

## Richard Hooker (1554 – 1600)

### I. Historical Context.

- The Elizabethan Settlement – refers to the principles by which Anglicanism was established independent of the Pope
- Anglicanism does not think of itself as founded by Henry VIII (1491-1547)
- The Church of England is the Catholic Church in England, separated from Roman jurisdiction when Elizabeth I became queen in 1558
- Elizabeth followed her half sister Mary (1516—1558) who had restored the Church of England to Roman rule after their half-brother Edward VI's death.
- The question of the day was what it meant for the Church of England to separate from Rome

### II. Biographical Context

- Born at Heavitree, near Exeter.
- Studied at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he ultimately became a Deputy Professor of Hebrew
- Married and became Rector of several parishes, gaining a living from them; but, he spent most of his time in and around London preaching and writing
- Principal work – The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity
- Became the supreme apologist for the Elizabethan Settlement
- In general, he stressed continuity of the Church of England with its medieval predecessor, but nonetheless advocated the doctrines of the Reformers

### III. The Three-Legged Stool: Scripture, Tradition and Reason

- The question is “how do I know what people say God is like is true?”
- Followers of John Calvin (1509-1564) in England were called Puritans. They later settled in Mass. They believed that the scriptures provided a certainty that transcended all other certainty, including *reason*. They wished to confine “reason” to science (i.e., all forms of human learning). They believed that scriptures must be read for themselves and devoid of subsequent interpretation, namely, *tradition*.
- Hooker's answer was that the scriptures were read apart from reason and tradition and were subject to all kinds of private interpretations, which were necessarily biased.

- This answer is consistent with past Catholic teachings. The same notion can be found in the teachings of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and is consistent with Augustine (354-430).
- Regardless of what anybody says, this is how people really read the Bible. They read it. They look at what others have said about it. And, in light of what they already know, they interpret it in a way that makes sense to them.

#### **IV. Reason.**

- The power of the human mind to discern truth – both intuitive and rationale
- Hooker argued that by means of reason we participate in the mind of God.
- He believed that the created order reflects the mind of God, which is discernable to human reason. The mind of God is placed into the mind of humanity like a “seed.” To abide with God’s grace is to illumine our reason until it participates fully in the divine reason.
- Paul – “My knowledge now is partial; then it will be whole, like God’s knowledge of me.” (1 Corinthians 13:12).
- Note that today we often get to the same place using a different method. Hooker began with God and moved to humanity. We are more likely to begin with humanity and go to God. We are more likely to say that our human mind is the only way to transcend our limitations and of making contact with God.
- We believe that the sincere pursuit of truth, done collaboratively, ultimately opens us to the mind of God. It is a spiritual exercise through which God speaks to those willing to hear.
- Basis for natural theology and, accordingly, the notion that non-Christians have a certain knowledge of God. This is also why we believe that the study of the various sciences will lead us to a deeper knowledge of God.
- Another way of saying this is that we emphasize the immanence of God as well as the transcendence of God.
- Revelation still necessary for salvation, and we are brought into relationship by divine initiative. We can’t do it on our own.

#### **V. Scripture.**

- God’s revelation is his self-disclosure.
- Paul speaks of the relationship between Christ and the church as the relationship between a husband and a wife. (Ephesians 5:23-33)
- The Canon (from the Latin meaning by which you measure) of Scripture contains 39 books of the Hebrew Scriptures, 14 of the Apocrypha and the 27 of the New Testament.

- It is the standard by which the belief of the church is measured. It is the Canon because the church says it is the Canon, not any intrinsic quality of the books themselves.
- Nothing should be taught contrary to scripture. But, this is very different from saying that nothing should be taught that is not in scripture.
- Scripture focuses on Salvation, not science. It is not intended to transcend reason. “A Year Living Biblically” of no real meaning to Anglicans.
- Scripture apart from reason becomes a mirror for the misdirected person to project his or her own opinions and give them the authority of God.
- We don’t believe, for example, that the New Testament prescribes any form of church governance.

## **VI. Tradition.**

- “To tradition” means to pass down from generation to generation within the community the church’s lore. Her understanding of God’s ways with humanity.
- The reading of scripture is to be done collectively in light of tradition.
- And, since it is the ongoing reflection by the church of her experience of God, it is a living, changing body of thought. It took almost three hundred years for the canon and the creeds to emerge. But, even so, God’s revelation did not end with the closing of the canon in the fourth century. The scripture is normative, but God’s continues to reveal himself in ways that expand upon what is found in the Bible. Compare “we have always done it this way” and “God is doing a new thing.”
- Think of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Notion of God as three persons in one nature not found in scripture. It grew out of Christological controversies in the fourth and fifth centuries.
- Not clear, but belief of Christ’s presence in the Holy Eucharist may have existed along side of scripture from the beginning -- i.e., part of church’s life from the beginning.
- Note that church speaks on councils. An ecumenical counsel of the whole church not possible since 1054, when the church of the East broke with the church of the West. Gathering at Lambeth has not legislative authority, despite its propensity to pass resolutions that sound binding.

## **VII. Conclusion.**

- In the end, Anglican authority is a bit like authority within a family. The parents are in charge, but operate with input from the children. Not every statement made carries the same authority, and one comes intuitively to know the difference. What is authoritative is what the family comes to treat as authoritative.
- One wishes for greater clarity, but that often comes in the form of tyranny.

- We should expect such “muddiness” when we are attempting to make clear the infinite mind of God for the finite minds of human beings.
- Over time look a lot like the White House Press Secretary walking back whatever the President said the day before!