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Richard Hooker's Doctrine of Justification

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Introduction

Paul Avis has described Richard Hooker as 'unquestionably the greatest Anglican theologian'.¹ Yet there still remains disagreement about where Hooker stood theologically. Is he a champion for the magisterial Reformers, as Torrance Kirby suggests?² Or maybe the great defender of the Anglican *via media* as Lee Gibbs asserts?³ Peter Lake has forcefully argued that Hooker found the perfect moment in history to be the mighty inventor of Anglicanism.⁴ Where did the 'judicious' Hooker anchor his theological ship?

In this paper we propose to briefly examine Richard Hooker's doctrine of justification. This is a subject that has not received much attention in Hooker scholarship. But it reveals some fascinating insights into the thought of the great divine. Moreover, it may provide some further clues concerning what it actually was that Hooker was attempting to do in his theology.

There are broadly three positions concerning Hooker's doctrine of justification. Firstly, there are those who see Hooker as thoroughly Protestant.⁵ Paul Avis asserts 'Richard Hooker's classical definition of justification in his great sermon of that title is pure evangelical theology'.⁶ Avis believes that Hooker accepted with all the Reformers, and indeed the Puritans, that justification was the *articulus standis aut cadentis ecclesiae*.⁷

The second opinion regarding Hooker's doctrine of justification comes from the Jesuit Joseph Devine.⁸ He argues that Hooker elucidated a version of the great doctrine that was contradictory and confused. According to Devine, Hooker sought to baptize the Protestant construal of justification in scholastic

1 Avis 1989 p 47

2 Kirby 1990 and also Atkinson 1997

3 Gibbs 1981 and 1983

4 Lake 1988 followed by Patrick Collinson 1997

5 Hughes 1982

6 Avis 1979 p 439

7 'The article of a standing or falling church' Avis 1981 p 75

8 Devine 1976

categories. But such an attempt turned out to be a failure. Devine argues that Hooker saw the formal cause of justification as the crux which divided Rome and Canterbury, but he did not and could not finally state what exactly the formal cause was.

The final evaluation concerning Hooker's doctrine of justification is that he was trying to produce something that was in fact a *via media* between Rome and Geneva.⁹ Hooker's doctrine of justification was neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic; it was comfortably settled at Canterbury. In the words of Alister McGrath:

Hooker attempts to construct a mediating doctrine of justification between Catholicism and Protestantism, which avoids the discredited eirenicon of double justification.¹⁰

The Meaning of the Word 'Justification'

Hooker tells us what, in his mind, was the meaning of the actual word 'justification'. The discussion appears in his late *Dublin Fragments*. Hooker asserts that generally 'justification' means 'to be made righteous', but more particularly it gives way to two further meanings:

To be justified, is to be made righteous. Because therefore, righteousness doth imply first remission of sinnes, and secondlie a sanctified life, the name is sometye applyed severally to the former, sometyes joyntlie it comprehendeth both.¹¹

So Hooker understood that firstly 'justification' signifies the forgiveness of sins. It is the forensic declaration of God that one is no longer guilty:

therefore in his blood we are justified, that is to say cleered and *acquitted* from all sinne.¹²

But Hooker believed 'justification' had a second meaning. He asserted that 'sometyes joyntlie it [justification] comprehendeth both' remission of sins

⁹ Gibbs 1981

¹⁰ McGrath II 1986 β30 p 104

¹¹ *Dublin Fragments* 16 FLE IV 117 10-14

¹² *Dublin Fragments* 16 FLE IV 117 15-16 (our emphasis)

and a sanctified life. The words ‘joyntlie’ and ‘both’ indicate that this second justification is not simply sanctification, but includes also the remission of sins.¹³ Such a construal is akin to that which Augustine pioneered and Western Christendom generally followed until Luther.¹⁴ In Hooker’s mind St. Paul spoke of first justification, and St. James of second justification:

Now betwene the grace of this first justification, and the glorie of the world to come, whereof wee are not capable, unles the rest of our lives be qualified with the righteousness of a second justification consisting in good workes, therefore as St. Paul doth dispute for faith, without workes to the first, soe St. James to the second justification is urgent for workes with faith.¹⁵

If there is any reformer that Hooker resembles in his understanding of the word ‘justification’ it seems to be that of Martin Bucer.¹⁶ The difference between the two would appear to be that Hooker includes remission of sin in the second justification whereas Bucer appears not to. We note that Calvin saw three meanings of ‘justification’ in scripture, none of them meant ‘to make righteous’.¹⁷

Justification and Imputation

Martin Luther’s great Reformation breakthrough was the notion of imputed righteousness. This is the idea that the alien righteousness of Christ was imputed to the believer, with the result that a believer could be justified or declared by God to be not guilty. Thus, in Luther’s theological schema, the believer was *simul iustus et peccator*, ‘simultaneously righteous and a sinner’. Imputed righteousness was a concept unknown for the first fifteen hundred years of Catholic theology.¹⁸ So it was this formal cause of justification (imputed righteousness) that demarcated Reformation theology from Rome.

13 *Contra Paul Avis* ‘Hooker uses the term “second justification” to mean sanctification’ *Avis* 1979 p 440.

14 ‘Augustine has an all-embracing understanding of justification, which includes both the event of justification...and the process of justification.’ McGrath I 1986 β4 p 31.

15 *Dublin Fragments* 16 *FLE* IV 118 12-17

16 ‘Bucer develops a doctrine of double justification: after a “primary justification”, in which man’s sins are forgiven and righteousness imputed to him, there follows a “secondary justification”, in which man is made righteous.’ McGrath II 1986 β23 p 34

17 *Inst* III 11 3, 14-16

18 McGrath I 1986 β19; Heinze 1986

Hooker himself followed the Reformers in having a clear doctrine of imputed righteousness. If his understanding that first justification was a declaration by God that a believer was acquitted, then the basis of such a declaration could only be the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to the believer. Hooker is utterly clear about this from his earliest to his latest writings. So in his early sermon on Jude he declares:

Being justified, all our iniquities are covered, God beholdeth us in the rightousnesse which is imputed, and not in the sinnes which wee have committed.¹⁹

In his great sermon on justification Hooker is at pains to distinguish between (first) justification and sanctification (or second justification). Justification consists in an imputed righteousness that is total and external, sanctification consists in an imparted righteousness that is incomplete and internal:

*The rightousnes wherewith we shalbe clothed in the world to come, is both perfecte and inherente: that whereby here we are justified is perfecte but not inherente: that whereby we are sanctified, inherent but not perfect.*²⁰

But the rightousness wherein we muste be found if we wilbe justified, is not our owne, therefore we cannot be justefied by any inherente quality. Christe hath merited rightousness for asmany as are *found in hym*.²¹

Nowe concerning the rightousnes of sanctification, we deny it not to be inherente, we graunte that without we work we have it not, onely we distinguishe it as a thinge in nature differente from the rightousnes of justification.²²

If one believes imputed righteousness marks the substance of reformation theology then Hooker is undoubtedly to be placed within the ambit of Protestantism. But Joseph Devine has argued that Hooker was confused

19 Jude 2, 23. *FLE* 5:50 19-21

20 *Just* 3 *FLE* 5:109 7-10

21 *Just* 6 *FLE* 5:112 23-25

22 *Just* 6 *FLE* 5:113 16-19

understood that sacraments are necessarie.²⁹

In light of such a position Hooker propounded a doctrine of baptismal regeneration also quite unlike the magisterial reformers. Hooker labours the point in chapters 58 to 61 of book V in his *Lawes*. In this section he explains how first justification is tied to baptism:

baptisme is a sacrament which God hath instituted in his Church to the ende that they which receive the same might thereby be incorporated into Christ and so through his most prestious merit obtaine as well that savinge grace of imputation which taketh away all former guiltines, as also that infused divine vertue of the holie Ghost which giveth to the powers of the soule their first disposition towards future newnes of life.³⁰

The imputation of Christ's righteousness occurs in the very action of baptism itself, whereby also the Spirit is received by the believer. Such a passage shows that in Hooker's sacramental theology baptism is not a meritorious work. Christ's merits are the entire basis of one's justification. So baptism is the instrumental cause of (first) justification. Such a position leads Hooker to two conclusions that differ from the magisterial reformers markedly. Firstly, Hooker believes that the very action of infant baptism leads to the child's sins being actually remitted even if faith is not present. Secondly, when Hooker talks of being justified by faith 'alone' he assumes that the sacrament of baptism is included. The Dublin Fragments expound both points:

To the imputation of Christ's death for remission of sinnes, wee teach faith alone necessarie; wherein it is not our meaning, to separate thereby faith from any other qualitie or dutie, which God requireth to be matched therewith, butt from faith to seclude in justification the fellowship of worth through precedent workes as the Apostle St. Paul doeth. For in Children God exacteth butt baptisme unto remission of sinne; in converts from infidelitie both faith and penitencie before baptism; and for remission of sinnes actuall after baptism, penitencie in all men as well as faith; Nor does any faith justifie, butt that wherewith there is joynd both hope and love. Yet justified we are by faith alone, because there is neyther Jewe noe Gentile, neyther Martyr, nor Saint, noe man whose workes in

29 *Lawes* V 57 4 *FLE* 2:246 20-25

30 *Lawes* V 60 2 *FLE* 2:255 6-13

whole or in parte cleere can make him righteous in Gods sight.³¹

Hooker argued for the necessity of water baptism by appealing to texts such as Ephesians 5:26, Acts 2:38, Titus 3:5 and especially John 3:5 'no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit'. He noted that in the latter 'water' was universally accepted in the early church as literal and not metaphorical, as Cartwright (following Calvin) had argued.³² But Hooker also believed that the Fathers were too harsh in insisting that an infant would be damned if it died without baptism. In circumstances that made it impossible for one to receive the sacrament, God in his grace would extend acceptance.³³

If first justification is the effect of baptism, it would appear that Hooker believes second justification is the effect of the eucharist:

Wee receive Christ Jesus in baptisme once as the first beginner, in the Eucharist often as beinge by continewall degrees the finisher of our life. By baptisme therefore we receive Christ Jesus and from him that savinge grace which is proper unto baptisme. By the other sacrament wee receive him also impartinge therein him self and that grace which the Eucharist properlie bestoweth.³⁴

Such a sacramental theology interfaces well with Hooker's central doctrine of participation.³⁵ This doctrine has two elements. Firstly the believer is said to be 'in Christ' (by external imputation) and secondly Christ is said to be 'in' the believer (by internal impartation):

Thus wee participate Christ partlie by imputation, as when those thinges which he did and suffered for us are imputed unto us for righteousnes; partlie by habituall and reall infusion, as when grace is inwardlie bestowed while wee are on earth and afterwardes more fullie both our soules and bodies made like unto his in glorie.³⁶

31 *Dublin Fragments* 16 *FLE* 4:117 33-4:118 12

32 *Inst* IV 16 25

33 *Lawes* V 60 5-V 61 5

34 *Lawes* V 57 6 *FLE* 2:248 4-9

35 Booty 1979 p 17; Booty 1998 pp 169-185; See also Booty's introduction to Book V in *FLE* VI Part One: 197-204

36 *Lawes* V 56 11 *FLE* 2:243 4-9

Baptism relates to the first aspect of participation (the believer in Christ), the eucharist to the second (Christ in the believer):

each sacrament havinge both that which is generall or common, and that also which is peculiar unto it selfe, wee maie hereby gather that the participation of Christ which properlie belongeth to any one sacrament is not otherwise to be obtained but by the sacrament whereunto it is proper.³⁷

John Calvin, like Hooker, believed that the sacraments were able to impart grace. But Calvin and Hooker meant something very different even though their sacramental language was similar. Calvin believed that the sacraments imparted grace because they were a subset of the word. God's word of gospel promise, according to Calvin, strengthens and nourishes faith.³⁸ The sacraments as visible words, to be sure words of promise, are performed in order to increase faith.³⁹

Hooker's theology of the sacraments places them side by side with the word as a means of grace in their own right. They are not simply a subset of the word, although they do function as signs of God's promises. This is particularly seen in Hooker's doctrine of infant baptism. We observed above that Hooker believed a child in baptism receives the remission of sins whether faith is present or not. Such a position is fundamentally different to Calvin.⁴⁰

Justification and Ecclesiology

The reformation doctrine of imputed righteousness led to a transformed ecclesiology. If a believer was *simul iustus et peccator*, someone viewed from two different perspectives, one sinful and one righteous, then the church also could be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly there was the human perspective, which became known as the visible church. Secondly, the church could be viewed from God's perspective, which was known as the invisible church; a group which only God knew. Hooker himself agreed with the

37 *Lawes* V 57 6 *FLE* 2:248 10-14

38 *Inst* III 2 6-7; 21

39 *Inst* IV 14 1-6

40 *Inst* IV 16 21

magisterial reformers' distinction between the visible and invisible church, although he referred to the invisible church as the church 'mysticall'.⁴¹ But Hooker had a very different theology of the visible church. Whereas the magisterial reformers talked of the visible church as a 'congregation', Hooker spoke of a 'societie':

the [visible] Church is alwaies a visible society of men, not an assembly, but a societie.⁴²

The magisterial reformers believed the visible church could be identified by two marks (*notae ecclesiae*). These were the pure gospel (Luther) or word (Calvin) and the sacraments rightly administered.⁴³ Hooker, on the other hand, identified different marks whereby the visible church could be identified. These marks were three: one lord, one faith, one baptism:

We speake now of the visible Church, whose children are signed with this marke, *One Lord, one faith, one baptisme*. In whomsoever these thinges are, the church doth acknowledge them for hir children; them onely she holdeth for aliens and strangers, in whom these thinges are not found.⁴⁴

For Hooker the visible church was recognized in those people who profess to have 'one Lord' (Jesus Christ),⁴⁵ who uphold the 'one faith' which is the basic content of the apostolic faith handed on once for all,⁴⁶ and who have been marked by 'one baptism'.⁴⁷

The key question that arises in Hooker's ecclesiology is what are the contents of the 'one faith' that is to be professed? What doctrines does it include? Hooker dealt at length with this in his celebrated conflation of three sermons, *A Learned Discourse of Justification, Workes, and How the Foundation of Faith Is Overthrowne*.⁴⁸ A key concept for Hooker in this sermon is what he calls the 'foundation of the faith'. Hooker believes that this foundation is to be found firstly in the New Testament writings:

41 *Lawes* III 1 2-3; Kirby 1990 pp 59-91

42 *Lawes* III 1 14 *FLE* 1 205 27-28

43 Avis 1981 pp 36-44

44 *Lawes* III 1 7 *FLE*1:198

45 *Lawes* III 1 4

46 *Lawes* III 1 5

47 *Lawes* III 1 6

48 *FLE* 5:105-169

If the foundation of faith do ymporte the generall grownd wherupon we reste when we do believe, the wrytinges of the evaungelistes and the apostles are the foundation of Christian faith.⁴⁹

But he goes further and expounds what he believes to be the absolute non-negotiable kernel of Christian truth. It is the ‘foundation’ which is to be believed for salvation. Time and again Hooker says what he believes this to be:

Christe crucefied for the salvation of the worlde.⁵⁰

Christ my savyor my Redeemer Jesus.⁵¹

In dede mony of them in former tymes as their bookes and wrytinges do yett shewe held the foundation to wit **salvacion by Christe alone**, and therefore mighte be saved.⁵²

salvation purchased by the death of Christe. By this foundation...⁵³

This is then the foundation wherupon the frame of the gospell is erected. That verie Jesus *whome the virgen conceyved of the holy goste*, whome Simeon imbraced in his armes whome Pilate condempned whome the Jewes crucefied who the Apostles preached, *he is christe the lord* [Luke 2:11] **the onely saviour of the world: Other foundation can no man laie** [1 Cor 3].⁵⁴

For towching the principall objecte of faith longer then it holdeth that foundation whereof we have spoken it neither justefieth nor is, but ceaseth to be faith when ceaseth to believe **Jesus Christe is the only Saviour of the world**.⁵⁵

Salvation only by Christe is the true foundation whereupon indeed Christiantye standeth.⁵⁶

49 *Just* 15 *FLE* 5:122 28-30

50 *Just* 16 *FLE* 5:123 23

51 *Just* 17 *FLE* 5:123 26

52 *Just* 19 *FLE* 5:126 29-31 (our emboldening)

53 *Just* 23 *FLE* 5:133 21-22

54 *Just* 23 *FLE* 5:134 17-22 (our emboldening)

55 *Just* 26 *FLE* 5:137 27 (our emboldening)

56 *Just* 29 *FLE* 5:149 20-22

Salvation therefore by Christe is the foundation of christianitye.⁵⁷

Thus the absolute minimum to be believed is that Jesus is the only saviour and Lord. This is the confession that determines the boundaries of the visible church. But Hooker's position is not simply that anyone who holds to this foundation is in the invisible church as many have thought.⁵⁸ His matrix is much more subtle. There are many who do hold to the foundation but are not to be included in the visible church. Hooker explains two key distinctions that qualify the foundation.

The first distinction is whether one denies the foundation 'directly' or 'indirectly'.⁵⁹ Those who deny directly Christ as the only saviour and Lord are clean excluded from the visible church. Whereas those who deny the foundation indirectly or 'by consequent' are not necessarily excluded. Another distinction is needed.

The second distinction for Hooker is between those who err in 'ignorance' and those who err in 'stubbornness'.⁶⁰ The ignorant are unaware that they hold to error and yet are desirous to know the truth. The 'stubborn' are those who are aware of their error yet persist in it. So there may be people who hold to the foundation but indirectly deny it. If they are unaware of this, and also are desirous to know more of the truth they should be included in the visible church. Those who hold to the foundation but also are aware that they deny it by consequent, are to be excluded from the visible church.

Given these two distinctions Hooker is able to include Rome within the sphere of the visible church. This is because Rome does not deny the foundation directly but by consequent:

Then what is the faulte of the churche of Rome? not that she requireth workes att their handes that wilbe saved but that she attributeth unto workes a power of satisfying god for syn and virtue to merite both grace here and in heaven glorye. That this overthroweth the foundation of faith

⁵⁷ *Just* 32 *FLE* 5:154 8-9

⁵⁸ Sykes 1995 pp 66-67; Booty 1998 p 45

⁵⁹ *Just* 25 *FLE*

⁶⁰ *Just* 26 *FLE* 5:142-143

I graunte willingly, that it is a directe deniall thereof I utterly denye.⁶¹ ...Salvation therefore by Christe is the foundation of christianitye. As for workes they are a thing subordynate, no otherwise necessary then because our sanctificacion cannott be accomplished without them. The doctrine concerning them is a thing builded upon the foundation, therfore the doctrine which addeth unto them power of satisfying or of merittinge addeth unto a thing subordinated, builded upon the foundation, not the very foundation it self, yett is the foundation consequently by this addition overthrowne.⁶²

Thus Hooker is able to conclude that many who died in the church of Rome before the reformation would have been saved. Yet those in Rome who are aware of justification by faith alone but continue to deny its truth are most likely excluded from the *visible* church. The corollary of Hooker's ecclesiology is that strictly speaking justification by faith alone is not the article by which the visible church stands or falls. It allows Hooker to hold that there was a church before Luther, indeed there has always been a church since Christ.⁶³

Should Protestants then treat Roman Catholics as brothers and sisters in Christ and thus not attempt to convince them of their position on justification? The outworking of Hooker's position would not allow this. Consistency with Hooker's position would be to take the pure gospel of justification by faith alone to Rome and call out of her those who truly are of Christ. This is because the true believers within Rome will be desirous to know the truth. Is this not exactly what the Apostle Paul did with the Galatians? He could not leave them in an error that destroyed the foundation by consequent, but preached to them justification by faith alone with white hot passion!

Conclusions

Given Hooker's doctrine of justification how would this contribute to the grand question concerning the purpose of Hooker's theology? The view that Hooker was elucidating a *via media* is problematic because his doctrine of justification cannot be forced through this hypothesis. Indeed what does a *via media* approach mean? That some of the doctrines were Protestant and other

61 *Just 32 FLE 5:153 16-154 2*

62 *Just 32 FLE 5:153 9-16*

63 *Lawes III 1 10 FLE 1:201 4-12*

were Roman or that each doctrine had Protestant and Romish elements? Kirby is right to note that the notion of a *via media* in Hooker is anachronistic.⁶⁴

We must conclude that Hooker is Protestant because he held to the doctrine of imputed righteousness. But he was well removed from the magisterial reformers by his sacramentology and his ecclesiology that allowed Rome into the visible church. Such a distance from the magisterial reformers does not fit well with the thesis that Hooker was an apologist for the magisterial reformation either.

To conclude that Hooker was inventing Anglicanism also has its problems. It seems that Hooker's great desire was to be truly catholic. Egil Grislis has argued that Hooker's methodology was that of 'consensus'.⁶⁵ He sought to include the best of church tradition in his formulations, not democratically but aristocratically. Thus Hooker drew not only from the well of the early church fathers and the reformers, but also from the Aristotelian scholastics! So it is unlikely that in Hooker's mind he was inventing anything. His formulations may well have been novel, as it appears his full position on justification was, but in his mind he was formulating catholicism. This is no *via media* but a *via catholica*. Moreover to say that Hooker invented Anglicanism is to deny that there were other theological formulations that fitted the Anglican symbols of Elizabethan England such as that of Whitgift. Hooker's was a version of Anglicanism.

Well then, can we classify Hooker's version of Anglicanism? Given his sacramentalism and support of the royal supremacy it would seem best to describe him as a high churchman, indeed probably the first high churchman. It would appear he set the theological trajectory in which divines like Lancelot Andrewes, John Donne, and William Laud would follow.

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64 Kirby 1990 pp 34-41

65 Grislis 1972 pp 180ff