The stateliness of houses, the goodliness of trees, when we behold them delighteth the eye; but that foundation which beareth up the one, that root which ministreth unto the other nourishment and life, is in the bosome of the earth concealed: and if there be at any time occasion to search into it, such labour is then more necessary than pleasant both to them which undertake it, and for the lookers on. In like manner the use and benefit of good lawes, all that live under them may enjoy with delight and comfort, albeit the groundes and first originall causes from whence they have sprung be unknowne, as to the greatest part of men they are.¹

Richard Hooker’s radical, foundational proposal at the outset of the first book of his treatise Of the Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie is easily summarized: ‘God is Law’. From a metaphysical or theological point of view this claim taken by itself is neither original nor wholly remarkable. Indeed Hooker’s claim that God is law—the hidden ‘first originall cause’—can reasonably be interpreted as a restatement, or better a reformulation of classical ‘logos theology’ such as one finds in the Hellenistic thought of Philo of Alexandria derived by him from pre-Socratic thought (Heracleitus) and the Stoics;² or in such early-church fathers as Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Ambrose, Jerome, Eusebius of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria or Augustine³ and which was reformulated in later Christian theology variously, for example, by Aquinas and Calvin.⁴ For all of these theologians, an

¹ Lawes I.1.2; 1:57.6–16.
uncreated divine principle, the Word (logos, or ratio, or paradeigma—reason, order, plan) constitutes the ‘idea of ideas’, the Platonic ‘archetypal idea’ and therefore the ‘first principle’ of all created order while the creation itself, both visible and invisible, proceeds from and is wholly dependent upon this original, un-derived and hidden divine principle as its first and primary cause.

For Hooker, however, the investigation of this hidden law or logos represents a great deal more in actuality than a purely metaphysical claim concerning the nature of the first principle. As the argument of his treatise unfolds, it becomes plain that Hooker is just as deeply invested in the full practical, political, even constitutional consequences of his claim that ‘God is law’ as he is committed to its underlying metaphysical necessity. Indeed the burden of his argument is to show that the Elizabethan constitutional and ecclesiastical order he seeks to explain and defend—the ‘stately house’ as it were of the established Church and the ‘goodly tree’ of the flourishing commonwealth—has its ultimate ground and justification in a first principle altogether hidden. Indeed it is of the utmost significance for Hooker that both his metaphysical ontology and his polemical apology of the Elizabethan religious settlement rest squarely upon this one simple proposition: God is Law. Hooker’s adaptation of classical logos theology is exceptional and indeed quite original for its extended application of the highest metaphysical principle to the most concrete institutional issues of a particular time and place. His sustained effort to explore the intimate connections of pressing political and constitutional concerns with the highest discourse of hidden divine realities—the knitting together of theology and politics—is the arguably the defining characteristic of Hooker’s thought. As C. S. Lewis points out, Hooker’s universe is ‘drenched with Deity’.5 Everything created ‘participates’ the divine first principle—by this participation, all things have God in them and, correspondingly, all things are in God. Hooker’s proposition that God is law is the substance of this idea.

Hooker defines law in general as ‘that which doth assigne unto each thing the kinde, that which doth moderate the force and power, that which doth appoint the forme and measure of working…so that no certaine end could ever be attained, unlesse the actions whereby it is

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