Of musique with psalms: THE HERMENEUTICS OF RICHARD HOOKER'S DEFENCE OF THE 'sensible excellencie' OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

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In a brief chapter buried deep within his massive apology of the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer in the fifth book of his treatise Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie (1597), Richard Hooker raises the question concerning the use 'of musique with psalmes'. This account of liturgical music is characteristic of Hooker's method and approach in its joint appeal to the authority of Scripture and the principles of Neo-Pythagoreanism. Not unexpectedly he refers to David, whom he names here as 'the prophet', as 'having singular knowledg not in poetrie alone but in musique also, [ard] judged them both to be thinges most necessarie for the house of God.' David was the author of adding unto poetrie melodie in publick prayer, melodie both vocall and instrumentall for the raisinge up of mens hartes and the sweetninge of their affections towards god.' On the basis of this scriptural authority, therefore, 'the Church of Christ doth likewise at this present daie reteine it as an ornament to Gods service, and an helpe to our own devotion.' Proponents of 'further reformation' of the Elizabethan Church, many of whom looked to the liturgical example set by the continental reformed churches, judged the forms of worship prescribed by the Book of Common Prayer to fall far short of the ideal, not least with respect to its aesthetic assumptions and the musical practices associated with its use. John Field, a Student of Christ Church, Oxford and author of the notorious pamphlet published in 1572 under the title A view of popishe abuses yet remaining in the Englishe church—argued that under the
provisions of the Act of Uniformity of 1559, the Church of England was "corrupted with popish orders rites and ceremonies banished out of certaine reformed Churches whose example therein we ought to have followed." For Field, together with Thomas Wilcox, Walter Travers, Thomas Cartwright and a host of other conscientious objectors to the Elizabethan religious settlement, the Book of Common Prayer was woefully lacking. Field describes it as

an vnperfect boke, culled & picked out of that popishe dunghil, the Portuaie and Masse boke full of all abominations . . . In all theyr order and seruice there is no edification, according to the rule of the Apostle, but confusion; they tosse the Psalmes in most places like tennis balles. That they sing Benedictus, Nunc dimittis and Magnificat, we knowe not to what purpose, except some of them were ready to die, or excepte they would celebrate the memory of the virgine, and Iohn Baptist &c. Thus they prophane the holy scriptures.6

In Elizabethan religious polemics the use of music in liturgy thus comes to be framed as a question of both hermeneutical and theological significance. For Thomas Cartwright, the liturgy constitutes a test, as it were, of the authority of scripture:

the whole Leyturgy/ & publike service of the church of england . . . is taken from the church of antichrist/. . . neyther the worde of God/ nor reason/ nor the examples of the eliest churches both Jewishe and christian/ doe permitte us to use the same formes and ceremonies / being neyther commauded of God/ neyther such/ as there may not as good as they/ and rather better be established . . . 

The separatist leader Robert Browne levelled another biting attack on Elizabethan church music, echoing Field’s comparison of antiphonal chant with a tennis match:

Their tossing to and fro of psalms and sentences, is like tenisse plaie whereto God is called to Judge who can do best and be most gallant in his worship: as bie organs, solfaing, pricksong, chauting, bussing and mumbling verie roundlie, on divers handes. Thus thei have a shewe of religion but indeed they turne it to gaming, and plaie mockhollaide with the worship of God.7

The 'sensible excellencie' of Public Worship

In sum, the Puritan objection to the liturgical and musical practices of the Elizabethan Church of England was ranged from an insistence that the evangelical principle of the abrogation of the ceremonal law required the "abrogation of instrumental musique" in worship, to the more moderate view that elaborate church music did not serve to edify. At stake was fidelity to the authority of scripture and the reputation of adherence to basic principles of orthodox reformed theology.

In keeping with his accustomed method of an appeal to first principles—an approach employed throughout the Lawes—Hooker’s initial response was to launch a brief foray into the musical theories of the Pythagorean and Platonic tradition with a view to framing the underlying hermeneutical significance of this debate. He defines musical harmony, whether it be instrumental or vocal, as a “proportionable disposition” of sounds “the force thereof, and so pleasing effects it hath in that very part of man which is most Divine, that some have been thereby induced to think that the Soul it self by Nature is, or hath in it Harmony.” This conception of the soul as a ‘harmony’ is put forward by the Pythagorean Simmias in Plato’s dialogue Phaedo where Socrates responds that “the theory of our soul as a kind of attunement (harmonia) has a strange hold upon me” (88d). Pythagoreans also claimed that heaven and earth constituted a cosmic harmony through the governance of the ‘world soul’, a view that Plato develops extensively in his dialogue Timaeus. The Christian philosopher Boethius (480–523/26) transmitted this Neo-Pythagorean teaching with his formulation of the three levels of music as a universal principle of order: musica mundana, the music of the spheres regulating the motions of the heavenly bodies; musica humana, the harmonious relation of body and soul through the attunement of the passions with the rational soul; and musica instrumentalis, the concordant relation of instrumental sounds and vocal pitches. Central to this musico-philosophical tradition is the assumption of the intrinsic interconnection of the three kinds of music, and it is this assumption which lies at the heart of Hooker’s religious aesthetics.

Musical harmony, Hooker maintains, is "a thing as seasonable in grief as in joy; as decent being added unto actions of greatest weight and solemnity, as being used when men most sequester themselves from action," that is in public and in private. The reason for this is

an admirable facilitie which musique hath to expresse and represent to the minde more inwardlie then any other sensible meane the vere
standinge risinge and fallinge, the verie stepes and inflections everie way, the turns and varieties of all passions whereunto the minde is subject: yea so to imitate them, that whither it resemble unto us the same state wherein our mindes alreadie are or a clean contrarie, wee are not more contentedly by the one confirmed then changed and led away by the other. In harmonie the verie image and character even of virtue and vice is perceived, the minde delighted with theire resemblances and brought by havinge them often iterated into a love of the things themselves.10

Instrumental music and harmony, therefore, provide a mirror—a "sensible meane," as Hooker puts it, "carried from the Ear to the Spiritual faculties of our Souls"11—whereby the soul may contemplate not only itself (musica humana) but also the beauty and order of creation (musica mundana). Music, as Plato taught in Republic, is a principal instrument for the education of citizens for their ideal city. Through the medium of music the soul is trained in practice of the virtues, chief among them Justice which is a harmony of the faculties both within the individual and in the city as the soul "writ large".12 Socrates asks his interlocutors, "Is it not then impossible for us to avoid admitting this much, that the same forms and qualities are to be found in each one of us that are in the polis?"12

Music for Hooker the Platonist is the "sensible mean" whereby the soul is connected to a higher, cosmic principle of order, and consequently the dispositio of music in its three forms—instrumentalis, humana, mundana—are united in a common end and purpose. As Hooker goes on to add,

although we lay altogether aside the consideration of dittie or matter, the verie harmonie of sounds being framed in due sorte ... is by a native puissance and efficacie greatlye available to bringe to a perfect temper whatsoever is there troubled, apt as well to quicken the spirites as to allay that which is too eger, soveraigne against melancholie and despare, forceable to drawe forth tears of devotion if the minde be such as can yeeld them, able both to move and to moderate all affections.14

One is reminded in this connection of Lorenzo's courtship of Jessica at Belmont:

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!  
Here will we sit and let the sounds of music  
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night  
Become the sauce of our harmony.

Such humanistic appeals to philosophical tradition, both here and scattered elsewhere throughout the Laws, were viewed by Hooker's Puritan opponents in a dim light. They advised him in the anonymous Christian Letter of 1599 that he

bee careful not to corrupt the English creede and pure doctrine (whereunto you have subscribed) either by philosophie or the vaine deceate of schoolemens newborne divinitie, or by any other beggerly rudiments of this word ... for as there is one that saith the church of Rome is Mater nostra, our mother: So if you should goe but one step further, we know not what injurie may be done to her Majesties rightfull Imperiall Crowne and dignitie.15

Hooker's erudition is evidenced in his concluding synthesis of Platonic and scriptural authority in his quotation of two eminent divines, Rabanus Maurus (776–856) and Basil of Caesarea. Hooker paraphrases the Abbot of Fulda's observation that the practice of the early Church in reciting the psalms was "more simple and plaine then wee are; that their singing was little more then onlie a melodious kinde of pronunciation [i.e. plain chant], that the custome which wee now use was not instituted so much for theire cause which are spirituall, as to the ende that into grosser and heavier mindes whome bare words doe not easily move, the sweetnes of melodie might make some entrance for good things."17 Music mediates spiritual sustenance through sensation. And, as Basil summarises the matter,

Whereas the holie spirite saw that mankinde is unto virtue hardly drawn, and the righteousnes is the lesse accompated of by reason of the pronenes of our affections to that which delighteth, it pleased the wisdome of the same spirite to borrowe from melodie that pleasure, which mingled with heavenly mysteries, causeth the smoothnes and
softnes of that which toucheth the eare, to conveye as it were by stelth the treasure of good things into mans mnde. To this purpose were thos harmonious tunes of psalmes devised for us . . . . O wise concept of that heavenly teacher, which hath by his skill found out a way, that doinge those things wherein we delight, wee may also learne that whereby wee profit.18

The hermeneutical question: a change of gears

In order to appreciate more fully the hermeneutical, theological, and apologetical significance of Hooker’s little excursus ‘of musique with psalmes’, it is helpful to return to the prolegomenon to the fifth book of the Lawes where Hooker lays out a set of general propositions as a sort of groundwork preliminary to his systematic exposition of the public duties of religion embodied in the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer.19 He formulates his first axiom governing the ordering of religious rites and ceremonies with the following observation:

that which inwardlie each man should be, the Church outwardlie ought to testifie. And therefore the Duties of our Religion which are seene must be such as that affection which is unseen ought to be. Signs must resemble the things they signifie. If religion bear the greatest sway in our hertes, our outwarde religious duties must show it as farre as the Church hath outward habilitie. Duties of religion performed by whole societies of men, ought to have in them accordance to our power, a sensible excellencie, correspondent to the majestie of him whom we worship. Yea, then are the publique duties of religion best ordered. is hen the militant Church doth resemble by sensible means, as it maie in such cases, that hidden dignitie and glorie wherewith the church triumphant in las en is bewtified.21

Signs are to resemble things signified; outward acts to testify to inward dispositions of the heart; human sensible means to show forth hidden divine glory; things visible to correspond to things invisible; the church militant to emulate the church triumphant: such is Hooker’s ‘first proposition’—or perhaps we might call it a fundamental hermeneutical premise—concerning the judgment of what is convenient and appropriate in what he calls ‘the outward public ordering of Churchaffairs’, chiefly with regard to the external forms of divine worship.21 This brief summary of what might be described not inappropriately as Hooker’s ‘semiotic postulate’ is heavily laden with ecclesiological, sacramental, and ultimately Christological consequence, not to mention its enormous apologetical significance. While Hooker hints briefly in his notes at the provenance of his presupposition regarding the principles governing the relation between signs and things signified, the disclosure of the full significance of his claim—in short, his hermeneutics—is the burden of much of the argument of the remainder of the fifth book, a more lengthy discussion than the previous four books of the Lawes combined. This hermeneutical axiom, as we hope to show, is of decisive significance not only in defining Hooker’s views on public worship and common prayer, but also in clarifying both his broader theological orientation, and his claim to a place among the leading figures of magisterial reform.

In support of his assertion regarding the essential connection between signs and things signified Hooker cites a characteristically eclectic combination of authorities: Second Chronicles, Ambrose of Milan, Sidonius Apollinaris, a 5th-century Roman patrician consecrated bishop of Clermont in the Auvergne, and Germanus Nauplius II, titular patriarch of Constantinople from 1226–1243. The passage in Chronicles (2 Chron. 2:4–6) refers to Solomon’s building of the Temple in Jerusalem: ‘And the house which I build is great: for great is our god above all god. But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heasen and heaven of heavens cannot contain him?’ In a certain sense these two short verses set forth the question in a nutshell: on the one hand the construction of the Temple seeks to reflect the divine greatness, and yet, at the same time, Solomon acknowledges the utter impossibility of the undertaking. The sign is wholly inadequate to the task of conveying the greatness of the signified, and yet the building is undertaken all the same, implying thereby an assertion of the possibility of establishing a connection between the incommensurable. According to Patriarch Germanus, ‘the Church’, like Solomon’s Temple, ‘is heaven upon earth.’22 Hooker cites Ambrose’s paraphrase of Psalm 27:3 which states: ‘One thing have I desired of the LORD, which I will require; esen that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.’ In his gloss on this passage, Ambrose binds together the Temple as ‘sign’ with the divine presence as ‘thing signified’ with the words “the delight of God is in the Church; the church is the substantial image of things heavenly.”23 For Sidonius Apollinaris, the Church “does in earth the works of heaven.”24 In the biblical references and in all three ecclesiological interpretations, the emphasis is upon the essential unity and
connectedness of the church militant and the church triumphant, the former an external and visible representation of the hidden and invisible reality. Thus Hooker marshals biblical as well as patristic and medieval authority in support of his central claim regarding the nature of signs and their relation to the things signified: “the publique duties of religion [are] best ordered, when the militant Church doth resemble by sensible means, as it maie in such cases, that hidden dignite and glorie wherewith the church triumphant in heaven is bewtified.”

When John Field’s colleague Thomas Wilcox observed in An Admonition to the Parliament (1572) that “we in England are so far off, from havyng a church rightly reformed, according to the prescripte of Gods woorde, that as yet we are scarce come to the outward face of the same,” his complaint was directed squarely in opposition to the assumption that such a ‘sensible’ resemblance the church triumphant was either possible or even desirable. In his defence of the Admonition published in the following year, Thomas Cartwright noted “the faults that are committed almost throughout the whole Leyturgy & publike service of the Church of England . . . neyther the worde of God/ nor reason/ nor the examples of the eldest churches both Jewishe and christian / doe permite us to use the same formes and ceremonies.” At the heart of these urgent Puritan objections was a growing sense that owing to the liturgy of Common Prayer, with its attendant vestments and ornaments, in its embrace of pomp and an ‘outward stateliness’ of worship, the Church of England had “in many thinges departed from the auncient simplicitie of Christ and his Apostles”; and in Hooker’s summary of these objections,

wee have framed our selves to the customes of the Church of Rome: our orders and ceremonies are papisticall . . . our Church-founders were not so carefull as in this matter they should have bene, but contented them selves with such discipline, as they took from the Church of Rome. Their error we outh to reforme by abolishing all Popish orders. There must bee no communion nor fellowship with Papistes neither in doctrine, ceremonies, nor government. It is not enough that we are devided from the Church of Rome by the single wall of doctrine, retening as wee doe parte of their ceremonies, and almost their whole government . . .

For Hooker, the question therefore was ‘whether we may follow the Church of Rome in those orders rites and ceremonies, wherein we doe not thinke them blameable, or els ought to devise others, and to have no conformitie with them.’ In setting out his argument in defence of Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal with its three-fold hierarchy of sacred ministers, Hooker appeals to an ancient authority who, at least superficially, looks to be the most unlikely ally in an apology intended both to justify “the state of reformed religion” in England and to urge the non-necessity of further Reformation along the lines proposed by Cartwright, Travers, and the authors of the Admonition and A view of popishe abuses, Wilcox and Field. In response Hooker observes that

no nation under heauen either doth or euer did suffer publique actions which are of waight, whether they be ciuil and temporall, or else spiritual and sacred, to passe without some visible solemnite; the very strangenes whereof and difference from that which is common, doth cause popular eyes to obserue and to marke the same. Wordes both because they are common, and doe not so strongly moue the phancie of man, are for the most parte but sleightly heard; and therfore with singular wisdome it hath bene prouided that the deeds ut men which are made in the presence of witnesses, should passe not onely with words, but also with certaine sensible actions, the memory whereof is farre more easie and durable then the memorie of speech can be.

Here also we detect the application of Hooker’s hermeneutic of signs in the employment of visible tokens to represent hidden realities, and here also the language is somewhat suggestive of a Platonic influence. The faculty of human ‘phancie’—an expression referring to the imaginative faculty, plausibly to Plato’s phantasia—is the mean or the instrument whereby the mind is addressed.

In support of the hermeneutics of ‘visible solemnite’ in the liturgy Hooker invokes patristic authority in the person of none other than Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, the obscure but remarkably influential early-sixth-century Syrian orthodox theologian who aimed at a synthesis of Christian doctrine with the late-Neoplatonic metaphysics of Proclus. In his Ecclesiastical Hierarchies, Dionysius offers the most succinct summary of governing principle of Hooker’s liturgical hermeneutics: “the sensible things which Religion hath hallowed, are resemblances framed according to thungs spiritually understood, whereunto they serve as a hand to lead and a way to direct.” This was a widely recognised formulation of the lex divinitatis, the so-called law of the ‘great chain’, influential earlier in the sixteenth century in the theology of John Colet. This law constitutes a principle of cosmic mediation of
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ecclesiastical dominion, or the Royal Supremacy, Hooker again quotes
Pseudo-Dionysius as the source of his thoughts on the question of order and
hierarchy, thus linking hermeneutically the questions of ceremonies and
ecclesiastical government: 35

If you take away order, of necessity confusion follows, whence arises
division and from division destruction . . . Therefore, the Apostle has
said that all things should be done with order . . . This order consists in
distinction of degree, so that one differs from his fellow in power and
the lesser obeys the greater, otherwise society cannot hold together.
And so it is a divine law [lex divinitatis], says Blessed Dionysius, for
the lowest things to be led back to the highest by those that are
intermediate. 36

That the lower 'sensible things' 37 serve to mediate knowledge of things
'spiritually understood' of which they are resemblances is as clear a formulation
as one might wish of the first axiom concerning the 'publique duties of
religion'. Thus, to return to the axiom, "duites of religion performed by whole
societies of men, ought to have in them—a sensible excellencie, correspondent
to the majestie of him whome we worship—[they are] best ordered, when the
militant Church doth resemble by sensible means—that hidden dignitie and
glorie wherewith the church triumphant in heaven is bewitified." 38 That there can
be an aesthetic correspondence between the visible beauty of the church militant
in earth and the invisible glory of the church triumphant in heaven is the
premise underlyng this logic of hierarchical mediation.

Throughout the Lawes Hooker continually employs arguments and
images which support the view that the church, her orders of ministry,
government, sacraments and ceremonies, and indeed her music are all modelled
on an exemplar of a cosmic order epitomised by the hierarchy of the angels. The
'law celestial' which governs the angelic beings provides a paradigm for order
and worship among mortals:

Neither are the Angels themselves, so farre seivered from us in their
kind and manner of working, but that, betweene the law of their
heavenly operations and the actions of men in this our state of
divine power and governance through a series of hierarchically ordered steps
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The 'sensible excellencie' of Public Worship

mortalitie, such correspondence there is, as maketh it expedient to
know in some sort the one, for the others more perfect direction. 39

The orderly obedience of the angels provides 'a paternce and a spurre'
to weaker human nature, particularly with respect to the 'sensible excellencie'
of ceremonies of the liturgy: 'even about the outward orders of the Church
which serve but for comlinesse, some regard is to be had of Angels, who best
like us, when wee are most like unto them in all partes of decent demeanor.' 40
Thus the clergy clad in 'holy garments' mandated by the Ornaments Rubric are
said to resemble "the glorie of the Saintes in heaven, together with the beutie
wherein Angels have appeared unto men." 41 This concept of the linking together
of human worship with angelic models is beautifully summarised in the Collect
appointed for the feast of Saint Michael and All Angels: "O Everlasting God,
who hast ordered and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful
order: Mercifully grant that, as thys holy Angels alway do thee service in heaven,
so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth . . ." 42 Thus

for Hooker

the howse of prayer is a court bewitified with the presence of the
celestial powers, that there we stand, we pray, we sound forth hymres
unto God, havinge his Angels intermingled as our associates; and that
with reference thereunto thapostle doth require so great care to be had
of decencie for the angels sake; how can we come to the house of
prayer and not be moved with the vere glorie of the place it selfe, so to
frame our affections prayinge, as doth best beseeme them, whose sutes
thalmightie doth there sitt to heare, and his angels attend to furder.' 43

Hooker devotes an entire chapter to a defence of the ancient practice of
antiphonal singing, that is "of singinge or sayinge psalmes md other parts of
common prayer wherein the people and the minister answere one another by
course." 44 For Basil of Caesarea, the practice of singing one verse with the voice
and attending in the heart to next "did both strengthen the meditation of these
holie words which were uttered in that sorte, and serve also to make attentive
and to raise up the hartes of men; a thinge whereunto Gods people of old did
resort with hope and thirst that thereby especiallie theire soules might be
edified; . . ." 45 The alternation between vocal and silent chant, between heart
and voice, serves in Hooker's view to reinforce the sense of the dispostoio
of worship between the angelic and human orders. Concerning antiphonal chant,
Cartwright observes that
from whence soever it came, it cannot be good, consideringe, that when it is granted, that all the people may praise God (as it is in singing of psalms) then this ought not to be restrayned unto a few; and where it is lawfull both with harte and voice to singe the whole psalme there is is not meete that they should singe but the one halfe with their harte and voice, and the other with their harte only. For where they may both with harte and voice sing there the heart is not enough. Therefore besides the incommoditie which cometh this way, in that being tossed after this sorte men cannot understand what is songe, those other two inconueniences com of this form of singing, and therefore it is banished in all reformed Churches.4b

The force of Cartwright’s negative response to antiphonal singing is to reassert the impossibilit and inappropriateness of the attempt to imitate or represent through external forms of worship as in such a manner as to suggest their being in any way proportionable to the ‘hidden dignitie’ of angelic praise. The distance between sign and the thing signified is too great to admit of disposition.

The apologetics of worship

How are we to construe theologically Hooker’s repeated invocations of the ‘beauty of holiness’? An invocation of worship fit for the presence of the angels as interpreted by the grand tradition of Christian Neoplatonism in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite raises the question whether Hooker may perhaps have been disingenuous in his repeated assertion that he is a defender of the reformed tradition in the Church of England. Hooker’s 16th-century Puritan critics and indeed many of his 19th-century and 20th-century admirers see his theology as essentially a theological compromise, even as a wholesale abandonment of Reformed principles. Some of Hooker’s contemporaries excoriated holus bolus his sustained defence of the authority of reason and natural law, the freedom of the will, the authority of the Fathers and ecclesiastical tradition, the ‘beauty of holiness’ as manifest in the splendour of Church architecture, ornaments, and liturgy, together with his defence of the hierarchy of bishops, and finally the royal headship of the Church as self-evident abandonment of main-stream Protestant orthodoxy, as a retreat into ‘the darkenesse of Schoole learning’, and therefore as a fatal compromise with ‘Poperie’, as the anonymous attack titled A Christian Letter puts it.47

John Henry Newman, John Keble, and many Victorian and later scholars influenced by what might be termed ‘the via media hermeneutic’ of Anglicanism (e.g. Harry Porter, Lee Gibbs, and William Haugaard) took—and continue to take—very much the same view of the substance of Hooker’s position on many of these substantive theological questions, except that they are by no means critical of such an apparent abandonment of Reformation principles, but rather welcome and praise this approach as striking a middle path between Rome and Geneva and thus as definitive of the peculiar character of the Church of England and of Anglicanism.48 Diarmaid MacCulloch has neatly summarised this via media hermeneutic in his description of the English Reformation as a ‘theological cuckoo in the nest’ where the ‘egg’ of Protestant doctrinal reform is laid and hatched in a ‘Romish’ ecclesiastical nest.49 As a consequence of an embrace of this paradigm, many scholars have interpreted Hooker’s axiom regarding the relation between signs and things signified, and his consequent sacralisation of the visible church, as solid evidence of a common-sense willingness to strike a compromise between Rome and Reform. This is the what is often referred to as the ‘exceptionalist’ account of the English Reformation, with Richard Hooker, the putative theological ‘father of Anglicanism’,50 held up as the first and greatest exponent of a new path of theological compromise—a ‘Protestant tertium quid among established European churches’ in William Haugaard’s formulation.51

Does this reading of Hooker as the author of the via media and inventor of Anglicanism hold water? I would like to propose that this very important question turns decisively on our reading of Hooker’s remarkably subtle hermeneutic of signs. (This question is important not only for the interpretation of the thought of Hooker, but also for the self-understanding of Church of England and the case for the authenticity of its claim to a place within the Reformed tradition.) To begin, I would like to leap back a generation to Hooker’s patron John Jewel, bishop of Salisbury, who puts the hermeneutical problem very succinctly in his celebrated Challenge Sermon preached at Paul’s Cross shortly after the accession of Elizabeth in November 1558.52 In his sermon Jewel offers a critique of the doctrine of transubstantiation wherein he states as his principal axiom: ‘first we put a difference between the sign and the thing itself that is signified.’ Such sharp distinction between a literal and a figurative interpretation of sacramental ‘presence’ is of crucial significance for the emergence of a distinctively Protestant hermeneutics. Indeed for Jewel the
key disagreement between the churches of England and Rome was reducible to hermeneutical method—the enormous attention received by this sermon on the part of both supporters and opponents is very likely owing to the clarity of his formulation of the critical semiotic problem of the Reformation. Drawing upon Augustine’s *De doctrina Christiana*, Jewel neatly summarises the key principle which would become definitive of Elizabethan hermeneutics, ecclesiasticum, and sacramental teaching: ‘we put a difference between the sign and the thing itself that is signified.’ Jewel demonstrates that in Augustine’s treatment of the Eucharist the preparation of the mind for the reception of communion is all important, for the ‘figure’ of the thing is not to be confused with that which it represents, the referent or the ‘thing itself’. ‘How shall I hold him,’ saith Augustine, ‘which is absent? How shall I reach my hand up to heaven, to lay hold upon him that sitteth there?’ He answereth, ‘Reach thither thy faith, and then thou hast laid hold on him. Faith had in the sacraments,’ saith Augustine, ‘doth justify, and not the sacraments.’ Augustine’s dictum “In sacramentis videndum est, non quid sint, sed quid significat” is quoted by Jewel repeatedly. Jewel summarises the Augustinian foundation of this reformed account of sacramental communion: ‘That we be thus in Christ, and Christ in us, requireth not any corporal or local being, as in things natural. We are in Christ sitting in heaven, and Christ sitting in heaven is here in us, not by a natural, but by a spiritual mean of being. St. Augustine saith: “postquam ex mortuis resurrexit, et ascendit ad Patrem, est in nobis per Spiritum” (de Trin. 6). The distance between sign and signified is underscored by the Ascension. A hermeneutics grounded in the distinction between sign (signum) and thing signified (significatum) takes on deeper Christological significance for Jewel when he cautions against so maintaining the divine nature of Christ as to take away the truth of his bodily human nature. Again quoting Augustine, ‘We confess there are in Christ two substances or natures; the one of the godhead, the other of the manhood; the one of the creator, the other of the creature; which substances notwithstanding are not confused, but united, and in one selfsame person inseparable, and remaining evermore in their own properties.’ To confuse sign and thing signifies is tantamount to overthrowing this crucial formula of patristic Christological orthodoxy, namely the Chalcedonian definition. Jewel’s Augustinian hermeneutic of sign and thing, and the classically ‘Reformed’ account of sacramental presence built upon that hermeneutic, reverberate throughout his critique of private masses, the adoration of images, and prayers in a strange tongue, as well as in his affirmation of communion under both kinds, his definition of the jurisdiction of bishops, and their dependence upon the ecclesiastical supremacy of Princes.

It is no exaggeration to state that Jewel set the hermeneutics—and consequently the ecclesiasticum of the Church of England—on a revolutionary new course, a course which he claimed to be unequivocally ‘reformed’. The great achievement of his *Apologia ecclesiae Anglicanae* is to link together the manifold characteristics of the faith, order, and worship of the reformed Church of England as they had emerged piece by piece during the previous three decades under Henry VIII, Edward VI, and most recently under Elizabeth, and to demonstrate their coherence in terms of a fully self-conscious restoration of an Augustinian hermeneutic of ‘signum et res’. By Jewel’s account, the ecclesiological coherence of the reformed and autonomous *ecclesia Anglicana* under Elizabeth was the product of this decisive hermeneutical shift—a conservative achievement in one important respect, namely that Jewel’s new approach was a ‘return’ to the authority of the Fathers of the early church.

The opposed logics of Catholic and Jewel’s new reformed ecclesiasticum are perhaps most plainly evident in their distinct accounts of sacramental theology. Whereas the traditional doctrine of the Mass and transubstantiation tended to collapse the distinction between signifier and signified in their assertion of an objectified ‘real presence’, the liturgy of the *Book of Common Prayer* reasserts a much sharper distinction between the two in tune with an Augustinian hermeneutic. According to Jewel’s critique of transubstantiation in his *Apologia* the traditional hermeneutic of sacramental presence fails to distinguish sufficiently between *signum* and *res*. Jewel’s insistence upon a distinction between a literal and figurative interpretation of sacramental ‘presence’ is of crucial significance for the formulation of a distinctly reformed ecclesiasticum, foremost with respect to the interpretation of the relation between the empirical, phenomenal reality of the visible church and the church universal. The new hermeneutics, in short, gives rise to a radical redefinition of the meaning of catholicity (as well as of the unity, sanctity, and apostolicity) of the universal church. The hermeneutic of ‘presence’ associated with the doctrine of Transubstantiation, on the other side, requires as its ecclesiological corollary a tighter correspondence between the church militant and the church universal—between *signum* and *significatum*. On the analogy of the consecrated Host, the church militant is an outward and phenomenal
The sensible excellency of Public Worship

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In the visible world of the invisible, universal, and mystical reality of the church as a supernatural community, the sign represents the thing signified. This description, of course, evokes the language employed by Hooker in his hermeneutical proposition at the outset of Book V of the Laws. Signes must resemble the thing signified — the Militant Church doth resemble by sensible means, as it were, the hidden dignities and glories with which the Church triumphant in heaven is clothed. This understanding of the sacrament as a visible representation of the invisible reality is fundamental to the Protestant reformation. Whereas the formularies of the old Mass (retained in the vernacular in Cranmer's first version of the Prayer Book of 1549) assert an eternalized real presence, “Take, eat; this is my body. Accepite et comedite. tine est corpus meum.” The revised words of 1552 transfer the locus of presence to the inner, subjective experience of the worshipper: “Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and fed thee in his heart by faith, with thanksgiving.” Consequently, “presence” is interpreted in the revised liturgy as a figural or conceptual synthesis of word and elements performed in the subjective forum of the minds of worshippers, and thus inseparable from reception of the host. The distinction between sign and thing signified is reinforced.

It is interesting in this connection to note that in the BCP of 1552, as well as in the subsequent revisions of 1559 and 1662, the administration of the communion occurs precisely at the stage in the liturgy at which the elevation of the host occurred in the old Mass, i.e., the moment of transubstantiation. The order of the liturgy clearly instructs that the chasm between sign and thing signified is no longer bridged in an external theurgical act, but rather through the elevation of the host — a move that was fundamental to the reformation of the liturgy. The internalization of this figural sacrament is thus a necessary consequence of the Protestant reformers' commitment to the distinction between sign and thing.
he presents the question of the reform of the English church in terms with apocalyptic overtones. The reference to 'Anti-christianitie' presupposes an incommensurability of the traditional ceremonial with Reformed evangelical principles—only with thus implying a hermeneutic of incommensurability between sign and thing signified. To mingle the 'order of the gospel' with the 'ceremonies of popery' is hermeneutical confusion. Cartwright beseesches the Queen and her Council "to deliver this realm from the hot furnace and iron yoke of the popish Egypt, to procure also that the corruptions which we have brought from them (as these with which we being so deeply dyed and stained have not so easily shaken off) may be removed from amongst us, to the end that we, being nearer both joined unto the sincerity of the gospel, and the policy of other reformed churches, may thereby be joined nearer with the Lord."3

Throughout the argument of the Lawes Hooker seeks at every turn to defuse this apocalyptic approach by means of the subtle dialectical proposal that it is possible to adhere to a clear distinction of sign and thing signified and, at the same time, to allow for the possibility of the correspondence or representation of the signified by its sign.6 Hooker's argument for bridging the gap between these two apparently contrary hermeneutical presuppositions—i.e. between the radical distinction of sign and signified, on the one hand, and the possibility of representational resemblance of the signified in the sign, on the other—is grounded in an appeal to two theological sources, one Reformed and the other Patristic. The former is articulated by Hooker's embrace of the instrumental realism found in the sacramental theology of Calvin,65 Heinrich Bullinger,66 and Peter Martyr Vermigli,67 succinctly summarised in the formula of the Consensus Tigurinus of 1549;68 the latter is contained in the Chalcedonian Christological definition which constitutes the 'central tower' around which the argument of the fifth book of the Lawes—and arguably the entire edifice of all eight books—is constructed.69

Hooker's preliminary discussion of the sacraments links their definition with the question concerning the nature of signs by noting that the word 'sacrament' is ordinarily confined to what he calls 'some few principal Divine ceremonies'. In such ceremonies there is "the substance of the ceremony itself which is visible; and, besides that, somewhat else more secret, in reference whereunto we conceive that ceremony to be a Sacrament."70 Hooker then rehearses Augustine's traditional definition:

When Sacraments are said to be Visible Signs of Invisible Grace, we thereby conceive how Grace is indeed the very end for which these Heavenly Mysteries were instituted; and besides sundry other Properties observed in them, the matter whereof they consist, is such as signifieth, figureth, and representeth their End.71

This much was not in dispute. The crucial question concerns the precise relation between the sign and the thing signified. Hooker wades further into the question when he asserts later on that sacraments serve as the 'moral instruments' of God:

where the Signs and Sacraments of his Grace, are not either through contempt unreceived, or received with contempt, we are not to doubt, but that they really give what they promise, and are what they signifie. For we take not Baptism, nor the Eucharist, for bare resemblances or memorials of things absent, neither for naked signs and testimonies assuring us of Grace received before, but (as they are indeed and in verity) for means effectual, whereby God, when we take the Sacraments, delivereth into our hands that Grace available unto Eternal Life, which Grace the Sacraments represent or signifie.72

As 'moral instruments' the signs effect what they signify. In this Hooker is demonstrably in agreement with the Consensus Tigurinus, the agreement reached by Calvin and Guillaume Farel with the Church of Zurich in 1549. According to the formulation of the Consensus,

\{What the sacraments truly figure, the Lord truly offers.\} [8] Moreover, while the testimonies and seals of his grace which God has given us are true, without any doubt he truly offers inwardly by his Spirit that which the sacraments figure to our eyes and other senses.
\{Signs and things signified are distinct.\} [9] Hence although we distinguish between the signs and the things signified, as is right and proper, yet we do not separate the truth from the signs; but rather we confess that all who by faith embrace the promises there offered receive Christ spiritually together with his spiritual gifts, and as long as they have been made partakers of Christ, continue and renew that fellowship.73

Here in the Zurich Agreement we find the crux of the matter. The signs and the things signified are distinct; yet, the truth of the sign is not separated
from the sign. This is the force of Hooker’s language of ‘instrumentality’74—
although the signs are not in any way to be confused with the signified,
nonetheless the former continue to be connected to the latter in such a manner
that enables the offering and receiving of the gift signified through the means of
the sign. Thus for Hooker,

The real presence of Christ’s most blessed body and blood, is not therefore to be sought for in the [external] sacrament, but in the worthie receiver of the sacrament. . . . As for the sacramentes, they reallie exhibit, but for ought wee can gather out of that which is written of them they are not reallie nor do reallie conteine in them selves, that grace, which with them or by them it pleaseth God to bestowe.75

Real presence, therefore, in the sacraments presupposes the faithful worshipper who is able to interpret the unity of the three things that ‘make the substance of the sacrament’, namely the gift offered, that is the thing signified; the elements which depict the gift, that the signs; and the word of scripture which articulates the link between the two.76 Thus viewed, sacraments become necessarily dynamic events where the instrumentality of signs works through the act of interpretation on the part of the receiver. “Whereupon”, Hooker concludes, “there ensueth a kinde of Transubstantiation in us, a true change, both of Soul and Body, an alteration from death to life.”77 This redefinition of presence cautiously avoids the extremes of either separating or confusing sign and signified.

NOTES

1. This paper was presented at a meeting of the Society for Reformation Studies held in Cambridge, April 2009.

2. Lanes V.38.2: 2:151.4—21.

3. The pamphlet was originally published together with Thomas Wilcox’s An Admonition to the Parliament [Hemel Hempstead?: J. Stroud?, 1572] and is reprinted in W.H. Frere 2. Lanes V.38.2: 2:151.4—21.

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numbers in the Folger edition (FLE). V.6.2; 2:33.26–34.6 (emphasis added).

22. Εικοσιστατο των ύπαγευθ οίκειων; ‘At Θειαί λατοφύλας (Rome: Demetrius Doukas, 1526), sig. M2; PG 98:384. See Laves V.6.2: 2:34f; see also FLE 6(2):659.
23. ‘Delectatio Domini in Ecclesia est, Ecclesia vero est imago caelestium;’ De interpelatione David, in Opera Omnia (Basle: Eusebius Episcopus, 1567), vol. 4, 410; PL 14:8:3.
27. See Walter Travers, Ecclesiastica discipline, et Anglicane ecclesia ab abstraccionibus, plena e verbo Dei, et dilucida explicatio (Rupellae: Adam de Monte, 1574) fol. 12 ‘f’. For a contemporary English translation of Travers’s treatise by Thomas Cartwright, see A full and plain declaration of ecclesiastical discipline ont the word off God: and off the declining off the church off England from the same (Heidelberg: Michael Schirat, 1574), 15–16.
28. Laves IV.3.1; 1:280.6–16
29. See Hooker’s peroration to Laves IV.14.7; 1:343.8–344.32, esp. 344.6.
32. Laves IV.1.3: 1:275.21–24 e. Pseudo-Dionsius the Areopagite, De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia 2.3.2; Opera (Paris: Guillaume Morel, 1562), p. 121; PG 3:397. See the translation of this passage in Pseudo-Dionysius: the Complete Works (Classics of Western Spirituality), translated by Colin Lubbe and Paul Rorem (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 205: “Sacred symbols are actually the perceptible tokens of theconceptual things. They show the way to them and lead to them, and the conceptual things are the source and the understanding underlying the perceptible manifestations of hierarchy.”
34. On Hooker’s extensive use of the concept of the lex divinitatis, see Torrance Kirby, ‘Grace and Hierarchy;’ Richard Hooker and the English Reformation, 25–40.
35. For Aquinas’s formulation of the lex divinitatis see Summa Theologiae Ia Iae q.172 art.2: ‘As the Apostle says (Rom. 13.1), Things that are of God are well-ordered. Now the Divine ordering (lex divinitatis) according to Dionysius (Eccl. Hier. V), is such that the lowest things are directed by middle things. Now angels hold a middle position between God and men, in that they have a greater share in the perfection of the Divine goodness than have men. Whencefore the divine enlightenments and revelations are conveyed from God to men by the angels.’ See also Denys Turner, ‘How to read pseudo-Denys today? ’ International Journal of Systematic Theology 7.4 (2005): 428–440.
37. Autograph Notes (Supplement II), 3:494.
38. ‘Sensible things’ and ‘hierarchies’ are both translated ‘sacramenta’ in the Latin edition of the Ecclesiastical Hierarchies. See Comm. on 1.275.21–24e in FLE 6(1):602
39. Laves V.6.2: 2:33.26–34.6 (emphasis added).
42. The Collect appointed in the Book of Common Prayer to be read on 29 September.
46. Cartwright, Replye, 203.
47. ACL 4:23.10–24.8: 6:45.1.
52. “To conclude, three things herein [i.e. concerning the sacrament] we must consider: first, that we put a difference between the sign and the thing itself that is signified. Secondly, that we seek Christ above in heaven, and imagine not Him to be present bodily upon the earth. Thirdly, that the body of Christ is to be eaten by faith only, and none other wise.” John Jewel, The copy of a sermon pronounced by the Bishop of Salisbury at Paules Crosse the second Sundaye before Easter in the yere of our Lord (London John Day, 1560). Quoted Jewel’s Works, 1:448.
53. Jewel quotes De doctrina Chistiana 2.1.1: ‘A sign is a thing that, besides the sight itself which it offereth unto the senses, causeth of itself some other certain thing to come into knowledge.’ In applying this hermeneutic to the interpretation of sacramental presence, Jewel invokes Augustine’s treatment of the ‘sursum corda’ (‘Lift up your hearts’) as the archetype of the distinction between signs and things; the heart of the worshipper must ascend to the heavenly places if it is to apprehend the divine presence in the sacrament.
54. Jewel, Apology, 64.
57. The reference is to Augustine’s proto-Chalcedonian formulation in De Verb. Dom. in Evang sec. Johan., lVIII. See Jewel’s Works, I.482.
60. Rosendale, Liturgy and Literature, 96.
61. Rosendale, Liturgy and Literature, 100–102.
63. Cartwright, A Reply, 106.
70. Laws V.50.2; 207.19–208.13.
71. Laws V.50.3; 2:208.8–13.
72. Laws V.57.5; 2.247.5–22.
74. V.67.5; 2:334.17–33. ‘The Bread and Cup are his Body and Blood, because they are causes instrumental, upon the receit whereof, the Participation of his Body and Blood ensueth. For that which produceth any certain effect, is not vainly nor improperly said to be, that very effect whereunto it tendeth. Every cause is in the effect which groweth from it. Our Souls and Bodies quickned to Eternal Life, are effects; the cause whereof, is the Person of Christ: His Body and Blood are the true Well-spring, out of which, this Life floweth. So that his Body and Blood are in that very subject whereunto they minister life: Not onely by effect or operation, even as the influence of the Heavens is in Plants, Beasts, Men, and in every thing which they quicken, but also by a far more Divine and Mystical kinde of Union, which maketh us one with him, even as He and the Father are one. The Real Presence of Christs most Blessed Body and Blood, is not therefore to be sought for in the Sacrament, but in the worthy Receiver of the Sacrament . . . . As for the Sacraments, they really exhibite; but, for ought we can gather out of that which is written of them, they are not really, nor do really contain in them selves, that Grace, which with them, or by them, it pleaseth God to bestow.’
75. Laws V.67.5; 2:334.30–335.10.
76. See Laws V.58.2; 2:249.161–250.3.