Cardinal Newman in His Age
In memory of my father
## Contents

Acknowledgments .......................................................... ix
Abbreviations Used in Footnotes ........................................ xi
Introduction ........................................................................ 1

**PART ONE Newman and the Old Orthodoxy** ......................... 11

I Newman and Hooker ......................................................... 13
II Newman and the Carolines .............................................. 23
III Newman and the Metaphysicals ...................................... 41

**PART TWO The Spirit Afloat** .............................................. 63

IV Newman’s Idealism ......................................................... 69
V Newman and the Alexandrian Fathers .............................. 83
VI Newman and Coleridge: The Whole Man Reasons .............. 97
VII Newman and Wordsworth: The Growth of a Poet’s Mind .... 113

**PART THREE Newman’s Modernism: A Theology of Safeguards** 135

VIII Orthodox Subjectivism: Newman on Faith and Reason .... 137
IX Orthodox Individualism: The Individuality of Certitude ....... 175
X Orthodox Relativism: Newman on Faith and Form ............. 203

**PART FOUR The Consequences** ........................................ 233

XI The Movement and the Establishment ............................ 235
XII The Desert and the City ............................................... 260
Index ............................................................................... 288
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# Abbreviations Used in Footnotes

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Reference</th>
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Abbreviations


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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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Introduction

Any valid estimate of the work of John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801–1890) must take into account his place in English theology and literature, with particular reference to what we now generally consider as “modern thought.” There can be little question that he is the most important English theologian of the last two centuries, and it is in these two centuries that what is called the “modern world”—the post-medieval and, some say, the post-Christian world—has come into being. The medieval edifice was collapsing in England during those very years in which Newman’s own thought was taking its characteristic shape, namely, in the eighteen-twenties and thirties. Moreover, during the later decades of the nineteenth century, while Newman was developing his own distinctive theories of dogma and belief, the subjectivism, individualism, and relativism which constitute the lineaments of modern thought were also defining themselves and gaining the political, philosophical, and theological ascendancy which they still occupy. In working out his religious position, Newman was obliged to take the new world view into account. He was, in fact, faced with an important choice in regard to it; he had to decide whether to make terms with it or to oppose it, and he chose to make terms. It seems no exaggeration to say that in doing so he prepared for the revolution in Catholic teaching, in both the Roman and Anglican communions, which is so prominent a factor in the theology and literature of the twentieth century and which promises to be a prominent factor for a great many years to come.¹ It is that choice, Newman’s decision to accept the

¹. Newman’s influence on the Second Vatican Council is generally acknowledged; for a brief summary and bibliography on the major issues see Charles S. Dessain, “Cardinal Newman as Prophet,” Prophets in the Church,
Introduction

philosophical premises of modern thought as his own and to treat them as though they were capable of synthesis with Catholic dogma, with which the following chapters deal.

The choice is implicit in all Newman’s work; however, it is stated explicitly on only one or two occasions. One of those is the familiar “Prospects of the Anglican Church,” published in 1839 at the height of the Oxford Movement’s influence.2 The essay serves as a sort of credo by which Newman defines his place in the movement, and we shall deal with it in due course. Another explicit statement, and Newman’s fullest, comes in his Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk in 1875, in the chapters dealing with the Syllabus of Errors.3 Here we may begin our consideration of the matter, for here Newman surveys the whole question of Catholicism and modern thought from the point of view of his own maturity. That survey leaves no doubt where the mature Newman stood.

The Syllabus of Errors (1864) was a defense of the old world; the medieval idea of a Christian society is implicit in all its propositions. As an obedient Catholic and also as a man who felt a great deal of nostalgia for that old order of Christian life, Newman is willing to defend the Syllabus, but only with qualifications which ultimately negate its effect.

He begins by pointing out that Englishmen have no reason to be shocked at the Pope’s intransigence: that they are so indicates that “men of the present generation” have forgotten “the words, ways, and works of their grandfathers.”4

Modern Rome then is not the only place where the traditions of the old Empire, its principles, provisions, and practices, have been held

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in honour; they have been retained, they have been maintained in substance, as the basis of European civilization down to this day, and notably among ourselves. In the Anglican establishment the king took the place of the Pope; but the Pope's principles kept possession.\(^5\)

“Their action,” he adds, “was restrained but they were still in force, when this century opened.” “In my own lifetime has that old world been alive, and has gone its way.”\(^6\) The *Syllabus*, then, says nothing new. In issuing it, the Pope has done no more than keep faith with the “old idea of a Christian Polity,” with “the tradition of fifteen hundred years.” “All this,” says Newman, “was called Toryism, and men gloried the name; now it is called Popery and reviled.”\(^8\)

What has replaced that “old idea of a Christian Polity”? The answer, of course, is the very relativism and subjectivism which the *Syllabus* condemned—all those philosophical assumptions about social equality and religious freedom which most men now glorify as “modern.” Newman mentions in particular “the plea of conscience . . . for the toleration of every sort of fancy religion,” the freedom of the press to say what it pleases against Church and crown, the right of public gatherings in the name of democracy or “republicanism,” the right of “monster processions” and the placing of squares and parks “at the mercy of Sunday manifestations,” the freedom of *savants* to insinuate atheism “in scientific assemblies” and of “artisans” to practice that atheism “in the centres of political action.” These are the fruits of the new order in England, and the *Syllabus* has done no more than register an old-fashioned disapproval, the very sort of disapproval which the Anglican grandfathers of the present generation would have registered with equal vigor had they lived to witness the new state of affairs. Could these modern practices have gone on in England even as late as the beginning of the nineteenth century? “No; law or public opinion would not suffer it; we may be wiser or better now, but we were then in the wake of the Holy Roman

\(^5\) *Diff.*, II, 262.
\(^6\) *Diff.*, II, 263.
\(^7\) *Diff.*, II, 262.
\(^8\) *Diff.*, II, 263.
Church, and had been so from the time of the Reformation. We were faithful to the tradition of fifteen hundred years.”

What then of Newman’s “modern” choice? Though he defends the Syllabus ostensibly and though he professes himself “to be an admirer of the principles now superseded in themselves,”11 those ancient traditions of popery and Toryism, nevertheless he clearly regards those principles and traditions as “superseded” and the new principles as being in possession. Therefore, though he admires the Syllabus and the spirit which conceived it, he also regards it as futile. Essentially his attitude toward the “old idea of a Christian Polity” is a combination of regret for its loss and at the same time of resignation to its end. Emotionally he may prefer the old ways, but his reason has convinced him that the progress of thought, of knowledge, in the modern world has made the medieval idea of the Christian commonwealth an impossibility. “When the intellect is cultivated, it is as certain that it will develop into a thousand various shapes, as that infinite hues and tints and shades of colour will be reflected from the earth’s surface, when the sun-light touches it.”12 As a consequence, in modern Europe there can be no longer a general consent to a common body of religious, political, and philosophical assumptions about the nature of man and of human society. England has discovered this difficulty and attempted to adjust herself to it within Newman’s lifetime, and the consequence of those adjustments has been the death of an order. “During the last seventy years, first one class of the community, then another, has awakened up to thought and opinion.” The result is “multiform views on sacred subjects” which “found expression in the governing order.” “The State in past time had a conscience; George the Third had a conscience”; but in the new order of affairs that common conscience of the nation has been fragmented, and “this brought on a dead-lock in the time of [George’s] successor.” The result was the death of Toryism: “The State ought to have a conscience; but what if it happened to have half-a-dozen, or a score, or a

10. Diff., II, 263.
hundred, in religious matters, each different from each?" When such a circumstance occurs, it is evident to Newman that the only alternative is to acknowledge, however sadly, that the old principle of Christian order is no longer defensible and to seek out new philosophical foundations for civilization.

However, if such a conclusion was evident to Newman, it was clearly not evident to Pius the Ninth nor to the many Catholics who endorsed the Syllabus of 1864. Nor was it fully evident to many old-fashioned Tory High-Churchmen such as William Palmer, for whom the defense of the Faith was inseparable from a defense of that “old idea of a Christian Polity.” When we realize that such a difference of opinion existed between Newman and his Catholic contemporaries, both Roman and Anglican, we begin to see how important, historically, his “modern” choice was. He becomes the first major English theologian of a High-Church or Catholic persuasion to accept as a philosophical possibility a union between the Christian faith and modern modes of thought, between Catholic teaching and what Newman calls, rather caustically, the “New Civilization.” Orthodox Anglican theology from the sixteenth century until the end of the eighteenth, from Hooker to Samuel Johnson, had taken as axiomatic the union of Christianity with “the old idea of a Christian Polity” and with the medieval metaphysics and, in some cases, the medieval cosmology attendant on that polity. The poets, with a few exceptions, followed suit. It is important to recollect that traditional alignment and to remember that, though Newman was just as orthodox in matters of dogma as any of those earlier defenders of the Christianity (indeed more so than some of them), he divorced himself from their essentially conservative modes of thought and from their medieval inheritance. For Hooker, Andrewes, and Laud, for Spenser, Donne, and Herbert, for Dryden, Pope, and Johnson, what was once called “Toryism” was considerably more than a political arrangement which could be dispensed with

14. For instance see Palmer’s *A Narrative of Events Connected with the Publication of the “Tracts for the Times”* (1843); also his *Treatise on the Church of Christ* (1838), 2 vols.
Introduction

(albeit wistfully) if “the times” demanded it. Rather it was a name for a philosophically consistent vision of the world and of human society in which metaphysical, political, ethical, aesthetic, and theological beliefs coincided. In relinquishing that vision, Newman separated himself from what may be called the main line of European theological development since Augustine. As he himself acknowledged, it was “the tradition of fifteen hundred years,” “the basis of European civilization down to this day, notably among ourselves.”

If Augustine was the father of that tradition, Aquinas was its chief exponent; the Summa gave it its full articulation. It was St. Thomas (and, through him, Aristotle) who made it possible for Europeans to justify and defend the “idea of a Christian Polity.” St. Thomas’s realism, his reliance upon sense experience as the source of knowledge, provided philosophical grounds for accepting the natural order as a reality in its own right, not merely as a symbol or metaphor for supernatural realities. At the same time, St. Thomas’s principle of the analogy of being, itself inseparable from a realistic epistemology, made it possible for human reason to discover in the visible world, in the evidence of the senses and in the operation of the human reason, a way to the “things not seen.” In other words, Aquinas’s theology offered sound reasons for taking the present world—its manners, its arts, its politics—seriously; and yet, with no derogation from the natural, human order in its own right, to find in nature and in human society a way to the knowledge of God. Therefore, under the influence of Thomism, it became customary to regard the order of kingdoms and of families as analogous to the order which is in God Himself and which He has planted as an image of Himself in the creation. To take the order of nature and of society seriously is to come to understand the order which is in God, while to violate the bond of kind—of family or of kingdom—is almost tantamount to blasphemy against God, who is both father and king. Thus in the “old idea of a Christian Polity” it becomes virtually impossible to conceive of religious experience except in terms of the whole ordered life of the creation; for it is only in that life—in the hier-

16. Throughout this study, the term realism is used in opposition to idealism rather than to nominalism,
Introduction

archy of plants, beasts, men, and angels—that we have access to the knowledge and love of God. In such a vision of the world, there is simply no such thing as personal or private religion in the modern sense, and the great accomplishment of English theology and poetry until the end of the eighteenth century was the fusion of the most delicate, the most sensitive, the most deeply "personal," religious experience with the experience of the society, natural and supernatural, and with the order of the cosmos. In Spenser, for instance, the New Jerusalem is compared in analogy with Cleopolis, the city of the Fairy Queen; she, of course, is Elizabeth, and Cleopolis is London. Red Cross’s quest for personal holiness is inseparable from the quest for order and virtue in England, and Elizabeth is symbol of the entire experience, both personal and public, both religious and political.

What replaced that old view of man and of human society was the modern idea of the autonomy of the individual mind, which Newman understands so clearly and which, with reservations, he accepts. In that acceptance, however hesitantly, he embraces a conception of man and of religious experience which is as radically different from the old as any which we can imagine—more radically different than we usually realize. Where the old “Polity” was corporate, the modern is individualistic. Where the old was objective and public, considering all Christian experience as inseparable from the life of the body politic and of the cosmos, the new is subjective and ultimately private. Where the old was predicated on the principle of hierarchy as both an ethical and metaphysical necessity, the new is essentially egalitarian. Such differences are manifestly great; yet Newman seems to have seen no final nor absolute conflict between these modern principles and his own thoroughgoing doctrinal orthodoxy. Therefore, though he does not like the new ways, he can still afford to give them a grudging acceptance, looking forward as he does so to some eventual synthesis of Catholic teaching and the “New Civilization.” “And thus, in centuries to come, there may be found out some way of uniting what is free in the new structure of society with what is authoritative in the old, without any base compromise with ‘Progress’ and ‘Liberalism.’”

17. Diff., II, 268.
Introduction

In light of the radical differences between the old principles and the new, it is easy to understand why Newman’s more conservative contemporaries could not imagine such a union without “base compromise”—why William Palmer persisted in his Tory High-Churchmanship, why Monsignor Talbot took the view that Newman was “the most dangerous man in England,” and why others thought him, very simply, a heretic. Of course there were no grounds for the latter charge. So far from Newman’s being a heretic, it is the very strength of his doctrinal conservatism which makes his position so remarkable. Had he indeed been a heretic, or an apostate of the typically modern type, we should have been able to see clearly the point at which his views of Catholic teaching and of the new civilization converge. We cannot even talk, however, at least not justly, about his “views of Catholic teaching”; he held no private “views,” but rather submitted himself to the whole body of Christian dogma, and it is for that very reason that his attempts at a reconciliation with the new philosophical modes are so important and also so nearly germane to our understanding of his thought. To deal with Newman fairly, we must keep three things in mind at once: his doctrinal orthodoxy, his philosophical “modernism,” and the implications and consequences of the union of the two. To lose sight of any one of these aspects of his thought is to misrepresent him and to misunderstand his place in English theology and literature.

It seems not unfair to say that many of Newman’s disciples and critics have lost sight of one or the other of these three considerations. Some of the older critics, such as Sarolea and Bremond, mistook the “modern” elements in Newman’s philosophy for indications of heterodoxy in dogma. The Modernists, Loisy and his school, made the same mistake and attempted, unfairly, to claim Newman as the father of their heresy. More recent critics—in fact, the great body of Newman scholars for the past thirty or forty years—convinced of his orthodoxy and sympathetic toward it, have given him a fairer reading than he received during the years of the Modernist controversy. In doing so, however, these commentators have overlooked the fact that Newman’s philosophy does present problems. That is not to say that they have ignored
his philosophy or failed to recognize its modernity; on the contrary, the strongest emphasis in recent Newman studies is philosophical and epistemological, and the modernity of that philosophy and epistemology has been generally acknowledged. What has not been acknowledged, however, is the third consideration which I have mentioned, the implications and consequences of that modernity. These, for the most part, have been ignored or misunderstood.

One suspects that that ignorance and that misunderstanding derive from the fact that most of the scholars in question are themselves philosophical modernists—that however orthodox they may be in matters of dogma, they are so deeply immersed in the “new civilization” that they are unable to keep it in perspective. Indeed, the tendency in Newman studies since the Second Vatican Council has been not only to acknowledge but to applaud his “modernism,” and such applause is largely unqualified by any respect for that “Toryism” which Newman himself respected so highly even as he relinquished it. These newest of Newman’s critics write as though his yoking of the “new civilization” with orthodoxy were an unmitigated and unquestionable good—as though it were one of the great intellectual achievements in the history of theology. In all fairness, let us admit that it may indeed be. On the other hand, we must recognize that it cannot be proved to be until what we might call the “Tory objections” have been duly acknowledged and duly answered; until Newman scholars are prepared to admire, as Newman himself admired, the “tradition of fifteen hundred years”; to recognize, as Newman himself recognized, what the world was like as recently as the age of Pope and Johnson, before the French Revolution and the new spirit of the nineteenth century, when “the traditions of the old Empire, its principles, provisions, and practices” were still held in honor. Admittedly Newman relinquished those principles, provisions, and practices, but if we, as critics, are to understand that relinquishment, its implications, and its consequences, we must first understand as fully as we can the world he gave up, and why, for fifteen hundred years, its “provisions” were considered indispensable to Christianity and to civilization. To do that we must enter imaginatively into those modes of
thought of which Aquinas's philosophy is the fullest manifestation; we must learn to think in the terms in which most Christians thought while Christendom was still a reality. Moreover, we must keep ourselves open to two possibilities: first, that those ancient modes of thought may be better—more harmonious with Christian dogma and with human nature—than those which have replaced them; and, second, that Newman may have made a grave mistake in relinquishing them.

This book explores those possibilities. Or, to be more precise, it argues their probability, from three points of view: first, that of Newman's departure from the old orthodoxy of England, from "the traditions of the old Empire" as they manifested themselves in the theology of Hooker and the Caroline divines and in the imagery of English Renaissance poetry; second, that of Newman's close philosophical kinship with his nineteenth-century contemporaries; third, that of the philosophical terms on which Newman accommodated his doctrinal orthodoxy to the demands of the "new civilization." In each of these relationships, Newman's philosophical modernism and its consequences for theology and literature are clearly evident.
In the early days of the Oxford Movement, Newman thought of himself and of his fellow Tractarians as defenders of the Caroline theological tradition. He even described the movement as a return to the principles of seventeenth-century Anglicanism. The Caroline divines, however, were committed to a defense of the “old idea of a Christian Polity” and of the traditional Thomist views of nature and reason, of the cosmos and of human society, which Newman’s philosophical and political “modernism” made impossible for him. These differences in philosophical assumptions are both subtle and far-reaching. Their consequence is that Newman’s ostensible espousal of seventeenth-century theology amounts, paradoxically, to a repudiation of the basic assumptions of the traditional English school, in much the same way that his “defense” of Pius’s Syllabus amounts, in effect, to its rejection.

The easiest way to begin a delineation of these differences—which in turn provide a key to Newman’s entire mode of thought—is to compare the respective positions of Newman and Hooker; for Hooker is the intellectual and spiritual father of Caroline Anglicanism, and


2. When I use “modernism” or “modernist” in lower case and in quotation marks, I refer to matters philosophical and political rather than doctrinal. When I refer to the doctrinal heresy of that name, I use Modernism or Modernist with an initial capital and without quotation marks.
though some of his successors differed with him on specific points of theology, all the major seventeenth-century figures accepted his philosophical premises. For Lancelot Andrews, Jeremy Taylor, and William Laud, for Hammond, Cosin, Pearson, Bramhall, and Ken, Hooker's work was the point of departure; and though he died in 1600, before the flowering of the Caroline school, Andrews, Laud, Taylor, and the rest have their significance in light of him. Moreover, the intellectual assumptions which he bequeathed to his successors are those very Aristotelian and Thomist principles which Newman ultimately rejected. Helen Gardner, discussing Donne's debt to Hooker, says that orthodox Anglicanism as it was understood in the seventeenth century came to exist because Hooker taught men of Donne's caliber not so much "what" but "how" to think: "how to see particular controversies in the light of certain philosophic principles." Newman also taught his successors "how" to think, but he approached "particular controversies" in the light of principles quite different from Hooker's. Hooker's vision is essentially medieval—corporate, hierarchical, objective; Newman's, as we have suggested, is essentially modern. Therefore, to draw out the philosophical differences between the two serves very well to illustrate Newman's departure from traditional English Christian thought.

3. Among the many critics who have dealt with the matter of Hooker's Thomism, the most lucid is A. P. d'Entreves. See his *The Medieval Contribution to Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939) and *Natural Law* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1951). See also Peter Munz, *The Place of Hooker in the History of Thought* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952). Munz's "Appendix A" (pp. 175–193) lists more than a hundred points of correspondence between Aquinas's work and the *Ecclesiastical Polity*. Many of these are acknowledged by Hooker himself in numerous citations of St. Thomas.

At the risk of banality, I begin with the simplest possible statement of the distinction between Hooker and Newman. Hooker's view of the world and of man's condition is generally bright, Newman's often very dark. The distinction between doctrine and philosophy should be emphasized here. Just as Augustine and Aquinas give different emphases and different modes of expression to the same beliefs, so too do Hooker and Newman. Of course, we should have to admit that the beliefs of the latter pair are not so nearly identical as those of the former, but, in spite of some discrepancies, Hooker and Newman are close enough to one another in doctrine that their divergence in philosophical principles is clearly evident by contrast. For instance, with reference to their respective views of man and his condition, we should remember that both of them hold the same doctrine of man—that he is a fallen creature and that nature, the world, has fallen with him. Both of them likewise believe that by the merits of Christ's passion and death man and, through man, nature has been redeemed. In fact, Hooker insists strongly on the doctrine of original sin and man's absolute dependence on God's grace, and, in their respective discussions of justification, Hooker tends to be more nearly Calvinist than Newman.¹ On the other hand, Hooker's imaginative understanding of the consequences of sin and redemption are quite different from Newman's, and here we see how identical beliefs can be subject to divergent philosophical emphases. The evidences of man's redeemed condition and of God's merciful operation among his

¹. Compare, for instance, Hooker's "A Learned Discourse on Justification" (1585–86 [?]) and Newman's Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification (1838).
creatures is much more readily apparent to Hooker than to Newman. For the latter, the miserable darkness, contradiction, and frustration of man’s and nature’s fallen state is oppressively obvious.

Hooker’s purpose in the *Ecclesiastical Polity* helps explain his position. He is immediately concerned with arguing against his Calvinist opponents that, in spite of the fall and of the presence of evil in the world, God is still present in nature and that man can still apprehend and worship Him. He is writing to refute the partially Manichaean notion that fallen nature and fallen man are all but totally depraved and, as a consequence of that depravity, are in complete alienation from God. Newman, on the other hand, shares many of the attitudes of those Calvinists whom Hooker was attacking, and we should not forget that the influence of Walter Mayers and of a number of Calvinist writers whom he read in his youth had drawn him strongly in that direction. As a Catholic, both Anglican and Roman, he had repudiated the Calvinist’s near approach to Manichaeanism, but in spite of his theological position, what impressed itself upon his consciousness was not a world flooded with God’s presence but rather a creation alienated from its Creator.

We can scarcely find a page in Hooker that does not at some point declare the harmony between God and nature, God and man. Our guide in ecclesiastical affairs should not be Scripture alone, as it must be for the Calvinists who distrust everything in creation except God’s precise commandment, but rather the combination of “nature, Scripture, and experience.” As to the matter in question, ecclesiastical polity, Hooker builds his defense of apostolic orders in the English Church, not upon sacred power or divine commandment alone, but upon the union of that power and commandment with nature and human reason. “As for the orders which are established, sith equity and reason, the law of nature, God and man, do all favour that which is in being . . . it is but justice to exact of you, and perverseness in you it should be to

deny, thereunto your willing obedience.” No man who did not believe that the laws of man and nature coincide in most cases with the law of God could argue from such a position. It is significant of Newman’s darker view of the world that he rests his argument for orders and sacraments almost exclusively on the Church and its authority. Distrusting nature and reason in their fallen state, he insists on the infallibility of the Church much more strenuously than Hooker and his Caroline successors ever need to do. This is characteristic of Newman both before and after his conversion to Rome; for it is contrary to his philosophic principles to trust as Hooker does in a general harmony between God and the world.

Hooker also speaks of the expectation of joy and comfort in this world as well as in heaven. “All men desire to lead in this world a happy life.” Obviously, he admits, that is not always possible. In fact St. Paul warns us that we may have to content ourselves at times with “no more than very bare food and raiment.” Such deprivation is not, however, and should not be, our desire or expectation. Rather, in warning us of that dark possibility, St. Paul is actually giving us to understand that deprivation is the exception rather than the rule; “that if we should be stripped of all those things without which we might possibly be, yet these [the bare minimum of food and clothing] must be left; that destitution in these is such an impediment, as till it be removed suffereth not the mind of man to admit any other care.”

In other words, Hooker is saying that not only is the order of earth in some sense correspondent with that of heaven, but even the bounty and pleasure of earth.

The first book of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity is the most important one for our purposes, for it is here that Hooker defines the way in which God’s laws bind earth to heaven and man to God. It is worth mentioning at the outset that, as Hooker’s own numerous footnotes indicate, he builds his system of law directly on Aquinas’s. Indeed, it is Hooker’s introduction of Thomist categories at this crucial point in the Ecclesiastical Polity which,

5. Hooker, I, 240.
6. See above, Part One, note 3.