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Chapter 2: Of That Law Which God Has Set for Himself

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“Of That Law Which God from before the Beginning Has Set for Himself to Do All Things By”

Chapter 2 of Book 1 in

Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity

By Richard Hooker

1594

[Hooker, Richard. “Concerning Laws and Their Several Kinds in General.” Book 1 in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. In Richard Hooker, *The Works of that Learned and Judicious Divine Mr. Richard Hooker with an Account of His Life and Death by Isaac Walton.* Arranged by the Rev. John Keble MA. 7th edition revised by the Very Rev. R.W. Church and the Rev. F. Paget (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888). 3 vols. Vol. 1. The Online Library of Liberty. http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/921. In the public domain. Some modernized vocabulary and contructions have been substituted in the text by the Witherspoon Institute.]

Within the text, numbers within brackets indicate the page divisions of the 1888 edition from which this text was taken; prose within text are insertions of the Witherspoon Institute to supply words required by modern English usage. In places the Witherspoon Institute has modernized archaic or obsolete vocabulary or constructions in Hooker’s text. In cases where the changes are very basic and risk no alteration to the original meaning of the text (such as changing “whereof” to “of which” and “saith” to “says”) there is no notation in the text; changes to more substantive vocabulary are noted with footnotes that show the original word that Hooker used.

Within the footnotes, text not within brackets are Hooker’s original notes; text within single brackets is supplied by the Witherspoon Institute; text within double brackets (that is, [[ ]]) is supplied by the editors of the 1888 edition.

Chapter 2: Of that law which God from before the beginning has set for himself to do all things by.

[1.] All things that are, have some operation not violent or by chance[1]. Neither does anything ever begin to exercise the same, without some fore-conceived end for which it works. And the end which it works for is not obtained, unless the work be also fit to obtain it by. For unto every end every operation will not serve. That which does assign to each thing the kind, that which does moderate the force and power, that which does appoint the form and measure, of working, the same we term a *Law*. So that no certain end could ever be attained, unless the actions by which it is attained were regular; that is to say,

made suitable, fit and correspondent to their end, by some canon, rule or law. This thing does first take place in the works even of God himself.

[2.] All things therefore do work after a sort, according to law: all other things according to a law, of which some superior, to whom they are subject, is author; only the works and operations of God have Him both for their worker, and for the law by which they are wrought. The being of God is a kind of law to his working: for that perfection which God is, gives perfection to that which he does. Those natural, necessary, and internal operations of God, the Generation of the Son, the Proceeding of the Spirit, are outside the compass of my present intent: which is to touch only such operations as have their beginning and being by a voluntary purpose, with which God has eternally decreed when and how they should be. This eternal decree is that which we term an eternal law.

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[3.] The wise and learned among the very heathens themselves have all acknowledged some First Cause, upon which originally the being of all things depends. Neither have they otherwise spoken of that cause than as an Agent, which knowing *what* and *why* it works, observes in working a most exact *order* or *law*. This much is signified by that which Homer mentions, Διὸς δ’ ἐτελείετο βουλή (Jupiter’s *counsel* was accomplished). Thus [202] much acknowledged by Mercurius Trismegistus, Τὸν πάντα κόσμον ἐποίησεν ὁ δημιουργὸς οὐ χερσὶν ἀλλὰ λόγῳ (The Creator made the whole world not by hands but by *reason*). This much is confessed by Anaxagoras and Plato, terming the Maker of the world an *intellectual* Worker. Finally the Stoics, although imagining the first cause of all things to be fire, held nevertheless, that the same fire having art, did ὁδῷ βαδίζειν ἐπὶ γενέσει κόσμου (proceed by a certain and a set *Way* in the making of the world). They all confess therefore in the working of that first cause, that Counsel is used, Reason followed, a Way observed; that is to say, constant Order and Law is kept; of which this cause must necessarily be the author for itself. Otherwise it would have some worthier and higher being to direct it, and so could not itself be the first. Being the first, it can have no other than itself to be the author of that law which it willingly works by.

God therefore is a law both to himself, and to all other things besides. To himself he is a law in all those things, of which our Saviour speaks, saying, “My Father works as yet, so I” (John 5:17). God works nothing without cause. All those things which are done by him have some end for which they are done; and the end for which they are done is a reason of his will to do them. His will would not have inclined to create woman, unless he had seen it could not be well if she were not created. *Non est bonum*, “It is not good man should be alone; therefore let us make a helper for him” (Gen. 2:18). That and nothing else is done by God, which would not be as good to leave undone.

If therefore it be demanded, why God having infinite power and ability, the effects notwithstanding of that power are all so limited as we see they are: the reason for this is the end which he has proposed, and the law by which his wisdom has stinted the effects of his power in such sort, that it does not work infinitely, but correspondently to that end for which it works, even “all things χρηστῶς, [203] in most decent and comely sort,” all things in “Measure, Number, and Weight” (Wis. 8:1, 11:20).

[4.] The general end of God’s external working is the exercise of his most glorious and most abundant power[2]. Which abundance does show itself in variety, and for that cause this variety is oftentimes in Scripture expressed by the name of *riches* (Eph. 1:7; Phil. 4:19; Col. 2:3). “The Lord has made all things for his own sake” (Prov. 16:4). Not that anything is made to be beneficial to him, but all things for him to show beneficence and grace in them.

The particular drift of every act proceeding externally from God we are not able to discern, and therefore cannot always give the proper and certain reason of his works. Nevertheless undoubtedly there is a proper and certain reason for every finite work of God, inasmuch as there is a law imposed upon it; which if there were not, it should be infinite, even as the worker himself is.

[5.] They err therefore who think that there is no reason of the will of God to do this or that besides his will. Many times [there is] no reason known to us; but that there is no reason thereof I judge it most unreasonable to imagine, inasmuch as he works all things κατὰ τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ, not only according to his own will, but "the Counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11). And whatsoever is done with counsel or wise resolution has of necessity some reason why it should be done, even though that reason be to us in some things so secret, that it forces the mind[3] of man to stand, as the blessed Apostle himself does, amazed thereat: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments," etc. (Rom. 11:33). That law eternal which God himself has made for himself, and by which he works all things of which he is the cause and author; that law in the admirable frame of which shines with most perfect beauty the countenance of that wisdom which has testified concerning herself, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, even before his works of old I was set up" (Prov. 8:22); that law, which has been the pattern to make, and is the card[4] [204] to guide the world by; that law which has been of God and with God everlastingly; that law, the author and observer of which is one only God to be blessed forever: how should either men or angels be able perfectly to behold? The book of this law we are neither able nor worthy to open and look into. That little of it which we darkly apprehend we admire, the rest with religious ignorance we humbly and meekly adore.

[6.] Seeing therefore that according to this law He works, "of whom, through whom, and for whom, are all things" (Rom. 11:36); although there seem to us to be confusion and disorder in the affairs of this present world: "Tamen quoniam bonus mundum rector temperat, recte fieri cuncta ne dubites:" "let no man doubt but that every thing is well done, because the world is ruled by so good a guide,"[5] as transgresses not His own law, than which nothing can be more absolute, perfect, and just.

The law whereby He works is eternal, and therefore can have no show or colour of mutability: for which cause, a part of that law being opened in the promises which God has made (because his promises are nothing else but declarations of what God will do for the good of men), touching those promises the Apostle has witnessed, that God may as possibly "deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13) and not be God, as fail to perform them. And concerning the counsel of God, he terms it likewise a thing "unchangeable" (Heb. 4:17); the counsel of God, and that law of God of which now we speak, being one.

Nor is the freedom of the will of God any whit abated, impeded[6] or hindered, by means of this; because the imposition of this law upon himself is his own free and voluntary act.

This law therefore we may name eternal, being "that order which God before all ages has set down with himself, for himself to do all things by."

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[1] [Hooker: or casual]

[2] [Hooker: virtue]

[3] [Hooker: wit]

[4] [A metal brush or similar tool by which one raises downy or hairy cloth to give it a more orderly appearance.]

[5] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book 4, pros. 5.

[6] [Hooker: let]

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