

Hooker was a Calvinist . . . Right?

On a certain Neo-Calvinist, but (ostensibly) Anglican blog, someone recently posted the following:

At least one scholar to my knowledge has pointed out that Richard Hooker was more Calvinist than the Puritans

Say Whattt???!!!

My response:

To have actually read Hooker is to know otherwise. Hooker's position could be described as Reformed Catholic. With the continental Reformers, he affirmed the primacy and sufficiency of Scripture, as well as justification by faith. He also endorsed Calvin's distinction between justification and sanctification.

However, Hooker's understanding of law—which is central to his entire project—depends on Thomas Aquinas, not the Reformers. Hooker always speaks positively on law, and there are no parallels to the Reformers' (especially Luther's) negative assessment.

Hooker affirms a high doctrine of eucharistic presence, although he declines to speculate as to the "how." Of course, Calvin himself affirmed a doctrine of presence through the Holy Spirit—which echoes the Orthodox rather than Roman position. (Neither was anything like a Zwinglian.)

Hooker's doctrine of sanctification has parallels to the Orthodox doctrine of deification, and the Roman Catholic doctrine of infused grace. Indeed, he uses the term infusion in reference to sanctification. He interprets sanctification in terms of (ontological) union with Christ's ascended

humanity, and draws a close connection between sanctification and partaking of the body of Christ through participation in the Lord's Supper.

As do Jewel and Cranmer, Hooker endorses baptismal regeneration, and draws parallels between Christ's action and presence in the Eucharist and in baptism. (Of course, Hooker insists—as does Aquinas—that if faith does not follow infant baptism, that the sacrament is ineffective.)

While Hooker does not unchurch those Reformation churches that lack apostolic succession, he argues that episcopacy can be traced to the apostles, and that it is the preferred form of church polity, intended by God and preserved by providence.

In defending Article 17 (on predestination), Hooker affirms (contrary to Calvinism) unlimited atonement, and resistible grace. He rejects negative predestination (reprobation) as well as monergism, and affirms that the elect are those whom God knows to respond to the gospel with faith and persevere, i.e., he is an "Arminian."

As do Cranmer and Jewel, Hooker argues that the Anglican position is in continuity with the patristic church, and that medieval Roman Catholicism departed from the catholicity of the early church. As do Cranmer and Jewel, he appeals repeatedly to the church fathers to confirm his position. While affirming the sufficiency of Scripture, he interprets Scripture within the hermeneutics of the Rule of Faith—as do Cranmer and Jewel. While Cranmer, Jewel, and Hooker are often critical of Rome, they are so because they insist that Rome is NO LONGER catholic, and the C of E has returned to the catholic faith of the patristic church! To the extent that Rome has preserved practices dropped by the continental Reformers, e.g., liturgical worship and episcopacy, Hooker insists that Rome is to be preferred.

While Hooker does not regard the deuterocanonical/apocryphal

books as canon, he insists (contrary to Puritans) that they are edifying and to be read as part of the church's worship.

If Hooker is more Calvinist than the Puritans, then Metropolitan Jonah might well have to rethink his position about Calvinism.

At the same time, I certainly agree that people should actually read the Parker Society volumes as well as Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, and his *Discourse on Justification*. They are full of surprises, not least of which that certain extreme Protestant readers of the Anglican Reformers are simply mistaken.