- Chapter 3 -

"Special Equity" and the particular

In his Preface to *Laws*, Hooker unmasks how the habits of thought nourished by his opponents function in service of their project of wresting ecclesial power from the Elizabethan conformists. Their ideology is justified by timeless truths discovered in both Scripture and the early church fathers. The task of this chapter is to appropriate Hooker's extensive critique of their universal claims. I can summarize that critique by simply alluding to the Wellsian distinction beween universal and ecclesial ethicists. In short, Hooker would agree with Wells and Quash that "the particular information, which universal ethics shuns... makes ethics comprehensible."[202]

To demonstrate this claim, I will dig into Hooker's unmasking of his opponents' ideology with the hope of understanding more clearly why universal ethics are problematic. First, I will comment briefly on his rhetorical and polemical method. Next, I will examine the concepts and methods of a subset of his opponents whom I dub the Ramist realists. My claim is not that Hooker's opponents were all Ramist realists, but that Ramist realism was a rising ideology gaining traction among opponents and colleagues alike during the 1590s. I'll then contrast them with Hooker by briefly commenting on his critique of their view of Scripture in general, and then by digging deeply into his critique of their ethical reasoning. Finally, I will thicken the Hookerian account by offering both philosophical and theological critiques of Ramist realism, holding it in conversation with Barth's doctrine of election.

Unmasking ideology

As noted in chapter one, Hooker scholars have long noted his polemical tone, and Hooker scholarship in recent decades has increasingly characterized Hooker as a Reformed polemicist in substantial continuity with the magisterial reformers. By my reading, Hooker engaged much of his career in an intramural theopolitical struggle

202. Wells and Quash, *Introducing Christian Ethics*, 192.

between Geneva-inspired English divines advocating presbyterian reforms and doctrinally similar colleagues advocating conformity with the Elizabethan Settlement. Renaissance scholars Debora Shuger and Arthur Ferguson sharpen our understanding of Hooker's purpose,[203] helping us to see that *Laws* was not mere polemic in support of those espousing support of the Elizabethan settlement.[204] To the contrary, *Laws* is an artful effort to unmask and debunk a rising ideology, nourished by Ramist commitments and infecting opponents and colleagues alike, which justified radical reform by denying England's "history of... legitimate discernment" and "mak[ing] the Bible a timeless absolute."[205]

Hooker signals this in his Preface to *Laws*. "The common sort" are not moved to favor his opponents' proposals by "the force of particular reasons," for "the multitude never did nor could so consider [particular reasons] as to be therewith wholly carried."[206] Rather,

> ... certain general inducements are used to make salable your cause in gross, and when once men have cast a fancy towards it, any slight declaration of specialities will serve to lead forward inclinable and prepared minds.[207]

Presbyterian propaganda seeks its ends through six steps. First, his opponents rip the current ecclesial leadership "with marvelous exceeding severity and sharpness of reproof,"[208] casting themselves typologically as heirs of the Old Testament prophets. Second, they "impute all faults and corruptions wherewith the world abounds" to the Elizabethan settlement.[209] Third, they "propose their own form of church government as the only sovereign remedy of all evils, and... adorn it with all the glorious titles that

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203. Arthur B. Ferguson, *Clio Unbound: Perception of the Social and Cultural Past in Renaissance England*, Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, vol. 2 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979), 207-224; Shuger, *Habits of Thought*, 26-30.
204. Conformists may have successfully routed English presbyterians politically by the early 1590s, rendering the possibility of further reforms unlikely in the short term. My suggestion is that Hooker recognized that, by 1592, the ideology was suppressed but not eradicated, and therefore his treatise is less an attack on their proposals for reform and more an attack on the ideology underlying their proposals for reform.
205. Rowan Williams, "Forward," in *A Companion to Richard Hooker*, ed. W.J. Torrance Kirby, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008), xxi.
206. *Laws*.Preface.3.5;I.15.6-9.
207. *Laws*.Preface.3.5;I.15.9-12.
208. *Laws*.Preface.3.6;I.15.15-16.
209. *Laws*.Preface.3.7;I.15.20-21.

may be."[210] Fourth, they:

> ... fashion[ ] the very notions and conceits of men's minds in such sort that when they read the Scripture, they may think that every thing sounds toward the advancement of [presbyterianism], and to the utter disgrace of the contrary.[211]

Because "their minds are forestalled and their conceits perverted beforehand,"[212] the uninformed are persuaded that the orders of "pastors, elders, doctors, and deacons"[213] are seen clearly in Zion and Jerusalem while all other forms of governance are to be associated with Samaria and Babylon.[214] Fifth,

> From hence they proceed to a higher point, which is the persuading of men credulous and over capable of such pleasing errors, that it is the special illumination of the holy Ghost whereby they discern those things in the word, which others reading yet discern them not.[215]

Hooker continues, describing how the sixth step in presbyterian propaganda generates division:

> After that the fancy of the common sort hath once thoroughly apprehended the Spirit to be author of their persuasion concerning [the presbyterian proposals], then is instilled into their hearts that the same Spirit leading men into this opinion doth hereby seal them to be God's children, and that, as the state of the times now standeth, the most special token to know them that are God's own from others is an earnest affection that way. This hath bred high terms of separation between such and the rest of the world, whereby the one sort are named The Brethren, the godly, and so forth, the other worldlings, timeservers, pleasers of men not of God, with such like.[216]

The final step is to teach the credulous to be impervious to the logic of their dissenting neighbors:

> But be they women or be they men, if once they have tasted of that cup, let any man of contrary opinion open his mouth to persuade them, they close up their ears, his reasons they weight not, all is answered with rehearsal of the words of John, "We are of God; he that knows God, hears us; as for the rest, you are of the world, for this world's pomp and vanity it is that you speak, and the world whose you are hears you.[217]

We don't have to speculate about why Hooker wrote *Laws* because he tells us in his Preface. Hooker's masterpiece is an artful effort to unmask and discredit an

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210. *Laws*.Preface.3.8;I.16.2-4.
211. *Laws*.Preface.3.9;I.16.9-12.
212. *Laws*.Preface.3.9;I.16.28.
213. *Laws*.Preface.3.9;I.17.2.
214. *Laws*.Preface.3.9;I.17.1-5.
215. *Laws*.Preface.3.10;I.17.10-14.
216. *Laws*.Preface.3.10;I.18.8-17.
217. *Laws*.Preface.3.10;I.19.22-27.

ideology that fueled discontent within the Elizabethan Church. Hooker is less clear in identifying his interlocutors, but he does name some of them. The most obvious of these are the allies of his old opponent from the Admonition Controvery of the 1580s, Thomas Cartwright, whom he regularly quotes. By extension, we might say that Hooker's interlocutors included all those who continued to resist the Elizabethan Settlement. By my reading, Hooker also understood himself to be in conversation with presbyterian opponents and conformist allies alike, both of whom were exposed to an ideology emanating from a prolific circle of Cambridge divines, the Ramist realists. To that group and their ideology, I now turn.

The Ramist Realists

The task of this section is to bring into view contrasting assumptions about how we recognize the good. A bringing-into-view is necessary because our assumptions about how we recognize the good entail prior philosophical and anthropological commitments that function as givens in our ethical reasoning. By examining key sub-surface commitments of one subset of Hooker's opponents, 'givens' that are prior to their surface-level disagreements over scriptural hermeneutics, Hooker's own philosophical and anthropological commitments will be seen in sharp relief. The task of the next section will then be to follow the contrast, drawing out the implications of these presuppositions for the way we understand both the authority and the art of reading Scripture.

The contrast I want to draw is with an outlook I shall denote as *Ramist realism*. While I shall point to an actual group who manifested this outlook in Hooker's time, my focus is on the present. I also deploy Ramist realism as a type, a recognizable habit of thought with a capacious tradition within Western Christianity. I take Barth's distinction between biblical and biblicist thinking to be referring to this outlook,[218] and, similarly, I take Stanley Hauerwas to have this outlook in view in his critique of

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218. See Karl Barth, *Karl Barth's Table Talk*, ed. John D. Godsey, Scottish Journal of Theology, vol. Occasional Papers (10) (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963). *CD*/IV.1.§§60.1.

literalism in his *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible From Captivity to America*.[219] While I don't believe that contemporary biblicists are conscious of an inheritance from Ramist realism, reflection on the premises of Ramist realism does, I believe, enable us to understand these habits of thought helpfully, and thereby helps us to see Hooker's contrasting commitments more clearly.

Ramist realism denotes habits of thought which presuppose the possibility of *objective* knowledge of the good through the application of logic to Scripture. Christian ethics are biblical ethics in the sense that Scripture is seen as the singularly valid source of authority from which universal axioms can be mined. We discern the good through systematic exegesis of a particular kind. Such exegesis avoids the perils of human subjectivity.

The contrast I want to draw, however, requires deeper excavation of the premises underlying such thinking. To do that, I will draw upon historians' accounts of Hooker's colleagues who practiced and cultivated the Ramist realism perspective at Cambridge during the period in which Hooker penned his masterpiece. My method is to highlight some key underlying premises of Ramist realism and then to show how and why Hooker explicitly refuted those premises. The result, I trust, will be a more nuanced view of Hooker.

While Hooker mentions this group polemically in *Laws*, the scholarship on the influence of Ramism in English Puritanism is sparse.[220] Peter Lake provides valuable insight into its practice through his ground-breaking studies of the puritanism of Laurence Chaderton, Edward Daring, Thomas Cartwright, William Whitaker, and William Bradshaw, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church*.[221] John Morgan similarly documents the embrace of Ramism by Cambridge Calvinists in his *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes Towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560-1640*,[222] noting

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219. Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible From Captivity to America* (Abingdon Press, 1993-10-01).
220. Neelands hints at this influence, noting that "Calvin, who followed the Reformers of the Rhineland in explaining the sense of the sanctification wrought in the person by grace, was chiefly influenced by the new logic of Ramus, which Hooker criticized." Neelands, "The Theology of Grace of Richard Hooker," 328.
221. Lake, *Moderate Puritans*.
222. John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes Towards Reason, Learning and Education,*

that "Dudley Fenner, in England, made Ramism the cornerstone of much (but certainly not all) future puritan thought by the extremely significant step of changing Ramus' examples from classical to scriptural texts."[223] Both of these engage positively the 1980 PhD dissertation of Donald McKim, *Ramism in William Perkins*.[224] McKim documented the use of Ramist methodology by a wide variety of English Calvinists as part of his project of demonstrating the influence of Ramism in Puritan thought. The most prominent of these was the subject of his study, William Perkins. A highly influential scholar and contemporary of Hooker's, William Perkins' Ramist realism provides a stark contrast to the Hookerian account of Christian formation developed in this study.[225]

Both McKim and Lake describe Perkins as a 'moderate' Puritan who did not advocate the presbyterian form of government. A contemporary of Hooker's, Perkins is of interest in the current study because his legacy stretches from his late sixteenth century work as a prominent professor at Christ College Cambridge to the seventeenth century work of John Milton.[226] Perkins "fostered... the Puritan plain style method of preaching" that was a presenting issue in Hooker's treatise, developed the form of Biblical exegesis that came to be seen as the Puritan alternative to "the methods of continental Protestant scholastics," and, most importantly, taught that Ramism "provided... a secure philosophical and epistemological basis for the belief

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1560-1640 (Cambridge University Press, 1988-04-29), 106-112.

223. Ibid., 109.

224. Donald K. McKim, "Ramism in William Perkins" (PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1980). See also Donald K. McKim, "The Functions of Ramism in William Perkins' Theology," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 16, No. 4, (Winter 1985): 503-517.

225. By inventing the term, Ramist realism, I am not taking a position in historical debates about any of the figures mentioned or on the extent or influence of Ramism among Cambridge Calvinists. My purpose is not to make historical claims about Ramist Puritans or to the extent that Hooker consciously engaged the Ramist Puritans in his own works. I focus on the use of Ramism by Hooker's contemporaries in order to place in sharp relief the Hookerian account of Christian formation developed in this study. Placed in contrast to Ramist Puritanism, the significance of Hooker's achievement stands out. I appropriate the descriptions of McKim, Lake, and Morgan in order to hold their descriptions in contrast with Hooker's thinking. My arguments do not depend on these scholars' historical claims about Ramism because I am deploying their descriptions heuristically in order to provide insights into recognizable contemporary habits of thought with which I want to draw a contrast. My contrast would hold even if these scholars' historical claims about Ramism were refuted because it is evident from Hooker's account - quoted below - that Hooker engaged dialectically *some* group holding substantially similar beliefs described here as Ramist realism.

226. McKim, "Ramism in William Perkins," 286-288.

that humans can ascertain the mind of God...."[227]

Perkins was a leading player at Cambridge, shaping its curriculum during the time when Hooker, an Oxford scholar himself, was immersed in his defense of the Elizabethan settlement. While Perkins did not advocate Genevan-style reforms, "the list of Cambridge Ramists reads like a list of the most radical Cambridge Puritans."[228] Significantly, both allies and opponents of Hooker's might well have embraced the presuppositions of Ramist realism that I describe below.

Ramist method entails "definition and division."[229] In contrast with the Aristotelian scholastic method taught by Hooker, syllogisms do not prove the truth of propositions, but merely "solve doubts when questions arose in matters of definition and division."[230] The key principle of Ramist epistemological method is to divide knowledge areas into opposing binaries or dichotomies.[231] McKim notes that, "As Perkins approached a passage or text he applied Ramist method: defining, dividing, classifying from general to specific."[232] A key assumption underlying this method was that, by so doing, "the "interior logic" or thought pattern of the author could be plainly shown. The inner relationships of all parts of the discourse became immediately visible."[233] Since the author of Scripture is the Holy Spirit, "The interior logic of the Holy Spirit, who stood behind the formation of Scripture, could be opened to view."[234] Ramist realists believed that their exegetical method "could lay bare the very mind of God Himself."[235] The exegete thereby discovered 'natural truths' in the Bible that are universal in application and that are, because of the method, free from the taint of human subjectivity.[236]

The key observation here has to do with the theological and philosophical

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227. Ibid., iv-v.
228. Ibid., 297.
229. Ibid., 77.
230. Ibid.
231. Ibid., iv.
232. Ibid., 295.
233. Ibid., 296.
234. Ibid., 298.
235. Ibid.
236. Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes Towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560-1640*, 106-112.

premises underlying Ramist realist method. "Perkins never attempted to justify or "prove" the divisions he made. To him these divisions had yielded *self-evident axioms*, the validity of which was beyond question."[237] The presupposition of Ramist exegesis is not only that the language of Scripture is *perspicuous*, but that the meaning clearly expressed and easily understood is *axiomatic*. The task of the exegete, then, is not to move from the particulars of the pericope to a logically sound conclusion based on the text, but to "discover the 'arguments' already present in his text."[238] These axiomatic arguments discovered in the text are *objectively* known "'universal rules'... discovered as refractions of the mind of God...."[239] "This was so because for the Ramists, the 'arguments' were built into the very fabric of the universe itself."[240]

McKim clarifies the ethical implications of these premises:

> In all this it was assumed that the mind will immediately give its assent to all true propositions which were actually axioms. Thus Scripture quotations alone were sufficient to prove a point since these can function in discourse as self-evidencing axioms. In Perkins and the other Ramists, the Scripture citation is usually all that is needed to support a "division" made.[241]

For the Ramist Puritan, right thinking is inseparable from right living, and right living is constituted by "artifacts"[242] demonstrating one's assent to self-evident axioms discovered in Scripture. The rightful task of theology, therefore, is not to discern the good but to assert the true:

> The system of Ramus gave sure results for the Ramist to whom the subject/ object problem was not an obstacle. It gave access to truth that did not need to be proved in the scholastic, Aristotelian fashion. Instead, truth need only be asserted. For the Puritans who followed Ramus, Christian doctrine was a series of self-evincing axioms. These axioms were so self-evident as to remove all doubts of their truth.[243]

Right living is the activity that produces "that which has been made well or done well" - where 'well' is defined by the "universal rules" discovered through the Ramist method.[244] The project of defining and dividing in order to discover the principles of right living is urgent not because it manifests participation in the life of God, but

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237. McKim, "Ramism in William Perkins," 296. Emphasis added.
238. Ibid.
239. Ibid., 300.
240. Ibid., 299.
241. Ibid., 302.
242. Ibid., 301.
243. Ibid., 304.
244. Ibid., 301.

because it fulfills the conditions God establishes for the contingent covenantal relationship between Creator and creature. Right action is urgent, and it consists of obedience to universal truths discovered dichotomously.

Ethics, therefore, are expressed rightly in the language of deontological axioms. The key questions are about how the community reliably recognizes what God commands and how it develops individuals willfully submissive to those commands. The discourse is not about 'knowledge of God' understood as personal participation in the life of God, but 'knowledge of God's arts' understood as logical discovery of universal rules ordained by God. The theological grammar subtly shifts from God as subject, interacting here and now with human subjects, to God's art as object, acted upon by human subjects capable of comprehending its refraction through ratiocination.

Implicit in Ramist realism is a philosophical optimism about human access to reality that cohabits oddly with the theological pessimism expressed in the doctrine of total depravity. The Ramist realist is no nominalist: "Ramists believed that all concepts are objectively real."[245]

Deeply embedded within Ramist realism are two worldview-shaping assumptions. First, *sola scriptura* is no longer a slogan pertaining narrowly to how one knows one's status before God, but a dogmatic claim about the only means by which humans have access to divine truths about right thinking and right living. We discover God's "art" through Scripture alone.[246] Where such an assumption prevails, it is difficult to appreciate a central role for the sacraments, which is perhaps why it was necessary for Hooker to devote an entire volume to the defense of sacramental practices. Second, Ramist realism presupposes a reality that can be truthfully described through division into neat binaries and reductive epitomes. A world whose truth is known through divisive dichotomies is quite distinct from a world dialectically known and described in syllogistic syntheses. We ought not be surprised when these different views of the

245. Ibid., 299.
246. Ibid., 301.

world yield different views of the Church.

Hookerian critique: the nature of Scripture

On Hooker's account, the resistance of certain Puritans to the Elizabethan Settlement was grounded in epistemological error. That is, their demand that the laws of England and practices of the Church be justified exclusively by biblical sources was an instance of what Wittgenstein would later describe as "philosophical puzzlement" that can only be "dissolved by pointing out where wrong turns were made."[247] His critique of his opponents' scriptural hermeneutics arises directly from the foregoing philosophical premises and consisted of at least five counterpoints. We've already seen his primary claim - (1) that the supreme authority of Scripture pertains particularly and narrowly to the revelation of the supernatural path to our beatitude in Christ and not to all matters of action in life.[248] In addition to this, Hooker asserted, in direct refutation of the presuppositions of Ramist realism: (2) that the authority of Scripture is not self-authenticating, (3) that its axioms are not perspicuous, (4) that there is no possibility of an objective interpretive stance that delivers us from the risk of interpretative error, and (5) that we cannot merely extract self-authenticating axioms from Scripture but rather must reach fitting conclusions by reasoning inductively from the particular narrative context of principles drawn from Scripture.

The jurisdiction of Scripture

Hooker was sharply critical of what he considered "a dangerous extremity" - the claim that "Scripture did not only contain all things in that kind necessary, but all things simply, and in such sort that to do anything according to any other law were not only unnecessary, but even opposite unto salvation, unlawful and sinful."[249] If God had intended all things to be contained in Scripture, then God would "clean have abrogated amongst them the law of nature."[250] The stakes in refuting this claim are

247. Brad J. Kallenberg, *Ethics as Grammar: Changing the Postmodern Subject* (South Bend: Univ of Notre Dame Press, 2001-09), 187.
248. *Laws*.I.14.1; 1:124.29-32. *Laws*.I.14.1; 1: 126.1-13.
249. *Laws*.II.8.7; I:191.21-25.
250. *Laws*.II.8.6;I:190.10-11.

high: "Admit this, and what shall the Scripture be but a snare and a torment to weak consciences, filling them with infinite perplexities, scrupolosities, doubts insoluble, and extreme despairs."[251]

Hooker worried equally about a correlative claim by his opponents - the erroneous notion that *sola scriptura* means that "the choice of good and evil in the daily affairs of this life"[252] is to be determined exclusively by scriptural axiom:

> Make all things sin which we do by direction of nature's light and by the rule of common discretion without thinking at all upon Scripture, admit this position, and parents shall cause their children to sin, as oft as they cause them to do anything, before they come to years of capacity and be ripe for knowledge in the Scripture.[253]

Decrying such puzzlement about the meaning of *sola scriptura*, Hooker insisted upon the distinction between "whatsoever is in such sort necessary,"[254] and matters non-essential to salvation:

> ... it is no more disgrace for Scripture to have let a number of things free to be ordered at the discretion of the Church, than for nature to have left it unto the wit of man to devise his own attire, and not to look for it as the beasts of the field have theirs....[255]

While Scripture does indeed provide all things necessary to salvation, that doctrine is not to be understood to mean that Scripture is "the only law whereby God hath opened his will touching all things that may be done, but there are other kinds of laws which notify the will of God...."[256] Rather, the doctrine presupposes that Wisdom teaches by Scripture, nature, "spiritual influence,... [and] in some things... only by worldly experience and practice."[257] Furthermore, the doctrine is correctly understood to assert that Scripture teaches "all things which are necessary to be known that we may be saved, but known with the presupposition of knowledge concerning certain principles whereof it receiveth us already persuaded, and then instructeth us in all the

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251. *Laws*.II.8.6;I:190.16-19.
252. *Laws*.II.8.6;I:190.15-16.
253. *Laws*.II.8.6;I:191.4-9.
254. *Laws*.III.4.1; I: 213.3-4.
255. *Laws*.III.4.1; I: 213.4-8.
256. *Laws*.II.1.4; I.147.15-17.
257. *Laws*.II.1.4; I.147.27-148.6.

residue that are necessary."[258]

Not self-authenticating

Hooker is quite concerned "that the benefit of nature's light be not thought excluded as unnecessary"[259] in our seeking of an ethical foundation in Scripture. One of the reasons is that, though knowledge of our "salvation could not be obtained"[260] without it, Scripture is not self-authenticating. This insight arises from philosophy: "Scripture indeed teacheth things above nature, things which our reason by itself could not reach unto."[261] Precisely because "Scripture teacheth all supernaturally revealed truth,"[262] human authority is necessary for us to learn what Scripture teaches. "... unless besides Scripture there were some thing which might assure us that we do well, we could not think we do well, no not in being assured that Scripture is a sacred and holy rule of well-doing."[263]

Because scripture's supreme authority has to do particularly with the supernatural path Christ has revealed, and we are unable to recognize Christ's authority until we have a personal relationship with him, "Scripture could not teach us the things that are of God unless we did credit men who have taught us that the words of Scripture do signify those things."[264] Here Hooker refutes his interlocutors on anthropological grounds: "Now it is not required or can be exacted at our hands that we should yield unto any thing other assent than such as doth answer the evidence which is said to be had of that we assent unto."[265] This criterion arises from the foregoing philosophical premises regarding human participation in the rationality of God. "The greatest assurance generally with all men is that which we have by plain aspect and intuitive beholding."[266] The authority of Scripture arises from "that which we see with our

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258. *Laws*.I.14.1; I.126.5-9.
259. *Laws*.I.14.1; I.129.1-2.
260. *Laws*.III.8.13; I:231.4
261. *Laws*.III.8.12; I:230.7-8.
262. *Laws*.III.8.13; I:231.2-3.
263. *Laws*.II.4.2; I:153.22-25.
264. *Laws*.II.7.3; I:177.31-33.
265. *Laws*.II.7.5; 1:179.25-27.
266. *Laws*.II.7.5; 1:179.10-12.

eyes;"[267] a man assents to Scripture as the Word of God "because we hold that his speech revealeth there what himself seeth...."[268]

Scripture, therefore, is not self-authenticating; rather, the Church testifies to the authority of Scripture, authenticating it through its concrete witness. Reason need only assent to the testimony of the Church regarding scripture's authority if the actions of the Church evince scripture's divine origins. Scripture becomes authoritative - in the eyes of rational men and women - only when the actions of the Church mean what they must mean if the Church is to perform the truth that is Christ.

Furthermore, that Scripture is not self-authenticating renders false his opponents' claims regarding the universality of axioms extracted from Scripture whose subject is not the supernatural path revealed in Christ. Such claims, if generally accepted by the community, are binding only upon the community. Such claims are about and for the community and not about and for all humanity, for "it is the general consent of all that giveth them the form and vigor of laws."[269] Christian ethics are of the Church, by the Church, and for the Church.

Not perspicuous

We saw above that the Ramist realists translate the claim that Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation into a doctrine of scripture's perspicuity. Hooker addresses directly the question of "whether *containing in Scripture* do import express setting down in plain terms, or else *comprehending* in such sort that by reason we may from thence conclude all things which are necessary."[270] We see here the distinction between the Ramist claim that Scripture contains perspicuous axioms and the humanist assumption that scriptural comprehension requires reasoning from the particularity of texts as phenomena to general conclusions about their meanings.

Hooker proceeds by distinguishing between two categories of subject matter in

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267. *Laws*.II.7.5; 1:179.20.
268. *Laws*.II.7.5; I:179.22.
269. *Laws*.VIII.6.11; III.403.10.24.
270. *Laws*.I.14.2; I.126.14-17. Emphasis original.

Scripture in like fashion to his treatment of scripture's jurisdiction. He invokes Augustine's point that truths regarding the supernatural path Christ has revealed "are plainly set down in Scripture so that he which heareth or readeth may without any great difficulty understand."[271] Thus Scripture is perspicuous with respect to the supernatural path of salvation. Yet some things aren't so plain and therefore require a learning not available to all men:

> Other things also there are belonging (although in a lesser degree of importance) unto the offices of Christian men which because they are obscure, more intricate and hard to be judged of, therefore God hath appointed some to spend their whole time principally in the study of things divine to the end that in these more doubtful cases their understanding might be a light to direct others.[272]

Scripture, then, is neither self-authenticating nor plain in its meaning, at least once one moves beyond claims about the saving action of Jesus Christ and into questions of matters of action. In the latter category, expertise in scriptural interpretation tends to be required, and the world rightly admires the "pillars" whose "great and rare skill" of interpretation and "whose exercises, labors, and divine studies [God] hath so blessed."[273]

Not objective

Related to the argument against perspicuity is the observation that Scripture does not contain axioms that can be *objectively* known. The vagaries of human subjectivity cannot be avoided by shouts of *sola scriptura*. Scripture is neither self-authenticating nor self-interpreting. Hooker demonstrates this by reference to his opponents' own love of proof-texting:

> ... even such as are readiest to cite for one thing five hundred sentences of holy Scripture, what warrant have they, that any one of them doth mean the thing for which it is alleged? Is not their surest ground most commonly, either some probable conjecture of their own, or the judgment of others taking those Scriptures as they do?[274]

His opponents "ground themselves on human authority, even when they most

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271. *Laws*.Preface.3.2; I:13.11-12.
272. *Laws*.Preface.3.2; I:13.12-18.
273. *Laws*.II.7.4; I:179.3-8.
274. *Laws*.II.7.9; I:184.34-185.4.

pretend divine."[275] The Spirit does not directly illuminate us in the reading of Scripture such that human reason is bypassed in biblical interpretation,[276] One cannot "go from the books of Scripture to the sense and meaning thereof"[277] by "exclud[ing] the use of natural reasoning."[278] This ought not cause anxiety, for Scripture is not reduced in its power through acknowledgement of our subjectivity:

> ... in respect of that end for which God ordained it, perfect, exact, and absolute in itself, we do not add reason as a supplement of any maim or defect therein, but as a necessary instrument, without which we could not reap by the scripture's perfection that fruit and benefit which it yieldeth.[279]

As we saw in the previous chapter,[280] the common reduction of Hooker's hermeneutics to the formula of "Scripture, Tradition, and Reason" is highly problematic, not least because Hooker refused to place Scripture and reason in opposition. Instead, he presented - already in the 1590s - a compelling 'post-liberal'[281] argument: reason precedes and is necessarily integral to all scriptural exegesis. There is no stance of objectivity from which humans can engage Scripture.

Hookerian prescription: The priority of the particular

We've seen that Hooker argues that all humans are governed by the eternal law. Yet, Hooker strongly resists universal prescriptions of the good, especially when it comes to the self-ordering of the church. Instead of such prescriptions, the Hookerian account is characterized by the priority of the particular.

To get a preliminary feel for the depth of Hooker's emphasis on the particular, one can turn to his doctrine of predestination in the *Dublin Fragments*. In describing

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275. *Laws*.II.7.9; I:185.6-7.
276. *Laws*.III.8.15.
277. *Laws*.III.8.15; I:233.9-10.
278. *Laws*.III.8.15; I:233.15-16.
279. *Laws*.III.8.10; I:227.2-9.
280. See page 63.
281. George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1984).

God's response to sin, Hooker, adapting Aquinas, distinguishes between God's *determining* will and God's *positive* will.[282] God does not predestine humans to be sinners, but rather responds to their sin as the "accidental event" it is.[283] This distinction between God's determining and positive wills is decisive for Hooker in reflecting on predestination. God's determining will is that all be saved, but God's positive will is concerned with "vengeance against Satan and Satan's slaves."[284] Hooker seems to see graceful ethical reasoning as properly in analogy to God's treatment of humanity, understood in Thomist terms of God's antecedent and consequent will. Essential/accident, determining/positive, general/particular - throughout his corpus, Hooker turns repeatedly to these distinctions in his quest for truthful descriptions. Nowhere is the distinction between the general and the particular more significant than in his prescription for the ethical reasoning by which communities discern the good.[285]

Hooker is often described as an apologist for the status quo, but this confuses his cognitive commitments with their consequences. He appears to be an apologist because he insists that the starting point in Christian ethics is to listen to the Church. That cognitive commitment leads to an inherently conservative (though not illiberal) posture:

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282. Aquinas, citing Damascene, speaks of God's "antecedent will" and God's "consequent will." The antecedent or determining will does not refer to God's self-determining or divine establishing, but rather to the will wherein God determines humanity. "It may be said of a just judge, that antecedently he wills all men to live; but consequently wills the murderer to be hanged. In the same way God antecedently wills all men to be saved, but consequently wills some to be damned, as His justice exacts. Nor do we will simply, what we will antecedently, but rather we will it in a qualified manner; for the will is directed to things as they are in themselves, and in themselves they exist under particular qualifications." ST. 1a.19.6 ad 1.
283. *Hooker, "Dublin," 32.*
284. Richard Hooker, "Notes Towards a Fragment on Predestination," in *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker, Volume Iv: Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity: Attack and Response, the Folger Library. The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity) (V. 4),* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982-01-01), 94. Hereafter referred to as *Notes Towards a Fragment on Predestination* followed by volume, page, and line numbers.
285. The Hookerian account necessarily speaks of the *particular* because the distinction I have described here permeates Hooker's corpus. In the 21st century, however, *particular* is less helpful because it can become itself an abstraction, and imply support for the notion of a reality behind the reality we encounter in history. That is not the way I use it in this study. In the Hookerian account, the phenomena we experience reliably refer to the reality of the objects we encounter, and the general/particular distinction distinguishes the inferences we make as we encounter phenomena from the cases, situated in discrete contexts, to which we might apply them.

> ... there is cause why we should be slow and unwilling to change without very urgent necessity the ancient ordinances, rites, and long-approved customs of venerable predecessors. The love of things ancient doth argue staidness, but levity and want of experience maketh apt unto innovations. That which wisdom did first begin and hath been with good men long continued, challenges allowance of them that succeed, although it plead for itself nothing. That which is new, if it promise not much, doth fear condemnation before trial; till trial, no man doth acquit or trust it, what good soever it pretend and promise.[286]

We saw in chapter two that, for Hooker, the "voices of men" carry the greatest weight after that which "Scripture doth plainly deliver."[287] But to what human authorities does he refer? To answer this, we have to dig a bit into Hookerian political concepts.

Hooker recognized that his rendering of the *duplex cognitio Dei* in terms of a second form of the eternal law has political implications. When viewed from the perspective of human access to knowledge of God, all humans and especially all the baptized are equal:

> For we have here only the being of Sons of God, in which number how far soever one may seem to excel another, yet touching this *that all are sons they are all equals*, some happily better sons than the rest are, but none any more a son than another.[288]

As Neelands notes, for Hooker, "there is no effective or practical difference, just as there is not perceptible difference, between the visible and invisible church, except at the end, when it shall be clear if there be any in the church who do not persevere."[289] If there is no *practical* difference between the visible and the invisible church until the fulfillment of time, then, when theology speaks of a right ordering of the church, the practical assumption must be that we are all, translocally and transtemporally, equal in our status before God and that the Spirit may use anyone at any moment to confess the Word given.[290]

Hooker therefore admonished his opponents who urged that the Church of

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286. Laws.V.7.3; II.36.26-37.8
287. *Laws*.V.8.2;II.39.8. For the priority of voices of men, see *Laws*.I.8.2-3.
288. *Laws*.V.56.12;II.244.7-11. Emphasis added.
289. W. David Neelands, "Richard Hooker on the Identity of the Visible and Invisble Church," in *Richard Hooker and the English Reformation,* ed. W.J. Torrance Kirby, (Dordrecht ; Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 109.
290. John Howard Yoder, "Sacrament as Social Process: Christ the Transformer of Culture," in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical,* (Herald Press (PA), 1994), 371-373.

England adopt the presbyterian discipline of Geneva in lieu of the polity of the Elizabethan church. They failed to appreciate that the Elizabethan polity united the Christians of the commonwealth in one "society of souls,"[291] binding together the elite and the common multitude under God while preserving the diversity that gave the commonwealth its vigor. Their denial of the rightfulness and necessity of setting apart bishops, presbyters, and deacons as guardians of ecclesial law was simply wrongheaded:

> The most natural and religious course in making of laws is that the matter of them be taken from the judgment of the wisest in those things which they are to concern. In matters of God, to set down a form of public prayer, a solemn confession of the Articles of Christian faith, rites, and ceremonies meet for the exercise of religion, it were unnatural not to think the Pastors and Bishops of our souls a great deal more fit than men of secular trades and callings.[292]

This judgment of the wisest in the matters of God is characteristic of the best form of ecclesial government, for the best government is that which is "administered by the best," by those excelling all the others together in excellence:[293]"

> Inequality as touching gifts and graces they grant because this is so plain that no mist in the world can be cast before men's eyes so thick but that they needs must discern through it that one minister of the gospel may be more learned, holier, and wiser, better able to instruct, more apt to rule and guide than another....[294]

The things essential to salvation are for the most part so "familiar and plain that truth from falsehood and good from evil is most easily discerned in them, even by men of no deep capacity. And of that nature for the most part are things absolutely unto all men's salvation necessary, either to be held or denied, either to be done or avoided."[295] But some things aren't so plain and therefore require a learning not available to all men:

> Other things also there are belonging (although in a lesser degree of importance) unto the offices of Christian men which because they are obscure, more intricate and hard to be judged of, therefore God hath appointed some to spend their whole time principally in the study of things divine to the end that in these more doubtful cases their understanding might be a light to direct others.[296]

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291. *Laws*.V.77.2; 2.425.14-19.
292. *Laws*.VIII.6.11; 3.403.10.24
293. Aristotle, *Complete Works Vol 2*, Pol.1288b.34-38.
294. *Laws*.VII.3.1; 3.153.16-21.
295. *Laws*.Preface. 3.2; 1:13.5-9.
296. *Laws*.Preface. 3.2; 1:13.12-18.

In short, the equality of our access to knowledge of God and of our election in Christ does not mean that we are equal in the gifts and graces must conducive to the fruitfulness of the church. Our differences matter, and our ecclesiastical polity rightly presupposes a high valuation of the judgment of the wisest. Our election in Christ entails a gift of a political identity shared by the elite and the common multitude, creating our belongingness to a particular society of souls whose governance scheme is a democratically-inclined polity which places a high value on the diversity of our gifts and graces.

The "voice of men" for Hooker, therefore, seems to entail a continuous translocal and transtemporal conversation in which all humans share and debate the coordinates of the good. Some of these coordinates are enshrined in local custom, some in local positive law, and some in "the general and perpetual voice of men" which is like "the sentence of God himself."[297] With respect to ecclesial law, then, 'the voices of men' does not correspond merely to 'doctors of the church', although such experts have a special role.

In this continuous conversation, the "bare consent of the whole Church" trumps the discretion of the local church.[298] Hooker would thus agree wholeheartedly with Barth "that the Church is constituted as the Church by a common hearing and receiving of the Word of God."[299] Endoxa rightly carry enormous weight in guiding the local church's and the disciple's discernment.

Yet, even in listening to the whole Church, Hooker denies the timeless appeal to a golden era. We see this in Hooker's deployment of ancient and medieval church authorities. In a comparison of Cartwright's and Hooker's appeals to the church fathers, John Luoma notes:

> Perhaps the most interesting point in Hooker's use of consensus is that it is not enmeshed in an overestimation of any age - even that of the apostles.... He shows great reverence for the early church (the majority of his citations are from the first six hundred years), but he does not neglect any century.[300]

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297. *Laws*.I.8.3;I.84.1-2.
298. *Laws*.V.8.2;II.39.22-23.
299. Barth, *CD*, 1/2 §§20.2, 588..
300. John K. Luoma, "Who Owns the Fathers? Hooker and Cartwright on the Authority of the

Luoma notes that what distinguishes Hooker is that he "is willing to gather his consensus from throughout the history of the church."[301] He adds,

> Hooker consciously attempts to form a broad based consensus, allowing each Father to speak for himself as part of a multifaceted consensus (consisting of Scripture, reason, and the Fathers) but weaving each into a comprehensive argument.[302]

For Hooker, there was no golden era whose voice halts the deliberative process or circumscribes the questions we may ask and the answers that are possible. The Church is equally vulnerable to error in all ages, even though not all generations have been equal in their faithfulness. Our discourse is both translocal and transtemporal. Though there is ambiguity, there is continuity: "No, the Church of Christ, which was from the beginning, is and continues unto the end, of which Church all parts have not been always equally sincere and sound."[303]

Hooker describes at length the rationale underlying his view of proper ethical reasoning in the ninth chapter of Book V. The English presbyterians, as we have seen, pressed for radical change in the ecclesial laws concerning worship practices and governance, and they grounded their arguments in appeals to universal axioms mined from Scripture or the early church fathers. In refuting such Ramist-like thinking, Hooker emphasized the importance of inductive thinking that attends properly to the particularity of things. Generalities, Hooker said, are "cloudy mists cast before the eye of common sense":

> The cause of [their] error is ignorance what restraints and limitations all such principles have in regard of so manifold varieties as the matter whereunto they are applicable doth commonly afford. These varieties are not known but by such experience from which to draw the true bounds of all principles to discern how far forth they take effect, to see where and why they fail, to apprehend by what degrees and means they lead to the practice of things in show though not indeed repugnant and contrary one to another, requireth more sharpness of wit, more intricate circuitions of discourse, more industry and depth of judgment than common ability doth yield. So that general rules, till their limits be fully known (especially in matter of public and ecclesiastical affairs), are, by reason of the manifold secret exceptions which lie hidden in them, no other to the eye of man's understanding than cloudy mists cast before the eye of common sense. They that walk in darkness know not whether they go.[304]

Primitive Church," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 8, no. 3 (October 1977), 56.

301. Ibid., 57.
302. Ibid., 58.
303. *Laws*.III.10.1;I.201.9-12.
304. *Laws*.V.9.2;II.43.16-31.

General axioms are popular "because of their plainness at the first sight," but "men of exact judgment [know] such rules are not safe to be trusted over far."[305] "No wise man will desire himself to be cured [by general rules] if there be joined with his disease some special accident" that distinguished his case from others "in the same infirmity, but without the like accident" because it could "be to him either hurtful or at the least unprofitable."[306] For the same reason:

> ... we must not, under a colorable commendation of holy ordinances in the Church, and of reasonable causes whereupon they have been grounded for the common good, imagine that all men's cases ought to have one measure.[307]

Central to Hooker's prescribed model for ethical reasoning is the concept of '*special* equity.' The adjective is decisive. 'Equity' seems to denote for Hooker a conformity to the natural law with attention to justice and fairness. 'Special' denotes a prudential departure from the general rule in a particular case intended to bring about such conformity. Special equity attends to the data differentiating the particular from the general, and modulates ethical reasoning as needed so that the justice which the general law seeks is obtained:

> Not without singular wisdom therefore it hath been provided, that as the ordinary course of common affairs is disposed of by general laws, so likewise men's rarer incident necessities and utilities should be with *special equity* considered. From hence it is that so many privileges, immunities, exceptions, and dispensations have been always with great equity and reason granted, not to the edge of justice, or to make void at certain times and certain men through mere voluntary grace or benevolence that which continually and universally should be of force (as some understand it) but very truth to practice general laws according to their right meaning.[308]

Because of their broad reach, good laws are necessarily expressed in general language, and the more far-reaching the consensus to which the Christian listens, the more generally the judgment of the Church is expressed in custom and law. This leads to inequity. The universal reasoning of his opponents fails to achieve the good the natural law intends because it fails to attend to "material circumstances" that ought to shape their reasoning:

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305. *Laws*.V.9.2; II.44.3-5.
306. *Laws*.V.9.2; II.44.5-10.
307. *Laws*.V.9.2; II.44.10-13.
308. *Laws*.V.9.3;II.44.13-24. Emphasis added.

> Moral laws are the rules of politics, those politics which are made to order the whole Church of God unto all particular churches, and the laws of every particular church rules unto every particular man within the body of the same church. Now because the higher we ascend in these rules the further still we remove from these specialties, which being proper to the subject whereupon our actions must work, are therefore chiefly considered by us, by them least thought upon that wade altogether in the two first kinds of general directions, their judgment cannot be exact and sound concerning either laws of churches or actions of men in particular because they determine of effects by a part of the causes only out of which they grow, they judge conclusions by demipremises and half principles, they lay them in the balance stripped from those necessary material circumstances which should give them weight, and by show of falling uneven with the scale of the most universal and abstracted rules, they pronounce that too light which is not if they had the skill to weigh it.[309]

Thus far, we've seen Hooker's critique of the Ramist realist presuppositions about the nature of Scripture and also his general laws and the priority of the particular in ethical reasoning. I turn now to his critique of appeals to scriptural timeless absolutes in ethical reasoning.

HOOKERIAN CRITIQUE: REASONING BY NON SEQUITUR

Appeals to timeless absolutes

We have already seen that Hooker rejected his opponents' claims to a golden era in their appeals to the church fathers. Similarly, he rejected appeals to a golden era in Scripture, recognizing as *non sequiturs* their deployment of timeless absolutes whether discovered in the Old or New Testaments. He foreshadowed this challenge to their logic in his Preface to *Laws*:

> "…. it is the error of the common multitude to consider only what hath been of old, and, if the same were well, to see whether still it continue; if not, to condemn that presently which is, and never to search upon what ground or consideration the change might grow; such rudeness cannot be in you so well borne with whom learning and judgment hath enabled much more soundly to discern how far the times of the church and the orders thereof may alter without offense…."[310]

What Hooker signals in his Preface he delivers in the fourth book of his first volume, describing discoveries of timeless universal axioms in Scripture as uncertain or insufficient:

> "For it is out of doubt that the first state of things was best, that in the prime of Christian religion faith was soundest, the scriptures of God were then best understood by all men, all parts of godliness did then most abound: and therefore it must needs follow that customs, laws, and ordinances devised since are not so good for the Church of Christ, but the best way is to cut off later inventions, and to reduce things unto the ancient state wherein at the first they were. Which rule or canon we hold to be either uncertain or at leastwise insufficient, if not both."[311]

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309. *Laws*.V.81.4;II.476.34-477.16
310. *Laws*.Preface.4.4; I.23.28.31.
311. *Laws*.IV.2.1; 1.276.30-277.8.

Appeals to timeless absolutes serve ideology by shutting down conversation or by setting boundaries on the kinds of questions that can be asked and the ranges of answers that are permissible. There are multiple forms of such appeals. One can, for example, appeal to abstract values like equality or justice. Alternatively, one can appeal to creation's primordial ordering to justify a return to that 'natural' state. Hooker's interlocutors deployed a third method, most frequently appealing to a golden era to which the Church must return. As Hooker notes, the intended rhetorical effect of such appeals to timeless absolutes is to manipulate discourse through circumscription.

In contrast, Hooker denies the indefeasibility of the judgments of all eras:

> The glory of God and the good of his Church was the thing which the apostles aimed at, and therefore ought to be the mark whereat we also level. But seeing those rites and orders may be at one time more, which at another are less available unto that purpose, what reason is there in these things to urge the state of one only age as a pattern for all to follow?[312]

Hooker asks, "Are we bound while the world standeth to put nothing in practice but only that which was the very first?"[313] He concludes, "Our end ought always to be the same, our ways and means thereunto not so."[314] His prescription, in brief, is to be informed by the superabundance of God's love as reflected in the extraordinary diversity in both nature and in the Church itself:

> A more dutiful and religious way for us were to admire the wisdom of God, which shineth in the beautiful variety of things, but most in the manifold and yet harmonious dissimilitude of those ways, whereby his Church upon earth is guided from age to age, throughout all generations of men.[315]

The priority of the particular permeates Hooker's defense of ecclesial practices in Book V. For example, presbyterians challenged the Elizabethan practice of ordaining presbyters and deacons without title and popular election by appealing to the apostolic era. In defending the practice, Hooker argued that the ancient era was not intrinsically normative unless the situation then and now is identical:

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312. *Laws*.IV.2.3; I.278.15-21.
313. *Laws*.V.20.4;II.75.8-10.
314. *Laws*.IV.2.3; I.278.14.15.
315. *Laws*.III.11.8; I.253.15-20.

> We forget not to examine whether the present case be the same which the ancient was or else do contain some just reason of which it cannot admit altogether the same rules which former affairs of the Church now altered did then require.[316]

Similarly, he defended the Elizabethan practice of providing residences and 'livings' to ministers as an example of "special privilege" in contrast with mere "privilege":

> For the voice of equity and justice is that a general law doth never derogate from a *special* privilege, whereas if the one were contrary to the other, a general law being in force should always dissolve a privilege. The reason why so many are deceived by imagining that so it should do and why men of better insight conclude directly it should not doth rest in the *subject or matter itself*, which matter *indefinitely* considered in laws of common right is in privileges considered as *beset and limited with special circumstances* by means whereof to them which respect it, but by way of generality it seems one and the same in both, although it be not the same if once we descend to particular consideration thereof.[317]

Defending the procession of the cross during worship, Hooker makes the point that precedent does not require that we attach the same meanings to things that generations before us did. To say it *was* so long ago, does not mean that it *is* so today. The meanings we associate with symbols evolves. He gives the example of the brazen serpent which was of soteriological significance to the Hebrews and remained a processional symbol in Jewish worship until the time of King David, by which time it had become merely "a memorial sign or monument of God's miraculous goodness towards them."[318]

In chapter after chapter of Book V, Hooker presses home his claim of the divine authority for local churches to evolve practices suitable to their specific contexts. He provides a history of rogation processions and other litanies, demonstrating their significant evolution since 506 CE.[319] Defending the Elizabethan liturgical calendar, he demonstrates that different churches in history have followed different fasting patterns and days of the week. He similarly demonstrates evolution in the vocations, authority, and support of deacons and presbyters.[320] And he describes such evolution using the Aristotelian category of *phronesis*: "So that the instituting and ordaining

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316. *Laws*.V.80.8;II.468.10-13.
317. *Laws*.V.81.4; II.476.19-30 Emphasis original
318. *Laws*.V.65.18;II.318.1-2.
319. *Laws*. V.41.2-3; II.163.6 - 165.2.
320. *Laws*.V.78.5; V.80.3.

both of these and all other times of like exercise is as the Church shall judge *expedient for men's good.*"[321]

Defending rites of burial against charges that they are unbiblical and noncontinuous with those of the Apostolic era, Hooker asks rhetorically, "Again if it might be proved that no such thing was usual among them, has Christ so deprived his Church of judgment that what rites and order soever the later ages thereof have devised the same must needs be inconvenient?[322] In Book VI, Hooker traces the history of the practice of penitence, showing how it evolved in response to the Church's changing cultural situation. Initially, the practice was voluntary, individual, and public. Over time it became voluntary and private, then mandatory and private, and then, in the Elizabethan Church, "external repentance for a sacrament, internal for a virtue."[323] Explaining why churches reasonably have such authority to evolve ecclesial practices locally, Hooker quotes Acts 27.38 - the story of Paul throwing food into the sea during a storm - as an example of casting off the good for a greater good.[324] "For of two such evils being not both evitable, the choice of the less is not evil."[325]

So what is the rule? In what conditions does the local church have the discretion to "cast off the good for a greater good?" This question returns us to what I've suggested are his deployments of the virtues of *episteme* and *phronesis*. Near the beginning of Book V, he explains:

> The Church hath authority to establish that for an order at one time which at another time it may abolish, and in both do well. But that which in doctrine the Church doth now deliver rightly as a truth, no man will say that it may hereafter recall and as rightly avouch the contrary. Laws touching matter of order are changeable by the power of the Church; articles concerning doctrine not so.[326]

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321. *Laws*.V.72.9; II.391.19-21.
322. *Laws*.V.75.4;II.412.20-23.
323. *Laws*.VI.4.3; III.17.15-16.
324. *Laws*.V.9.1;II.42.8-11.
325. *Laws*.V.9.1;II.42.12-13.
326. *Laws*.V.8.2;II.38.17-23.

Appeals to false analogies

The Ramist method of defining, dividing, and classifying encouraged the frequent use of typologies and reasoning by analogy. But it is one thing to analyze things by placing them in logical categories, and quite another to reason ethically by claiming that Old Testament and apostolic practices prefigured and thereby dictated contemporary Christian practices. A species of appeals to timeless absolutes, such appeals tend to exclude the particular information which might modulate reasoning from the general case in order to achieve equity. Hooker consistently refuted ideological claims of his interlocutors by unmasking their use of false typologies and analogies.

One such claim was that Christ had forbidden all change of laws set down in Scripture.[327] In support of this, opponents proposed that the household of the Jews prefigured the household of Christ. Since there was but one enduring law of Moses governing that people, they claimed, so, too, did Christ intend for there to be one set of ecclesiastical laws for his own household. Hooker denied such prefiguration:

> "... seeing that nations are not all alike, surely the giving of one kind of positive laws unto one only people, without any liberty to alter them, is but a slender proof, that therefore one kind should in like sort be given to serve everlastingly for all."[328]

In order to argue that no practice should be warranted if it is not first found in Scripture, Thomas Cartwright appealed to Paul's teaching that "meats and drinks... are sanctified... by the word of God."[329] In Cartwright's logic, Paul's claim that meat and drinks are sanctified defines the category of things which may be used or done by disciples. Those things explicitly mentioned in Scripture may be used; all others belong to the type of things which may not be used. Hooker set aside the appeal, noting that "though meats and drinks be... sanctified by the word of God, and by prayer, yet neither is this a reason sufficient to prove that by Scripture we must of

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327. *Laws*.III.11.1; I.246.title
328. *Laws*.III.11.6; I.251.7-10.
329. *Laws*.II.2.3;I.151.20-21. The scriptural reference is to 1 Tim 4:5.

necessity be directed in every light and common thing which is incident into any part of man's life."[330]

Opponents, in arguing against the use in worship of non-canonical readings, including the apocrypha, appealed to the example of the rules governing the Jewish Temple, in which nothing could be brought into the temple - "neither brooms, nor fleshhooks, nor trumpets, but those only which were sanctified."[331] Hooker refuted the claim on the grounds that it posited a false analogy: "it would be demanded by what rule the legal hallowing of brooms and fleshhooks must needs exclude all other readings in the Church save Scripture."[332]

Responding to opponents upset because the priest offers the bread and wine to individuals during the Eucharist, whereas Jesus denoted the entire gathering of disciples in his "Take, eat, and drink,"[333] Hooker recognized that sermons and sacramental are different types of remembering, and that Jesus and a contemporary priest are not analogues. He wittily summarized his consistent objection to false analogies, "The softness of wax may induce a wise man to set his stamp or image therein; it persuadeth no man that because wool hath the like quality it may therefore receive the like impression."[334]

To be clear, Hooker did not deny the use of analogical reasoning. Quite the opposite. As we saw above in his use of the church fathers, he granted the authority of precedent:

> In Scripture we grant every one man's lesson to be the common instruction of all men, so far forth as their cases are like, and that religiously to keep the Apostle's commandments in whatsoever they may concern us, we all stand bound.[335]

That said, in order for precedent to have force, the similarity between precedent and the particular case must be strong, for "the laws positive were not framed without

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330. *Laws*.II.2.3;I.150.24-28.
331. *Laws*.V.20.1;II.2.72.14-15. I render *besomes* as brooms.
332. *Laws*.V.20.2;II.2.73.12-14. I render *besomes* as brooms.
333. *Laws*.V.68.1; II.344.7.
334. *Laws*.V.68.2; II.346.9-21.
335. *Laws*.III.11.11; I.256.20-24.

regard had to the place and persons for which they are made."[336]

For example, when his opponents argued for correspondences between factions in Corinth and Rome of which Paul wrote and the presbyterians opposing Elizabethan sacramental practices, he named the analogy as false. There is no analogy between Jewish and Gentile Christians and the "weak brethren" of the Elizabethan Church, and there is no analogy between "scandalous meats" and "ceremonies which have been abused in the church of Rome."[337] "Between these two cases are great odds."[338] "For neither are our weak brethren as the Jews, nor the ceremonies which we use as the meats which the Gentiles used."[339] "Their use of meats was not like unto our of ceremonies, that being a matter of private action in common life, where every man was free to order that which himself did; but this a public constitution for the ordering of the Church."[340]

Cartwright also compared the nurse who baptizes an infant to a thief who uses a seal stolen from a prince:

> As by the seal which the prince has set apart to seal his grants with, when it is stolen and set to by him that has no authority, there grows no assurance to the party that has it; so if it were possible to be the seal of God which a woman should set to yet for that she has stolen it and put it to not only without but contrary to the commandment of God, I see not how any can take any assurance by reason hereof."[341]

Hooker refuted Cartwright's argument against the efficacy of baptism by a female nurse by naming Cartwright's deployment of a false analogy:

> Their argument taken from a stolen seal may return to the place out of which they had it. For it helpeth their cause nothing... That God has committed the ministry of baptism unto special men, it is for order's sake in his Church, and not to the end that their authority might give being or add force to the sacrament itself.[342]

Similarly, Hooker denied the false analogies by which those "rapt with the pang of

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336. *Laws*.III.11.6; I.250.32-251.1
337. *Laws*.IV.12.7; I.324.21-23.
338. *Laws*.IV.12.7; I.324.29.
339. *Laws*.IV.12.7; I.324.30-31.
340. *Laws*.IV.12.7; I.325.6-9
341. *Laws*.V.62.19; II.285 See notes.
342. *Laws*.V.62.19; I.285.11-286.6.

a furious zeal"[343] argued for the razing of English churches due to the claim that they'd been tainted by the rites of Rome in the same way the high places of Israel had been tainted by the worship of idols:

> Now whereas commandment was also given to destroy all places where the Canaannites had served their gods, and not to convert any one of them to the honor of the true God: this precept had *reference unto a special intent and purpose* which that there should be but one only place in the whole land whereunto the people might bring such offerings, gifts, and sacrifices as their Levitical law did require.... we should likewise consider how great a difference there is between their proceedings, who erect a new commonwealth which to have neither people nor law, neither regiment nor religion the same that was, and theirs who only reform a decayed estate by reducing it to that perfection from which it hath swerved. In this case we are to retain as much, in the other as little of former things as we may. Since therefore examples have not generally the force of laws which all men ought to keep, but of councils only and persuasions not amiss to be followed by them whose case is the like, *surely where cases are so unlike as theirs and ours*, I see not how that which they did should induce, much less any way enforce, us to the same practice."[344]

The foregoing militates against recommendation of the Ramist realist method of discerning the good. Scripture is not properly seen as a catalog of axioms productive of bald moral maxims. This is not a claim that Scripture is anything less than a fount of divine wisdom. Rather, it is a claim that, as a general rule, such wisdom cannot be discovered simply by extracting texts out of context and positing them as timeless axioms for moral reasoning. Hooker insists that a proper biblical hermeneutic recognizes the particularity of narrative, and reasons from the particular to the general, giving historical and cultural context its due, rather than presuming the axiomatic nature of biblical texts. Furthermore, he insists that gracious ethical reasoning similarly recognizes the priority of the particular, attending to the circumstances of cases in order to fulfill the general intent of the natural law, which positive law can only approximate. The good consists of that which is both beneficial and amiable, and Scripture often recognizes a range of possible paths.

Hookerian critique: No Ramist shortcuts

The Hookerian account developed so far contrasts sharply with this brief sketch of Ramist realism. Ethics do not take the form of divine command theory. There is no avoiding the subjectivity of our encounter with Scripture and ethical reasoning

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343. *Laws*. V.17.1;II.61.16.
344. *Laws*. V.17.5;II.63.17-64.5 Emphasis added.

requires a priority on the particular. In what follows, I switch to a more constructive register in order to underscore salient features of the emerging Hookerian account. First, I will take note of significant philosophical differences that are decisive in our descriptions of reality. Second, I will suggest that the Reformation doctrine of election leads properly to a view of reality that is open, and in which there are no universal rules apart from Christ. If my suggestions are sustained, then skepticism toward Ramist-like appeals to timeless absolutes is in order on scriptural, philosophical, and theological grounds.

Hooker writes of "the poverty" of Ramism, pointing to its suggestion that Ramist method makes knowledge of the mind of God accessible without substantial investment in true arts and learning. Hooker lampoons Ramist method for its "marvelous quick dispatch," revealing "as much almost in three days, as if it dwell threescore years with them."[345] For Hooker, the "speedy discourse" of Ramism restrains discernment, limiting human knowledge of God to the generalities accessible to the least of men. Such short cuts are not the path to wisdom.

Stanley Hauerwas, quoting John Howard Yoder, observes that "the task of theology is 'working with words in the light of faith.'"[346] "Working with words" entails working with our descriptions of reality, which is the special domain of philosophical and theological inquiry (reason and revelation). Describing reality requires a grammar, and grammar is the domain of philosophy. The philosopher engages our discourse on matters of practical divinity so that our reasoning is grounded in reality. The theologian does so, however, "in light of faith." That is, the theologian deploys philosophy from the perspective of faith. To describe reality so that it is grounded in ultimate reality is to describe reality so that it is grounded in that which God has revealed about God and creation, which is to say we must speak of God, "but the God to whom and about whom we must speak defines the words we use."[347]

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345. *Laws*.1.6.4; 1:76.9-20.
346. Hauerwas, *Working With Words*, Kindle location 81-100, Preface, para 5-7. Hauerwas quotes Yoder, citing John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Brazos Press, 2007-09-01), 41..
347. Hauerwas, *Working With Words*, Kindle location 81-100, Preface, para 5-7.

The philosophy and theology underlying the Hookerian account contrast sharply with those of the Ramist realist. Philosophically, the account diverges in its description of how humans know reality. Theologically, the account diverges in its description of the stakes of our knowing. I will describe the philosophical divergences here, and reserve discussion of the theological differences in the next section.

Hooker's complaint about the 'speedy discourse' of Ramist method points directly to the most fundamental philosophical difference. In the Hookerian account, binaries and epitomes can not sufficiently describe reality in all its complexity. Reality defies description through reduction. One reason for the complexity of the world is the ongoing creativity that reflects creation's participation in the rationality of God. Hooker appropriates the Aristotelian concepts of phenomenon, endoxon, and dialectic in order to describe human experience of and engagement with this creativity. Humans encounter phenomena, dialectically gather endoxa that describe these phenomena, and then create structures and concepts in response to phenomena that then themselves become phenomena for all who follow. Reality is not fixed, but open.

We saw that Ramist realism evinces a philosophical optimism about human access to reality, but that optimism is circumscribed by the qualification that such access is exclusively in the form of axiomatic principles discovered in Scripture. The current account is optimistic as well, but in a different way. Reality is directly known, but always phenomenally.[348] The phenomena we experience reliably refer to the reality of the objects we encounter, though we are always vulnerable to probabilistic error in our apprehension of them. As I will develop in the next chapter,[349] our descriptions of reality occupy two descriptive domains - the spaces of causes and reasons. In the interpretative stance of causes, we reason inductively by identifying efficient causes. This *scientific* knowing is least resistant to reductive summarization and categorization schemes. Yet this is not our only manner of knowing. We also experience things and ideas as final causes; they manifest themselves to us rationally through their addressing

348. See page 60.
349. See page 132.

us and through our responses to them - through our shared history. We know them personally in their particularity. We are justified in our claims about their dispositions. When we make such claims, we do so within the descriptive domain of the logical space of reasons. Such personal knowing defies schematic reduction. It cannot be exhausted in binaries and epitomes. Ramist method gives no account of *personal* knowing.

Dialectic, not division

A second, related philosophical difference follows from this. The Hookerian account of this study privileges phenomena, endoxa, and dialectic as the primary methods of inquiry into the nature of reality. These methods are themselves phenomena - concepts known within the logical space of reasons. The privileging of these tools, however, entails assumptions about the nature of reality and human participation in it. This is best seen in contrast. To argue for them as methods of ethical discernment over and against the method of mining axioms objectively discovered in Scripture is to presuppose something about reality and human knowledge of it. At minimum, such privileging assumes that dialectical discourse more fruitfully assists us in knowing the good.

The dialectic common in Hooker's era was derivative of the medieval scholastic practice based on Aristotelian dialectics. In my Hookerian account, I do not denote merely that particular form, but rather the broader category of dialectical deduction appropriate "for training, for conversational exchange, and for sciences of a philosophical sort."[350] We have already seen that conversational exchange with moral exemplars is particularly important in the formation of mimetic virtue. Dialectical discourse generally involves premises to be tested and relevant endoxa. One of the potential results of such testing may simply be the negation of the premise. In that instance, it simply resolves binaries in a fashion similar to Ramist method. Yet the premise might instead be affirmed, elevated partially into a new premise, or transformed through correction. The key move here is to notice the orientation

350. Aristotle, *Complete Works Vol 1*, Top. 101a26-b4.

towards a "*mediating* synthesis":

> Dialectic is a tool whose chief use is to resolve and reconcile binaries, not through a median synthesis (something like splitting the difference and avoiding extremes), but through a *mediating* synthesis (sublation as elevation, transformation, abolition, and preservation all at once) It is overcoming contradictions and resolving tensions by inheriting the strengths of predecessor/competitor theories and practices while overcoming their weaknesses.[351]

This orientation towards synthesis in our primary method of ethical discernment signals a worldview quite distinct from that reflected in intellectual inquiry grounded by self-authenticating axioms. It implies a communal quest for knowledge of the good in which address and response are expected, and in which our conclusions are at best probabilistic. More importantly, however, it sees this communal quest itself as creative and open. Through dialectic, humans overcome contradictions and resolve tensions, creating a mediating synthesis that not only describes the good, but (potentially) manifests the good.

Dialectic and the doctrine of election

Underlying the deployment of phenomena, endoxa, and dialectic as primary methods of inquiry is a presupposition involving the nature of reality, or at least the nature of human communal knowing. That presupposition contradicts the premise underlying the claim that we objectively know universal rules ordained by God directly through discovery of axioms in Scripture. This presupposition is not merely related to a scriptural hermeneutics but precedes and informs it. Creation is open and ongoing. In the Church's language game, the community participates in the rationality and creativity of God dialectically, not just by creating new synthetic concepts but also by re-creating structures that are the context of our life with God. The orientation towards synthesis signals the premise that humans do not just encounter God's creativity, but imitate and cooperate with it. In so doing, humans do not merely obey universal rules ordained by God, but *participate* in the rationality of God.

I must offer at this point a provisional attempt to think beyond Hooker in order to underscore the importance of the christodramatic ethics which will follow. In the

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351. Derek Woodard-Lehman, "Email Message to Author," (August 2, 2013). Emphasis original.

foregoing, dialectical discourse is presented as a method of inquiry that characterizes communal life in Christ. I alluded to a presupposition that precedes and informs hermeneutics. It might appear that I am merely suggesting that the presupposition is to be identified with a preferred resolution to a problem in epistemology. My argument might thereby be reduced to the claim that we rely upon dialectical discourse rather than Ramist-like methods because of its greater pragmatic merit - dialectical discourse is more fruitful because creation is complex. But such reduction would be to miss a larger point that I feel is largely unrealized in Hooker, but to which Barth points.

My claim is indeed that dialectical discourse is preferable to Ramist-like alternatives because creation is complex. The important points, however, are that this is an ontological problem, not merely an epistemological one, and that *there are no universal rules upon which our ethics can be grounded*.

Precisely because "election is 'new every morning'" there is new creation, and because there is new creation, creation is indeed 'open.'[352] Our descriptions of reality must be dialectic because our knowledge of God is determined by God's continuing act of election which itself constitutes the cosmos. Put another way, our epistemological problem is not merely - with Aristotle - that our knowledge is probabilistic at best because of human finitude, but that our object of study - the cosmos - is itself dynamic and complex (rather than static) due to God's continuing creative acts of justification. In epistemology, we have to deal with both the soteriological problem of our blindness and the ontological problem of the dynamism of creation.[353]

We saw in my description of Hooker's doctrine of participation that the self-determination of the Father is to be in relation to the Son, and the identity of the Son is determined by relation to the Father. Our participation in Christ's humanity arises

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352. David W. Congden, "*Creatio Continue Ex Electione*: A Post-Barthian Revision of the Doctrine of *Creatio Ex Nihilo*," *Koinonia* XXII, (2010), 49.

353. I am indebted to David Congden for helping me to recognize that this is an ontological problem, not merely an epistemological one.

ultimately from the triune God's self-determination to be present to God's creation. As Barth observed, in speaking of the divine decision of election, "we are not dealing with a systematic relationship but with one which can be the object and content only of a law which is itself spirit and life, concrete history."[354] In speaking of Christ's election, "there is no reason whatever why we should suddenly substitute for this concept a concept of isolated and static being."[355] Christ's election is decisive for history, "an eternal happening,"[356] yet this is not to be understood as God's static agenda:

> Only as concrete decree, only as an act of divine life in the Spirit, is it the law which precedes all creaturely life. In virtue of its character and content this decree can never be rigid and fixed. It can never belong only to the past. Because it is God's decree it must, of course, be constant, authoritative and powerful. But because it has pleased God to let it be a concrete decree, it never ceases to be event.[357]

David Congden clarifies the implications of Barth's insight:

> ... the divine life-in-the-Spirit that constitutes the living actuality of election takes place within the event of Jesus Christ. The awakening work of the Spirit does not simply point toward a finished and completed reality in the past; it is rather constitutive of the event itself....The Spirit does not enable a mere "recollection" of a "completed and isolated" election. Instead, the Spirit actualizes the contingent "repetition" of Christ's election in both hidden and manifest forms, thus extending the originating event to embrace new concrete particularities ....[358]

God's self-determination to be for us is not an abstraction that happened pre-temporally, but a reality that happens in every moment as Christ re-creates and governs the cosmos. God meets us always in our irreducible particularity. Hence, "election is 'new every morning'":

> What happens in the present and the future is not simply the noetic acknowledgement or recognition of what has already happened on behalf of all in Jesus Christ. Rather it is Christ himself confronting us today, proclaiming the divine "Yes" to us and to all. The act of election is thus no eternally past or perfect decision, but it repeatedly occurs as a particular, concrete event in the pentecostal totality of Christ's past, present, and future historicity... Election itself is a continuous election: it is God's continuous reaffirmation of Godself as God-for-us and God's continuous reaffirmation of the creature as creature-for-God.[359]

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354. Barth, *CD*. 2.2.§§33.184.
355. Ibid.
356. Ibid.
357. Ibid.
358. Congden, "*Creatio Continue Ex Electione*," 48.
359. Ibid., 49.

God's continuing creative acts of justification constitute creation, and this has immense ethical implications:

> Creation, we can thus say, is an eternal act rooted in the eternal Word of God who is self-determined by the eternal decision of election.... Creation, properly speaking, is new creation. We cannot isolate an old creation, or "nature," from which to draw general theological or ethical concepts. Our only epistemic access to creation is through election, and thus through the Spirit of God who meets us in the word that justifies sinners. Moreover, since election is a continuous christological event, so too is creation.[360]

A profound implication for ethics thus arises from the doctrine of justification. Precisely because Christ's Spirit meets us personally, reconciling us in our particularity, Christ's "creative act repeats itself in the justifying word that declares new life to dead sinners."[361] Creation is always new creation. Therefore, "we cannot isolate an old creation, or "nature," from which to draw general theological or ethical concepts." There are no universal rules, no original created human nature to which we can point in order to ground our ethics, no axioms governing matters of action that we can mine in order to secure our covenantal position with God. There is only Christ himself, "the concrete universal, the contingent event that is universally significant in that it includes all other people and events within its singular reality."[362]

Ramist-like methods of definition and division, therefore, are properly rejected as methods of theological and ethical inquiry. This rejection is not merely on pragmatic grounds, but because their deployment represents theological puzzlement: a failure to recognize that theological inquiry is an ontological problem, not merely an epistemological one. Our descriptions of reality must be dialectical because our knowledge of God is determined by God's continuing act of election which itself constitutes the cosmos. Reality is neither fixed materially nor static, but dynamic, and there are no universal rules to be mined or upon which to ground our ethics, precisely because of Christ's justifying acts of re-creation.

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360. Ibid.
361. Ibid.
362. David Congden, "Email Message to Author," (August 9, 2013).

Chapter Summary

We are now in a position to take measure of what has been said about the contrast between Hookerian and Ramist scriptural hermeneutics. We have seen that the Hookerian account rejects the assumptions of Ramist hermeneutics. The divine wisdom found in Scripture is neither self-authenticating, self-interpreting, objective, nor universal. Scripture is not a catalog to be mined, but a practice that forms us in the mind of Christ.[363] The Ramist scriptural hermeneutics postulated the possibility of direct, objective knowledge of God's law. As we have seen, Hooker denied this possibility, insisting that God is always wholly other and the good therefore only indirectly, inferentially, and probablistically known. Ramist-like hermeneutics treats Scripture as a catalogue of timeless absolutes, and through its focus on the general loses sight of the particular. But the particular is the proper focus of ethical reasoning precisely because the general can only approximate the natural law, for though our faculties are apt, our universal judgments are necessarily contingent and inherently probabilistic efforts to clear "the mists that cloud our eyes."[364]

So far, we've seen Hooker's powerful critique of Ramist-like ethical reasoning. But this tells us, negatively, only that such reasoning is not how the mind of Christ is formed in community. We've not yet seen Hooker's positive account, though we have anticipated some of its tenets. The Hookerian account maintains the centrality of Christ and the priority of Scripture's witness to Christ. Our engagements with Scripture are phenomena and therefore inherently subjective in the same way as our encounters with the glorious works of God. No Ramist shortcut can provide an objective foundation upon which to base our ethical reasoning.

If Ramist realism is a false path, how, then, is the mind of Christ formed in community? Hooker's answer begins with an account of our participation in Christ. To that we now turn.

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363. This perspective of Scripture as a *practice* is manifest in chapters 18-22 (on preaching and teaching) and 37-40 (on psalms and canticles) of Book V of *Laws*.
364. *Laws*.V.9.2;1.43.29-30.