

The ‘sundrie waies of Wisdom’: Richard Hooker’s sapiential theology

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At Pusey House, Monday, 8 February 2016

‘Wisdom reacheth from one end to another mightily, and sweetly doth she order all things.’¹

1. Of lawe there can be no lesse acknowledged, then that her seate is the bosome of God, her voyce the harmony of the world, all things in heaven and earth doe her homage, the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her power; both Angels and men and creatures of what condition so ever, though each in different sort and manner, yet all with uniforme consent, admiring her as the mother of their peace and joy.²
2. my whole endeouour is to resolue the conscience, and to shew as neare as I can what in this controuersie the hart is to thinke, if it will follow the light of sound and sincere iudgement, without either clowd of preiudice or mist of passionate affection.³
3. But if we wil give judgement of the laws under which we live, first let that law eternall be alwayes before our eyes, as being of principall force and moment to breed in religious minds a dutifull estimation of all lawes, the use and benefite whereof we see; because there can be no doubt but that lawes apparently good, are (as it were) things copied out of the very tables of that high everlasting law, even as the booke of that law hath said concerning it selfe, By me Kings raigne, and by me Princes decree justice. Not as if men did behold that booke, and accordingly frame their lawes; but because it worketh in them, because it discovereth and (as it were) readeth it selfe to the world by them, when the lawes which they make are righteous.⁴
4. The Father as Goodness, the Son as Wisdom, the Holy Ghost as Power do all concur in every particular outwardly issuing from that one only glorious Deity which they all are. For that which moveth God to work is his Goodness, and that which ordereth his work is Wisdom, and that which perfecteth his work is Power. All things which God in their times and seasons hath brought forth were eternally and before all times in God, as a work unbegun is in the artificer which afterward bringeth it unto effect.⁵
5. The light created of God in the beginning did first by itself illuminate the world; but after that the Sun and Moon were created, the world sithence hath by them always enjoyed the same. And that Deity of Christ which before our Lord’s incarnation wrought all things without man, doth now work nothing wherein the nature which it hath assumed is either absent from it or idle. Christ as man hath all power both in heaven and earth given him. He hath as Man, not as God only, supreme dominion over quick and dead, for so much

1 *Wisdom* 8:1—also the Advent antiphon ‘O Sapientia’, retained in the Almanack of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1559)—quoted by Hooker in *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*, 1.2.3; *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, gen. ed. W. Speed Hill (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), vol. 1, ed. Hill, 60.27–61.6. All references to the *Lawes* below cite book, chapter, and section followed by volume, page, and line numbers found in the Folger edition.

2 *Lawes* I.16.8; 1:142.9

3 *Lawes* Pref.7.1, 2; 1:34.20-35.2

4 *Lawes* I.16.2; 1:4-15.

5 *Lawes* V.56.5; 2:236.

his ascension into heaven, and his session at the right hand of God do import.⁶

6. Whatsoever either men on earth, or the Angels of heaven do know, it is as a drop of that unemptiable fountaine of wisdom, which wisdom hath diversly imparted her treasures unto the world. As her waies are of sundrie kinds, so her maner of teaching is not meereley one and the same. Some things she openeth by the sacred bookes of Scripture; some things by the glorious works of nature: with some things she inspireth them from above by spirituall influence, in some things she leadeth and trayneth them onely by worldly experience and practise. We may not so in any one speciall kind admire her that we disgrace her in any other, but let all her wayes be according unto their place and degree adored.⁷
7. ...albeit scripture do professe to conteyne in all things which are necessary unto salvation; yet the meaning cannot be symple of all things that are necessarye, but all things that are necessarye in some certaine kinde of forme; as all things that are necessarye, and eyther could not at all, or could not easily be knowne by the light of naturall discourse; all thinges which are necessarie to be knowne that we might be saved; but known with presupposal of knowledge concerning certain principles whereof it receiveth us alreadie persuaded, and then instructeth us in all the residue that are necessarie. In the number of these principles one is the sacred authoritie of Scripture [itself]. Being therefore persuaded by other means that these Scriptures are the oracles of God, themselves do then teach us the rest, and lay before us all the duties which God requireth at our hands as necessarie to salvation.⁸
8. ...We all beleve that the Scriptures of God are sacred, and that they have proceeded from God; our selves we assure that wee doe right well in so beleeving. We have for this point a demonstration sound and infallible. But it is not the worde of God which doth or possibilie can assure us, that wee doe well to thinke it his worde.⁹
9. Because we maintaine that in scripture we are taught all things necessary unto salvation, hereupon very childishly it is by some demaunded, what scripture can teach us the sacred authoritie of the scripture, upon the knowledge wherof our whole faith and salvation dependeth. As though there were any kind of science in the world which leadeth men into knowledge without presupposing a number of thinges already knowne. No science doth make knowne the first principles whereon it buildeth, but they are alwaies either taken as plaine and manifest in them selves, or as proved and graunted already, some former knowledge having made them evident. Scripture teacheth al supernaturally revealed truth, without the knowledge wherof salvation cannot be attayned. The maine principle whereupon our beliefe of all things therin contayned dependeth is, that the scriptures are the oracles of God him selfe. This in it selfe wee cannot say is evident. For then all men that heare it would acknowledge it in hart, as they do when they heare that every whole is more then any parte of that whole, because this in it selfe is evident. The other we knowe that all do not acknowledge when they heare it. There must be therefore some former knowledge presupposed which doth herein assure the hartes of all believers. Scripture teacheth us that saving truth which God hath discovered unto the world by revelation, and it presumeth us taught otherwise that it self is divine and sacred.¹⁰
10. Injurious we are unto God, the Author and giver of humane capacity, judgement and wit, when because of some things wherein he precisely forbiddeth men to use their own inventions, we take occasion to

⁶ *Lawes* V.55.8; 2:232.

⁷ *Lawes* II.1.4; 1:147.23–148.6. See *The Wisdom of Solomon* 11:20.

⁸ *Lawes* I.14.1; 1:125.32–126.5.

⁹ *Lawes* II.4.2; 1:153.13–25. ‘‘

¹⁰ *Lawes* III.8.13

disauthorize and disgrace the works which he doth produce by the hand, either of nature or of grace in them. We offer contumely, even unto him, when we scornfully reject what we list without any other exception then this, 'the brain of man hath devised it'. Whether we look into the church or commonweal, as well in the one as in the other, both the ordination of officers, and the very institution of their offices may be truly derived from God, and approved of him, although they be not always of him in such sort as those things are which are in Scripture.¹¹

11. there can be no lesse acknowledged, then that her seate is the bosome of God, her voyce the harmony of the world, all things in heaven and earth doe her homage, the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her power; both Angels and men and creatures of what condition so ever, though each in different sort and manner, yet all with uniforme consent, admiring her as the mother of their peace and joy.¹²

¹¹ *Lawes* VII.11.10; 3:210.27-211.6.

¹² *Lawes* I.2.3; 1:60.27-61.6.