

Richard Hooker's Sapiential Theology: Reformed Platonism?

Torrance Kirby

Abstract

Richard Hooker (1554-1600) was a preeminent theologian and philosopher of the Elizabethan Church. Queen Elizabeth appointed him Master of the Temple Church at the Inns of Court in London. In Book I of his treatise *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie* (1593) Hooker identifies Law with Holy Wisdom. Hooker's exposition of the nature of Law echoes the sapiential books Scripture, viz. Proverbs, Job, and the Wisdom of Solomon. Hooker also appeals to a hierarchical disposition of the species of law contained in the scholastic conception of the '*lex divinitatis*', especially as formulated by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and later by Thomas Aquinas. For Hooker, the First Eternal Law concealed in the 'Bosome of God' is unutterable, while its external emanation, the Second Eternal Law, is a 'Voyce' whose utterance constitutes the 'Harmony of the Worlde'. This distinction between two species of Eternal Law owes much to the Neoplatonic metaphysics of Proclus. Both Hooker's sapiential theology and his invocation of the law of the 'great chain' stand in creative tension with his professed adherence to doctrine expressed by the Elizabethan *Articles of Religion* (1571). Is Hooker successful in reconciling his legal ontology with his Reformed soteriology?

Brief Bio

Torrance Kirby is Professor of Ecclesiastical History and sometime Director of the Centre for Research on Religion at McGill University, Montreal. He received a DPhil degree in Modern History from Oxford University in 1988. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, an old member of Christ Church, Oxford, a life member Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and a McCord Fellow of the Princeton Centre of Theological Inquiry. Recent books include *Persuasion and Conversion: Religion, Politics and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (2013), *The Zurich Connection and Tudor Political Theology* (2007), and *Richard Hooker, Reformer and Platonist* (2005). He is also the editor of *A Companion to Richard Hooker* (2008), and co-editor of *Paul's Cross and the Culture of Persuasion, 1520-1640* (2014). His most recent book is an edition of selected *Sermons at Paul's Cross, 1521-1642* (OUP, 2017).