

Title: Covenant in Conflict: The Controversy over the Church Covenant between Samuel Rutherford and Thomas Hooker

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the mid-seventeenth-century controversy over the church government between Samuel Rutherford (Presbyterian) and Thomas Hooker (Congregationalist) focusing on its theological underpinnings. The church covenant played a significant role: For Hooker, it constitutes the theological and logical foundation of his systematic defense of the New England Way—particularly in the issues of the nature of the visible church, church membership, the power of the keys, sacraments, and church discipline. Rutherford considers the church covenant as a human invention because it is unknown to Scripture. In reply, Hooker argues both that the concept of church covenant is warranted by God's word, and also that Rutherford's Presbyterianism is neither biblical nor true to the Reformation.

Their differing views of the church covenant are closely interconnected with each man's covenant theology. Hooker emphasized the dispensational administration of the biblical covenant, by which he justifies church covenant as the basis of the congregational polity which belongs to the final stage in God's dispensation of the covenants. Rutherford stresses the unchanging substance of the covenant of grace, which is based on the *atemporal* covenant of redemption. He argued that given the sufficiency of the covenant of grace, there must be no more dispensation of the covenant beyond the covenant of grace.

Rutherford tends to identify Hooker's church covenant with an inward covenant in line with the Separatists' ecclesiology. Hooker insists that it is an outward covenant, which belongs to a visible church only. In order to remove misunderstandings about Congregationalism, hooker attempts to use many important distinctions—such as the church as *totum essentiale/organicum*, explicit/implicit church covenant, outward/inward covenant, church privileges/power, real/visible saints, judgment of truth/charity etc. For Hooker, these distinctions are useful in dealing with the problem of the compatibility between Congregational church and other forms of church polity. Also, they show that the former is compatible with the traditional distinction of the visible/invisible church.

Finally, I will seek to critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of each man's arguments on the one hand, and, on the other, the success and failure in completing their ecclesiastical projects, particularly from the perspective of each man's own ecclesiastical context.