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*An asterisk means that the book is in print; if you wish to purchase it from our friends at Eighth Day Books, call 1.800.841.2541.

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more on Hooker, etc.
W. Bradford Littlejohn’s The Peril and Promise of Christian Liberty: Richard Hooker, the Puritans, and Protestant Political Theology* (2017) is published by Eerdmans. Littlejohn is also the author of Richard Hooker: A Companion to His Life and Work* (Cascade Books, 2015). C. S. Lewis found Hooker’s prose in his Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity to be “mellow gold.” In his English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama (1954), Lewis wrote: “The style is, for its purpose, perhaps the most perfect in English. . . . On occasion, he can write a paragraph so heightened that readers who have no taste for Hooker will enjoy it, detached, in an anthology. . . . But this is very rare; the beauty of Hooker’s prose is functional. His characteristic unit is the long, syntactically latinized, sentence, unobtrusively garnished with metaphor, anaphora, and chiasmus. The Latin syntax is there for use, not ornament; it enables him, as English syntax would not, to keep many ideas, as it were, in the air, limiting, enriching, and guiding one another, but not fully affirmed or denied until at last, with the weight of all that thought behind him, he slowly descends to the matured conclusion. The structure mirrors the real movement of his mind.” However functional the beauty of Hooker’s writing may have been for his contemporaries and may still be for readers as attentive and discerning as C. S. Lewis, one must entertain the possibility that the neglect of Hooker’s ideas today is a function of its “most perfect” prose. Hence, the Davenant Institute (with which Dr. Littlejohn is affiliated) has launched an ambitious project to translate into less accomplished but more accessible prose Hooker’s landmark volume. As the Institute’s website announces, “The time has come to translate it into modern English so that Hooker may teach a new generation of churchmen and Christian leaders about law, reason, Scripture, church, and politics.” One lives in the hope that an initiative may someday be launched employing Hooker’s genius to teach a new generation of churchmen and Christian leaders about the importance of beautiful prose. Hope is nurtured by a point of clarification on the same web page announcing this modernization: “Note that our translation should not be treated as a substitute for the original. Hooker’s intricate sentence structures are self-conscious and in many cases play a key role in conveying meaning and rhetorical effect. Our hope is that readers may find these editions an accessible point of edification it has been our blessing to experience in the course of this project.” After all, form is content. This new edition of Hooker’s Laws is part of a larger Davenant Institute project: The Library of Early English Protestantism. The project includes works of 16th- and 17th-century figures who “defined the shape of Reformed orthodoxy for future centuries” as well as English churchmen who “contributed luminous commentaries on the English liturgy, devotional texts, and defenses of episcopacy that would help nourish the distinctive identity of the Church of England in the decades to come, and eventually its offspring in the Anglican Communion.”

more on Other books & authors mentioned

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