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Chapter 12: Why So Many Natural Laws Are Set Down in Scripture

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“The Cause Why So Many Natural or Rational Laws Are Set Down in Holy Scripture”

Chapter 12 of Book 1 in

Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity

By Richard Hooker

1594

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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 12: The cause why so many natural or rational Laws are set down in Holy Scripture

[1.] When supernatural duties are exacted as necessary^[1], natural [duties] are not rejected as needless. The law of God therefore is, though principally delivered for instruction in the former, yet fraught with precepts of the latter also. The Scripture is fraught even with laws of Nature; insomuch that Gratian defining Natural Right, (by which is meant the right which exacts those general duties that

concern men naturally even as they are men,) terms “Natural Right, that which the Books of the Law and the Gospel do contain.”^[2] Neither is it vain that the Scripture abounds with so great [a] store of laws in this kind: for they are either such as we of ourselves could not easily have found out, and then the benefit is not small to have them readily set down to our hands; or if they be so clear and manifest that no man endowed with reason can lightly be ignorant of them, yet [when] the Spirit as it were borrows them from the school of Nature, because they are useful for proving things less manifest, and for inducing^[3] a persuasion of something which would be in itself more hard and dark—unless it should in such sort be cleared—the very applying of them to particular cases is not without most singular use and profit [in] many ways for men’s instruction. Besides, be they plain of themselves or obscure, the evidence of God’s own testimony added to the natural assent of reason concerning the certainty of them, does not a little comfort and confirm the same.

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[2.] Wherefore inasmuch as our actions are occupied with^[4] things beset with many circumstances, which cause men of sundry intellects^[5] to be also of sundry judgments concerning that which ought to be done; requisite it cannot but seem [that] the rule of divine law should in this help our imbecility, that we might the more infallibly understand what is good and what evil. The first principles of the Law of Nature are easy; hard it would be to find men ignorant of them. But concerning the duty which Nature’s law does require at the hands of men in a number of particular things, so far has the natural understanding even of sundry whole nations been darkened, that they have not discerned some^[6] gross iniquity to be sin.^[7] Again, being so prone as we are to fawn upon ourselves, and to be ignorant as much as may be of our own deformities, without the feeling sense of which we are most wretched, even so much the more, because not knowing them we cannot so much as desire to have them taken away: how should our festered sores be cured, except that God has delivered a law as sharp as the two-edged sword, piercing the very closest and most unsearchable corners of the heart^[8], which the Law of Nature can hardly, human laws by no means possible, reach to? By this we know even secret concupiscence to be sin, and are made fearful to offend though it be but in a wandering cogitation. Finally, of those things which are for direction of all the parts of our life needful, and not impossible to be discerned by the [264] light of Nature itself; are there not many which few men’s natural capacity, and some which no man’s, has been able to find out? They are, says St. Augustine, but a few, and they endowed with great ripeness of intelligence^[9] and judgment, free from all such affairs as might trouble their meditations, instructed in the sharpest and the subtlest points of learning, who have, and that with great difficulty^[10], been able to find out [] only the immortality of the soul. The resurrection of the flesh what man did ever at any time dream of, having not heard it otherwise than from the school of Nature? By this it appears how much we are bound to yield to our Creator, the Father of all mercy, eternal thanks, for that he has delivered his law to the world, a law in which so many things are laid open, clear, and manifest, as a light which otherwise would have been buried in darkness, not without the hazard, or rather not with the hazard but with the certain loss, of infinite thousands of souls most undoubtedly now saved.

[3.] We see, therefore, that our sovereign good is desired naturally; that God the author of that natural desire had appointed natural means whereby to fulfil it; that man having utterly disabled his nature to those means has had another^[11] revealed from God, and has received from heaven a law to teach him how that which is desired naturally must now supernaturally be attained. Finally, we see that because those latter exclude not the former wholly and entirely^[12] as unnecessary, therefore together with such supernatural duties as could not possibly have been otherwise known to the world, the same law that teaches them, teaches also with them such natural duties as could not by light of Nature easily have been known.

^[1] [Hooker: necessarily exacted]

^[2] “Jus naturale est, quod in Lege et Evangelio continetur.” p. 1, d. 1. [[*The Corpus of Canon Law*]].

[3] [Hooker: Nature, as serving to prove . . . to induce . . .]

[4] [Hooker: conversant about]

[5] [Hooker: wits]

[6] [Hooker: no not]

[7] Josephus, *Contra Apion*, book 2, [[chapter 37]]: “Lacedæmonii quomodo non sunt ob inhospitalitatem reprehendendi, fœdumque neglectum nuptiarum? Elienses vero et Thebani ob coitum cum masculis plane impudentem et contra naturam, quem recte et utiliter exercere putabant? Cumque hæc omnino perpetrarunt, etiam suis legibus miscuere.” [How is it that the Spartans are not condemned for their inhospitality and their abominable neglect of marriage? Or why not condemn the Eliensians and the Thebans for their relations with men that were plainly shameless and against nature, and which they thought they practiced rightly and to good use? And when they perpetrated all these things, they even wrote them into their own laws”. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II.94.4-6: “Lex naturæ sic corrupta fuit apud Germanos, ut latrocinium non reputarent peccatum.” [“The law of nature was so corrupted among the Germans that they did not regard theft as a sin.”] [and] Augustine (or whoever the author is) *Book of Questions about the New and Old Testaments*, Question 6: “Quis nesciat quid bonæ vitæ conveniat, aut ignoret quia quod sibi fieri non vult aliis minime debeat facere? At vero ubi naturalis lex evanuit oppressa consuetudine delinquendi, tunc oportuit manifestari scriptis, ut Dei iudicium omnes audirent [[legem manifestari, ut in Judæis omnes homines audirent:]] non quod penitus oblitterata est, sed quia maxima ejus auctoritate carebant, idololatriæ studebatur, timor Dei in terris non erat, fornicatio operabatur, circa rem proximi avida erat concupiscentia. Data [[danda]] ergo lex erat, ut et quæ sciebantur auctoritatem haberent, et quæ latere cœperant manifestarentur.” [“Who could not know what is fitting for a good life, or could be unaware that whatever he does not wish to be done to himself he should not do to others? And yet where the natural law disappeared after it was crushed by the habit of sin, then it had to be made manifest through the Scriptures, so that all might hear the judgment of God [alternative reading: “that the law be made manifest, that through the Jews all men might hear”]: not because it had been altogether obliterated, but because they lacked His most high authority, they were given over to idolatry, the fear of God was absent from the earth, fornication was being committed, there was a greedy concupiscence for the things of one’s neighbor. Therefore the law was [alternative reading “had to be”] given, in order that the things that were known might have authority, and that what began to become hidden might be made manifest.”]

[8] Heb. 4:12.

[9] [Hooker: wit]

[10] [Hooker: very hardly]

[11] [Hooker: other]

[12] [Hooker: quite and clean]

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