cross is therefore everything and also the most mysterious in the claims made for it.

As for the extent of Christ's deliverance, Hooker reserves some of strongest pastoral language. It is the outlook of the BCP

²¹ Hooker, "Fragments," 404:12ff.

²² Hooker, "Fragments," 405:21.

²³ Richard Hooker, "A Learned Sermon of the Nature of Pride Abac. 2.4," in *Tractates and Sermons*, vol. 5 of *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. Egil Grisliis and Laetitia Yeandle, gen. ed. W. Speed Hill (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 320:30.

²⁴ Hooker, "Fragments," 406:22.

²⁵ Hooker, "Fragments," 406:12-20.

Exhortations pressed even more strongly. The discussion of point three is the extent of the effects of the Cross and the Eucharistic feast “which the God of our salvation *hath not prepared for a few.*”²⁶ [emphasis mine]. This is telling. It is clearly an attenuation of Calvinist scruples concerning the visibility of the elect. What Hooker has done is replace the certainty of assurance by which the elect can adjudicate authenticity of their own election (which s pastorally suspect), with the offer of salvation made utterly liberal and generous to the extent that “If any be thereof deprived, the falt is their own.”²⁷ That is, determined not by a double predestination but by human rejection of grace—again, an attenuation of the view that grace is irresistible. But this is not a theological possibility upon which Hooker wishes to dwell because it is inconceivable to him that needy persons in whatever condition would spurn the gift of grace. Hooker’s extensive meditation on the *extent* of salvation is positively Wesleyan in scope and embodies some of his strongest language. Consider the following:

Let men not dig ... the cloudes to find out secret impediments; let them not ... stormingly impute their wretched estate unto destinie. Let no such cogitation take place in the hart of any man; abandon it with all execration and hatred: it were even impious and diabolically. ... *That from deliverance through the death of Jesus Christ there ever was child of perdition excluded by maine strengthe, or that any hath bene ever withheld otherwise then by the malice of an indisposed will,* ... Wherefore upon this as a sure foundation let us build. Christ hath died *to deliver all.* Let not the subtiltye of Satan beguile you with fraudulent exceptions, and drive you into such laberinth or mazes as the wit of man cannot enter into but with danger to lose it self. ... Christ by death hath defeated Satan, to the end that he might *deliver all* whosever were detained in bondage. Urge this.²⁸

²⁶ Hooker, “Fragments,” 406:29.

²⁷ Hooker, “Fragments,” 406:30.

²⁸ Hooker the surrogate Apostle who “urges” compliance with inherent authority. Cf. 1 Corinthians 4:16, 16:16; 2 Corinthians 9:5; 1 Timothy 2:1, 6:2; Titus 2:6; Hebrews 13:19.

God cannot denye himselfe.²⁹ And himself doth preach deliverance by death unto all. If any therefore be not delivered, it is because they have sayd in their harts *Nolumus hunc*: our present pleasure shall still be our god, for such favour we care not, we will not him to be our deliverer.³⁰

Again, Hooker piles up short emphatic sentences building on the Cross as the central instrument of grace, and with the frequently repeated note that Christ died for *all*. This must reflect Hooker's point of departure from a rigid puritanism that made election and predestination the centrepiece of God's saving activity. It is still important to observe that in saying this, Hooker rejected neither election nor predestination but he never considered these the touchstone of faith because they served not to initiate faith but rather sustain it.³¹ They are intended for those who, on other more immediate and vital grounds (the Cross), seek to marvel at the wisdom and mercy of God. Election resides in the counsels of God and for Hooker, while grace can be resisted, the evangelical proclamation is that God wills all to be delivered from the bondage of sin. In this, Hooker is emphatic.

Hooker has not, however, explained why divine deliverance could possibly be resisted, given the alternative. Why is the corruption of the will so tenacious that one might prefer death to the promise of life? The answer is further developed in point four with rare psychological insight. Part of our deliverance is our actual desire to be delivered.³² To fail to grasp our situation is the key attribute of "ghostly servitude." Our natural master puts us to "vile labour"³³ and because we live comfortably with

²⁹ Echoing 2 Timothy 2:13.

³⁰ Hooker, "Fragments," 406:31-407:25.

³¹ "Predestination bringeth not to life, without the grace of externall vocation, ..." Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. Book V*, vol. 2 of *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. W. Speed Hill, gen. ed. W. Speed Hill (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), V.60.3: 2.256.18.

³² Hooker, "Fragments," 409:10.

³³ Hooker, "Fragments," 408:19.

it, to a sufficient degree, we do not see the problem, and our spiritual oppression keeps us blind to our plight. Hooker puts it this way:

... they which live in this kind of ghostly servitude, ... are in this unlike unto servants: they doe not feel the misery they are in, but their servitude is sweet unto them, because they see it not to be servitude. It is the care of all tyrants to provide as much as they can, that such as are most oppressed by them may not seem to be oppressed. In kingdomes tyrannized therefore we see, that the doors of mens lips yea their very lookes are with jealousy observed and watched: least men by powring forth their mutuall complaints should prove to be touched somewhat deeply each with the sense of others misery, and in the end studye how to shake the yoke that lyeth heavy upon them.³⁴

Now Hooker contrasts the old servitude with the new servitude. The new servitude is Christian freedom and the fear of death as a “*miserie escaped is not misery.*”³⁵ The fear of which Hebrews 2 speaks is also found in its more extensive treatment in the *Remedie*.³⁶ It is a consistent theme. Hooker never loses an opportunity to moderate the Puritan anxiety occasioned by a contemplation of assurance. Fear is natural and therefore not to be reprovèd—it all depends on the cause of the fear. Some fear needs better counsel. And it is true that since “*death hath as yet the upper hand ... conflict with death naturally is feared.*”³⁷ There can be no simplistic handling of human emotions around this topic. Hooker knows very well that the experience of fear, even when rationally defensible, is variable and fickle. St. Paul said as much. There is much to live for and many desires which any person would wish to see fulfilled—death however, as Tols-

³⁴ Hooker, “Fragments,” 408:26-409:6.

³⁵ Hooker, “Fragments,” 410:9.

³⁶ Hooker, “Remedie,” 368:5ff. There is also considerable verbal similarity on the theme of the fear of death between the Hebrews 2 fragment and the *Remedie*.

³⁷ Hooker, “Fragments,” 411:21.

toy's Ivan Illych declared, was the great spoiler of dreams. But the attendant problem is also our tendency to believe that the "covenant with all things dreadful" ³⁸ is stronger than the covenant of mercy. We may justly fear death because we not only perceive its existential reality, but mainly because we understand its theological construal. Death is not a neutral thing that is merely "part of life." It is only neutral in who it takes. Hooker, like the Scriptures, wants to know *why* it is part of life, and he is not satisfied with scientific or rational descriptions of its processes alone. One may be entirely fearful *for* someone in danger while not participating in the danger itself. So Hooker is only distancing himself from Puritan piety as a matter of degree and emphasis, not as to the statement of the problem.

At the conclusion of the sermon, Hooker engages in a remarkable discussion of those things that "abate the fear of death"³⁹ Our relationship with death is nonetheless complex. The fear of death can be abated in many ways that include our participation in the ways of nature, which is a kind of resignation and which, Hooker thinks, is the limit of heathen resolution in face of the inevitable. He is not content with Aristotle on this question, and writes, "And such as that of Aristotle [who said]. As birth, so death is beneficial unto the state of the whole world. Birth doth stop death, and death doth ease birth. No reason therefore but that we should be contented to give place unto others by death, as by birth we have succeeded others dead."⁴⁰ Yet Hooker is not content with Aristotle's analysis of the "violent smotherings of fear."⁴¹ These can only "rightly be conquered but by strength of infallible reason."⁴² And by this, Hooker means reason shaped and conformed to the Gospel which, as in the *Remedie*, is the product of rational belief in Christ since fear is the principle result of error. And reason can only

³⁸ Hooker, "Fragments," 410:24.

³⁹ Hooker, "Fragments," 412:5.

⁴⁰ Hooker, "Fragments," 412:18-23.

⁴¹ Hooker, "Fragments," 412:9.

⁴² Hooker, "Fragments," 412:11.

be “infallible” if it is thoroughly consonant with the truth of Scripture.⁴³ So the conclusion of the sermon is quite consistent with the *Remedie*—perspective is everything, and anxieties and setbacks are temporary phenomena, and to be viewed as such. The believer does not need to depend exclusively on internal psychological conviction because such convictions are variable—the truth is objectively in the midst of the immediacy of fear and such truth is not contingent on our experience. Yet fear is not condemned, it is real and does not attract condemnation from Hooker except insofar as it is rooted in error. Neither is it the touchstone of one’s deliverance. Fear is neither good nor bad—the absence of fear can be as threatening as an overburden of fear—it may actually be a greater danger because it can proceed from denial of the true human situation within which God holds us accountable. In this respect, Hooker has provided a kind of deliverance from the anxious piety of Puritan insistence on assurance on the one hand, and a trivialising of human circumstances on the other where even suffering is of no account. To be sensible of fear can save a person from those actions which can push them towards divine judgment.

At its conclusion, Hooker rapidly brings the sermon to a close with a memorable line: “They who lived as sonnes, being dead are as heyers blessed. The labours which heer they did suffer are ceased, the evill they did is buried and their works of righteousnesse follow them ...”⁴⁴ as one might say, works whose significance only becomes evident at the parousia.

Fragment 3: Proverbs 3:9-10

Honour the Lord with thy substance ...

One of the features of Richard Hooker’s writing is the manner in which he is often on the alert for internal paradox in a text or topic that presents itself. A typical preacher! Things are never

⁴³ “Infallibility” here in its Tudor sense means strong confidence in the Gospel not an absolute inability to err.

⁴⁴ Hooker, “Fragments,” 413:4-7.

what they appear—there is always an unexplored dimension that can shed light, be it linguistic, historical, cultural or theological. But in looking for paradox, Hooker always tries to establish coherence because while paradox hides truth behind incongruity, coherence is its unmasking and allows the paradox to be more fully enjoyed. This being so, its truth is more readily grasped and internalised. We have seen this in Hooker's discussion of fear and death, and the present fragment from the book of Proverbs also does something of this. The Proverbs fragment is obviously incomplete—Hooker introduces five points he wishes to elaborate but the fragment ends some way into the second.

Here are the five points:

1. the relationship between divine promise and our duty. That is, the obligation to honour God materially *so that* the worshipper will prosper—a very modern question!
2. does this promise apply to the individual?
3. what sort of prosperity is in view?
4. how prosperity is in view?
5. how can the benefits of divine obligation be demonstrated?

Hooker's main question is one of causality. In keeping with the outlook of Proverbs as a whole, the underlying assumptions are driven by Deuteronomic theology as suggested by Deuteronomy 28:1ff and similar. There, the causal relations of covenant obedience and reward are spelled out in detail, and also the consequences of disobedience—such relations declare that right actions produce right results, and *vice versa*. Very straightforward and generally true.⁴⁵ But first, Hooker identifies an apparent paradox. To honour God with the motive that we shall be

⁴⁵ The wisdom tradition of Israel includes, of course, Ecclesiastes and Job, where this reasoning comes in for very serious challenge. But here, we are working within the thought world of Proverbs.

materially satisfied seems base. Such a motive appears unworthy because it is driven by self-interest rather than love. Such an elementary paradox is immediately negated by Hooker. In fact, says Hooker, it is neither a paradox nor a principled way of withholding the honour due to God, but rather our necessary cares in the world which achieve this unaided. Our self-interest is rational, not reprehensible. So these words of assurance are made to imprint the idea "that we shall better this way supply our wants than any: that God will not suffer his to be the worse provided for, because they bestowe themselves in his service."⁴⁶ Once again anticipating the argument, Hooker notes the objection: what benefit is it if a person gives to God only to find it harder to meet their own wants and necessities? But yet again, the purposes of God are inherently good and however our service takes place, God intends "not to impoverish but to enrich thereby his servants. ... That God ... doth thus reward his servants, ... comes not by the worthiness of their service but from his goodness whom they serve."⁴⁷ Hooker is therefore careful not to place any hope in the question of merit. Rational self-interest does not force us to choose between the service of God and a desire to live with sufficiency.

That paradoxical questions of this sort actually exist is located in the paradoxical nature of human existence itself. The ones who bear the image of God, made little lower than the angels, are also the objects of divine wrath and mercy. Given the conditions of man's rebellion, new forces that bring coherence to our lives are now in play—indeed, they must be in play if we are to live at all. All questions of our relationship with God now must consider the force of heavenly wisdom upon the dark corners of human life. Therefore, we will always be conscious of paradox and contributes to our sense of dislocation in the world. Hooker puts it this way:

⁴⁶ Hooker, "Fragments," 414:22f.

⁴⁷ Hooker, "Fragments," 414:29-416:11.

So that we may set down as a grounded axiom that man degenerating and transgressing the duty which his nature standeth bound unto, he loseth the benefit which things in the world working according to their natures might otherwise have yeilded unto him, and now do not; God restrayning their force in such sort, that either they doe not at all or doe not so easilye answer his desires and supply the wants of his nature. That God doth ... enlarge or restraine the forces and powers of things naturall, needeth rather meditation then proof.⁴⁸

Ideally, man lives in a fashion consistent with his nature as does the entire created order. Yet that order is corrupt and this is the source of the paradox. The further tension that Hooker wants to avoid is the notion that such a paradox excludes God from the bounds of his own creation and that nature stands outside either the care or hand of God. The fragment ends with the question of particularity. That is, the fate of the individual is often contrasted with the fate of the community in Scripture. Hooker sees the problem immediately—if the general provisions of the Torah or any other precept are sufficient for the community but collapse under any given particular circumstance, “this would be but a poore comfort, a slender encouragement, and God should less respect his family which is the world then the children of men do theirs, whose care extendeth even in particular unto the meanest creatures estate that doth them service.”⁴⁹

Hooker's reply? “For this cause the spirit doth single every man out by himself, for this cause we are as it were spoken to one by one, that no man might doubt to reap the fruite of his righteous service even with his very own hands.”⁵⁰ And the obverse is also true, by which the reader is left to conclude that a different fruit is reaped from *un*righteous service.

⁴⁸ Hooker, “Fragments,” 416:19-28.

⁴⁹ Hooker, “Fragments,” 417:13-17.

⁵⁰ Hooker, “Fragments,” 417:19-22.

Conclusions

The *Fragments* disclose the same carefully constructed reasoning that we find in the *Lawes*. The sermons on Hebrews and Matthew appear to be complete by virtue of their closure and the completeness of their sermonic trajectory. Each sermon is notable, as in all Hooker's sermons, for its extensive range of Scripture quotations and allusions, presupposing congregations familiar with them and able to consider their applicability. Further, the discipline of the sermons marks them as expository and intertextual in nature because Hooker, although always ready to expand his given text into other texts, does so on the basis of *scriptura scripturam interpretatur* or *sacra scriptura sui interpretres*. If Hooker departs from his main text he still remains firmly connected, overall, to his main idea and the issues it raises for him.

With respect to those issues, the Puritan debate is always in sight, and Hooker never loses an opportunity to contrast his own understanding of a text's implications with those an imagined Puritan reading might produce. It is a common strategy for Hooker and in this respect, the *Fragments* do not disappoint. Notwithstanding, it is important to acknowledge in Hooker the trademark signs of genuine pastoral care and insight which stands as a modest corrective to the idea that Hooker is primarily a rationalist theologian. What he *does* do however, is argue that many pastoral issues originate in distorted thinking (the superior part of the soul for Hooker), that error in one's reasoning will eventually distort even good and sincere intentions—this is theology as the rational pursuit of a Christian mind, *not* devoid of the Holy Spirit but always crucially dependent on the Spirit. The Bible for Hooker, teaches theology. It enables us to distinguish good theology from bad theology, establish the language of theological discourse and, if such discourse is worthy, supplies the necessary conceptual framework by which pastoral care is lifted from much of the therapeutic subjectivism so common in modern *pastoralia*. Yet here again, to distance oneself from pastoral subjectivism does not mean a

loss of empathy or sympathy—quite the reverse, because the pastor, of all people, must see a situation in its spiritual dimensions as well its presenting pathology. Therein lie the resources of divine counsel and we the beneficiaries of Hooker's spiritual and theological gifts.

To sit among the sermons is a little like sitting in our grandparents' attic going through an old trunk and marvelling at lives and conversations opened up through letters, cards, and diaries. Viewing life through the eyes of another, seeing what was important to them and, without judgment, realising that the themes of their lives were much like our own, sifting through their joys and skirmishes, anxieties, hopes, and failures. If the sheer humanity and commonality of our lives is sometimes obscured by Hooker's rigorous reasoning in the *Lawes*, his sermons make clear that questions about living faithfully within life's contingencies were the same as ours, that pastoral wisdom is not a de-intellectualised version of theology, that the best spiritual formation begins with freedom from gross error which, it may be said, is the essence of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, "to lead us into all truth."⁵¹

⁵¹ This paper was first presented at the Richard Hooker Society conference at Trinity College, Toronto in October 2009.