Introduction

"The past is never dead. It's not even past."
—William Faulkner

One of my favorite books is *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis. This novella purports to record a series of letters written by Screwtape, an experienced senior demon, offering advice to his nephew, Wormwood, a junior tempter seeking to shepherd a human soul into hell. In the letters Lewis weaves exploration of Christian theology and ethics into an engaging, lively story of the characters and lives of the book's two demonic antiheroes and an unnamed man who is the focus of the demons' attention. In one of the letters, Screwtape discusses the various ploys demons use to turn people away from serious engagement with history. He then explains the importance demons place on refocusing human attention away from the lessons of history. "Since we cannot deceive the whole human race all the time, it is most important thus to cut every generation off from all others; for where learning makes a free commerce between the ages there is always the danger that the characteristic errors of one may be corrected by the characteristic truths of another."[1] As Screwtape

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1. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: MacMillan, 1944), 140 (Letter 27). Because there are many editions of *The Screwtape Letters*, in citations of this text page number in the cited edition will be followed by reference to a letter number. This will allow for references to be found in other editions due to the relatively short length of each letter.

indicates, the past has plenty to say to the present, and it is my hope in this study to help learning move a bit more freely between the late-sixteenth and the early-twenty-first centuries.

Lewis' spiritual home, the Anglican Church, does not have a Martin Luther or a John Calvin upon whose ideas the tradition centers; there is no single "founding patriarch" but rather a company of sixteenth-century individuals who collectively shaped the fundamental character of the church. While there is no absolute agreement among scholars regarding the identity of this group, few would exclude Richard Hooker from their short list of architects of the Anglican tradition. Despite his formative influence, however, Hooker is largely unknown to modern Christians. Screwtape himself mentions Hooker only once, and then merely to emphasize how little familiarity modern Anglicans have with his understanding of the Eucharist.[2] In part Hooker's biography is responsible for his obscurity. Little detail is available regarding his life, and to the extent that it is known, it is relatively uneventful.[3] Rather than being known for what he did, Hooker is known almost exclusively for what he wrote; his fame and enduring influence rest on his literary masterpiece, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, a defense in eight books of the established institutional structures and liturgical forms of the Church of England during the reign of Elizabeth I.[4]

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2. Lewis, *Screwtape*, 84 (Letter 16).

3. For more on Hooker's biography, see Lee Gibbs, "Life of Hooker," in *A Companion to Richard Hooker*, ed. Torrance Kirby (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 1-25; Philip Secor, *Richard Hooker: Prophet of Anglicanism* (London: Continuum, 1999).

4. The *Laws*, a large work (over 1200 pages in the modern edition), was conceived by Hooker as a whole but for various reasons was published in parts. The Preface and Books I–IV were published in 1593 and Book V in 1597. Books VI–VIII were published posthumously from drafts. At his death Hooker "left Book VII in near readiness for the press; and a considerable portion of Book VI is extant, although an earlier and longer manuscript of it is lost. Book VIII survives in pieces, but it is possible to fit them together and to reconstruct most of this last book." "Textual Introduction: The Last Three Books," in *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, vol. 3, ed. P. G. Stanwood (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), xiii.

The Church *of* England had emerged from the Catholic Church *in* England in the 1530s during the reign of Henry VIII (reigned 1509–1547). When a combination of dynastic, political, romantic, economic, and theological considerations led Henry to sever the institutional ties that bound the English church to the Roman church, the institutional structures, liturgical practices, and doctrinal standards of the new church that emerged differed relatively little from those of its mother church. When, a turbulent decade after Henry's death, his daughter Elizabeth (reigned 1558–1603) acceded to the throne, she established an English church that was doctrinally Protestant but retained traditional institutional structures and some of the elements of worship associated with Roman Catholicism. These "popish" liturgical and institutional elements of the English church soon became targets of criticism. Opposition arose because some English Protestants (labeled "Puritans" by their detractors) came to the conclusion that the church was "but halfly reformed." Some of these critics, generally known as "presbyterians," argued that a presbyterian polity (in which ecclesiastical authority derived from each congregation rather than from bishops or the monarch, as in the established church) was the only legitimate form of church government, mandated by Scripture as binding on all true Christian churches. It was against such claims that Hooker defended the church he served, penning a defense that included extensive discussion of the authority of Scripture and its proper interpretation. His reflections on the means by which God's will revealed in Scripture is discerned make Hooker a valuable resource for modern Christians.

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In the decades surrounding the four hundredth anniversary of his death in 2000, scholarly interest in Hooker has undergone a bit of a

renaissance, including publication of a critical edition of his complete works[5] and a spate of books and essays. One such study, a collection of essays entitled *A Companion to Richard Hooker*, concludes with an overview of Hooker's reputation. In this essay Diarmaid MacCulloch applies to Hooker Screwtape's assessment of the value inherent in studying the past with an eye to the present.

> Hooker's intricate discussion of what constitutes authority in religious matters gives him a contemporary usefulness. The disputes which currently wrack Western Christianity are superficially about sexuality, social conduct or leadership style: at root, they are about what constitutes authority for Christians. The contest for the soul of the Church in the West rages around the question as to how a scripture claiming divine revelation relates to those other perennial sources of human revelation, personal and collective consciousness and memory; whether, indeed, there can be any relationship between the two. Hooker provides one major discussion of these problems in one historical context, and it would be foolish for modern Christians to ignore such a resource.[6]

The claim that a long-dead Elizabethan cleric may have something of value to add to contemporary debates is rendered more plausible by two recent studies of the sixteenth century. In the preface to her study of sixteenth-century intellectual history, Susan Schreiner calls attention to a number of recent articles discussing certainty and its desirability in late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century religious and political discourse. She then asserts, "What is striking about these pieces is that they raise questions similar to those of the sixteenth century. Both the desire for certainty, especially religious certainty, and the warnings against certainty permeated this earlier era."[7] These

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5. W. Speed Hill, gen. ed., *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, vols. 1–5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977–1990).
6. Diarmaid MacCulloch, "Richard Hooker's Reputation," in *A Companion to Richard Hooker*, ed. Torrance Kirby (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 610.
7. Susan Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), vii–viii.

similarities add credibility to her further claim that study of the intellectual history of the sixteenth century can shed light on current debates regarding certainty. "The sixteenth century has bequeathed to us profound insights into the human hunger for certitude. If we wish to benefit from this history, we will use these insights as a lens through which we may question our own age."[8]

An example of a scholar seeking to apply insights from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first century is provided by James Simpson in *Burning to Read*.[9] In this unabashedly polemical work, Simpson argues that early-sixteenth-century Protestant thought is less the forerunner of modern liberalism than the source of modern religious fundamentalism. The first generation of Protestant reformers—Simpson focuses on Martin Luther and his English disciple William Tyndale—claimed that the meaning of Scripture was clear to any reader who approached it with an open mind and a sincere desire to understand. Simpson points out that such claims of scriptural clarity should not surprise us; indeed they were crucial to the Protestant movement inasmuch as only an unambiguous Scripture could supply a secure, reliable foundation from which to oppose the established authority of the Catholic Church. As Luther memorably stated this position at the Diet of Worms (1521), only the clear teachings of Scripture or manifest reason could move him to obedience, "for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves."[10] The claim that fallible human institutions could not supply religious teachings in which one could place confidence

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8. Ibid., xi.

9. James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and Its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

10. Quoted in Mark Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, third ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 146.

energized rather than confounded Luther because he envisioned an alternative doctrinal standard that was not subject to such ambiguity.

The Bible alone, understood in accord with the plain, literal meaning of the words, was initially supposed by Protestants to supply such an unambiguous standard of truth. Thus Schreiner speaks of Tyndale's hope for a "wholly biblical Reformation" and of the "exegetical optimism of early Protestantism,"[11] and Timothy Rosendale refers to early Protestant hopes that "institutional dogma would eventually melt away as all people came together, one by one, in the true biblical knowledge of Christ."[12] Despite such early optimism, it did not take long to realize that Scripture could not communicate its message so clearly that misinterpretation of the text was impossible, and the situation on the ground quickly bore out Catholic concerns that if the determinations of church authorities were subordinated to individuals' subjective readings of Scripture, "we will have nothing in Christianity that is certain or decided."[13] Disagreements among Protestants regarding the true meaning of Scripture on a wide array of topics arose early and often. Soon even the most vocal champions of the clarity of Scripture were accompanying their Bible translations with prefaces and marginal notes to guide readers to the true sense of the text as well as publishing an endless stream of commentaries, interpretive guides, and rebuttals of competing interpretations.[14]

Faced with this Babel of competing readings of Scripture and having jettisoned the institutional church as a standard to distinguish

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11. Schreiner, *Alone Wise*, 79, 83, the second quoting David Steinmetz.
12. Timothy Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 73.
13. These are the words of the imperial secretary responding to Luther at Worms, quoted in Noll, *Turning Points*, 147.
14. Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 107–8, 122–32; Rosendale speaks of a "Pandora's box of discourse" being opened by Henry VIII's endorsement of Protestantism in the early years of the English Reformation. Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature*, 109; see also 4–5, 70–77.

correct from incorrect interpretations, Protestants searched for alternative structures through which interpretations of Scripture could be assessed. Under pressure to explain why so many—both recalcitrant Catholics and other Protestant camps—failed to see what Scripture plainly taught, some reformers argued that in fact the Bible could only be rightly understood by those chosen ("elected") by God for salvation and empowered by God's Spirit, thereby mingling doctrinal certainty with certainty of salvation. This, in turn, could and did occasion a great deal of pressure toward absolute hermeneutical assurance inasmuch as any uncertainty regarding the meaning of the Bible could be understood as signaling a lack of the Holy Spirit's guidance and thus exclusion from the company of the elect. The ultimate test of the validity of a belief came to be seen as the experience of certainty itself which accompanied the Spirit's presence. "In actual practice," Simpson notes, "the elected Christian simply affirms that he's certain because he feels certain."[15] This approach to interpretation tended to make readers quite suspicious of potentially reprobate peers who interpreted Scripture differently, a tendency exacerbated by the fact that the elect must assiduously avoid any compromise with the necessarily misguided reprobate. Furthermore, because one of the clearest objective signs that another person was not among the elect was a failure to read the Bible correctly, discussions regarding the meaning of Scripture that did occur tended to be among like-minded individuals who would marginalize, vilify, or exclude others who did not share their interpretations. At best those who failed to share one's readings were pitied as hopelessly blind, lacking eyes to see or ears to hear the truth; at worst they were demonized as children of the devil pursuing their father's diabolical will.[16]

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15. Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 139.
16. "Evangelical reading practice looks, in short, pretty bad. . . . [I]t can produce moral

An example of the type of religious "dialogue" fostered by this hermeneutical context is presented by Mark Edwards in his study of Luther's polemics in the last decade and a half of his life. Edwards surveys a war of words between the Catholic Duke Heinrich of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel on one side and the Protestants Landgrave Philipp of Hesse and Elector Johann Friedrich of Saxony on the other.[17] A few titles from the dispute, which began in 1538 and involved both political and religious elements, will give a feel for the tone of the exchange. Among the increasingly abusive tracts that were issued back and forth between the camps, were, from the Catholic side, the *Steadfast, True, Upright, Godly, and Well-Established, Irrefutable Answer to the Landgrave's Recently Published Ungodly, Unchristian, Dishonorable, Mendacious, Fabricated, and Baseless Libel Against His Princely Grace*, followed by the *Well-Grounded, Steadfast, Grave, True, Godly, Christian, Nobly-Inclined Duplicae Against the Elector of Saxony's Second, Defamatory, Baseless, Fickle, Fabricated, Ungodly, Unchristian, Drunken, God-Detested Treatise*. Not to be outdone, responses from the Protestant camp included the *True, Steadfast, Well-Grounded, Christian, and Sincere Reply to the Shameless, Calphurnic Book of Infamy and Lies by the Godless, Accursed, Execrable Defamer, Evil-Working Barabbas, Also Whore-Addicted Holophernes of Braunschweig, Who Calls Himself Duke Heinrich the Younger*, and the *Expostulation and Letter of Rebuke from Satan, Prince of this World, to Duke Heintz of Braunschweig, His Sworn Servant and Faithful Vassal*. Not surprisingly given the titles, while these works did include serious consideration of the issues under debate, "discussion of these substantive issues was liberally peppered with insults, name-calling,

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authoritarianism; it can isolate its readers; and it can recast history as almost entirely erroneous. The future, it might be added, becomes a story of schism foretold." Ibid., 222.

17. Mark Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles: Politics and Polemics, 1531–46* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), ch. 7.

and abuse."[18] When Luther entered the lists, the stridency of the polemic only became more pronounced. As Edwards summarizes his review of the relevant literature, when the treatises are compared, "it becomes difficult to escape the impression that [Luther's contribution] represented an escalation in the coarseness and abusiveness of the controversy." In part this was simply due to Luther's superior rhetorical skills, but the escalation was also partly due to Luther's dualistic understanding of the confrontation as a contest between God's people and the minions of Satan. "In part this [escalation] must also be attributed to Luther's intense conviction that he was engaged in the climactic battle between the true and false church, that the real opponents were not men but devils."[19]

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On the whole, Simpson's criticisms of the reading practices of early Protestants, particularly Tyndale, are not especially controversial or even strikingly original.[20] One aspect of his work that has proven controversial is the lesson that Simpson draws from sixteenth-century hermeneutics regarding our contemporary situation, presenting modern fundamentalist movements as the heirs of this hermeneutic. One problem with such a claim is that it strides directly from the mid-sixteenth century to modern fundamentalism without any account of the role the intervening centuries played in shaping the modern fundamentalist mind. Little effort is made to trace a direct lineage between the way the Bible was approached in the sixteenth

18. Edwards, *Luther's Last Battles*, 149.
19. Ibid., 154.
20. For examples of authors voicing criticisms parallel to those voiced by Simpson, see Mary Jane Barnett, "From the Allegorical to the Literal (and Back Again): Tyndale and the Allure of Allegory" and Douglas Parker, "Tyndale's Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Word, Church, and State: Tyndale Quincentenary Essays*, eds. John Day, Eric Lund, and Anne O'Donnell (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1998), 63–73, 87–101.

century and the way it is approached in the early twenty-first. This limitation notwithstanding, the lessons Simpson draws from his study of the sixteenth century highlight valid concerns. One need not claim direct descent from sixteenth-century reading practices to the twenty-first-century mind to find convincing Simpson's claim for a family resemblance between much contemporary religious rhetoric and the hermeneutic he outlines. Public discourse that implicitly rests on appeals to a Scripture that is plain, simple, and needs only to be read in accord with the obvious meaning of the text is all too common in our day. To choose one conspicuous example, one often hears reference to the "biblical" view of marriage, as if Scripture clearly, consistently, and unambiguously affirms the type of monogamy that has been the norm in the West. This same hermeneutic is operative every time the phrase "the Bible says" is used to close rather than open discussion of matters of doctrine, morality, or politics.

In addition to moving a bit too facilely from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century, Simpson also proposes an alternative approach to interpretation that has problematic elements. In his penultimate chapter, Simpson argues for a hermeneutic relying on dialogue, founded on mutual trust, and taking place in the context of an institution that endures over time—an interpretive approach that he attributes to Thomas More. This presentation of More as the champion of a dialogue-based hermeneutic is plausible, but only up to a point. That point, of course, is where More put aside the conviction that dialogue rather than coercion was the proper response to heresy and began to call for brutal enforcement of antiheresy laws and to write vituperative anti-Protestant polemic. Especially problematic for Simpson, his hero of dialogical interpretation had already discounted dialogue as an effective means

of dealing with "heretics" in 1515, noting that fear was more effective anyway.[21] More did not simply emphasize

> the existence of "interpretive communities" as environments within which we all necessarily read, and he certainly is not trusting of his evangelical opponents. He believed, rather, that the Catholic Church is the *only* proper community within which to read and that its teachings are the *only* proper object of full "textual trust." This is, of course, the chief reason that More tortured and burned heretics: He believed them to be separating credulous people from the only community by which and in which we can be reconciled to God.[22]

The violence, both verbal and physical, that More employed in his efforts to stop the spread of heresy is an albatross hanging around Simpson's claim that More provides a model of reading practices modern Christians ought to emulate. Simpson acknowledges the darker aspects of More's career, arguing that the descent into persecution was a betrayal of his earlier dialogical interpretive principles, and he seeks to isolate from More's virulent polemic a communal hermeneutic that can inspire healthier approaches to Scripture in modern readers. This effort is only partially successful. Many modern readers, particularly Protestants, will not so easily look past More's persecutory streak, and the very fact that More did ultimately succumb to a persecutory mind–set is itself problematic. If More's higher hermeneutical ideals were unable to sustain his own commitment to dialogue, they do not seem promising as means to inoculate modern readers against divisive reading practices.

Not only do these practical problems exist, but there is also a theoretical aspect of More's hermeneutic that makes it a hard pill for modern Christians, particularly Protestants, to swallow. While in

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21. A point that Simpson himself acknowledges, *Burning to Read*, 265.
22. Alan Jacobs, "Reading, Writing, and Reformation," *First Things* 186 (October, 2008): 54.

some contexts More did favor an open-ended approach to religious truth based on dialogue, as a polemicist More "highlighted the need for a strong disciplinary infrastructure to regulate the faith and for an authoritative interpreter to ensure that Scripture was rightly understood."[23] Any meaningful and open dialogue More would tolerate had to operate within the fairly narrow field defined by the Catholic Church authorities. In the end, More simply seems to be too authoritarian in his approach to Scripture to serve as a viable model for the type of dialogical reading practices Simpson promotes.

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Against this backdrop and with these concerns in mind, let us return to consideration of Richard Hooker. Hooker, recall, published his magnum opus *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* in the 1590s to defend his church against Puritan critics seeking to "complete" the reformation of the Church of England. His defense involved a heavy dose of biblical hermeneutics because a primary basis on which Puritans criticized the established church was that it did not conform to requirements they believed to be laid down in Scripture, and it is on Hooker's hermeneutics that this study will focus. Like Simpson, I will suggest that an approach to interpreting Scripture put forward in the sixteenth century can serve as a model for modern interpreters. Indeed, this exploration of Hooker's thought can be understood as presenting a different alternative, Hooker rather than More, to fundamentalist reading practices.

A priori there is reason for optimism regarding Hooker as an alternative to the loudly clamoring and conflicting certainties of his century as well as ours. Living at the end of the sixteenth century,

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23. Robert Benedetto, ed., *The New Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), s.v. "More, Thomas," 446.

Hooker had the advantage of hindsight to which neither Tyndale nor More had access. The elusiveness of Christian consensus, the fragmentation of the church, the difficulty of sustaining claims to certitude, and the violence to which doctrinal disagreements gave rise were manifest by the 1580s and '90s. Hooker's potential as a resource for modern readers interested in developing dialogical and communal approaches to Scripture is also reflected in his rhetoric. Even at his most polemical, his handling of opponents was, by the standards of sixteenth-century religious polemic, quite mild, a quality that is reflected in his epithet of "judicious" and attested in the secondary literature. In his consideration of Hooker's rhetoric in the Brill *Companion to Richard Hooker*, Rudolph Almasy calls attention to the fact that Hooker sought not merely to condemn the errors of his opponents and bludgeon them into submission but also to move them to conscientious acceptance of the orders of the established church. While he did feel it necessary to censure what he considered the errors of his opponents, Hooker also tried to "invite [his ideological opponents] the presbyterians into the church community."[24] "It is in this regard that Hooker does something . . . unusual for Tudor polemics." While polemicists of Hooker's day typically would address themselves solely to an idealized "indifferent reader" seeking to warn of dangers "with the rhetor poised to belittle the opponent, Hooker often presents his opponents as potentially capable judges, as individuals who could be led through the logic of the argument and the force of . . . thought to embrace and conform [to the established church]—both intellectually and emotionally." Consequently, Hooker pursued two goals; he sought not only "to teach for obedience," to convince indifferent readers to obey the laws of the

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24. Rudolph Almasy, "Rhetoric and Apologetics," in *A Companion to Richard Hooker*, ed. Torrance Kirby (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 123.

church, but also "to instruct for judgment," to prepare even his opponents to accept the legitimacy of the established church.[25]

Almasy is not alone in noting Hooker's unusually irenic treatment of his opponents. Torrance Kirby points out that "there is a significant difference between Hooker's rhetorical approach and that of previous contributions to Elizabethan polemics. He abandons the usual recourse to ridicule and personal abuse which was so characteristic of the vast majority of tracts contributed by both sides of the controversy."[26] MacCulloch speculates that initially poor sales of the *Laws* were perhaps owing to the public being "baffled by a [polemical] work which grounded its assault on its opponents on axioms from Aristotle, Plato and the medieval scholastics, rather than getting straight down to satisfyingly direct insults."[27] In the words of W. B. Patterson, Hooker "stands apart from theologians who were intent on ridiculing, belittling, or demonizing their opponents. His sentences, sometimes immensely long, suggest the viewpoint of a contemplative, even detached observer. Hooker conveyed eloquently his conviction that truth cannot be expressed adequately in stark, declarative form."[28]

Of course the irenic nature of Hooker's *Laws* must not be overstated. As will be noted, especially in the second chapter, Hooker was quite willing to call attention to the faults and foibles of his presbyterian opponents, and he certainly did not downplay the potential dangers they posed to Elizabethan society. Yet even his attacks generally lack the "satisfyingly direct" character of much controversial writing then and now. His "polemic is only

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25. Almasy, "Rhetoric and Apologetics," 128–29.
26. Torrance Kirby, *Persuasion and Conversion: Essays on Religion, Politics, and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 162.
27. MacCulloch, "Hooker's Reputation," 573.
28. W. B. Patterson, "Elizabethan Theological Polemics," in *A Companion to Richard Hooker*, ed. Torrance Kirby (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 110.

occasionally harsh or extreme. Mostly it is gentle and sometimes witty,"[29] and he refuses to exclude either the much-reviled papists or his Puritan opponents from the community of Christians. Hooker's relatively conciliatory rhetoric, his recognition of ideological adversaries as fellow Christians, and his habit of talking to rather than past presbyterian dissenters all correlate to his conviction that discerning the meaning of Scripture is best undertaken in the context of an inclusive, dialogical community of interpreters. This study elucidates the hermeneutical presuppositions and ramifications associated with this conviction for the purpose of recommending Hooker's approach to interpreting the Bible as a resource for modern Christians.

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In defending the church, Hooker did not merely answer the nebulous criticisms of a generic Puritan critique. Rather, he composed the *Laws* primarily to answer specific criticisms of the church voiced in a specific dispute from a couple of decades earlier. The first chapter of the following study surveys this dispute that came to be known as the Admonition Controversy. It was waged in the 1570s between the presbyterian Thomas Cartwright, who argued for fundamental reform of the liturgy and polity of the church on the basis of what he took to be biblical mandates and John Whitgift, master of Trinity College, Cambridge (and later archbishop of Canterbury), who wrote to defend the legitimacy of the established church.[30] From their Protestant forebears, the controversialists inherited a biblical hermeneutic that emphasized, first, the primacy of the plain, literal text of Scripture and second, the necessity of the Holy Spirit's

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29. Patterson, "Elizabethan Polemics," 113.
30. The nature of the controversy is outlined in more detail in chapter 1.

assistance to guide the reader to a correct understanding of Scripture. From within this common position, each man emphasized one of these strands and made it the centerpiece of his argument. Cartwright emphasized the necessity of the Holy Spirit's guidance to guarantee access to a correct interpretation of Scripture, spiritual guidance that allowed the "godly" to see that Scripture endorsed presbyterianism. In response, Whitgift promoted a hermeneutic that centered on the importance of taking Scripture at face value in accord with the plain, literal sense of the text, a sense that was clearly consistent with the practices of the established church. With these presuppositions, Whitgift and Cartwright conspired to promote a situation in which authentic dialogue regarding what Scripture required of the Elizabethan church was precluded. Whitgift was convinced that attempts at dialogue were pointless because Cartwright perversely refused to acknowledge the obvious meaning of scriptural texts. Cartwright was equally certain that dialogue with Whitgift was useless because the latter, clearly lacking the Spirit's aid, could not grasp the true meaning of Scripture.

The Admonition Controversy shows that the problematic hermeneutic outlined by Simpson was very much alive well into the reign of Elizabeth. At the same time, intellectual countercurrents were also emerging. As Christian identity became less a mitigating and more an exacerbating force in the frequency and brutality of violence in Europe, voices began to emerge questioning both the possibility of obtaining and the desirability of demanding certain knowledge in relation to many facets of religious truth. The second chapter explores the dangers of an unrealistic desire for certainty, a desire that puts people at risk of being manipulated into hasty conclusions to which they then cling far beyond the limits that objective consideration of the evidence warrants. Most troublingly, such unwarranted certainty can lead to destructive behavior toward

individuals or institutions believed to be offensive to God, violence that is perpetrated without scruple because it is undertaken on God's behalf. To illustrate this concern, the second chapter compares Hooker's presentation of the dangers of Puritanism in the *Laws* to Shakespeare's depiction of the tragic character of Othello in *Othello*. In each of these very different works, an overweening desire for certainty is presented as causing scant evidence to be interpreted as infallible proof, closing the adherent off from healthy instruction, and leading to acts of violence against innocent victims.

Having warned readers of the dangers of misplaced certainty, Hooker turned to address the question of where hermeneutical trust could with confidence be placed, the topic of the third chapter. Hooker acknowledged the necessity of the Holy Spirit's assistance for fallen human beings to understand Scripture correctly, but he argued that the primary means by which the Spirit typically guided Christian interpreters was by empowering their reason to grasp the meaning of Scripture. Thus Hooker claimed that reason was the standard that Christians should apply when seeking to distinguish true from false interpretations of the Bible, a standard that provided a basis for dialogue in cases of disagreement. Such disagreement remained a possibility because even when empowered by the Spirit, the exercise of reason retained a human element and was thus fallible. In order to minimize errors as well as maintain order, Hooker furthermore identified an institutional locus to resolve conflicts when dialogue failed, pointing to a representative council as the highest interpretive authority for English Christians. By following the determinations of Parliament and Convocation, representative bodies speaking on behalf of all English Christians, subjects could be confident of the orthodoxy of their religious beliefs, resolving the conscience and underwriting obedience that ensured order, peace, and unity in the English church.

There are definitely challenges that must be faced in order to present Hooker as championing a hermeneutic of openness, dialogue, and communal trust and to win for that hermeneutic a modern hearing. Two of these challenges are the subjects of chapters 4 and 5. Because he identified Parliament as the highest authority in the interpretation of the Bible, Hooker could be seen as supporting a dangerously authoritarian vision in which religious truth is subordinated to state interests. As Rowan Williams notes, Hooker wrote in defense of "a regime which, in modern eyes, was seeking to destroy religious liberty." Nevertheless, Williams furthermore claims, the approach to Scripture embedded within Hooker's defense of the Elizabethan church "was potentially a ground for making sense of certain aspects of religious diversity."[31] One facet of Hooker's thought related to this apparently paradoxical feat is considered in the fourth chapter. The focus of this chapter is his recognition that the hermeneutical fallibility associated with human reason applied not only to Christian individuals but also to human institutions, including Parliament. Simply put, the authorities may be mistaken, a concession that legitimated Christian subjects remaining open to the possibility of discerning more adequate interpretations of Scripture than those endorsed by Parliament. While both order and authentic rationality demanded that individual judgments be submitted to the authorities for validation, the fallibility of all human interpreters required that those same authorities be open to hearing the arguments of dissenters and be willing to embrace more compelling interpretations brought forward from any quarter. In other words, Hooker provided avenues for questioning the laws that governed the church. Subjects were admonished not to break fellowship with the established church over disagreements, but they were also allowed to reflect critically on the

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31. Rowan Williams, "*Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie* Revisited," in *A Companion to Richard Hooker*, ed. Torrance Kirby (Leiden: Brill, 2008), xxv.

doctrine, polity, and ceremonies of the church and to advocate for reform when necessary.

Overbearing authoritarianism is not the only potential problem associated with Hooker's hermeneutic; the recognition of human fallibility raises another concern regarding his approach to discerning Christian truth. In Puritan rhetoric, certainty that one had correctly understood Scripture was linked to certainty of salvation, and so Hooker's hermeneutical reorientation required a new approach to assurance of salvation. In contrast to what he considered unrealistic Puritan promises, Hooker denied that God provided absolute doctrinal certitude to the elect and thus denied that uncertainty was a sign of reprobation. This freed the individual to be open to authentic religious dialogue and to growth in religious understanding without forfeiting confidence of God's favor. Hooker then went further, arguing that the proper means to gaining assurance that one was in a right relationship with God was not looking for hermeneutical certitude or any other sign or evidence that could "prove" one's election. Rather, the key to gaining such assurance was to live out the relationship, committing oneself to God despite difficulties and doubts, on the basis of a heartfelt, not a rationally generated, conviction of God's love. It is such emotional commitment to God that Hooker presents the liturgy of the established church as promoting, meaning that the path to assurance of salvation runs through wholehearted participation in the communal worship of the church, not through Puritanical aloofness and denigration of the church's liturgical forms. In this way Hooker seeks not only to convince readers of the importance of hermeneutical dialogue but also to inspire them to commit to participation in the life of the church community that provides a context in which such dialogue can most profitably occur.

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Hooker sought to outline a reasonable, dialogue-based hermeneutic that avoided the dangers of both rampant subjectivity and overbearing authoritarianism. If the current study is successful, it is hoped that by the conclusion Hooker's approach to Scripture will be seen as appealing and useful for modern Christians. Of course the details of his solution for resolving conflicting readings of Scripture cannot simply be lifted from his context and transplanted into ours. Nevertheless, his articulation of a hermeneutic that balances reason and inspiration while taking seriously the limitations of all human efforts to discern truth, his search for representative structures that can provide standards of orthodoxy within a community while remaining open to the insights of individual community members, and his prioritization of orthopraxis centered on the maintenance of unity and charity are all valuable resources for modern Christians seeking paths to dialogue and reconciliation in a fractured church.