

**Social context and theological practice.
Radical Orthodoxy and Richard Hooker¹**

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever, yet every generation of Christians has been impelled to adjust their expression to engage with the world of their contemporaries to whom they sought to preach the gospel, and to the society in which they themselves were called to live out their Christian vocation. Holding together constancy and change, faithfulness and creativity has been a perennial issue in Christian theology since the time when Jesus tried to preach to his fellow Jews about a kingdom which was coming and new, yet the fulfilment of their own law and traditions. Indeed the very idea of fulfilment carries within it the issues of continuity and change.

Sustaining a balance between these two impulses is not easy, especially in a time of rapid social and cultural change, or in contexts where the Christian community moves from one cultural entity to another, or where cultural environments are down the plural end of the spectrum of human experience. We live in such a time of change and plurality and it is therefore not surprising that theologians find it difficult to deal with issues of social and cultural engagement. It is a fresh and particular challenge for any long running theological tradition such as Anglicanism. Indeed Anglicanism faces a particularly acute form of this issue because of the relationship between the spread of Anglicanism with British imperialism and the social-cultural transformation from the decolonisation of the second half of the twentieth century.²

¹ This article began life as a paper for the annual seminar of the Australian Anglican Theological Society annual seminar and I gladly acknowledge the benefit of discussion at that seminar.

² See Douglas I. T. and Pui-Lan K. (ed.), *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism. The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-First Century*, (Church Publishing, New York 2001), and Sachs W., *The Transformation of Anglicanism. From State Church to Global Communion*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993).

In the recent book ³ *Radical Orthodoxy. A New Theology*, most of the authors are Anglicans, indeed Anglicans from a particular tradition and they are concerned precisely with the issues of the practice of theology in relation to the social context. The transitional phase which we experience in the present generation is marked at least in part by the dissolution of national English imperialism. The beginnings of English national imperialism are located in the consolidation of power and the growth of English nationalism in the sixteenth century,⁴ the ecclesiastical aspect of which is clearly represented in the Tudor Reformation settlements especially to the role given to the Royal Supremacy. In this article I want to examine the social engagement of the Radical Orthodoxy project from the perspective of continuity and change and to compare their approach with that of a previous representative of this Anglican tradition who worked in a context shaped by the beginnings of English national imperialism, namely Richard Hooker.

The Radical Orthodoxy Project

Several of the essays gathered in *Radical Orthodoxy* continue a programme to which their authors have already contributed.⁵ These particular essays set out to make a number of claims in the name of Radical Orthodoxy as a generic programme. The authors thereby present themselves as representatives of a particular version of Christianity. This is an interesting rhetorical move suggestive of some about to be identified coherent reality and thereby at once attempting to privilege coherence and unicity. Without wanting to follow that move or the further claim that this position represents orthodoxy, it is reasonable nonetheless to treat these essays as if they did represent such a single point

³ Milbank, J, C Pickstock, and G Ward, eds. *Radical Orthodoxy. A New Theology*. (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁴ See Hastings A., *The Construction of Nationhood. Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1997) for an historical account and for a sociological account see Nisbet R., *The Quest for Community. A Study in the Ethics of Order and Freedom*, (Institute for Contemporary Studies, San Francisco 1990).

⁵ Most obviously John Milbank and most notably in Milbank J., *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, (Blackwell, Oxford 1990).

of view.

The context these essays set for themselves is an analysis of the current social and cultural situation of western societies and a claim to be recovering a "true tradition" of Christian theology, the crucial focus of which centres around epistemological issues.⁶ The essays begin with a bold claim, now well rehearsed in many theological circles, that "secularism has been defining and constructing the world. It is a world in which the theological is either discredited or turned into a harmless leisure-time activity of private commitment."⁷ According to this claim secularism is linked not only to a move towards a dualism between reason and revelation but also to a particular interpretation of the origins of that move in the modern situation. The autonomy of reason is traced back to the work of Duns Scotus on the basis that it was Scotus who first claimed that it was possible to consider being in abstraction.⁸

Radical orthodoxy sets out therefore to recover what the group regard as the true tradition. It claims to be orthodox "in the straightforward sense of commitment to credal Christianity and the exemplarity of its patristic matrix."⁹ On the one hand these writers align themselves with aspects of the *nouvelle theologie* which lay behind many of the reforms of Vatican II while on the other they identify an indebtedness to Karl Barth, but seek to go beyond his presentation of the issues by taking philosophical concerns more seriously and operating in a different style. "Where Barthianism can tend to the ploddingly exegetical, radical orthodoxy mingles exegesis, cultural reflection and philosophy in a complex but coherently executed collage."¹⁰

In re-discovering the "true tradition" the German radical pietists Jacobi and Hamman

⁶ Milbank J., Pickstock C. and Ward G. (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy. A New Theology*, Routledge, London 1999, p.1.

⁷ *Radical Orthodoxy*, p.1

⁸ *Radical Orthodoxy*, p.5

⁹ *Radical Orthodoxy*, p.2

¹⁰ *Radical Orthodoxy*, p.2

represent a significant fulcrum, especially for John Millbank. The radical pietism they represent offers him the opportunity to re-cast the description of the theological tradition as going beyond Luther on one hand and yet on the other hand anticipating many of the subsequent questions which have now come to more popular focus in the form of post modernism. In passing Millbank is highly critical of Karl Barth for overlooking the radical pietist tradition and at certain points of misunderstanding and mis-representing them.¹¹

These writers focus their concern on the epistemological issues of how one can know after the fall. They argue for a "theological framework for radical orthodox". That central theological framework "is participation as developed by Plato and re-worked by Christianity because any alternative configuration reserves a territory independent of God."¹² All truth is by supernatural origination and hence reason can only be true as it shows that fact

The essays therefore seek to address those sites which modernity characteristically regards as most important, but which according to these authors turn out in the modern understanding to be significantly neglected. One of the underlying themes in the essays is the nihilism which modernity carries with it. The authors therefore seek "to re-envisage particular cultural spheres, from a theological perspective which they all regard as the only non-nihilistic perspective, and the only perspective able to uphold even finite reality."¹³

John Millbank's essay in particular seeks to restore the central significance of Hamman and Jacobi in the modern theological tradition. " They are the source not of neo-orthodoxy, but of a more genuinely anti-liberal radical orthodoxy, which does not hesitate to argue even with philosophy itself and which, just because it is more mediating, is also

¹¹ *Radical Orthodoxy*, p.22

¹² *Radical Orthodoxy*, p.3

¹³ *Radical Orthodoxy*, p.4

less accommodating than the theology of Barth".¹⁴ The epistemological significance of Jacobi and Hamman is illustrated by the use of the phrase "knowledge by faith alone".¹⁵ Millbank takes up this phrase in order to set Jacobi and Hamman in contrast with contribution of Scotus on the one hand and on the other hand with the work of Martin Luther who while undertaking the project of justification by faith alone did not undertake any project connected with knowledge by faith alone. For Millbank faith and reason are included within the more generic framework of participation in the mind of God.

Clearly these writers stand in the classic tradition of theology in the sense that they are seeking to give expression to the character of God in the particularities of the social and cultural circumstances in which they see themselves to be located. The context is defined not simply by the philosophical assumptions of culture but by the theological realities of the human condition after the fall. In that sense Millbank affirms Hamman's conception of theology as a pilgrimage. "We must set off on an eschatological pilgrimage in which we hope to see God's restoration in person of the human form."¹⁶

Radical Orthodoxy represents a significant impulse in the current theological conversation. It is fundamentally concerned not to be captured by the philosophical assumptions of modernity nor even of post modernity. They claim that theology and its practice need to be revised and that such a re-vision can be justified on the basis of a re-configuration of the theological tradition. On the one hand radical orthodoxy seeks liberation from the tyranny of the assumptions of modernity and to have the capacity to interpret modern life theologically according to a conception of God which can be defended out of the re-envisioned tradition. Millbank's essay on Hamman and Jacobi is therefore strategically important in the argument, indeed it is crucial to the project.

Radical orthodoxy approaches the question of the social context and the practice of theology through an appeal to the interpretation of the theological tradition which

¹⁴ *Radical Orthodoxy*, p.23

¹⁵ *Radical Orthodoxy*, p.23

¹⁶ *Radical Orthodoxy*, p.28

emphasises participation and incarnation. Those themes are not new in the tradition as Millbank and others point out in these essays. The French *nouvelle theologie* had itself a long historical pedigree in Gallicanism,¹⁷ though they do not draw attention to this. It would have helped the intention of this project, especially in relation to their espoused Anglican heritage for it would have shown up crucial issues to do with epistemology and institutionality. The controversies surrounding the Gallican Articles and the Grand Assembly of 1681-82, and the role and arguments of Bossuet in this well illustrate the challenges faced by Christian theology in a time of cultural change. An Anglican theologian who illustrates these issues is Richard Hooker. He tried to be faithful to the “participating” God in an era of heightened imperial nationalism. If we live in the sunset of British Imperialism Hooker lived at the time of its rising and for this reason he makes an interesting counter example for the Radical Theology project.

Richard Hooker and the Social Context of Theology

For obvious reasons Richard Hooker has been seen as the defender of the Elizabethan settlement. He set out his work in those terms, and he undoubtedly pursued that aim. However he has often been interpreted as defending a theory of church and state as coterminous with that embodied in the Elizabethan settlement. The royal supremacy was the symbolic representation of that single entity the nation of which there were two parts spiritual and secular. Hooker’s influence on the English tradition of the interpretation of church state relations has been very significant¹⁸ though, as Connell Condren has recently pointed out, Hooker has operated more as an icon for the particular point of view of subsequent writers in circumstances which were often quite differently structured from

¹⁷ See the two summary articles by Costigan R. F., 'The Consensus of the Church: Differing Classical Views', *Theological Studies*, 51, 1990, pp. 25-48 and 'Bossuet and the Consensus of the Church', *Theological Studies*, 56, 1995, pp. 652-72.

¹⁸ Gascoigne J., 'Church and State Unified: Hooker's Rationale for the English Post-Reformation Order', *Journal of Religious History*, 21, 1997, pp. 23-34.

those in which Hooker wrote.¹⁹ In the rhetoric of political and theological debate the name of Hooker was a good trump to play if you could get him on your side. Gladstone's book on Church and State²⁰ published in 1839 asserted a form of the Hooker model, but he soon recognized it was a model which could not survive in the nineteenth century. "Scarcely had my work issued from the press ... when I found myself the last man on a sinking ship".²¹ Social circumstances and philosophical categories had so significantly changed since the time of Hooker that the single national empire model simply could not operate.

My intention here is not to investigate the way in which Hooker has been interpreted or used in subsequent debates²² but rather to look at the way in which he himself approached the question of the royal supremacy in his own historical circumstances. How did the social context shape the way in which he addressed the question of authority and what theological categories were important in that exercise. In this context I want first to identify the location of the material dealing with the royal Supremacy in the *Laws*, then to re-examine the central argument for the royal supremacy in book eight to uncover Hooker's theological method in relation to this subject. In this analysis I want to make use of the recently discovered Dublin manuscripts and the critical edition of Hooker's writings now available to us in the Folger Edition.

¹⁹ Condren C., 'The Creation of Richard Hooker's Public Authority: Rhetoric, Reputation and Reassessment', *Journal of Religious History*, 21, 1997, pp. 35-59.

²⁰ Gladstone, W. E. *The State in its relations with the Church*. 3rd ed. (London: Murray, 1839).

²¹ Quoted from W.O.Chadwick, 'The Idea of a National Church. Gladstone and Henson', in *Aspects de l'Anglicanisme, Colloque de Strasbourg, 14-16 June 1972*, p. 189.

²² There has been a growing interest in Hooker stimulated by the publication of a new critical edition of his works, Speed Hill W. E. (ed.), *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, I-VII, (Harvard University Press and Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Cambridge Mass and Binghampton 1977-1998) hereafter referred to as *Hooker Works*. See the collections of essays in Speed Hill W. (ed.), *Studies in Richard Hooker: Essay Preliminary to an Edition of His Works*, (Case Western Reserve University Press, Cleveland 1972), Kaye B.(ed.), 'Authority and the Shaping of Tradition: New Essays on Richard Hooker', *Journal of Religious History*, 21, 1997, and McGrade A. (ed.), *Richard Hooker and the Construction of Christian Community*, (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Tempe 1997).

The location of material on the royal supremacy

Those sections of Hooker's *Laws* which deal with the royal supremacy are contained mainly in book eight. The opening chapter of book six deals with the problem of public spiritual discipline and book seven deals with the authority of bishops but it is in book eight that the defence of the Crown's power of ecclesiastical Dominion is argued at length.

In the opening section of book six Hooker introduced the discussion of lay Elders as distinct from episcopal order by identifying the root issue between him and his opponents. He will now speak of “the weightiest last remains of that cause, Jurisdiction, Dignitie, Dominion Ecclesiasticall. For let not any man imagine, that the bare and naked difference of a few ceremonies could either have kindled so much fire, or have caused it to flame so long...”²³

In 1974 new manuscripts of Hooker's work were discovered in Dublin in the library of Trinity College.²⁴ Fourteen folios of Hooker's working notes were found and they have a very particular impact on books six and eight. These notes show how Hooker worked. They are arranged according to topics on sources which he had been reading, essays on those topics and then a consolidation of this material into the whole which led to the final manuscript of the *Laws*.

These manuscripts show that Hooker intended a more comprehensive treatment in book six on ecclesiastical institutions. The notes highlight Hooker's decision not to settle the issue of how and on what basis to discipline and the ruler. Hence the final section of book six is an exposition of a view of the incorrigibility of rulers, but not at all necessarily Hooker's own view.

In book eight the chapter divisions are important in regard to the basis of royal power.

²³ Hooker *Works*.6.1.1

²⁴ See Hooker *Works*, vol 6, especially pp.233-248

The manuscript provides outlines and there are three lists of chapters for this book. The division between chapters two and three has been a matter of some doubt, but these manuscripts make it clear that chapter 2 is a short statement on the nature of the power of Dominion and that the long chapter three is an exposition of how Christian kings may hold their dominion, that is, by what right, in what manner with what convenience and according to what example. This clarification of the textual divisions highlights that the scriptural material in chapter three, in the words of Steven McGrade are “corroborative rather than probative”²⁵ for the point of view which Hooker was arguing.

The main Argument

As with the whole of the Hooker's ecclesiastical laws book eight is concerned with the assertions of others, described in the title to the chapter as their seventh assertion, "That unto no civil Prince or Governor there may be given such power of Ecclesiastical Dominion as by the Lawes of this Land belongeth unto the Supreme Regent thereof." The most obvious candidates for Hooker's opponents in this subject are Roman Catholics and "reformers". Throughout the chapter Hooker takes pains to deal with the claim of universal jurisdiction made by the bishop of Rome and also the claim that the secular and spiritual are quite separate and distinct realms.

Hooker's argument is quite distinctive in the context in which he wrote. The act of supremacy of Henry VIII claimed to restore the Crown's "ancient jurisdiction ecclesiastical". Stephen Gardiner's defence of the royal supremacy and Henry's break with Rome was based upon the tradition of the divine right of kings. As Steven McGrade observes, "almost without exception, every defence of the royal supremacy offered from the Reformation parliament until Hooker's book eight was an appeal to this presumed divine appointment of the King, an appeal theologically supported by reference to Old Testament models and rendered popular by its refusal of a subjection to a foreign power."²⁶

²⁵ Hooker, *Works*, vol 6 p.359

²⁶ Hooker *Works*, vol 6, 342

The arguments which Hooker uses in book eight are in fact quite consistent with the terms of his own argument in the *Laws* as a whole. He appeals to the authority of the church and his familiar concept of consensus. He had asserted in book six an authority for bishops and so in book eight he relates that to the authority of the Crown. The ruling idea of law which appears here in Book 8 is the foundation upon which the argument of the whole work had been established.

It is noteworthy that while the theory of the royal supremacy in the hands of someone like Stephen Gardiner and in many subsequent interpreters, particularly in the eighteenth century,²⁷ implies an entirely united and singular society of people the reality in sixteenth century England was one of diversity and division. Henry's Act of Uniformity was more an assertion of ambition than a reflection of the social reality. It is not surprising that the legitimation of the Royal Supremacy might call forth such theological arguments as those of Stephen Gardiner. Hooker, however, does not choose the imperial category. Hooker begins book eight with an admonition concerning men's judgements about the question of Regal power in which he seeks to clarify the distinctions and differences that can be made between the Commonwealth and church. He is well aware that in history the Crown has had spiritual and temporal authority and that many in the church have wanted to see not just a distinction but a separation of the commonwealth from the church. He is well aware that not all nations are Christian, nor all monarchies coincide as societies with the church. He discusses the significance in the early church of the conversion of Constantine and the adoption of Christianity by the empire in relation to this theory. However in England at the time Hooker was writing church and Commonwealth did coincide and that was the political reality with which his argument was concerned.

Having established this distinction and the actual empirical realities which provide the context for his discussion of the royal supremacy Hooker announces his discussion of the character of the power of the Crown in such a society by reference to the necessity of

²⁷ See especially, Gascoigne J., 'Church and State Unified: Hooker's Rationale for the English Post-Reformation Order', *Journal of Religious History*, 21, 1997, pp. 23-34

order in society. "Without order there is no living in public society, because the want thereof is the mother of confusion, whereupon division of necessity follows, and out of division inevitable destruction."²⁸ Indeed Hooker says the whole world consists of such diversity that the only thing which holds it together is the activity of the creator who set them in order and that this same God "both keeps and requires for ever this to be kept as a law, that wheresoever there is a coagmentation of many, the lowest be knit to the highest by that which being interjacent may cause each to cleave unto other and so all to continue one."²⁹ This order of things and persons in public societies is the work of polity and the proper instrument thereof in every degree is power, power being that ability "which we have of our selves or receive from others for performance of any action."³⁰

Christian kings, Hooker says, do not have their power and their Dominion " simply without exception of anything...For what man is this so brains sick as not to except in such speeches God himself, the King of all the kings of the earth?"³¹ So this supremacy of the Crown is held under God and refers only to the territory of the particular kingdom. Within that kingdom the spiritual Dominion of this Christian King of this Christian society may not be overruled by any foreign jurisdiction.

In chapter 3 Hooker goes on to ask a series of questions. By what right does the King hold his power? Every independent multitude has power of itself and therefore such right as the King has is by human right, it is not a divine right. The King is not in the position of the judges in ancient Israel who received their authority and power directly from God. Once however the King is established according to this human rule as the Christian King of a Christian society then Christian citizens have divinely laid obligations upon them in relation to that King. It is important to recognise that he is here addressing what he takes to be the situation in England and in that situation the rule is a voluntary rule and by agreement. In England "the people are in no subjection but such as willingly themselves

²⁸ *Laws*, 8.2.1

²⁹ *Laws*, 8.2.2

³⁰ *Laws*, 8.2.2

³¹ *Laws*, 8.2.3

have, condescended unto for their own most behoof and security."³² Of course the voluntary acceptance of the rule of a Christian King may be located far in the distant past and the reasons and the terms may be forgotten. But Hooker's contract theory approach deals with this by saying that people do accept by remaining, and by public and presumed acceptance of the royal authority. "May then a body politic at all times withdraw in whole or in part that influence of Dominion which passes from it if inconvenience doth grow thereby? It must be presumed that supreme governors will not in such case oppose themselves and be stiff in detaining that, the use whereof is with publique detriment."³³ The measure of the agreement and power that the King has is that power which was agreed originally and subsequently accepted either overtly or by silent consent.

The extent of the kings power is that which is best for the people and is related to the most indifferent rule of law, "I mean not only the law of nature and of God but every national or municipal law consonant thereunto. Happy that people, whose law is their King in the greatest things than that whose King is himself their law."³⁴ Such law is established by convenience and the example and pattern of power for the King is defined by its use in serving that good which includes the good of the soul.

Later sections of book eight deal with the question of kingship. It is different from Christ's both in order, Christ's kinship is overall, in terms of measure, it is less in extent than Christ's, in terms of kind, it relates to externals whereas Christ's relates to all aspects of the human condition. "The headship which we give unto Kings is altogether visibly exercised and ordereth only the external frame of the churches affayres here amongst us, so that it plainly differeth from Christs even in very nature and kinde."³⁵ Such a King has power to call General assemblies where those General assemblies involve all the community of the church. Such a King's powers in making ecclesiastical laws are mainly by denying a proposal. He has power in making ecclesiastical judgments and

³² *Laws*, 8.3.2

³³ *Laws*, 8.3.2

³⁴ *Laws*, 8.3.3

³⁵ *Laws*, 8.4.5

governors and is himself exempt judicially from the kinds of punishment that clergy might seek to impose upon him.

Given the history of the interpretation of Hooker and the perception that the royal supremacy has behind it the power of the tradition of the divine right of kings, Hooker's exposition in book eight of a contract theory and a limited notion of the royal supremacy in relation to a particular Christian country with an established monarchy is to say the least surprising. It is in relation to England that he says that the church and Commonwealth are the same because the membership is the same. The Constitution provided that people were English and citizens and were subjects of the King as head of the realm and they were also therefore to be subject in this realm in their religious identities.

The fundamental theological argument could work in different circumstances to quite different effect. The issue is the particular character of Christ's moral lordship and the need for order in human society. That Hooker is aware of this can be seen by his discussion of the church fathers of the ante-Nicene period and the significance he attributes to the conversion of Constantine. Thus Hooker does not commit himself to the doctrine of the divine right of kings. That would be to confuse the distinction between Christ's lordship and the dominion of the crown. It would also place the monarch in too privileged a position in relation to law and the law. Hooker's view of the dominion of the Royal Supremacy and authority is thus quite differentiated and circumscribed. This is less true for Hooker's opponents, the disciplinarians and the papalists who both represent a less differentiated and more singular notion of authority. That is possibly the reason Hooker undertakes to argue not on the grounds of a universal principle such as the divine right of kings, which he gives no indication of believing, but rather on the grounds of what was the actual empirical situation in England at the time he was writing. The radical character of this argument may be part of the reason for the late publication after Hooker's death of Book eight

The identity of the church and political community is argued not only because of

membership but also because of purpose. He uses Aristotle's view that the end of political life is not just living but "living well".³⁶ Especially in a Christian country with a Christian king religion comes within the compass of the meaning of the term "living well". It is noticeable that Hooker adds to the sixteenth century idea of the supreme authority of the crown an emphasis upon the actual role of all of the community in the exercising of any authority, an emphasis that arises directly out of his contractarian approach.

The royal supremacy argument as deployed by Hooker in the particular empirical situation of sixteenth century England is strikingly innovative in its context. The royal supremacy is qualified in relation to God. It is not "the divine mandate" and is different in relation to order, measure and kind from the authority of Christ. It is qualified by law. Hooker is strikingly distinctive in making this point in his period.

Hooker presents his picture as a description of Elizabethan reality, in which he may seem naïve, or perhaps writing rhetorically in an attempt to bring this picture to reality. However, as a profession of political values by the defender of a strong monarchy, it seems notably enlightened

The entire community gives general order by law how all things publicly are to be done and the King as the head thereof, the highest in authority over all causes according to the same law every particular to be framed and ordered thereby. The whole body politic makes laws which laws give power unto the King and the King having bound himself to use according unto law that power, it so falls out that the execution of the one is accomplished by the other in most religious and peaceable sort. [8.9; 3:434.24-435.4].

This characterisation of Hooker's view by Stephen McGrade³⁷ draws attention to the way

³⁶ *Laws*, 8.1.4

³⁷ *Works*, vol 6, pp.374f.

in which this text of Ecclesiastical Laws needs to be read with some clear understanding of the social condition to which it was addressed and the social and intellectual context out of which it has been written. Clearly this conception of the royal supremacy envisaged a very inclusive notion of English society. In that sense his account of the royal supremacy can be regarded as Conservative in the short-term but progressive in the long-term. Hooker's vision of a Christian society as the acme of political association was inspired by a conception of human well-being as participation in the life of God. It is the fall from currency of this conception as much as Hooker's comprehensiveness in sixteenth-century terms that has made him steadily harder to understand."³⁸ In our own time we do not find ourselves able to reconcile the reality of our political circumstances with such a vision of Christian society.

This reading of Hooker on the royal supremacy sets out to show that Hooker did not really believe in the royal supremacy in any sense that would establish it as a principle in all political circumstances nor in any absolute terms in sixteenth century England. On the contrary his method was to take the empirical reality as he saw it in sixteenth century England and to make something of it in theological terms, those theological terms being developed out of a particular conception of the presence of God operating through law in the whole world including the particular case of England. That is why the Preface and Book I provide in Hooker's plan of writing such a determining function in the development of the argument of the Ecclesiastical Laws.³⁹ It is not that they lay down a principle which is then drawn out into particulars. Rather they provide the foundation which in turn enables a reflex critique of Tudor England to be undertaken setting out that interpretation against criticisms which are based on the in principle theological opinions of the disciplinarians and the papalists. This is a reflex theological method. Furthermore it is a method which involves not simply being a mirror of the empirical reality in its own terms but rather an interpretation of that reality as a rhetorical exercise to frame the interpretation and perceptions of his contemporaries.

³⁸ *Works*, vol 6, pp.381

³⁹ See McGrade A., 'The Coherence of Hooker's Polity: The Books on Power', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24, 1963, pp. 163-82.

Is also significant that in this method the social is a paradigm test for theology as well as the location of its particular exposition.

Conclusions

The concerns of the Radical Orthodoxy authors with social context and theological practice are real and also not unprecedented. The re-positioning which they advocate is in the direction of “givenness” and of re-asserting a place for theology in making sense of the world. Thus they speak of “knowledge by faith” and take up the radical pietists of the eighteenth century, Hamman and Jacobi, in order to re-shape the perception of the tradition and also to re-work a stream of response to the early movement of the enlightenment.⁴⁰

Where the social and cultural context is seen in such strong terms as described in these essays then some kind of rigorous reaction is understandable. How far the social context is as they contend is a further question which I have not explored, though a case can be made that there is a return to the religious away from the conception of religion as personal *superstitio* and society as irreligiously secular, indeed such a case has been made by Keppel⁴¹ and is more than hinted at by recent writings of Peter Berger.⁴² Perhaps Radical Orthodoxy could be thought of as part of the “revenge of God” described by Keppel

However, even given the social analysis upon which Radical Orthodoxy writers set themselves, the strategy they adopt plays into the hands of the secularist in claiming the

⁴⁰ How far these responses, and their re-assertion in Radical Orthodoxy have connections with the springs of the Romantic reaction to the enlightenment is an interesting question which I have not explored here.

⁴¹ Keppel G., *The Revenge of God. The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*, (Polity Press, Cambridge 1994).

⁴² Berger P. (ed.), *The Deseccularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1999).

field for theology in the same imperial terms as the secularist's claim. The result of such a strategy is that the secular is re-enforced by not being challenged in its own arena of claim and in the imperial character of its conception of knowledge and thus authority.

But how, in whatever situation we are in, is a response to be undertaken? Answering such a question involves some sense of what theology is trying to do, indeed, what it can do. That in turn can only be answered out of an attempt at theological understanding already undertaken. The alternative example of Richard Hooker which I have offered here at least provides in my view something of the beginnings of an answer. Hooker's approach seems to me to be a combination of affirmation and qualification. He defends that in the social context which he thinks to be defensible, not because it is perfect, but, in this instance, because the alternatives, or rather the alternative critical offerings are flawed in terms of their authority foundations. However, Hooker's affirmation is not in such terms that the affirmation gives any basis for over stating the significance of what he defends. On the contrary his qualifications are the sting which not so much is in the tail, as un-does the tail. This approach has the effect of accepting the experienced reality of the social context and remaining in the social political context, yet at the same time changing the terms of reference. Such an approach is actually consonant with an incarnationalist, participatory understanding of God's relation to the created order, a characterisation for which Radical Orthodoxy does not have a monopoly.

However, such an approach raises in the present circumstances two very particular challenges for theology, challenges which are especially acute for the Anglican theological tradition. The first issue is the relation between theology and values, behaviour and institutional conceptualities. It raises the question of how such values which are shaped by this kind of theology are at the one and the same time true and proximate rather than absolutes. If what theology yields is enough to be going on with in the present circumstances, then commitment and confidence have to be reconceived in more modest and contingent terms, appropriate for pilgrims committed to a crucified God. The second issue has to do with how the manifestation of the divine is to be understood in the present cultural context. What is the relation, for example, between

prayer in the world and faithful behaviour in that world?

These are category questions which the Radical Orthodoxy authors raise, but they do so in a way which does not challenge adequately the fundamental shape of the epistemological landscape. Hooker, in a different context and with a seemingly more modest approach to the practice of theology in its social context, actually offers an approach which is more fundamental and subversive in the long run, and in the short term better enables us to speak with rather than to our neighbours and our social context.