

BOOK REVIEW

Philip Hobday, *Richard Hooker: Theological Method and Anglican Identity*, T&T Clark Studies in English Theology (New York: T&T Clark, 2023), pp. xiii+223. ISBN 978-0-5677-0803-8

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A characteristic of contemporary Anglicanism is seemingly interminable debates about Anglican identity, in which the debating parties construe Anglicanism as catholic, reformed, or a *via media* between the two. This debate is not infrequently worked out through competing analyses of the Elizabethan theologian Richard Hooker, who despite his relative unimportance during his lifetime has come to be seen as *the* touchstone for Anglican theological identity. Those who wish to stress a ‘catholic’ Hooker tend to compare him to Thomas Aquinas; those who seek a ‘reformed’ Hooker note instead his similarities to John Calvin. Philip Hobday, in his *Richard Hooker: Theological Method and Anglican Identity*, a revised version of his doctoral dissertation, argues that this debate about Anglican identity broadly and Richard Hooker specifically is so frustratingly irresolvable because it rests on a fundamentally mistaken understanding of the relationship between ‘catholic’ and ‘reformed’.

Hobday argues that ‘catholic’, by which he means the teaching and practice of the pre-Reformation Church, and ‘reformed’, which he uses to refer broadly to the commitments of those advocating separation from Rome in the sixteenth century, need not be seen as opposing end points of a continuum, in which becoming more catholic means becoming less reformed (and vice versa). Rather, he suggests that the two need not be seen as in opposition to each other at all, meaning that it is possible to be simultaneously catholic and reformed. The project of his book is to show that on questions of theological method, this is in fact the case: the ‘catholic’ and ‘reformed’ positions are not opposed but express a shared consensus. A comparison of Richard Hooker with both Thomas Aquinas (representing ‘catholic’ theology) and John Calvin (representing the ‘reformed’) shows that these three theologians share a broadly compatible account of the theological warrants of Scripture, reason and tradition. Thus, Richard Hooker – and Anglicanism as a whole – need not be seen as either catholic *or* reformed, and still less a sort of midpoint between the two, but rather ought to be understood as fulsomely and fully catholic *and* reformed.

After an initial chapter setting the groundwork for the analysis to follow, the meat of Hobday's book is in four central chapters: three treating natural knowledge of God, reason, and Scripture in Thomas, Calvin, and Hooker, respectively, and a fourth chapter dealing with the role of tradition in each. Hobday argues that Thomas is significantly more chastened in his account of the possibilities of reason to attain salvific knowledge of God and of the role of tradition in establishing truth than is often understood. In fact, he asserts that Thomas holds a sort of *sola scriptura* position insofar as he believes that saving knowledge of God is available only via God's revelation in the Scriptures. Unfortunately, per Hobday, this has been obscured by reading the positions of Tridentine Catholicism and Trent's later appropriation back into Thomas himself. This is especially the case regarding the role of tradition as an independent warrant for knowledge of God. Calvin has similarly been misunderstood, if in the opposite direction. Hobday shows that Calvin holds the possibility of natural knowledge of God and is not as dismissive of reason, philosophy or the tradition of the early church as has sometimes been alleged. *Sola scriptura* for Calvin is primarily about the source of our knowledge of saving doctrine; he does not disallow reason a subsidiary role in explicating that source or the use of the theologians of the early church as helpful though not inerrant aids for such interpretation. Calvin's own polemical rhetoric, scholarly misunderstandings of Thomas and a tendency to read Barth's views on natural theology and reason back into Calvin, Hobday thinks, have all led scholars to miss the broad compatibility of Thomas and Calvin on theological method.

If Thomas and Calvin have these broadly compatible accounts of Scripture, reason and tradition, then, Hobday argues, we need not see Hooker as fundamentally closer to one and opposed to the other – and thus 'catholic' or 'reformed' – nor argue that his similarities to each means that he holds a view that is a *via media* synthesis of the two. Rather, Hooker is like both Thomas and Calvin in allowing for real, but limited natural knowledge of God attainable by reason while holding that saving knowledge of God can be found in Scripture alone. Hooker's doctrines of Scripture's sufficiency and self-authenticating nature are not, Hobday believes, as dissimilar from Calvin's or that of the broader reformed tradition as has sometimes been alleged. Hooker's willingness to allow human reason and church tradition a great deal of room to shape the external life of the church does not mark a deviation from *sola scriptura* but is in fact an application of it: the Scriptures are our sole source for *saving knowledge* of God; matters of the external governance of the church are not necessary to salvation and thus not set forth for us normatively in Scripture. Hobday particularly blames John Keble for setting Hooker interpretation on an unfruitful path; Keble's search for a 'catholic' Hooker led him to fundamentally misconstrue Hooker's thought on tradition, inaugurating a long and mistaken trajectory of Hooker interpretation until the 1980s which sought to establish Hooker as 'catholic' rather than 'reformed'. But in fact, Hobday argues, Hooker's treatments of Scripture, tradition and reason place him not as 'catholic' over and against 'reformed' (or vice versa), but rather squarely within the catholic-reformed consensus.

Hobday's final chapter seeks to show how this view of Hooker and Anglicanism as both catholic and reformed, existing within a broad catholic-reformed consensus on theological method, might clarify contemporary discussions over the

relationship between faith and reason and authority in the church. He suggests that these theologians help us towards a theologically sound account of reason as communal, embodied and not abstracted from particular contexts and experiences, an account which might be helpful in current discussions about the place of reason in Christian theology. He then seeks to show that this account might also help clarify questions of authority in ecumenical dialogue, showing that Hooker's distinction between doctrine (as determined by Scripture) and church order (as potentially variable, determined by Scripture and reason in conversation with tradition) helps explain Anglican discomfort over the papacy shown in the work of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.

Hobday provides us with a thoughtful and compelling account of the surprising compatibility of Thomas, Calvin and Hooker on key questions of theological method. Drawing upon recent scholarship on the use of Thomas in Protestant thought and revisionist Hooker scholarship challenging the 'catholic Hooker' consensus, Hobday has very helpfully dispelled readings of Thomas as fully Tridentine, Calvin as a Barthian *avant la lettre* and Hooker as Keble in sixteenth-century garb, in order to show the shared features of their thought. If there are points at which the author's reading is slightly speculative – on Thomas and the infallibility of the universal church, for example – the general argument that these three figures have broadly compatible accounts of the theological warrants of Scripture, tradition and reason is convincing and generative.

I did find myself wondering about Hobday's move from this particular compatibility, which he establishes, to arguing for the existence of a broad catholic-reformed consensus. One might query whether the thinkers he chooses can entirely stand in for the diversity of both pre-Reformation and Reformation thought. Does a consensus between Thomas and Calvin on method mean a catholic-reformed consensus on method? Even if one answers this question in the affirmative, one might also ask whether such a catholic-reformed consensus on method means a broad compatibility between 'reformed' and 'catholic' identities writ large; one might argue instead that the consensus on method simply means that the distinction between the two is to be found elsewhere. But I pose these questions not to detract from the genuine achievement of this work. It dispels the obscurity caused by sixteenth-century polemics and contemporary scholarly shibboleths alike to reveal to us a surprising consensus on core questions of theological method among Thomas, Calvin and Hooker. In so doing, it provides a gift to Hooker scholarship and broadly to those thinking about the relationship between pre-Reformation and Reformation thought and about contemporary Anglican identity.

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