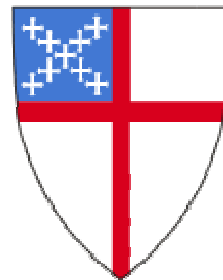


The Lessons Appointed for Use  
on the Feast of

# Richard Hooker

Priest, 1600

November 3



## The Collect

O God of truth and peace, you raised up your servant Richard Hooker in a day of bitter controversy to defend with sound reasoning and great charity the catholic and reformed religion: Grant that we may maintain that middle way, not as a compromise for the sake of peace, but as a comprehension for the sake of truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## The First Lesson

### 1 Corinthians 2:6-10, 13-16

Among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish. But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the human heart conceived,  
what God has prepared for those who love him" --

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. Those who are spiritual discern all things, and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny. "For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

## The Psalm

### Psalm 37:3-6,32-33 Page 633, BCP

- 3 Put your trust in the LORD and do good; \*  
dwell in the land and feed on its riches.
- 4 Take delight in the LORD, \*  
and he shall give you your heart's desire.
- 5 Commit your way to the LORD and put your trust in him, \*  
and he will bring it to pass.
- 6 He will make your righteousness as clear as the light \*  
and your just dealing as the noonday.
- 32 The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, \*  
and their tongue speaks what is right.
- 33 The law of their God is in their heart, \*  
and their footsteps shall not falter.

Looking up to heaven, Jesus said, "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

## RICHARD HOOKER

### PRIEST AND THEOLOGIAN (3 NOV 1600)

On any list of great English theologians, the name of Richard Hooker would appear at or near the top. His masterpiece is *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Its philosophical base is Aristotelian, with a strong emphasis on natural law eternally planted by God in creation. On this foundation, all positive laws of Church and State are developed from Scriptural revelation, ancient tradition, reason, and experience.

The occasion of his writing was the demand of English Puritans for a reformation of Church government. Calvin had established in Geneva a system whereby each congregation was ruled by a commission comprising two thirds laymen elected annually by the congregation and one third clergy serving for life. The English Puritans (by arguments more curious than convincing) held that no church not so governed could claim to be Christian.

Hooker replies to this assertion, but in the process he raises and considers fundamental questions about the authority and legitimacy of government (religious and secular), about the nature of law, and about various kinds of law, including the laws of physics as well as the laws of England. In the course of his book he sets forth the Anglican view of the Church, and the Anglican approach to the discovery of religious truth (the so-called *via media*, or middle road), and explains how this differs from the position of the Puritans, on the one hand, and the adherents of the Pope, on the other. He is very heavy reading, but well worth it. (He says, on the first page of Chapter I: "Those unto whom we shall seem tedious are in no wise injured by us, seeing that it lies in their own hands to spare themselves the labor they are unwilling to endure." This translates into modern English as: "If you can't take the intellectual heat, get out of the kitchen. If you can't stand a book that makes you think, go read the funny papers.") The effect of the book has been considerable. Hooker greatly influenced John Locke, and (both directly and through Locke), American political philosophy in the late 1700's. Although Hooker is unsparing in his censure of what he believes to be the errors of Rome, his contemporary, Pope Clement VIII (died 1605), said of the book: "It has in it such seeds of eternity that it will abide until the last fire shall consume all learning."



Hooker's best short work is his sermon, "[A Learned discourse of Justification](#)." In an earlier sermon, Hooker had expressed the hope of seeing in Heaven many who had been Romanists on earth. A Puritan preacher took him to task for this, saying that since the Romanists did not believe the doctrine of Justification by Faith, they could not be justified. Hooker replied at length in this sermon, in which (1) he sets forth the Doctrine of Justification by Faith, and agrees with his opponent that the official theology of Rome is defective on this point; (2) he defends his assertion that those who do not rightly understand the means that God has provided for our salvation may nonetheless be saved by it, in which connection he says (I quote from memory): "God is no captious sophister, eager to trip us up whenever we say amiss, but a courteous tutor, ready to amend what, in our weakness or our ignorance, we say ill, and to make the most of what we say aright."

by James Kiefer

# Richard Hooker

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

**Richard Hooker** (March 1554 – [3 November 1600](#)) was an [Anglican](#) priest and an influential [theologian](#).<sup>[1]</sup> Hooker's emphases on reason, tolerance and the value of tradition considerably influenced the development of Anglicanism. He was the co-founder (with [Thomas Cranmer](#) and [Matthew Parker](#)) of Anglican theological thought.



## Youth (1554-1581)

Details of Hooker's life come chiefly from [Izaak Walton](#)'s biography of him.

Hooker was born in the village of [Heavitree](#) in [Exeter](#), [Devon](#) sometime around [Easter Sunday](#).<sup>[2]</sup> He attended Exeter Grammar School until 1569. Richard came from a good family, but one that was neither noble nor wealthy. His uncle [John Hooker](#) was a success and served as the chamberlain of [Exeter](#).

Hooker's uncle was able to obtain for Richard the help of another Devon native, [John Jewel](#), [bishop of Salisbury](#). The bishop saw to it that Richard was accepted to [Corpus Christi College, Oxford](#), where he became a fellow of the society in 1577.<sup>[2]</sup> On [14 August 1579](#) Hooker was ordained a priest by [Edwin Sandys](#), then [bishop of London](#). Sandys made Hooker tutor his son Edwin, and Richard also taught George Cranmer, the great nephew of [Archbishop Thomas Cranmer](#).

## Marriage (1581-1584)



In 1581, Hooker was appointed to preach at [Paul's Cross](#). It was at this time, according to his biographer Walton, that Hooker made the "fatal mistake" of marrying his landlady's daughter, Jean Churchman. As Walton put it: "There is a wheel within a wheel; a secret sacred wheel of Providence (most visible in marriages), guided by His hand that allows not the race to the swift nor bread to the wise, nor good wives to good men: and He that can bring good out of evil (for mortals are blind to this reason) only knows why this blessing was denied to patient Job, to meek Moses, and to our as meek and patient Mr Hooker." In truth, the Churchman family belonged to the [puritan](#) wing of the [Church of England](#) and they must have been extremely obnoxious to the high church associates of Hooker. Nevertheless, Richard seems to have been a good husband who seems to have always treated his wife with respect. The couple would have six children together, only two of whom survived beyond the age of 21. Hooker named Jean executrix in his will.

## Later years (1584-1600)

Hooker became rector of [St. Mary's Drayton Beauchamp](#) in [Buckinghamshire](#) in 1584.<sup>[2]</sup> The following year, Archbishop Edwin Sandys brought Hooker to the attention of Queen [Elizabeth I](#), who appointed him Master (i.e. rector) of the [Temple Church](#) in [London](#). There, Hooker soon came into public conflict with [Walter Travers](#), a leading [Puritan](#) and [Assistant](#) at the Temple.<sup>[1]</sup> Hooker later served as Subdean of [Salisbury Cathedral](#) and [Rector](#) of St. Andrew's Boscomb in [Wiltshire](#).<sup>[2]</sup> The influential character of Hooker's writings, particularly *[Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity](#)*, cannot be overestimated. Published in 1593, and subsequently, Hooker's eight volume work is primarily a treatise on Church-state relations, but it also deals comprehensively with issues of [biblical interpretation](#), [soteriology](#), [ethics](#),

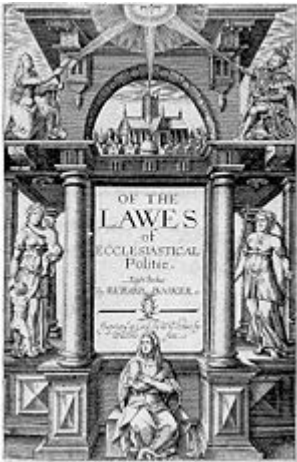
and [sanctification](#). Throughout the work, Hooker makes clear that [theology](#) involves prayer and is concerned with ultimate issues, and that theology is relevant to the social mission of the church. In 1595, Hooker became Rector of the parish of St. Mary's in [Bishopsbourne](#) in [Kent](#). He died [3 November 1600](#) at Bishopsbourne.<sup>[2]</sup> He was buried in St. Mary's [Churchyard](#).

## Works

### *Learned Discourse of Justification*

An important work was Hooker's sermon of 1585, *A Learned Discourse of Justification, Works, and how the Foundation of Faith is Overthrown*. In this he defended his belief in the doctrine of [Justification by faith](#), but argued that even those who did not understand or accept this could be saved by God. This therefore included Roman Catholics, and emphasised Hooker's belief that Christians should concentrate more on what united them, rather than on what divided them. Hooker thus further articulated the Reformed nature of the English Church alongside its claim of belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church founded by Christ and the Apostles. Sermons much like this one provoked a reaction that led to his greatest work. Walter Travers, for example, publicly attacked Hooker's extension of salvation to [Roman Catholics](#) and elsewhere critics complained that his support of reforms in the church did not go far enough. Hooker responded with his masterpiece, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*.

### *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*



Hooker's most well-known work, the first four books of which were published in 1594. The fifth was published in 1597, while the final three were published posthumously<sup>[1]</sup> and may not all be his work. Hooker argued for a middle way (a "*Via Media*") between the positions of the Roman Catholics and the Puritans. In these books, it was argued that reason and tradition were important when interpreting the [Scriptures](#), and that it was important to recognise that the [Bible](#) was written in a particular historical context, in response to specific situations: "Words must be taken according to the matter whereof they are uttered."<sup>[3]</sup> It is a massive work, and its principal subject is the proper governance of the churches ("[polity](#)"). The Puritans, then known in England as the "Geneva Church," for [John Calvin](#)'s influence on them, advocated the demotion of clergy and ecclesiasticism. Hooker attempted to work out which methods of organizing churches are best.<sup>[1]</sup> What was at stake behind such a seemingly

[theological argument](#) was the position of the [Queen Elizabeth I](#) as the [Supreme Governor](#) of the Church. If doctrine were not to be settled by authorities, and if [Martin Luther](#)'s argument for the [priesthood of all believers](#) were to be followed to its extreme and there were to be government by the Elect, then having the monarch as the governor of the church was intolerable. On the other side, if the monarch were appointed by God to be the governor of the church, then local parishes going their own ways on doctrine were similarly intolerable.

*The Laws* is remembered not only for its stature as a monumental work of [Anglican](#) thought, but for its influence in the development of theology, political theory, and (being one of the first major works of theology written in English) English prose.

### Scholastic thought in a latitudinarian manner

Hooker worked from [Thomas Aquinas](#), but he adapted [scholastic](#) thought in a [latitudinarian](#) manner. He argued that church organization, like political organization, is one of the "things indifferent" to God.



He wrote that minor doctrinal issues were not issues that damned or saved the soul, but rather frameworks surrounding the moral and religious life of the believer. He argued there were good monarchies and bad ones, good democracies and bad ones, and good church hierarchies and bad ones, what mattered was the piety of the people. At the same time, Hooker argued that authority was commanded by the Bible and by the traditions of the early church, but authority was something that had to be based on piety and reason rather than automatic investiture. This was because authority had to be obeyed even if it were wrong and needed to be remedied by right reason and the [Holy Spirit](#). Notably, Hooker's affirmed that the power and propriety of bishops need not be in every case absolute.

## Legacy

[King James I](#) is quoted by [Izaak Walton](#), Hooker's biographer, as saying, "I observe there is in Mr. Hooker no affected language; but a grave, comprehensive, clear manifestation of reason, and that backed with the authority of the Scriptures, the fathers and schoolmen, and with all law both sacred and civil." <sup>[4]</sup> Hooker's emphasis on Scripture, reason, and tradition considerably influenced the development of Anglicanism, as well as many political philosophers, including [John Locke](#).<sup>[1]</sup> Locke quotes Hooker numerous times in [The Second Treatise of Civil Government](#). In the Church of England he is celebrated with a [Lesser Festival](#) on 3 November.

## References

- <sup>^</sup> [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) [d](#) [e](#) The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church by F. L. Cross (Editor), E. A. Livingstone (Editor) Oxford University Press, USA; 3 edition p.789 (March 13, 1997)
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- <sup>^</sup> Hooker, Richard, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1593 - 1662) Book IV.11.7
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## Further reading

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# What Three-Legged Stool?

By Chuck Bradshaw +

If you are a member or prospective member of the Episcopal Church, someone at some point is going to tell you about the “Three-Legged Stool” of scripture, reason, and tradition, as a way of describing the Anglican ethos. The image of a stool with three equal legs is an appealing picture of something perfectly balanced. But, at the risk of being called un-Anglican, I have some objections, or at least questions, about the way we use the term “three-legged stool,” especially if it is intended to present scripture, reason, and tradition as three equally authoritative, and possibly independent, sources of revelation; or as if by consulting reason and tradition we might overrule scripture.

On what basis do people refer to the three-legged stool as somehow foundational for us Anglicans? You won’t find it explicitly spelled out in the Bible, or in the collection of “Historical Documents” in the fine print at the back of the Prayer Book. The alleged source of the three-legged stool is the Rev. Richard Hooker (1554-1600), an Oxford University scholar who wrote the first 5 volumes of The Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity between 1594 and 1597.

The *Lawes* were mostly ignored in Hooker’s lifetime (and are rarely read today even by people who claim to be quoting Hooker), but after his death they were recognized as providing a rationale for what is has been called “the Elizabethan settlement”— how, during the reign of Elizabeth I, the Church of England *settled* after about 50 years of fluctuation into an identity as the “Protestant Catholics”: that household of Christ’s Church which participated in the Reformation, with the Reformers’ emphasis on the authority of Scripture, and the centrality of the biblical teaching on salvation by grace through faith; while retaining the catholic orders of ministry (bishop, priest, and deacon) along with the catholic sacraments.

Hooker described a dynamic relationship— not competing, but hierarchical— between scripture, reason, and tradition. That relationship is summarized in Book V: “What Scripture doth plainly deliver, to that the first place both of credit and obedience are due; the next whereunto, is what any man can necessarily conclude by force of Reason; after this, the voice of the church succeedeth.”

Against the Roman Catholic Church, which cited tradition to justify adding “beliefs necessary to salvation” to what the Bible teaches, Hooker stood for the sufficiency of the Scriptures; to the Puritans, who argued that the “plain meaning” of the Bible is enough, without the aid of human reason, he pointed out that there are some questions not explicitly covered by the Bible, but with the aid of reason we can at least ground our approach to them on biblical principles; and besides, even to cast suspicions on reason in favor of the “plain sense” of Scripture, requires some exercise of reason. “The 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.”

Many 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century commentators who invoke the three-legged stool seem to misunderstand what Hooker meant by reason. Opinion polls and questionable “research” in the social sciences are sometimes cited on the side of “reason,” as if to

discredit what the Bible, supported by tradition, clearly teaches. Such authors are often afflicted with "chronological snobbery" (I think that was C.S. Lewis' phrase), the assumption that ancient people were by definition more stupid than people are now, and that the more reasonable one is, the more likely one is to side with the assumptions of the present age against a long-standing Christian consensus.

Hooker acknowledged that sinful human beings fail to act on what their reason perceives, and that even reason has to be converted. Also, reason, in Hooker's sense, included both left-brained linear-sequential logic and something he called "right reason," that is, right-brained, intuitive common sense, along with an intimate, relational "knowing." I think Hooker would say that reason, in this sense, validates what the Church has come to understand as the Bible's teaching.

The Rev. Dr. Christopher Seitz, Professor of Divinity at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, offers this warning against the misapplication of the "three-legged stool" concept:

We should probably not be surprised that an organic notion found in Hooker would be perverted by Western, consumerist Christians and turned into a sort of channel-changer, to find a stool-leg to suit...

The conclusion to be reached is that a vacuum was created after the failure of Anglicanism to retain a doctrine of scripture into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the three-legged stool suddenly emerged as precisely the sort of lens needed to accommodate varieties of Anglicans who had simply lost their way. Some could hear it as a very conservative principle... others could see it as a channel-changer for an Anglican TV set inherently diverse and ambiguous... At least we should be fair and stop attributing such a view to Hooker.

Reformed Catholicism of Hooker's day can only be dragged violently into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Legs would get sawed off, inevitably, and then used as clubs: some wielding one, and others another. It is hard to imagine a better way to mislead and confuse Christians seeking guidance and revelation from scripture called holy, within a church called catholic, in a world that scripture tells us bears God's design and glory, however poorly perceived by sinful women and men, than by claiming a three-legged stool as a distinctive feature. This would wreak havoc, and indeed it has.

*(email posted 12/7/2003 on the traditionalist Weblog:  
[www.titusonenine.blogspot.com](http://www.titusonenine.blogspot.com))*

I'm not arguing against the use of reason (in case any reader should conclude that I am) or denying that there is a grain of truth in the three-legged stool analogy, or pretending that there aren't a great many ambiguities for us to wrestle with. I'm just saying, when you hear references to the Anglican three-legged stool, remember that this dynamic relationship falls apart unless the Bible is recognized as the Church's primary source of authority.