

INTRODUCTION

The focus of the argument of this book is Richard Hooker's defence of the royal headship of the Church of England in the reign of Elizabeth I. In the final book of his treatise *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*, he develops an extremely sophisticated theological analysis of the Royal Supremacy in response to a series of objections raised by Thomas Cartwright, a pre-eminent Puritan divine. Both Cartwright's criticisms and Hooker's response to them are remarkable for their doctrinal complexity. The issue of whether the Civil Magistrate may assume the title and responsibility of "headship" in relation to the Church was disputed by them on the highest level of theological discourse. On the one side, Cartwright insisted that Christ alone is entitled to be called "Head of the Church". On the other side, Hooker argued that because there are two kinds of ecclesiastical power, the "ghostly" and the "external", the Church may therefore have both a ghostly head, viz. Christ, and an external head, viz. the Civil Magistrate. Below the surface of this disagreement respecting the "title of headship" there is a complex theological debate which lies at the very core of the constitutional controversies of the Elizabethan Church. Hooker's approach to the question of the royal headship is remarkable indeed. He responds to the Disciplinarian objections against the Royal Supremacy by mounting a three-pronged attack on their most basic doctrinal assumptions. First he impugns their commitment to the received orthodoxy with respect to certain fundamental categories and distinctions of Christology and Trinitarian dogma. Secondly, he questions their interpretation of the crucial distinction of Reformation soteriology between the two realms or two kingdoms. Finally, he rejects their adherence to the principles of ecclesiological orthodoxy established by the magisterial reformers. In short, Hooker's doctrine of the Royal Supremacy is closely interwoven with three of the central issues of sixteenth-century theological dispute.

The central purpose of this book is to explore the theological matrix of Hooker's doctrine of the Royal Supremacy. Our aim is to investigate the connections between the theological and political aspects of his discourse and to show how the question of the royal headship of the Church was tied to certain of the more fundamental themes of Reformation thought. Modern students of Hooker's political thought have been remarkably reluctant to bridge the gap between these two "realms" of his discourse. Indeed very few critical studies of Hooker's political thought have appeared in the past thirty years. Those studies which have addressed his

theory of the Royal Supremacy have failed to make sufficient allowance for the alien character of Hooker's thought. For him there was no clear cut division between the disciplines of theology and political theory. Yet modern critics persist in treating his achievement as a political philosopher in isolation from several of the crucial theological issues of the time. It is the purpose of this study to attempt to overcome this anachronistic assumption in the methodology of modern Hooker scholarship and hence to treat the *Lawes* as a work of "political theology".

In addition to this general methodological issue in modern Hooker scholarship, there are other questions of interpretation which must be raised. By far the most important point of disagreement in recent scholarship over the interpretation of Hooker's doctrine of the Royal Supremacy, and of his theory of the Tudor constitution in general, is the question of their logical coherence with respect to his philosophical first principles. Some scholars argue that the defence of the Royal Supremacy in Book VIII of the *Lawes* contradicts his legal theory in Book I. Others defend the unity and consistency of the treatise, on the grounds that Hooker clearly subordinates all principle to the pragmatic necessity of securing political stability, that Hooker in fact submits to merely polemical expediency in the face of the ecclesiastical crisis of the late 1580s and early '90s. Against these two sceptical evaluations of the treatise, we propose to argue that Hooker's position is indeed coherent, but that the internal consistency of his argument derives not from sheer polemical necessity, but rather from his continual reference of the key issues to the principles of systematic theology and reformed doctrinal orthodoxy. Our aim, furthermore, is to emphasize the irenic character of Hooker's apologetic intention. That is to say, his argument is addressed chiefly to certain protestant divines, the so-called "moderate Puritans", who expressed theological doubts about the ecclesiastical constitution established under the Elizabethan Settlement, and in particular concerning the Royal Supremacy. Hooker's apologetic aim was to resolve these doubts by a reasoned theological defence of the royal headship according to the doctrinal principles of the magisterial reformers. The commonly received view of Hooker as the preeminent representative of an Anglican *via media* between the Catholic and Protestant positions cannot be reconciled with such an interpretation of the apologetic purpose of the *Lawes*. Thus our argument will require a reconsideration of Hooker's basic theological assumptions with respect to the Reformation. In short, therefore, our aim is to set Hooker's defence of the Royal Supremacy in the context of the Elizabethan ecclesiological controversies, to examine more closely the apologetic intention behind Hooker's treatise, and thereby to demonstrate the crucial role of theological modes of argument in the framing of his doctrine of the Supremacy.

The method of this inquiry is to trace the critical steps which connect the relevant underlying theological assumptions of Hooker's thought with his eventual analysis of the Royal Supremacy in Book VIII of the *Lawes*. Hooker was very careful about his own methodology, and spells out his approach clearly in both the Preface and Book I of the *Lawes*. As a result, his treatise is a great deal more systematic than most other polemical works of the time. He begins with "more generall meditations" and then proceeds in order to "later particular decisions". (*LEP* 1.1.2; Pref. 7) Our examination of the relevant general meditations, however, will not be restricted simply to the more theoretical early books of the *Lawes*. The interpretation of the fundamental shape of Hooker's thought demands that attention be paid to his various sermons and tracts. These lesser works of Hooker will figure prominently in the discussion of his formulation of the two realms and two regiments doctrine, which, as will also be shown, is the keystone of the political thought of such magisterial reformers as Luther and Calvin. The contributions of Thomas Cartwright and John Whitgift to the Admonition Controversy will be reviewed at the appropriate stages. For Hooker constructs his own argument as a reply to Cartwright's final unanswered salvo in that debate of the 1570s. The next step is to show the soteriological basis of Hooker's doctrine of the Church. Hooker's ecclesiology stands as the pivotal link between the theological first principles embodied in the two realms theory, on the one hand, and his doctrine of the Royal Supremacy, on the other. The doctrine of the Church as "politique societie" is of crucial importance in his subsequent analysis of ecclesiastical jurisdiction—the Royal Supremacy being the power of supreme ecclesiastical jurisdiction. This consideration of his ecclesiology will develop the view that Hooker sets out to criticise the Disciplinary-Puritan doctrine of the Church from the high ground of reformed orthodoxy.

In the final chapter these various strands of Hooker's theology will be drawn together in the interpretation of the difficult text of his defence of the royal headship with which we began. Hooker's analysis of the chief categories of Cartwright's theological objections to the royal headship will be examined. Then there will follow an examination of Hooker's response to these objections. These are to be divided into the following categories: 1) the Trinitarian question; 2) the Christological question; 3) the ecclesiological question; and 4) the question of the two realms and two regiments—this being the order of Hooker's argument.

What, then, is the outcome of this inquiry? Is there originality in the argument? And does it constitute a worthwhile contribution to Hookerian studies? In its methodology the present study has set out to overcome the anachronistic assumptions implicit in the customary modern

approaches. Hooker's defence of the royal title of headship in the fourth chapter of Book VIII has often been ignored or skirted by modern critics of the political theory of the *Lawes*. The attempt to reinterpret this aspect of Hooker's political doctrine in the light of the theological matrix of his thought is long over-due. The contribution which we have sought to make above all is to reassess this key feature of Hooker's political theory through the alien categories of the contemporary discourse which modern critics have avoided. Our interpretation of Hooker's apologetic purpose will entail some revision of his place among the sixteenth-century protestant divines. The anachronism of "Anglicanism" has been observed already by other modern historians of the Elizabethan period. This revision has yet to be applied to a more general interpretation of Hooker's theology. Obviously this revision cannot be accomplished within the scope of this present essay. Nevertheless, our study can at least hope to initiate this process of reevaluation. To demonstrate that Hooker and his contemporaries, both Establishment and Disciplinarian, saw the Royal Supremacy as a fundamentally theological issue is the chief burden of this thesis. It is our aim to offer an interpretation of some of the chief elements of that issue. For a considerable period of time Hookerian studies have remained fragmented among a variety of disciplines. The interpretation of Hooker's political theory in particular has suffered from this unconscious imposition of an anachronistic division of the sciences. The separation of the realms of political and theological discourse which we have inherited from the Enlightenment ought not to be assumed in our reading of this sixteenth-century divine. To do so necessarily involves a failure to apprehend the essentially alien character of his thought. While we can probably never expect to recover this mode of thought in any complete and wholly satisfactory manner, it is nevertheless the aim of this essay to attempt to do so as far as possible.