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## **Chapter 5: The Law Whereby Man Is Directed to the Imitation of God**

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#### **“The Law Whereby Man Is in His Actions Directed to the Imitation of God”**

Chapter 5 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 constructions 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.*

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**Chapter 5: The law whereby man is in his actions directed to the imitation of God**

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[1.] God alone excepted, who actually and everlastingly is whatever he may be, and which cannot hereafter be that which now he is not; all other things besides are somewhat in possibility, which as yet they are not in act. And for this cause there is in all things an appetite or desire, whereby they incline to something which they may be; and when they are it, they shall be more perfect than now they are. All which perfections are contained under the general name of Goodness. And because there is not in the world anything by which another may not some way be made the more perfect, therefore all things that are, are good.

[2.] Again, since there can be no goodness desired which proceeds not from God himself, as from the supreme cause of all things; and every effect does after a sort contain, at leastwise resemble, the cause from which it proceeds: all things in the world are said in some sort to seek the highest, and to covet more or less the participation of God himself.<sup>[1]</sup> Yet this does nowhere so much appear as it does in man, because there are so many kinds of perfections which man seeks. The first degree of goodness is that general perfection which all things do seek, in desiring the continuance of their being. All things therefore coveting as much as may be to be like unto God in being always, that which cannot to this [216] attain personally does seek to continue itself another way, that is by offspring and propagation. The next degree of goodness is that which each thing covets by affecting resemblance with God in the constancy and excellency of those operations which belong to their kind. The immutability of God they strive to, by working either always or for the most part after one and the same manner; his absolute exactness they imitate, by tending to that which is most exquisite in every particular. Hence have risen a number of axioms in philosophy, showing how “the works of nature do always aim at that which cannot be bettered.”<sup>[2]</sup>

[3.] These two kinds of goodness rehearsed are so nearly united to the things themselves which desire them, that we scarcely perceive the appetite to stir in reaching forth her hand towards them. But the desire of those perfections which grow externally is more apparent; especially of such as are not expressly desired unless they be first known, or such as are not for any other cause than for knowledge itself desired. Concerning perfections in this kind; that by proceeding in the knowledge of truth, and by growing in the exercise of virtue, man among the creatures of this inferior world aspires to the greatest conformity with God; this is not only known to us, whom he himself has so instructed,<sup>[3]</sup> but even they do acknowledge, who among men are not judged the nearest to him. With Plato what one thing [is] more usual, than to excite men to the love of wisdom, by showing how much wise men are thereby exalted above men; how knowledge does raise them up into heaven; how it makes them, though not gods, yet as gods, high, admirable, and divine? And Mercurius Trismegistus speaking of the virtues of a righteous soul, “Such spirits” (says he) “are never cloyed with praising and speaking well of all men, with doing good to everyone by word and deed, because they study to conform<sup>[4]</sup> themselves according to *the pattern* of the Father of spirits.”<sup>[5]</sup>

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<sup>[1]</sup> Πάντα γὰρ ἐκείνου ὁρέγεται. [“For all things desire him.”] Aristotle, *De Anima [On the Soul]*, 2.4.

<sup>[2]</sup> Aristotle, *De Caelo [On the Heavens]*, 2.5.

<sup>[3]</sup> Matt. 5:48; Wis. 7:27.

<sup>[4]</sup> [Hooker: frame]

<sup>[5]</sup> Mercurius Trismegistus, *The Divine Pymander*, 4.74.

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