

Both these discussions of Hooker are derived from doctoral theses, but they are very different in their quality and value as examples of scholarship. Simut sets out explicitly to ‘prove’ (pp. 39, 143) that, in his soteriology generally and in his theology of justification in particular, Richard Hooker was a pedigree Protestant theologian, perpetuating the doctrine of Luther and Calvin (though not what he alleges to be the ambiguities of Melanchthon and Bucer). Hooker was, it is claimed, certainly not a ‘Catholic’ theologian, neither was he merely ‘semi-Reformed’. Least of all was he an originator of Anglican Arminianism, which would have brought him ‘extremely close to Pelagianism’ (p. 82)! So this book stands within the PC (‘protestantly correct’) tendency of Hooker interpretation, represented by Torrance Kirby, Nigel Atkinson and Nigel Voak, that seeks to claim Hooker as a reformed theologian. Of course he is that, but that is not all he is: he is as indebted to Aquinas as to Calvin and remains always his own man. While the book’s conclusion is not far out – Hooker’s doctrine of justification was indeed close to Calvin’s – the argument that leads up to it is so seriously flawed that this review must take the form of a health warning. (I pass over the point that to set out to prove a case and to unashamedly ‘design’ (p. 39) one’s work around this attempt is probably not the most appropriate way to carry out research at a doctoral level.)

With regard to his method, the author is obsessed with ‘pigeonholing’ (p. 1) not only Hooker, but all his relevant predecessors and contemporaries, as well as those who have written about him. He does this in a crude and procrustean way, e.g. mixing up political thought (Hooker’s conciliar elements) with soteriology, and not allowing for the possibility that a scholar may belong in more than one camp (Hooker himself being a case in point *par excellence*). Much of the material is a parade of interpretations, but a rather brutal hermeneutic is applied: authors are not expounded for what light they can shed on Hooker and his times, but all too often are marshalled as evidence for the prosecution or the defence. Truisms of historical interpretation as presented with an air of discovery, as though the author has not got the sense of proportion that comes from a broad overall perspective. The Romanian author’s English is usually
reasonably good, but there are some solecisms that should have been filtered out by the publishers, as when he begins the book by referring to Hooker as ‘the reputed author’ (p. 1) of the *Ecclesiastical Polity* – meaning an author of repute, the celebrated author, not one whose authorship is rumoured and open to question.

Issues of substance that deserve to be questioned are too numerous to list, but here is a sample from the first half of the book. Simuț has misunderstood (p. 21) what Hooker means when he says in the *Discourse of Justification* that the Roman Catholic Church ‘overthroweth’ the doctrine of justification ‘by a consequent’, taking it to mean that the hierarchy misleads the faithful, rather than in the intended logical sense (which is pivotal to Hooker’s argument that Roman Catholics, especially ‘our fathers’, may be saved). He says on several occasions that John Calvin regarded the Roman Church as ‘a true church’ (pp. 36f, 91), which is the opposite of the case: Calvin recognised only ‘vestiges’ of the Church in the Roman Church. Again, it is said that Hooker believed that Roman Catholic soteriology was ‘nothing else but sin’ (p. 58) – an extraordinary exaggeration of Hooker’s actual accusation, that the Roman Church culpably makes her people to tread a maze of confusion where this doctrine is concerned. We are told – another highly questionable assertion – that Hooker held Calvin’s doctrine of total depravity (pp. 96, n. 104, 109) and that, for Hooker, ‘the essence of human nature is sin’ (p. 64).

In conclusion: I do not have confidence in the author’s deployment of evidence or in his judgements. The first is tendentious, the second simplistic and often so wide of the mark as to be bizarre. The book looks solid and is heavy with references, but that panoply turns out to be an illusion. The publishers have made a mistake in bringing it out in their academic imprint, graced by the names of some considerable scholars. Quality control should be better than this.

Brydon shows that there is nothing new in theological protagonists attempting to wrest Hooker to their own ends: he had been firmly appropriated for this role by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Brydon’s work surveys the history of Hooker-interpretation from the beginning of the seventeenth century until the reign of Queen Anne (territory already probed by Eccleshall in 1981, Condren in 1997 and MacCulloch in 2002). The *Ecclesiastical Polity* was barely resisted at the time that it appeared: it is indeed ‘incredible’ (p. 22) that only one challenge – the so called ‘A Christian Letter’ – was published in Hooker’s lifetime (short though the span was between publication of the first five books and Hooker’s death). Hooker had set out to be unanswerable and had succeeded. As Gauden said in his life of Hooker (1662), his great work