

CORNELIU C. SIMUȚ, *Richard Hooker and his Early Doctrine of Justification: A Study of his Discourse of Justification* [Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion Theology, and Biblical Studies]. Ashgate, Aldershot 2005, x + 180 pp. ISBN 0754652688. £ 45.

Corneliu Simuț argues a controversial thesis in his monograph study of Richard Hooker's soteriology. Simuț sets out to demonstrate that the great late-Elizabethan divine is firmly situated within an established tradition of "Reformed" doctrinal orthodoxy on the basis of a careful reading and analysis of a sequence of Hooker's sermons on the doctrines of grace, justification, and works composed in the mid-1580s. In addressing this particular question Simuț has taken hold of what might well be described as the "hot potato" of current critical interpretation of Hooker's theology. In two recent monographs — Nigel Atkinson's *Richard Hooker and the Authority of Scripture, Reason, and Tradition* (1997) and Nigel Voak's *Richard Hooker and Reformed Theology* (2003) — a marked divergence of critical opinion concerning the interpretation of Hooker's soteriology turns on the key question of Hooker's precise relation to norms of continental reformed theology. Several other Hooker scholars have also been grappling with this question of late, including David Neelands, Lee Gibbs, Egil Grisliis, Peter Lake and, in the interest of transparency, the author of this review. Simuț's reading engages very closely the central concern of current revisionist criticism, namely Hooker's adherence to the chief tenets of reformed doctrine.

Dr Simuț commences his inquiry with a helpful taxonomy of the current critical literature. He distinguishes three major approaches to interpretation briefly identified as 1) the "via media" Anglican (Keble, Gibbs, Monohan); 2) the partially Reformed (Voak, Lake, Grisliis); and 3) the thoroughly Reformed (Hughes, Kirby, Atkinson). This argument pins its colours firmly to the revisionist mast of defining Hooker's soteriological position as "thoroughly Reformed." In order to set up the discussion the book offers a constructive contextualisation of the Elizabethan debate about grace and justification, and then proceeds to provide summaries of the relevant influential continental theologies, viz. Lutheran, early Reformed, and classically Reformed, all with the intent of clarifying the most plausible of Hooker's potential sources for his own formulation of the doctrine of grace and justification. Simuț proceeds to examine systematically the constitutive theological elements of Hooker's position. Justification and sanctification are treated respectively as the objective and subjective expressions of his reformed doctrine of righteousness. When he finally gets down to the exposition of the constitutive elements of Hooker's soteriology, Simuț has made sure to prepare firm ground upon which comparisons may be drawn between his teaching and the various continental articulations of the Protestant position. His argument that there is nothing in Hooker's soteriology even mildly suggestive of "via media" Anglicanism is thoroughly persuasive. Hooker is shown to adhere consistently

and unambiguously to a mainstream reformed understanding of the doctrine of salvation.

Nigel Voak's interpretation of Hooker restates John Henry Newman's thesis that Hooker's mature position on the doctrine of Justification of the 1590s represents an Arminian "development" of his earlier, more unambiguously reformed position in the mid-1580s. Arguably Newman's identification of such a development away from reformed orthodoxy represents more wishful thinking on Newman's part, comparable in some respect with John Keble's attempt to read *iure divino* episcopacy into Book VII of the *Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie*. Yet Simuț demonstrates conclusively that Hooker's response to his Disciplinary puritan critics in his notes on *A Christian Letter* and in the *Dublin Fragments* — composed near the end of his life in 1599-1600 — suggests that Hooker's mature position is in fact more thoroughly reformed than at any previous stage. Consequently, there is perhaps some lingering irony in the choice of the title of this book. To distinguish Hooker's "early" doctrine of Justification from his later teaching is to invoke the idea of the "developmental" approach of Newman's and Voak's "via media" reading of Hooker's theology. Simuț, however, turns this logic on its head by his own clear identification with the revisionist criticism which sees Hooker's treatment of the doctrine of grace as consistently reformed throughout his career with the proviso that in the 1590s his reformed orthodoxy becomes more pronounced than ever.

Corneliu Simuț's book makes a very timely contribution to Hooker studies. It addresses in a helpful and scholarly manner one of the key points in dispute in current scholarship and it extends the revisionist critique of Hooker's thought by challenging at the root some broadly held assumptions of recent interpretation. Many of the questions and problems facing the interpretation of a number of themes in Hooker's thought — viz. ontological, epistemological, hermeneutical, ecclesiological, and political — can all be traced back to the basic theological assumptions formulated in his sermons and other writings on grace and justification. This monograph helps the reader to engage constructively with these fundamental precepts of Hooker's theological position. While the book is addressed primarily to the specialist in Reformation thought, it is nonetheless accessible, very readable, and should be of considerable interest to a broad audience with an interest in the English Reformation and early modern historical theology.

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