

FINDING GOD IN THE DARKNESS: A FRESH LOOK AT
RICHARD HOOKER'S *A LEARNED AND COMFORTABLE
SERMON OF THE CERTAINTIE AND PERPETUITIE OF
FAITH IN THE ELECT*

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ABSTRACT. Richard Hooker's sermon *A Learned and Comfortable Sermon of the Certaintie and Perpetuitie of Faith in the Elect* appears, on the face of it, to be further evidence of his commitment to Reformed theology. History, however, tells a slightly different story as readers have debated just exactly what theological position Hooker was taking. Over the years it has attracted comment from those who have used it both to align Hooker with and to separate Hooker from the Magisterial Reformers. These debates continue. This article, however, does not pursue this particular method of engagement. Instead, through a careful reading of the text, Hooker's more complex and often startling theology is revealed—as he locates God's presence in the pivot between doubt and despair, in places where God is thought to be absent. Hooker's aim seems to be to find God in the darkness and in so doing he transcends the usual questions and debates that surround the doctrine of certainty and offers to present day readers a creative and sensitive approach to the anxiety caused by doubt.

KEY WORDS: assurance, certainty, doubt, desire, Richard Hooker

Introduction

On the face of it Richard Hooker's *Certaintie* sermon is not remarkable. The title suggests that this is simply one of many sermons preached at this time to promote a key doctrine of the Reformation period, namely assurance of faith. This belief, a key tenet of Reformed theological identity, focussed upon the individual's confidence as regards both her own salvation and the doctrines of the faith and it stood in stark contrast to what the Reformers saw as the doubt-filled hope that flowed from Roman Catholic beliefs in works and merit as the path of salvation. Woven within this doctrine was the theology of predestination, the comforting belief in election that affirmed God's gracious action as the sole cause of salvation. Such a belief, it was argued, led to the removal of anxiety and the constant unease of be-

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ing unsure as to one's own standing before God. The true Christian would have infallible certainty, a gift of God within them, intimately linked with faith and grace.

Although this belief was articulated clearly and seemingly straightforwardly, it had far-reaching pastoral implications and as such was the subject of many sermons, including ones preached by Richard Hooker. It is not surprising therefore that, as a key doctrine, Hooker's sermon has been studied by those attempting to position him theologically and the obvious assumption would be that this places him firmly within the theology of the Magisterial Reformers. Historical evidence paints a more complex picture. Walter Travers quoted from the sermon in his appeal to the Privy Council to remove Hooker (Travers, 1990: 189-210) and yet in 1612 the sermons were published to restore Hooker's Reformed theological credentials. In subsequent years it was largely overlooked but in the nineteenth century Keble, claiming Hooker for High-Church Anglicanism, engaged with it in some detail and surprisingly found reassurance in the text that Hooker had moved away from this Reformed position, although parts of it still left him a little baffled (Keble, 1888).

The end of the 20th century saw Keble's claims regarding Hooker challenged. The High Church reading of his works was rejected as a product of the Oxford Movement's ecclesial agenda and the *via media* ('middle way') title questioned and found wanting by many. In the work of scholars such as Kirby (1990) and Atkinson (1997), Hooker has been realigned with the Magisterial Reformers and even for those who wish to retain a sense of his *via media* this has been redrawn in a more nuanced and historically sensitive manner.

Although this scholarship has tended to focus upon *The Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Hooker's sermons have also played a part in the quest to 'discover the real Hooker'. Nigel Voak's work in 2003 explored the issue of certainty, assurance and epistemology and he carefully examined Hooker's sermon on *Certainitie* as part of his research. Whilst his aim was to explore wider issues, he still sought to answer the question of Hooker's theological pedigree and whilst concluding that

theologians of Hooker's eclectic nature are not simple to categorize: they do not fit easily into classificatory straitjackets. Was he, or was he not, a theologian of the reformed tradition? Hooker does not explicitly answer this question: at most he describes the Church of England as one of the 'reformed Churches' in the *Lawes*, which says nothing about the precise orientation of his own theology, and he seldom quotes from or cites Continental Reformed writers (Voak, 2003: 318).

And yet Voak goes on to say, 'Hooker, right through his life, can be identified more or less clearly with certain Reformed positions' (2003: 318).

Following on from him, two other authors have also used the sermon in detail: Corneliu Simuț (2005) and Debra Shuger (2008). For Simuț, the sermon is further proof of Hooker's Reformed credentials whilst Shuger takes a more creative ap-

proach, asserting that, whilst assurance is indeed a key part of the text, this sermon is actually dealing with theodicy, although she does comment that the text reveals Hooker had moved a little way from an orthodox Reformed position on certainty. We can see that all three take a different approach and draw diverse conclusions, reflecting the theological and hermeneutical problems that Hooker poses.

In this short essay I do not wish to enter the debate as to how Reformed Hooker is and how this sermon might help or hinder that question. In fact I want to argue that it becomes immediately obvious that, in spite of the sermon's title, this is not the 'usual' sermon supporting certainty and assurance at all. In another publication (Ashgate, forthcoming) I will argue in detail that Keble and Simuŕ read Hooker through a specific lens and thus neglect the complex and nuanced theology he produces. In a similar vein, I will examine Voak's careful reading, which moves in the right direction but I will argue that he too becomes restricted by the need to categorise Hooker. In this article, however, I want to build upon and develop Shuger's line of thinking and argue that this is a deeply pastoral sermon with a radical theological edge. As Christians today we may no longer be asking the same type of questions or addressing the same issues as Hooker's congregation did: we rarely hear a sermon outlining the Golden Chain of salvation for example, and even less the 'comforting' doctrine of predestination. Nevertheless, anxiety still nestles in the heart of many believers when it comes to the question of doubt and despair and this sermon supplies a creative, encouraging and even startling response as Hooker declares God's presence in the most unlikely, one could even say Godless, places. With this answer Hooker begins to emerge from the theological straitjackets he has often been placed within, and in so doing raises the question as to whether this sermon can be used at all as a means to calibrate his theology.

The Doctrine of Certainty and Assurance

We can be fairly sure that the *Certaintie* sermon was preached at some point in 1585 during Hooker's time as Master at the Temple Church. Evidence for this arises from the fact that Walter Travers cites it in 1586 as he appeals to the Privy Council for Hooker's removal from his position. From the text of the sermon it is clear that this address forms part of a series, but sadly the previous sermons are lost to us. Its title however, *A Learned and Comfortable Sermon of the Certaintie and Perpetuitie of Faith in the Elect* (Hooker, 1990) suggests that its topic will be fairly straightforward: a sermon detailing the doctrine of certainty and its links to perseverance. The *ordo salutis*—or the Golden Chain of salvation as many referred to it, was well known in Elizabethan England. Based upon Romans 8:30, 'And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified,' delivered, it was thought, assurance to the believer at each and every stage. The entire soteriological narrative begins

and ends with God, and the individual is released from the burden of proving herself as either deserving of salvation or indeed able to be saved. Wallace (2004: 44) notes, for example, that 'John Bradford, a close pupil of Bucer, had given elements of that order—election, vocation, justification, sanctification, and glorification—a very warm and personal tone as he employed them as instruments of conversion, comfort, and assurance, a use to which it was the declared intention of the reformed theologians'. Each stage in the process is evidence of God's desire and ability to save and the depth of his gracious mercy.

It must be noted that the idea of complete assurance was not something simply plucked from the air as a challenge to Roman Catholic belief, but rather it was seen as the necessary outcome of a theology that is grounded upon the gracious act of God in unconditionally electing (in Christ) those who are to enjoy salvation, in spite of their sins. This election is revealed by the effective calling of the individual who is then justified by the gift of faith, through which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to her; sanctified by the inherent working of the Holy Spirit and eventually glorified through the gift of perseverance. This so called 'Golden Chain' was expressed in diverse ways by different preachers and writers, with extras included (and sometimes sanctification omitted), but the overall result was the same: salvation was from first to last the gracious act of God, and as such once that chain had made itself known in the life of the individual there was no need for doubt or despair. As an example, Kendall (1979: 55) notes that for Perkins double predestination lay at the heart of the Golden Chain (even though this was not so for all of his contemporaries), and interestingly the title page of Perkins' work states that it is 'adjoyned to the order used by Beza in comforting afflicted consciences'. The assurance arose from the truth that what God had begun he would bring to completion and worries about not being good enough could be removed forever.

This doctrine is not, however, problem free. It may be logical and objective but it fails in its entirety if the believer has any doubts as to her particular status. Once certain that she is one of the elect, the mechanism rolls into action and assurance flows. However, if the question is, 'how can I know (be certain, be assured) that *I am* one of the elect?' then simply citing the 'Golden Chain' and God's graciousness fails to provide an answer. There had to be ways of knowing, and this became the greatest pastoral question of the sixteenth century.¹

Various answers were provided by preachers and theologians, and one of the most popular was that of self-examination. In effect, this was to begin in the mid-

1 Lake points out that although predestination provided 'objective roots for the divide between the godly and the wicked' it was also inherently ambiguous as 'only God knew the identity of his elect'. It would be presumptuous to second-guess God and yet there was the need to internalise the doctrinal truths and be confident as part of faith. It is this link between the objective and subjective that became the pressing task of the preacher (Lake, 1988: 151-155).

dle of the chain and work backwards. Individuals were encouraged to sift their lives and look for evidence of the Spirit's work that is the process of sanctification. 'To an extent external conduct could be a guide' (Lake, 1988: 134). The fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace and so on, as well as acts of kindness and a pure life, were themselves signs that the Holy Spirit was at work in the individual's life. This in turn was evidence of justification, which revealed an effective call and election. Wallace (2004: 51) quotes from John Downname's declaration in his 1604 publication *The Christian Warfare*:

'And therefore if we would have any true assurance of our election, we must examine our selves whether we be sanctified' by looking for fruits of such sanctification—holiness of life. If the fruits of holiness are present, 'we may undoubtedly conclude that we are justified, called elected'.

It is not difficult to see that such a sifting is fraught with problems. Sensitive souls would find it difficult to decide if their life was changed enough or holy enough to lead to the conclusion of election and at the other extreme the possibility of pride and a severe judgment of others became a distinct possibility. Coolidge eloquently describes the practice of self-scrutiny as 'like straining every nerve in an effort to relax' (1970: 132) and John Stachniewski (1991) has examined the psychological and social effects of predestination and the doctrine of assurance in detail, on the basis that the crucial question of how people lived with these ideas is worthy of study. He quotes Blair Worden, that 'we err if we neglect the darkness of Puritanism, at least in its seventeenth century form. The volume of despair engendered by Puritan teaching on predestination is incalculable' (1991: 1).

Beyond the practice of searching for changes in one's life, other discussions arose as to the nature of certainty. For Tyndale, it amounted to 'feeling faith' where the believer did not just trust another's word but also, as with any other sense perception, experienced directly the assurance of being God's elect through the conviction given by the Holy Spirit (Shuger, 2008: 224). 'Faith is not a matter of trusting a historical report but of felt experience, with all the clarity of direct physical sensation' (Shuger, 2008: 224).² This was not everyone's view and many writers stressed not conviction but knowledge, 'less a matter of feeling certain than *being* certain' (Shuger, 2008: 224). This knowledge was gained not through the workings of reason but, as Calvin asserts, by 'the enlightening of the holy Ghost' (Shuger, 2008: 225). The Lambeth articles described it as '(t)he true believer, i.e. one who possesses justifying faith, is certain by the full assurance of faith of the forgiveness of his sins and of eternal salvation through Christ' (Shuger, 2008: 226).

2 But note that although Shuger highlights Tyndale's emphasis upon felt faith, as Wallace points out he also thought there was other evidence, namely the holiness of life of the believer (Wallace, 2004: 11).

This was not a feeling but rather, as Bucer said, certain knowledge, engraved upon the believer's heart. In practice it may difficult to see how this differed from Tyndale's 'feeling faith' as certainty implies a conviction that manifests itself in a feeling, even if the source of the confidence is not the emotion itself.

Faith was, in the words of Calvin, 'sure and firm' in order to express a more solid constancy of persuasion:

For, as faith is not content with a doubtful and changeable opinion, so it is not content with an obscure and confused conception; but requires full and fixed certainty such as men are wont to have from things experienced and proved (1960: I.560).

Whereas it had once been said that assurance followed faith, the two were now so entwined that faith became in itself a certainty and assurance, not just concerning the articles of faith but of the believer's own status before God. Such a doctrine was a minefield. How certain did faith have to be? Did the believer have to be without doubt either as to the specific doctrines taught, the promises of God and their own election? The problem became even more acute when the possibility of temporary faith was introduced into the discussion.

The question of whether faith could be lost, or whether there was in fact the possibility of faith appearing to be true but in reality being a sham, was one that caused significant problems and engendered complex discussions. How did the falling away of some believers square with the promise that what God had begun he would bring to completion: that is, the gift of perseverance to the elect? In one way the answer was simple: by falling away those individuals showed themselves not to be one of the elect and thus not recipients of the gift of perseverance. But what about the fact that, until then, their lives had seemed no different to the Christians around them? As Lake points out, there was a real tension here as both the reprobate and the elect, from the outside at least, often looked alike (1988: 135). Lake enlarges this point in chapter seven, outlining the contradictions and tensions implicit in a view that tried to incorporate the division between the godly and the ungodly; the potentially temporary nature of that division (perseverance may not be given, whilst death bed repentance was always a possibility); the possibility of similar if not identical outward actions and lives and the difficulty of judging inner motivation. He argues that once the differing interpretations of suffering as either a test of the elect or the punishment of the damned is added into the mix and likewise prosperity as either a blessing of the elect or a false assurance to the damned, the tension is palpable.

Calvin was aware of many of these problems, and realised that the doctrine of assurance may, if applied in a certain way, simply give the believer confidence for today but barely beneath the surface was a constant anxiety about tomorrow. Kendall has argued that the doctrine of temporary faith 'poses the chief pastoral problem in Calvin's theology' (1979: 22). Calvin's response to the issue is typically strident:

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Thus, they say that even though according to our present state of righteousness we can judge concerning our possession of the grace of God, the knowledge of final perseverance remains in suspense. A fine confidence of salvation is left to us, if by moral conjecture we judge that at the present moment we are in grace, but we know not what will become of us tomorrow (1960: I.587).

His answer to the problem is to quote Romans 8:38-39, namely that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ and that this assurance was not a special one given to the apostle, but is for all believers. Such an assertion, however, seems to beg the question, especially when Calvin's views regarding temporary faith are taken into account.

Calvin simply denied that temporary faith was true faith, and argued that it only resembled it from the outside:

I know that to attribute faith to the reprobate seems hard to some, when Paul declares it the result of election... Yet this difficulty is easily solved. For though only those predestined to salvation receive the light of faith and truly feel the power of the gospel, yet experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected by almost the same feeling as the elect, so that even in their own judgment they do not in any way differ from the elect... Therefore it is not at all absurd that the apostle should attribute to them a taste of the heavenly gifts- and Christ, faith for a time... not because they firmly grasp the force of spiritual grace and the sure light of faith, but because the Lord to render them more convicted and inexcusable, steals into their minds to th extent that his goodness may be tasted without the Spirit of adoption (1960: I.555).

The passage is fraught with theological problems, for at times it seems that Calvin agrees that the faith held by the non-elect may well be true faith ('faith for a time') and yet he also stresses that such a faith only resembles true faith, with his stress upon 'almost'. It is this resemblance that Calvin takes forward, showing that a more detailed consideration will reveal the differences between the reprobate and the elect. The former will only ever exhibit 'a confused awareness of grace' whereas in the elect 'the Spirit, strictly speaking, seals forgiveness of sins in the elect alone, so that they apply it by special faith to their own use.' But Calvin's confusion continues. He asserts that those who are reprobate appear to begin the faith journey, even to the extent of 'receiving the gift of reconciliation, although confusedly' and their minds are illumined by God 'enough for them to recognise his grace' (1960: I.555). However, they never 'attain the full effect and fruition thereof' (1960: I.555). This is surely no more than simply stating that time will tell, perhaps confirmed by Calvin's closing line in the section, 'Only his elect does he account worthy of receiving the living root of faith so that he may endure to the end' (1960: I.555).

As Shuger comments:

(t)his distinction between temporary and saving faith took deep root in English Calvinism. William Perkins, the pre-eminent Calvinist theologian of Hooker's generation, thus divided reprobates into those not-called and those granted the temporary faith of an ineffectual calling (2008: 227).

It would seem reasonable, therefore, to suppose that Hooker's sermon will address these very matters and that it will seek to give comfort, to reassure his hearers that certainty is obtainable, that perseverance is a gift that is available and that the elect can rest assured in their standing with God and their eventual glorification.

The problem, however, is that this is not quite what is delivered.

The *Certaintie* Sermon

The first sign that this is not to be a sermon on the 'usual' lines surely lies in Hooker's choice of text: Habbakuk 1:4, 'So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous—therefore judgment comes forth perverted.' Arriving at church on Sunday morning and hearing this text read would not immediately bring to mind the question of certainty and assurance. But for Hooker, Habbakuk's musings are of paramount importance. Habbakuk has cried out to God, asking how long his plea will be ignored. He has pointed to violence, wrongdoing, trouble and destruction and God has not responded in word or action. Instead, the wicked prosper and surround the righteous. The law becomes ineffective, and justice fails. Or at least that is how Habbakuk sees the situation. Evil is overcoming good and God is silent and inactive in the face of it all.

The situation that brings this about is not, at least initially, Hooker's concern. What is, is Habbakuk's challenging of God, through his questioning of the law. This is the crucial question for Hooker, 'Whether the prophet Abacuk by admitting this cogitation into his mind, the law doth fail did thereby shew himself an unbeliever?' (1990: 69). Here, we see the seed of the sermon title beginning to flourish: is all doubt evidence of unbelief? When is faith not faith? How can I know I am one of the elect when my life is so full of doubt and uncertainty? When I look around me at the world and I despair of God, I despair of my faith—is that a sign that I am not really a Christian?

These questions are pertinent because, in spite of the intention, the doctrine of certainty had not delivered the assurance and comfort that was expected and desired. It may have been the theological outcome of a belief in God's unconditional mercy towards those He had chosen but as we noted, it fails in its entirety if the believer has any doubts as to her particular status.

The main thrust of first section of the sermon is actually to disarm doubt, to rob it of its power to produce despair and anxiety. There is not sufficient space in this article to deal with Hooker's creative arguments regarding doubt in any detail, but in essence he asserts that for human beings no form of knowledge is ever full and complete and as such doubt is a natural part of life and faith. This is not

simply because of the effect of sin and imperfection but also because of the way reason works. In fact, Hooker goes further and claims that a Christian could never have a perfect faith and that to claim that faith could be perfect is actually to imply that all virtues could be faultless, and then ‘what need wee the righteousness of Christ?’ (1990: 71). Such a belief, he argues, is actually against the life of faith, rather than a part of it, and robs the Christian of ‘the comfortable support of that weaknes which in deed they have’ (1990: 71-72).

Hooker is at pains to stress that doubt is no match for God. In fact, doubt not only proves our need for him but it also assures us of God’s action and presence. Doubt reveals our need for God and allows Him to work in and through us. Already we begin to see the skill of Hooker’s argument: doubt itself, as revealing our weakness, becomes an assurance of God’s strength. But Hooker goes further than this. He will develop this idea of God as present in the places and experiences that at first sight we consider Godless and as he does so he offers a concept of assurance that transcends the usual categories and understandings. The presence of God who is truth and goodness is present where we assume He is absent, and it is this truth that will light the remainder of the sermon.

Finding God in the Darkness

It is in the final section of this sermon that Hooker’s complex and creative theology really emerges. He has previously underlined why we doubt (because our knowledge can never be full) and has shown God’s light shining in that particular darkness before he turns to the main focus of this sermon—how can we know when doubt is a part of faith and when it is a sign of lack of faith? Earlier in the sermon Hooker had alluded to sanctification and the changes that occur in the life of the Christian. In an arresting statement he declared to his congregation that sanctifying faith cannot fail. ‘It did not in the prophet, it shall not in you’ (1990: 73) and here he would seem to be in line with the orthodox doctrine we encountered earlier. How he develops this concept is not all expected as he differentiates between the two types of doubt not through conduct, or feelings, but in the presence of desire. This desire is not the same as the one Hooker described in his sermon on *Jude*, where desire is shown through delight in God and his ways, but rather this desire hides amongst despair and unbelief, in the very darkest corners of an individual’s life—a seemingly Godless place. He asks the question that is central to the discussion: how do we know we are born of God? How do we know that we are true believers? *We know because we desire to believe*. Hooker does not produce a checklist of doctrinal affirmations, such as the thirty-nine articles and nor does he point to conduct. Instead he points to desire, a sensuous word that suggests more than mere emotion and more than an intellectual yearning. And even more arresting is that this desire is not a joyous longing but is shown in gut-wrenching grief. It is this desire that reveals a secret love for that which we desire, and desire

in turn proves belief. We will now look at how Hooker arrives at this startling conclusion.

Hooker begins this final section of the sermon by outlining a scenario and in doing so shows his own pastoral experience, aware of the concerns and thought processes that anxious Christians have shared with him. When people wish to be sure of their standing before God, he says, they search their hearts for faith and then despair because they fail to discover it there. Hooker's phrase is that they 'find not themselves in themselves' (1990: 74).³ But, he says, the truth is that they fail to find that which is actually there. 'For that which dweleth in their hartes they seeke, they make very diligent search and inquire, it abideth it speaketh it worketh in them, yeat still they aske where, still they lament as for a thing which is past finding' (1990: 74). As a result of their inner searching they conclude that they do not have faith and as such they despair. He imagines them saying, 'I have thorowly considered and exquisitely sifted all the corners of my hart, and I see what there is, never seek to perswade me against my knowledge, I know I do not believe' (1990: 76).

And what leads them here? Hooker begins by showing his own down-to-earth spirituality as he suggests that the person may be ill, and if so that will pass, '(w)hich in some I graunt is but a melingcholie passion proceeding only from that dejection of minde the cause whereof is in the body and by bodily meanes maie be taken away' (1990: 74). But it may be more serious than this and then we must look for why and how this conclusion is reached. 'But where there is no such bodily cause the mind is not lightly in this moode' (1990: 74) and Hooker gives three explanations as to why this is.

Firstly, those who despair have often compared themselves with others and find themselves wanting or else they look back at their lives and see that they have not grown in faith but rather are weaker and less sure than they were. '(J)udging by comparison ether with other men or with them selves at some other time more strong they thinke imperfection to be a plain deprivation, weaknes to be utter want of faith' (1990: 74).

The second reason for concluding a lack of faith is because the individual does not feel joyful. Here Hooker sets out his beliefs about emotions and it is clear that he does believe that feelings have a place in the life of the Christian but their presence or absence does not indicate the existence of faith. The mistake is to collapse joy into faith. '(A)n error groweth when men in heaviness of spirit suppose they lack fayth because they find not the sugred joy and delight which in deed doth accompany fayth but as a separable accident, a thing that may be removed from it' (1990: 75). This expectation of constant joy is not just unreal but such a state would, in fact, prevent the believer from ever appreciating the beauty of joy and

3 This is an interesting comment: does Hooker understand salvation as the place where we find who we truly are? To be truly human is to participate in God.

delight. Hooker believes that times of darkness and difficulty can, in fact, deepen and nourish the Christian journey, acting as a contrast to the good times so that the latter are appreciated but also preventing presumption and shallowness and enabling the growth of humility. Hooker does not just tell his hearers to battle through the difficult times, he actually urges them to discover and experience God in the darkness. 'No, god wyll have they that shall walke in light to feel now and then what is to sit in shadow of death. A greeved spirit therefore is no argument of a faithles mind' (1990: 75).

Thirdly, the Christian considers his inner life, the temptations he feels and entertains, and believes that this is evidence of faithlessness. '(T)hey fasten their cogitations upon the distrustful suggestions of the flesh whereof finding great abundance in them selves they gather thereby, Surely unbelefe hath full dominion' (1990: 75). Hooker replies that the life of faith is not overwhelmed by such things and that God hears the spirit groaning in the midst of it all. '(O)ur *spirit groneth* and that god heareth it when wee do not' (1990: 75).

However, Hooker knows that such arguments do not always reassure people. He gives reasons as to why all of this is not enough but he also knows that to just push their decision aside is insufficient. So, he proceeds by accepting them at their word, 'favour them a little in their weaknes, let the thing be graunted which they do imagine' (1990: 76). He allows that they do not believe and one could assume that this is the end of the argument but far from it. Instead, Hooker turns his attention upon the grief of those who assert their unbelief; he notes their lamenting. Here is a place of loss and nothingness, of lack of faith and the darkness of despair, but for Hooker it is the very place where God's presence is revealed and the key is in the desire that lurks within lament. 'Do they not wish it might and also strive that it may be otherwise?' (1990: 76). The mourning, the terrible grief at the lack of faith shows a desire to believe, a desire for the situation to be other than it is, and Hooker sees this desire as the very place of life and hope. This desire for belief reveals the existence of belief, 'by desiring to belev they prove them selves to be true belevvers' (1990: 76).

How can and does this radical claim make sense? Because desire is born from a secret love.

Whenc cometh this but from a secret love and liking which they have of those thinges that are believed? 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 belev they prove them selves to be true believers. For without faith no man thinketh that thinges believed are (1990: 76).

Hooker's logic is that we wouldn't desire that which we did not love or like. And we would not love that which we knew for a fact did not exist. Belief in existence is a prerequisite of love and this leads to the conclusion that belief is shown by the desire to believe, and this desire is in turn shown in true grief for the loss of belief.

This is more than just a clever argument. Hooker is dispelling the illusion that covers certainty and doubt. Earlier on in the sermon he has pointed to our love for God, our cleaving to him, as a response to His imprint within us (1990: 71). Desire then, born of love, not only points to evidence of our belief in the existence of God as an intellectual assent, but as evidence of our apprehension of God. I think Simuț misunderstands Hooker here for he believes Hooker is arguing that ‘lack of faith proves the non-existence of spiritual things’ (2005: 148). This is not the thrust of Hooker’s argument. Firstly, he is showing that desire reveals a belief in the existence of God. Hooker is not saying that we can ever be certain that God does exist, or that an intellectual belief in existence is the proof thereof. That is clearly unappreciable. But he is saying that despair is not a sign of unbelief.

He then takes a step further and reveals the interweaving of intellect and affections as he speaks of desire as flowing from a ‘secret love’, and love for God is always for Hooker a response to God’s love, apprehended by and in the heart. It may be worth a moment here to reflect upon Simuț’s response to this as he appears to make distinctions and creates polarities that Hooker does not. Simuț distinguishes between faith and love, saying that Hooker’s argument here is faulty, ‘(t)he flaw of Hooker’s argument is the connection between the supposed love for spiritual things, and the actual or real existence of spiritual things’ (2005: 149). He thinks there is a ‘faulty connection’ here as faith ‘should necessarily be manifested by love, but there is not an actual guarantee that love necessarily be manifested by faith’ (2005: 149). Simuț somehow moves on from this to say that Hooker was a forerunner of Rahner and believed in ‘anonymous Christians’, as from his argument it is possible for an individual to have faith and be a Christian without being aware of it. How Simuț arrives at this conclusion is unclear and outside the parameters of this article but what is relevant is that he is using the two realms theory (a crucial factor in his argument for Hooker as a Reformed theologian) and finding that Hooker does not fit. Hooker, he says, tries to link intellectual assent and trust through love, ‘as an inherent element of human nature, which is obviously part of the natural realm’ (2005: 151). If he had used the Holy Spirit ‘as part of the spiritual realm’ (2005: 151) that would have been better and ‘would have kept the consistency of Hooker’s argument’ (2005: 151). In a telling phrase Simuț writes ‘If love were actually worked out by the Holy Spirit, Hooker’s conclusion regarding the subsequent existence of faith would have been *theologically sound* because he would have considered an element of the spiritual realm such as faith as being from the Spirit’ (2005: 150, italics mine). Like many before him Simuț has discovered that Hooker, at the last hurdle, simply refuses to toe the line. The truth is that Hooker did not divide the world, or love and faith, into these categories and that is why the theory will not work.

We must remember that the sermon is not an apologetic work, proving the existence of God from human understanding or affection, in a sense God’s existence is a given. This is a sermon to bring hope to Christians whose love for God, a re-

sponse to God's love for them, is right there before their eyes. This is not about faith proving God's existence but about desire revealing faith, even when it is clothed in unbelief. And faith is the presence of God in the life of the individual.

We see here that the very foundation of Hooker's argument is a belief in the goodness and love of God that hides amongst the darkness of doubt and despair. Such a belief does not deliver certainty, but it does deliver hope and trust based upon God's character and actions. There is little wonder that Hooker ends his sermon with the words of Romans 8, exclaiming that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Hooker, 1990: 82). Hooker has shown that to be the truth—for not even doubt and despair part us from God's love.

But there is still something left to say, for Hooker does not think that the Christian is merely passive in all this. If doubt and despair are like a sickness, then Hooker has a remedy and that is to engage the memory. The devil makes us forget, 'taketh all remembrance from them' (1990: 78) and we must not let this happen. In passages reminiscent of Augustine, Hooker sees the memory as the treasure house, able to sustain and strengthen us through times of poverty and famine. But this is purely because God is constant. His truth and goodness yesterday are promises of his truth and goodness today and in the future.

Sir, yow must learn to strengthen youre faith by that experience which heretofoe yow have had of goddess greate goodness towards yow... When yow doubt what yow shall have, search what yow have had at godes handes, make this reckninge that the bemfites which he haith bestowed ar bills obligatory and sufficient surties for that which he will bestow further, his present mercy is still a warrant for his future love (1990: 79).

It is interesting to note in this text that there is no hint here of God calling, illumining and then withdrawing, as in Calvin. If we believe God is love then He is constant love and this is what we can be assured of. Even though we forget and doubt, due to sin, the devil, and weakness (1990: 80) God is greater than all these things and his presence in our lives through faith, however weak, is still strong because it is the very love and goodness of God.

Consequently, Hooker urges his hearers to participate in this great action of God through remembering and there are echoes here of Eucharistic theology and liturgy. As the story of Jesus' last supper is retold in the Communion service the communicants are caught up in the act of remembering his life, death and resurrection in a way that makes the 'story' present *in* the present. In the same way Hooker urges his hearers to remember God's great acts of love and goodness to them in the past so that his presence will be made present to them now. The remembrances are an assurance of God's future goodness and in so doing they 'make' God present at this moment. In the same way, the Eucharist is the place where we seek and desire God and where He may seem to be absent, and only the elements are present. This, in one sense, is the very epitome of absence at the place of desire, and yet the Church teaches that it is the place where God is most

present. Similarly, Hooker has revealed God to be present just where he may be thought to be absent—in the darkness of doubt, despair and anxiety, in unbelief itself and at the place where desire is illuminated against this shadowy backdrop.

Locating God in the darkness reminds us of Shuger's belief that the *Certainitie* sermon is in fact dealing with theodicy (2008). Hooker is wrestling with how Christians can hold on to a God who is both love and goodness in the face of life-experiences that seem to deny that truth. What Shuger's argument does illuminate is that Hooker's concern is not about the certainty of knowing we are saved (we cannot ever be sure) but rather whether we can ever be assured of God's character as good, loving and just. The difference may seem small but it is crucial for the effect is to turn the spotlight away from the individual and onto God. As he does, the hearer is drawn into the world of hope where God shows His nature through His sharing of His very life with His people. Hooker's answer does not alleviate all doubts and concerns and neither does it pretend that there is not serious evidence to the contrary but these factors are forced into the shadows as the light of Hooker's God slowly emerges as the sermon progresses.

It is this change in focus that is crucial and that leads to Hooker's theology being difficult to categorise. He appears not to be answering, or even asking, the usual questions. Instead, he is turning the spotlight onto God and asking his hearers to turn their faces towards the light. This is the source of Travers problems as he sought to distil Hooker's theology from sermons that simply did not answer the questions Travers was posing.

In the closing paragraph Hooker builds his argument to a crescendo, leading his hearers to the very love and kindness of God as the source of assurance.

The earth may shake, the pillers of the world may tremble underusse, the countenance of the heaven may be appald, the sonn may losse his lyght, the mone hir bewtie, the stares there glorie. But concerning the man that trusteth in god, if the fier have proclamed it selfe unable as much to singe a heare of his heade, if lions if beastes be ravenous by nature and kene with hunger being set to devower, have as it were religiously adored the very flesh of the faithfull man, what is there in the world that shall change his hart overthro his faith alter his affection towards god or the affection of god to him? (1990: 81).

Conclusion

It is clear from this brief engagement with Hooker's sermon that he points not to intellectual assent to doctrine, nor emotion nor a changed life as the source of our certainty and assurance, but rather to the awe-inspiring, mercy-laden love and kindness of God. We can know this, he argues, even in (perhaps especially in) times of darkness, doubt and despair, because our grief illumines God's presence within us—a desire born of God's life already active and present. Remembering, tasting God's goodness is a requisite and especially so in the community of God's family, and it is this that leads us beyond emotion and reason, both of which are

present and necessary in the life of the Christian. Our lives will change and develop, and this encourages us but the source of our assurance is not, ultimately, in such evidence. God's kindness has been shared with us and our 'knowledge' of this empowers and enlightens us through the dark times, revealing God's presence with us as we actively share His life. In the light of this we can understand Hooker's final words:

I have a sheperd full of kindness full of care and full of power: unto him I commit my self; his owne finger haith ingravened this sentense in the tables of my hart,⁴ *Satan haith desired to winnow the as wheate, butt I have praied that thy faith faile not.* Therfor 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 (1990: 82).

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4 Surely another allusion to the Eucharist, the table of the Lord.

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