

JOSEPH BINGHAM'S USE OF PATRISTIC MATERIAL AS A SUPPORT OF ANGLICAN INFANT BAPTISMAL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Joseph Bingham (1668–1723) was one of the defenders of Reformed Orthodoxy in the Church of England. In his time, he was known as a patristic scholar whose magnum opus, titled *Origines Ecclesiasticae*, or *The Antiquities of the Christian Church*, stood as a testimony of his superb studies. This massive work of ten volumes was published between 1708 and 1722. Entangled in a Trinitarian controversy at Oxford University in his younger years, he spent the rest of his life proving his orthodoxy through his patristic studies and publication. This article focuses on Bingham's use of the writings of the church fathers in his defense of the theological beliefs and practices of infant baptism in the Church of England. By defending the orthodoxy of the Church of England—by way of its alignment with the church fathers—he indirectly positioned himself in the same line of orthodoxy and therefore purging himself of the tarnished reputation during the height of the Trinitarian controversy at Oxford.

Keywords: *Joseph Bingham, infant baptism, Reformed orthodoxy, Church of England, Trinitarian controversy, Oxford, patristic theology*



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Introduction

Joseph Bingham (1668–1723) is one of the foremost British patristic scholars of the late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth centuries. His massive ten-volume work on the early church, entitled *The Origines Ecclesiasticae, or the Antiquities of the Christian Church*, was published between 1708 and 1722.¹ This work, praised by many critics from both England and the Continent as the very first—and perhaps also the last—complete work in the archaeology of the Christian church,² enjoyed several reprinting well into the nineteenth century.³ In recent scholarship, however, Bingham’s work has been generally ignored. The only scholarly articles dealing extensively with his work are those of Leslie Barnard.⁴ There are a few other authors who briefly mention Bingham and his contribution to British patristic scholarship. Among these authors are Jean-Louis Quantin,⁵ George Every,⁶ Robert Cornwall,⁷ Frederick Bussby,⁸ and Philip Dixon.⁹

In this essay, I intend to bring new light and appreciation of Bingham’s contribution to patristic scholarship in early-eighteenth-century Anglicanism that marked his strong support of Anglican infant baptismal practice through his patristic studies. Situated in the historical context of baptismal debates in England during the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries and the Trinitarian controversy at Oxford in the seventeenth century, Bingham’s patristic scholarship serves as a very good example that patristic scholarship in his days was far from being neutral. By strongly defending the Church of England’s rootedness in the teaching of the church fathers, he demonstrated that he, together with his church, stood firmly on the orthodox beliefs, and thus he cleansed himself from his tarnished reputation earlier in his life.

A Brief Sketch of Bingham’s Life and Work

Bingham was born in September 1668 at Wakefield in Yorkshire.¹⁰ He was first educated at Wakefield Grammar School under the care of Edward Clarke, who regarded

¹ Joseph Bingham, *The Origines Ecclesiasticae, or the Antiquities of the Christian Church*, in ten volumes. In writing this essay I consult the 1840 edition of Bingham’s works under the title: *Origines Ecclesiasticae: Or the Antiquity of the Christian Church and Other Works*, in nine volumes, published in London by William Straker and Oxford by J.H. Parker. Quotations from Bingham’s work will be taken from this edition. Reference to Bingham’s work will be indicated as *Works*, followed by volume and page numbers of this edition.

² Sydney Lee, ed., in *Dictionary of National Biography* [hereafter: *DNB*] (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1885–1901), 48.

³ The last traceable publication of Bingham’s *Origines* is the two volume 1878 edition published by Reeves and Turner, London. See, *The National Union Catalogue*, vol. 58, (Chicago: Mansell Information / Publishing Limited, 1969), 60.

⁴ Leslie W. Barnard, “Joseph Bingham and the Early Church,” *Church Quarterly Review* 169 (1968): 192–205; Leslie W. Barnard, “Joseph Bingham and Asceticism,” in *Monks, Hermits and Ascetic Tradition*, ed. W. J. Sheils (Basil Blackwell, 1985), 299–306; Leslie W. Barnard, “The Use of the Patristic Tradition in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries,” in *Scripture, Tradition and Reason: A Study in the Criteria of Christian Doctrine*, ed. Richard Bauckham and Benjamin Drewery (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 174–203; Barnard, 174–203; Leslie W. Barnard, “Patristic Study in England in the Early Eighteenth Century,” ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *Studia Patristica* 23 (1989): 211–14.

⁵ Jean-Louis Quantin, “The Fathers in Seventeenth Century Anglican Theology,” in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, ed. Irena Backus, vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 987–1008.

⁶ George Every, *The High Church Party, 1688–1718* (London: SPCK, 1956).

⁷ Robert D. Cornwall, *Visible and Apostolic: The Constitution of the Church in High Church Anglican and Non-Juror Thought* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993).

⁸ Frederick Bussby, *Winchester Cathedral 1079–1979* (Southampton: Paul Cave Publication Ltd., 1979), 181.

⁹ Philip Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 133. Dixon’s book is another good example of how Bingham’s contribution in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century scholarship receives very little attention today. While mentioning Bingham’s involvement in late-seventeenth century Trinitarian controversy at Oxford, Dixon does not provide any bibliographical reference of Bingham.

¹⁰ Matthew Henry Peacock, *History of the Free Grammar School of Queen Elizabeth at Wakefield* (Wakefield: W. H. Milnes, The Radcliffe Printing Works, 1892), 208.

him as an exceptional student.¹¹ The school proudly listed his name together with its other distinguished pupils who were later admitted studying at the University of Oxford and afterwards held important positions.¹²

On May 26, 1684, Bingham matriculated at the University College, Oxford, as a servitor, because he came from a poor family.¹³ Being a servitor means that he had to serve other students at the dormitory to earn some money to pay for his tuition. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree on June 28, 1689.¹⁴ On July 1, 1689, he was elected fellow of the university.¹⁵ After his appointment as fellow, Bingham continued his study toward the M.A. at the same college. He received his Master of Arts degree on June 23, 1691. Soon afterwards he was appointed a tutor at the university.¹⁶

Four years after Bingham received his Master's degree, a Trinitarian controversy, which had swept England for a few decades, escalated at Oxford.¹⁷ Bingham was called to preach on the Trinity before the learned body of Oxford in his capacity as a Master of Arts on October 28, 1695 at St-Peter's-in-the-East, the University Church.¹⁸ In his sermon, he took a bold step in adopting what was then considered new approach in defining the meaning of "person" in the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁹ Instead of following the accepted Athanasian formulation of the doctrine, he took William Sherlock's approach in defining person as self-consciousness. Sherlock was the Dean of St. Paul's and Master of the Temple, London, and a graduate of Cambridge.²⁰ For Sherlock, the three persons of the Trinity should be understood as three infinite minds—or consciousness—all equally existing in the Godhead.²¹ Prior to the time when Bingham preached his sermon, Sherlock had been in debates with Robert South, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford.²² South rejected Sherlock's

¹¹ *Works*, vol. 1, iii.

¹² This list ranks Bingham in the same level as John Radcliffe who later became the Royal Physician to William III and then was elected M.P. of Buckingham in 1713, and also John Potter who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1737. Peacock, *History of Wakefield Grammar School*, 129, 208.

¹³ *The Book of Registration and Admission* of University College, Oxford records Bingham's matriculation where in his own handwriting he wrote: "May 26. 1684. Serviens. Ego Josephus Bingham filius natu minimus Francisci Bingham de Wakefeldia in Cornitatu Ebarasensi lubens subscribo." University College, Oxford University Archive, *Registrum Admissionvm AB Anno 1660*. Shelf Mark: UC: J1/A/1, page 7.

¹⁴ University College, Oxford, *Registrum*, vol. 1. 1509–1722, 117, shelf mark UC: GB3/A1/1, states that Bingham was examined together with three other students, by way of the usual procedure of final examination. The record of his examination says that it had been conducted in the strictest way possible, covering questions on philosophy and philology, with a focus on the knowledge of Latin. The examination was administered by three Masters and recorded in the book kept by the proctor.

¹⁵ The archives in the University College record Bingham's appointment as a fellow with no less than fifteen leaders of the university, including the Vice Chancellor, approving his appointment. Other high-ranking Oxford personnel who approved Bingham's appointment included: Thomas Bennett, Proctor of Oxford from University College since 1686, Edward Pockocke, Royal Hebrew Professor since 1648, Gilbert Ironside, Vice Chancellor of Oxford in 1687 and 1688, John Hall, Margaret Professor since 1676; William Jane, Professor of Divinity since 1680, and William Levintz, Royal Greek Professor since 1665. University College, Oxford, *Registrum*, vol. 1, 118, shelf mark: UC: GB3/A1/1. For complete description of these people's terms at Oxford see John Ayliffe, *The Antient and Present State of the University of Oxford*, vol. 2 (London: E. Curll, 1714), 306–11.

¹⁶ *Works*, vol. 1, iv.

¹⁷ For more detailed discussions of the Trinitarian controversy during the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries in England see, for instance: Roland N. Stromberg, *Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954); H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951); Martin Grieg, "The Thought and Polemic of Gilbert Burnet, c. 1673-1704" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge, 1991), and also Grieg's "Reasonableness of Christianity? Gilbert Burnet and the Trinitarian Controversy of the 1690s," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44, no. 4 (October 1993): 631–51; D. W. Dockrill, "The Authority of the Fathers in the Great Trinitarian Debates of the Sixteen Nineties," ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, *Studia Patristica* 18, no. 4 (n.d.): 335–47; Thomas C. Pfizenmaier, *The Trinitarian Theology of Dr. Samuel Clarke (1675-1729): Context, Sources and Controversy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997); Dixon, *Nice and Hot Disputes*.

¹⁸ Anthony à Wood, *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary, of Oxford, 1632-1695*. 3 Vols., vol. 3 (Oxford: Printed for the Oxford Historical Society, at the Clarendon Press, 1891–1900), 492, see also *Works*, vol. 1, v.

¹⁹ The manuscript of this sermon is now kept in the Collection of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, shelf mark: MS. Eng. th.e. 156, fols. 1–72. The printed form of this sermon is incorporated in *Works*, vol. 9, 318–47.

²⁰ *DNB*, vol. 52, 95.

²¹ William Sherlock, *Vindication of the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity, and the Incarnation of the Son of God* (London: W. Rogers, 1690), H4r.

²² *DNB*, vol. 53, 275–76.

doctrine of the Trinity because for him this representation of the doctrine implied the existence of three gods, and therefore heretical.²³

In advancing the novelty of Sherlock's definition of "person," Bingham used Boethius' description that a person is "an individual substance of rational or intelligent nature."²⁴ When it is applied to the Trinity, the three persons should be understood as "three individual substances of the unity of the Godhead."²⁵ Moreover, Bingham said that in this unity of the Godhead, "there are three Persons and every one of those an individual substance, in that sense there are three distinct substances, too, that is, three minds or spirits in the Unity of the Godhead."²⁶ The unity of the Godhead, he added, was by virtue of the community of nature and inseparable union.²⁷

Bingham's sermon was severely criticized, mostly by South and his supporters. The ruling members of the university considered his sermon as asserting false doctrine, impious, and heretical.²⁸ This accusation was soon followed by a public announcement in printed form, identifying Bingham's teaching with Arianism, Tritheism, and the heresy of Valentinus Gentilis.²⁹ Because of this condemnation, Bingham had to resign from his fellowship at Oxford on November 23, 1695.³⁰

Not long after Bingham's resignation from Oxford, Dr. John Radcliffe offered him the position of rector of Headbourn-Worthy, about one mile from Winchester.³¹ Bingham was thankful for this offer and expressed his gratitude to Radcliffe in the preface to the first volume of his *Origines Ecclesiasticae*.³² Like Bingham, Radcliffe was a native of Wakefield and received his early education at Wakefield Grammar School, who later continued his education at the University College, Oxford. Around the time of Bingham's resignation, Radcliffe was one of the most important benefactors of the University of Oxford.³³

Bingham wrote and published the multi-volume *Origines Ecclesiasticae* from Headbourn-Worthy, and later from Havant, both in the diocese of Winchester. Other than the visitation sermons, he never wrote any treatise on the doctrine of the Trinity. The *Origines* and his other ecclesiastical treatises are his way to show his orthodoxy. Through his patristic scholarship, he demonstrated that he was a loyal defender of the Church of England in its teaching and practices.³⁴ In particular, his use of the patristic material

²³ Robert South, *Animadversions upon Dr. Sherlock's Book, Entitled A Vindication of the Holy and Ever Blessed Trinity, &c* (London: Printed for Randal Taylor, 1693), A2 v.

²⁴ *Works*, vol. 9, 327

²⁵ *Works*, vol. 9, 328.

²⁶ *Works*, vol. 9, 328.

²⁷ *Works*, vol. 9, 328.

²⁸ *Works*, vol. 1, vi.

²⁹ This accusation is included in the printed proclamation now kept at the Oxford University Archive, shelf mark WP® 28/8, folio 32r. The hand-written draft of this proclamation, in both Latin and English, was signed by Benjamin Cooper, Public Notary and Register of Oxford University. Oxford University Archive, NEP/SUB/BC, the back part, page 12.

³⁰ For elaborate discussion and further historical look at Bingham's sermon on the Trinity that he preached at Oxford on October 28, 1695, see Yudha Thianto, "Three Persons as Three Individual Substances: Joseph Bingham's Sermon on the Trinity and Its Place in the Trinitarian Controversy at Oxford in the Last Decade of the Seventeenth Century," *Fides et Historia* 39, no. 1 (2007).

³¹ *Works*, vol. 1, vi., see also, Peacock, *History*, 207–208.

³² *Works*, vol. 1, lix.

³³ *DNB*, vol. 47, 129.

³⁴ For a more detailed description of Bingham's life and works, see, Yudha Thianto, "Baptismal Practice and Trinitarian Belief in Joseph Bingham's *Origines Ecclesiasticae*: A Study in the Historical and Theological Contexts of Patristic Scholarship at the Close of the Era of Orthodoxy" (Ph.D. diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2006).

in discussing early church's infant baptism practices was his way to demonstrate his orthodoxy.

Baptismal Issues in Late-Seventeenth-Century Anglicanism

Ever since the second half of the sixteenth century, the issue of baptism had become point of contention between the Anglicans and the Puritans. The so-called "Vestarian Controversy" of the 1560s is illustrative of this Puritan approach and remained emblematic of the Puritan problem against which Bingham also posed his scholarship. The controversy was centered on the question of how worship must be carried out. The Puritans' dissatisfaction was reflected through several protests directed to both the Parliament and the Church.³⁵

In 1572 the Puritans published a treatise entitled *An Admonition to the Parliament*.³⁶ It presented several criticisms of the practice of Anglican baptism. First, it charged the statement in the prayer that the baptism of Jesus sanctified the water of Jordan and all other waters was superstition. Next, it rejected the required promise of a godfather or a godmother as the interrogation of the infant himself or herself, as if the infant was an adult, and finally, it spoke strongly against the sign of the cross in baptism.³⁷

As we will see later in this paper, Bingham defended the practice of the Church of England through his studies of the church fathers, partly as a response to Puritans' criticisms to what the Anglican Church stood for. Among other areas, he demonstrated that the sign of the cross in baptism was a very common practice in the early church. The *Origines* served as his tool to argue, based on the practice of the ancient church, that the Anglican practice was as old as the Christian church itself. Therefore, Bingham would argue that the Puritans' accusation that the practice of the Church of England was a popish novelty was groundless. The controversy over the sign of the cross in baptism became stronger with time, and it put many of the parish ministers in an awkward position. Because the sign of the cross was so objectionable, many ministers thought of some ways to escape by not actually touching the baby's forehead and only pretending to do so. According to Davies, the latter part of the seventeenth century witnessed the fact that public baptism went out of fashion and was often replaced by the practice of private baptism at home.³⁸ Bingham's detailed discussion on patristic practice of making the sign of the cross was meant to silence the Puritans.

In the periods of the 1640s and 1650s, the Baptists started to build a sense of denominational coherence. Both the Particular and General Baptists dramatically demonstrated their distinctiveness by administering baptism by total immersion. Debates over modes of baptism—immersion as opposed to sprinkling—characterized most of the

³⁵ Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 41.

³⁶ This admonition was published anonymously. Frere and Douglas note that in its first edition this treatise did not even have a formal title page. See W. H. Frere and C. E. Douglas, *The Puritan Manifestoes: A Study of the Origin of the Puritan Revolt with a Reprint of the Admonition to the Parliament and Kindred Documents, 1572* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972), xxviii.

³⁷ Davies, *Worship and Theology*, vol. 2, 209.

³⁸ Davies, *Worship and Theology*, vol. 2, 210.

literatures that defended the Baptists' position.³⁹ The Baptists insisted on the establishment of a pure church by baptizing only the ones who were able to profess their faith and conversion. Baptists' Confession of Faith consistently emphasized the fact that baptism was an ordinance instituted by Jesus Christ, administered to those who can profess repentance.⁴⁰ They did this, because they perceived the individual churches as the gatherings of people who had been sanctified by the grace of God and called out to be the fellowship of believers. They considered themselves to be "an egalitarian, democratic and consensus society."⁴¹ Before they baptized new members, they examined prospective members very carefully. They used elaborate procedures to guarantee that only those who could demonstrate their faith and Christian experience were admitted into the church. Michael Watts reports that in those days, a prospective member had to undergo a series of interviews so that the church could be sure that the person repented from past sins, accepted Jesus as Lord, and demonstrated a new Christian lifestyle, before the person could be baptized.⁴²

The two Baptist groups, even though sharing a very similar position on many of their doctrinal teachings, such as the visible church as the gathering of believing people baptized by immersion, formed two separate organizations.⁴³ The General Baptists, the older of the two, was so named following their basic Arminian theological tenet that Christ died for all people thus providing "general redemption" for all. The Particular Baptists were so named based on their Calvinistic heritage and belief that Christ died only for the elect.⁴⁴ The difference between these two groups of Baptists, Hylson-Smith observes, outweighed their common views so that friendly communication, let alone cooperation, was impossible. The Particular Baptists condemned the view of general redemption as a heresy.⁴⁵

Bingham's discussion on infant baptism became an important issue regarding the relationship between the Anglican and the Baptist churches. By the time he wrote his *Origines*, the Baptists had become well-established as a denomination. Bingham defended the doctrine of infant baptism based on the patristic teaching of the doctrine. In the *Origines*, Bingham did not openly attack the position of the Baptists, but he defended the Anglicans' practice of infant baptism through the writings of the church fathers. He used the earliest patristic documents, such as the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, to prove that infant baptism was an accepted custom even at the time when the Canon of the New Testament was just closed.⁴⁶ Through this historical study, he defended the practice of the Church of England and, at the same time, quietly demonstrated his disagreement with the Baptists.

The liturgy of baptism in the dissenting churches was marked with simplicity. The

³⁹ Take, as an example, the debate between Alexander Kellie, who supported infant baptism, and Jeremiah Ives, a supporter of believer's baptism in Jeremiah Ives, *Infants-Baptism Disproved: And Believers Baptism Proved* (London: Richard Mobite, 1655).

⁴⁰ See, for instance, *A Brief Instruction in the Principles of Christian Religion* (London, 1695), 19–20. This anonymous work, written in the form of question and answer, is undoubtedly intended for catechizing adults who intended to join a Baptist congregation. See also Benjamin Keach, *The Articles of the Faith of the Church of Christ, or Congregation Meeting at Horsley-Down* (London, 1697), 20–21.

⁴¹ Kenneth Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II*, vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1996), 201.

⁴² Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 316.

⁴³ B. R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century* (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1983), 7.

⁴⁴ White, 7.

⁴⁵ Hylson-Smith, *The Churches in England from Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II*, 1:201.

⁴⁶ *Works*, vol. 3, 451.

most essential elements in their baptismal service were the explanation of the meaning of baptism and its biblical basis. These two elements were then followed by explicit or implicit charge to the parents that they would instruct the child in the rudiments of Christian belief, behavior, and worship. A prayer for the child that he or she may receive the blessing of the covenant was offered prior to the baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The ceremony was concluded with the declaration that the child was accepted into Christ's Church.⁴⁷ In contrast to the simplicity of this baptismal rite, the baptism ceremony in the Anglican Church was more elaborate. Bingham's lengthy explanation of how the early church performed baptism, both of infants and adults, was his way of demonstrating the fact that the Anglican baptismal rite was rooted in antiquity.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, sponsors or surety in baptism received sharp criticism from some Nonconformists, most notably from Richard Baxter. Baxter criticized the Anglican Church for not allowing parents to be the godparents of the child.⁴⁸ Bingham replied that this was not entirely true. The Anglican Church did not allow parents to be the only sponsors of the child but allowed the parents, together with a godparent, to dedicate their children to Christ.⁴⁹ For Bingham, this regulation did not "supersede the obligation of parents, but only superinduced a further obligation upon other persons for greater security of performance."⁵⁰ He also disagreed with Baxter who accused the Anglicans of allowing non-Christians, even atheists and infidels, to be godparents.⁵¹ Bingham said that Baxter's statement was wrong because he believed there was never any canon that permitted such a thing to happen.⁵² He insisted that the Church of England always emphasized that the godparents had to keep the promise they made in baptism and that the parents must choose sponsors who were well-instructed in Christianity, upholders of the godly life, and people whom the parents knew very well so that should the parents die while the child was still young, the godparents would assure that the child would get religious education.⁵³

Bingham also reacted negatively to the Dissenters' charge that the Anglicans made indifferent rites and ceremonies necessary. He said that the Church of England did not make these things necessary for salvation. What the church did was to regulate the outward act without imposing any doctrinal necessity. Besides, the Church of England did not impose these rites on all churches in all places. What the church required was conformity from its own members for the sake of peace, union, and order.⁵⁴ He made it clear that each church had its own set of regulations for certain rites and that none of those was necessary for salvation. He explained:

⁴⁷ Davies, *Worship and Theology*, vol. 3, 104.

⁴⁸ Richard Baxter, *The English Nonconformity as under King Charles II and King James II, Truly Stated and Argued* (London: Printed for the Parkhurst, 1689), 59.

⁴⁹ *Works*, vol. 9, 188.

⁵⁰ *Works*, vol. 9, 188.

⁵¹ Baxter, *The English Nonconformity*, 69.

⁵² *Works*, vol. 9, 191.

⁵³ *Works*, vol. 9, 192.

⁵⁴ *Works*, vol. 9, 74.

Suppose any man desires to be admitted to baptism, or the communion, in any church: is it not necessary for him to comply with the particular orders of that church, as to the time when, and the place where, those sacraments are to be administered? He must go to a church and not to a river, or a pond, to be baptized; and he must meet the assembly in a church, not in an upper room; in the morning precisely at a stated hour, if he will hold communion with them.⁵⁵

In cases where the Church of England denied communion to those who refused to follow the rules, such as refusing the sign of the cross in baptism, or receiving the communion kneeling, or receiving communion from a minister who wore a surplice, Bingham said that it was within the power of the church to impose the rules. It was ridiculous to say that the church made those rules with the aim to exclude those who would not follow them.⁵⁶ Bingham thought that Baxter was among those who believed that the church made the rules to exclude those who would not follow them.⁵⁷

Bingham's Use of Patristic Material as Support of the Practice of Infant Baptism Prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer

Bingham discussed early-church baptismal practices in volume four, book 11 of his *Origines Ecclesiasticae* under the title "Of Rites and Customs Observed in the Administration of Baptism in the Primitive Church."⁵⁸ His overall intention in publishing this work was to provide his church with a reliable source of the history and practice of the early church. He wrote in English rather than Latin because he had common readers as his audience.⁵⁹ In the section on infant baptism, he defended a strong position that the early church baptized infants as his way of defending the position of the Church of England. He disagreed with some of his contemporaries who said that during the first two centuries of Christianity, only adults who had been instructed in the faith and doctrine of Jesus Christ were baptized. However, in the *Origines*, he made it explicit that he did not want to spend much time refuting these people since many of his contemporaries had written on this subject, most notably William Wall.⁶⁰ In Bingham's judgment, Wall had carefully considered almost every writer in the early church who had discussed infant baptism.⁶¹

The rubric of public baptism of infants in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* is started with a clear statement that parish ministers must encourage the people to baptize their children as soon as they are born. Furthermore, the rubric emphasizes that baptism should not be delayed more than four or five weeks after the birth of the child. It also says that the baptism should be administered on Sundays or other holy days, in a worship service

⁵⁵ *Works*, vol. 9, 76.

⁵⁶ *Works*, vol. 9, 78.

⁵⁷ Baxter, *English Nonconformity*, chap. 14.

⁵⁸ *Works*, vol. 3, 396–607.

⁵⁹ *Works*, vol. 1, lvi.

⁶⁰ William Wall, *The History of Infant Baptism* (London: Joseph Downing, 1702). The second edition of this work was printed in 1707, in quarto, enlarged with an addition. The third edition was printed in London in 1720, together with Mr. Gale's Reflections and Walls' Defense. The edition followed here is the 1862, two volume reprint of Wall's *History of Infant Baptism*, 2 vols., ed. Henry Cotton, published by Oxford University Press.

⁶¹ *Works*, vol. 3, 453.

where maximum number of church members can come to witness the baptism. The intention is that the congregation, upon witnessing the sacrament, can also be reminded of their own baptism. Such a public act of baptism tells us that for the Church of England, baptism unites the whole congregation, not just the child being baptized, into one body.⁶²

To demonstrate that the earliest of the church fathers practiced infant baptism and thus to show that the Church of England followed patristic practices, Bingham used the writings of Clement of Rome.⁶³ He acknowledged that Clement did not directly mention infant baptism. However, he took Clement's statement that even infants were born with original sin to mean that Clement must have seen the necessity of baptizing infants. Clement's view of original sin was expressed in his statement about Job, who said that there was none who was free from sin, not even if the person was just one day old.⁶⁴ Therefore, if Clement taught that infants were born with original sin, then it would not be incorrect to say that Clement believed that even infants "have the need of baptism to purge them from it [original sin]."⁶⁵

In his effort to argue for the early church's practice of infant baptism, Bingham had to use the patristic text in such a way that the text fits his purpose. He had his own theological position that he wanted to defend. He also needed a support for it. Thus, one can see in Bingham's treatment of Clement that his theology made him infer from Clement what Clement did not actually say. The text that Bingham used was not about infant baptism. It was about original sin. It is true that the logical conclusion, derived from Clement's teaching that infants were born with original sin, would be the need of regeneration, and thus the need of baptism for infants. But this conclusion was more indicative of Bingham's theologizing than a plain explanation of what the text said.

Bingham used *The Shepherd of Hermas* in a similar fashion. Because Hermas lived at approximately the same time as Clement of Rome, he, too, could testify that from the earliest time of the Christian Church, infant baptism had been the common practice. Besides, Hermas spoke about the necessity of baptism by water for all people.⁶⁶ He came to this conclusion from his interpretation of Hermas' vision of a tower built on the water. In this vision, Hermas asked a woman about the meaning of the tower built on the water. The woman said that it signified that everybody must be saved through water.⁶⁷ He also referred to Hermas' other vision of the stones of the tower that had to come out of water in order to be made alive.⁶⁸ He interpreted the stones in this vision to be souls. He said that Hermas must have believed in the necessity of the souls ascending by water so that they might be at rest since they would not be able to enter the kingdom of God unless they put off the mortality of the former life.⁶⁹ Bingham concluded that for Hermas, the water must

⁶² Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer with the Additions and Deviations Proposed in 1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), 269.

⁶³ *Works*, vol. 3, 453.

⁶⁴ *Works*, vol. 3, 453, footnote 1, see also, 1 Clement 17.

⁶⁵ *Works*, vol. 3, 453.

⁶⁶ *Works*, vol. 3, 453.

⁶⁷ *Works*, vol. 3, 453. See also, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 3, no. 3, verse 5.

⁶⁸ *The Shepherd of Hermas*, Similitude 9, no. 16, verse 1.

⁶⁹ *Works*, vol. 3, 454.

have worked as a seal by which the soul was delivered from death. The seal must have meant baptism.⁷⁰ In his opinion, Hermas was just repeating the teaching of Jesus that unless one was born of water and the Spirit, the person could not enter the Kingdom of God.⁷¹

Still trying to find more support from the early church, Bingham went to Justin Martyr. He was aware that he could not find a direct statement indicating that Justin Martyr practiced infant baptism.⁷² However, he saw that Justin, as many other church fathers, believed very strongly in the doctrine of original sin. He said that if Justin taught that everybody was born with original sin and, thus, needed regeneration through baptism, then for Justin, infants, too, must be baptized so that they may receive redemption from original sin.⁷³ Bingham used Justin's explanation in the *Dialogue with Trypho*. He pointed out that Justin drew a parallel between baptism and circumcision and said that baptism was a spiritual circumcision by which Christians received the mercy of God for sinners.⁷⁴ He concluded that Justin must have believed that infant baptism was necessary because:

. . . then, as infants were admitted to circumcision, so they were to be admitted to baptism, that being the ordinary means of applying the mercy of the Gospel to them, and cleansing them from the guilt of original sin.⁷⁵

Tertullian had a different view about baptizing newborn babies, and Bingham recognized it. He preferred delaying infant baptism when there was no danger of death until the children came to the age of discretion. Tertullian wanted to protect the sponsors or godparents from punishment just in case the baptized child strayed away from the church.⁷⁶ However, Tertullian also taught that no one should die without baptism. Anyone in danger of death should be baptized, and under life-threatening circumstances, any Christian could administer the sacrament.⁷⁷ Bingham assured his readers that Tertullian's approach was not universally accepted in the early church.⁷⁸ According to him, the common practice of the church was that:

. . . she baptized infants as soon as they were born, though without any imminent danger of death, as appears from Tertullian's discourse itself, who laboured to make an innovation, but without any success; for the same practice continued in the Church in the following ages.⁷⁹

Bingham must have realized that Tertullian placed heavy emphasis on adult baptism. In chapter 18 of his treatise *On Baptism*, Tertullian strongly indicated that people must ask for their salvation.⁸⁰ This action was only applicable to adults. In addition, in his treatise

⁷⁰ Works, vol. 3, 454, see also, Hermas, *Similitude*, 9, no. 16, verse 4.

⁷¹ Works, vol. 3, 456.

⁷² Works, vol. 3, 457.

⁷³ Works, vol. 3, 457.

⁷⁴ Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho the Jew," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, n.d., 204. See also, Works, vol. 3, 457, footnote x.

⁷⁵ Works, vol. 3, 458.

⁷⁶ Works, vol. 3, 460. See also, Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, chap. 18.

⁷⁷ Works, vol. 3, 463.

⁷⁸ Works, vol. 3, 462. See also, Tertullian, *On Baptism*, chap. 18.

⁷⁹ Works, vol. 3, 462.

⁸⁰ Tertullian, *On Baptism*, chap. 18.

On Chaplet, Tertullian addressed only adult baptism. In this treatise, he discussed such matters as the renunciation of the devil and his power, the three-time immersion, the eating of milk and honey, and refraining from taking a bath for a whole week after baptism.⁸¹ So, it must have been clear to Bingham that Tertullian had no problem with delaying the baptism of infants. Bingham must have also noticed that in the early church there were different positions with regard to infant baptism. Some churches quite possibly agreed with Tertullian. Other churches practiced infant baptism. But for his own purpose in defending the practice of the Church of England, Bingham did not hesitate to disagree with Tertullian. He clearly sided with the *Book of Common Prayer*. The rubric on infant baptism in the *Prayer Book* clearly states that ministers must encourage people to baptize their children as soon as they were born. The rubric even regulated that baptism should not be delayed longer than four or five weeks after birth.⁸² This statement clearly contradicted Tertullian. Therefore, it was necessary for Bingham to argue against him.

In talking about the age infants to be baptized, Bingham related the question that Fidus, a bishop from Africa, once asked Cyprian. Fidus wanted to know whether infants should be baptized as soon as they were born or whether one should wait until the eighth day in keeping with the Old Testament law of circumcision.⁸³ Cyprian answered that all infants were polluted with original sin and, therefore, in need of baptism. There was no need to wait for two, three, or even eight days.⁸⁴ Like Cyprian, several ancient writers such as Optatus, Basil, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Augustine thought that it was not necessary to wait until the eighth day to baptize a baby. Here again, Bingham quietly pointed out his disagreement with Tertullian. By mentioning these church fathers, who thought that one should not wait to baptize infants, Bingham demonstrated that Tertullian's view should not be followed. What Bingham failed to do in this case, however, was to acknowledge the differences in the father's opinions in a scholarly manner and to explain why one opinion was preferable to the others.

There were special days that the early church considered right times to celebrate the baptism of both infants and adults.⁸⁵ Easter was the most common one. Augustine described very vividly how on Easter, infants, little children, and sucklings were carried to church for baptism.⁸⁶ Because of the church's tradition to baptize infants on Easter Sunday, Bingham noted that Palm Sunday was commonly called *octavae infantium* or "the octave of infants."⁸⁷

Discussion about the time for baptism was a significant issue in Bingham's day. The 1662 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* removed an earlier rubric (from 1549) noting the practice of the early church to baptize infants on certain days, especially Easter. The new edition of the *Prayer Book* allowed children to be baptized at any times. The new rubric

⁸¹ Tertullian, *The Chaplet*, chap. 3.

⁸² Church of England, *Book of Common Prayer*, 1662, 269.

⁸³ *Works*, vol. 3, 465.

⁸⁴ Cyprian, *Epistle 58, to Fidus*, par. 3.

⁸⁵ *Works*, vol. 3, 469.

⁸⁶ *Works*, vol. 3, 469. See also, Augustine, *Sermon de Tempore*, 160.

⁸⁷ *Works*, vol. 3, 470.

on baptism simply mentioned that baptism should be administered on Sundays, or other holy days, when many people could attend the service. The rubric even added that, under certain circumstances, children may be baptized on any day.⁸⁸

In discussing the ancient baptismal practice, Bingham consistently stated that the early church considered the Trinitarian formula for baptism the only acceptable one. The early church maintained this formula to guard the orthodoxy of its teaching over against several heretical sects that threatened the early Christians. Thus, in holding strongly to the trinitarian formula in baptism, the ancient church not only kept the biblical teaching, but it also demonstrated that the unity of the church could be maintained through this practice. Bingham understood this principle well. In the *Origines*, he wanted to demonstrate how he upheld the orthodox teaching of the church. By showing that the early church rejected non-trinitarian formulae for baptism, he did not just tell his readers the ancient practice. He wanted his readers to know that he, too, strongly held this position. It was necessary for him to clear his own name, after what he experienced early in his Oxford career. As a man charged as a tritheist by the university, he needed to assure his readers that he was not a heretic as the university had once declared.

Bingham noted that some of his contemporaries held that non-trinitarian formulae for baptism were acceptable. He strongly disagreed. Therefore, in the *Origines*, he used the writings of the church fathers as a textual argumentation. Here Bingham handily combined his textual studies of the church fathers with his defense of the practices of the Church of England. He pointed out that sometimes some sects baptized only in the name of Christ.⁸⁹ He believed that in the early church baptism in the name of Christ only was an exception and not the general rule. Most of the church fathers rejected this formula.⁹⁰ Bingham was sure that Basil insisted that baptism should be in the name of the Trinity and that baptism was not valid unless it was done in the name of the Triune God. He referred to Basil's *On the Holy Spirit*. In this work, Basil had a chapter entitled "Against those who assert that baptism in the name of the Father alone is sufficient."⁹¹

The early church strongly rejected heretical baptism that denied the Trinitarian formula. Augustine disagreed with those who did not baptize in the name of the Triune God.⁹² Agreeing with Augustine, Bingham affirmed that without the trinitarian language, baptism could not be consecrated. He said:

And hence it appears that St. Austin, and those other writers, thought this precise form of words necessary to be used in the administration of baptism, by virtue of the original appointment and institution.⁹³

⁸⁸ Church of England, *Book of Common Prayer*, 1662, 269.

⁸⁹ *Works*, vol. 3, 425.

⁹⁰ *Works*, vol. 3, 426.

⁹¹ *Works*, vol. 3, 426. See also, Basil, *On the Spirit*, chapter 12.

⁹² *Works*, vol. 3, 424.

⁹³ *Works* vol. 3, 424.

Bingham's affirmation of the ancient church's insistence on the Trinitarian formula for baptism served another purpose. Even though Bingham kept the objectivistic tone of his presentation, he used this discussion to defend the practice of the Church of England. One could see that in writing on this subject, Bingham already had an agenda behind what he discussed. Most of the time he used the ancient texts to defend the Anglican Church from the Dissenters. Accusations from dissenting groups on several practices of the Church of England were commonly heard in Bingham's time. The Dissenters thought that the Church of England was too close to the novelty of the Roman Catholic Church. For Bingham the discussion on the Trinitarian formula of baptism was a very good opportunity to defend his church. By showing that the Church of England baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, he was able to demonstrate that on this very fundamental practice the Church of England kept the practice of the early church. Therefore, the Dissenters should not continue their accusations. The practice of the Church of England was orthodox, and deeply rooted in the tradition.

Bingham showed that the ancient church believed the symbolizing of dying and rising with Christ in the sacrament of baptism was taught in New Testament passages such as Romans 4:4, Colossians 2:12, etc.⁹⁴ Chrysostom believed that being baptized and immersed in the water and rising again out of it symbolized descending into hell and returning from it.⁹⁵ Cyril of Jerusalem explained it differently. He taught that just as the person was physically surrounded by water, the Spirit incomprehensibly baptized or washed the interior soul.⁹⁶

Even though immersion was widely practiced, the early church did not rule out baptism by sprinkling. The baptism of very sick persons by sprinkling was never considered unlawful or imperfect.⁹⁷ The early church understood the biblical statement that God "will have mercy and not sacrifice" to mean that it was the significance of baptism and not the method that mattered. Cyprian taught baptism by sprinkling. For Cyprian, baptism was valid as long as there was no defect in the faith of either the one giving it or the one receiving it.⁹⁸ Bingham concluded that sprinkling was as effective as immersion, since the sacrament was completed by the power of God. The effectiveness of the sacrament depended on the truth of the faith of the person.⁹⁹

Through the discussion of different modes of baptism in the early church, Bingham showed that one mode of baptism was not to be preferred over another. His acknowledgment that the ancient church accepted both modes to a certain degree reflected the fact that in the *Book of Common Prayer*, there is preference for dipping the child in the water. Sprinkling is acceptable in cases where the baby is too weak to be immersed in the water.

⁹⁴ *Works*, vol. 3, 593.

⁹⁵ *Works*, vol. 3, 593 footnote p. See also, Chrysostom, *Homily on 1 Corinthians*, Hom. 40.

⁹⁶ *Works*, vol. 3, 594. See also, Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* 17, no. 14.

⁹⁷ *Works*, vol. 3, 596.

⁹⁸ Cyprian, *Letter 69 to Magnus*, no. 12.

⁹⁹ *Works*, vol. 3, 598.

Some of Bingham's contemporaries, particularly William Cave, thought that in the early church the sign of the cross was made on the forehead of the person being baptized.¹⁰⁰ Bingham did not contest this opinion. At the same time, he was also aware that the ancient texts that Cave used did not directly prove the practice.¹⁰¹ Cave said that this practice was in use at the time of Tertullian and Cyprian and that therefore should not be omitted from baptism.¹⁰² Following Tertullian Cave said:

. . . that upon every motion, at their going out or coming in, at their going to bath, or to bed, or to meals, or whatever their employment or occasions called them to, they were wont *frontem signaculo terere*, 'to make the sign of the cross upon their forehead.'¹⁰³

Bingham commented that in the ancient fathers the sign of the cross did not refer only to the sign in baptism. Many of the fathers, he explained, related the sign of the cross to unction or confirmation.¹⁰⁴ Augustine taught that "the cross is always joined with baptism."¹⁰⁵ Cyprian held that the sign indicated that those, so marked, were born again.¹⁰⁶ The *Constitutions of the Apostles* explained that:

The water is to represent Christ's burial; the oil, to represent the Holy Ghost; the sign of the cross, to represent the cross; and the ointment or chrism, the confirmation of men's professions.¹⁰⁷

By discussing and defending the ancient practice of making the sign of the cross, Bingham demonstrated that it was not just a Roman Catholic practice. He had the Puritans in mind. Since the period of Reformation, the Puritans required that the practice be removed from the baptismal liturgy since they considered it a papal novelty.¹⁰⁸ Bingham strategically defended the practice of the Church of England without ever explicitly engaging in polemic against the Puritans. The Anglican practice of making the sign of the cross in baptism is explained in the *Book of Common Prayer*. It is a sign that the baptized infant would not be ashamed to confess faith in Christ crucified, to fight against sin, the world and the devil, and to continue to be a soldier of Christ always.¹⁰⁹

The early church considered the prayers consecrating the water for baptism were as important as the water itself. Bingham thought that the early church believed that the efficacy of the prayer consecrating the water of baptism did not depend on the worthiness of the person offering the prayer.¹¹⁰ He found that Augustine, in the controversy with the Donatists, said that the water of baptism was not made sacrilegious or profane even if the

¹⁰⁰ *Works*, vol. 3, 572. See also, William Cave, *Primitive Christianity*, part 1, chap. 10.

¹⁰¹ *Works*, vol. 3, 572

¹⁰² *Works*, vol. 3, 572

¹⁰³ Cave, *Primitive Christianity*, part 1, chap. 10. See also, Tertullian's *De Corona*, chapter 3.

¹⁰⁴ *Works*, vol. 3, 572.

¹⁰⁵ *Works*, vol. 3, 573. Here Bingham quotes from Augustine's Sermon 101, "De Tempore."

¹⁰⁶ *Works*, vol. 3, 573

¹⁰⁷ *Works*, vol. 3, 574. See also, *The Constitutions of the Apostles*, book 3, chap. 17.

¹⁰⁸ See, "The Admonitions to the Parliament," in *Puritan Manifestoes*, 14.

¹⁰⁹ "On Baptism," in *The Book of Common Prayer, 1549*. The rubric on public baptism stated in the 1552 edition of the Prayer Book does not indicate any change in making the sign of the cross after the infant was baptized. The rubric concerning the sign of the cross was also present in the 1661 edition of the Prayer Book. See Lighton Pullan, *The History of the Book of Common Prayer* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1909), 197.

¹¹⁰ *Works*, vol. 3, 578.

invocation was spoken by a profane person.¹¹¹ Augustine believed that even if a wicked person or a heretic prayed for the consecration of the water, the wickedness of the person would never affect the truthfulness of the sacrament itself.¹¹² Bingham found that Augustine even believed that an error in the prayer of consecration did not destroy the essence of baptism.¹¹³ For the Bishop of Hippo, only the absence of the promise of the Gospel would destroy or take away the essence of baptism.¹¹⁴ Bingham interpreted Augustine's statement to mean that the Trinitarian formula for baptism, as instituted by Christ and given to the Apostles, was the most important part in baptism.¹¹⁵ Bingham added that at the time of the Donatist controversy, both the orthodox church and the Donatists must have done the consecration in the same way.¹¹⁶ He was sure that Augustine was not too concerned about what kind of person offered the consecration prayer since the very being and essence of baptism did not depend on the prayer. The fact that Augustine did not require the Donatists to be rebaptized indicated that, for him, who consecrated the water of baptism was not very significant.¹¹⁷

In this discussion, Bingham supported another practice of the Anglican Church. The *Book of Common Prayer* included the consecration of the water in the baptism of both adults and infants. The priest must pray: "... sanctify this water to the mystical washing away of sin; and grant that the persons now to be baptized therein may receive the fullness of thy grace, and ever remain in the number of thy faithful and elect children..."¹¹⁸ At the same time, Bingham's use of Augustine's position is significant in his own historical context. The anti-Donatist solution is genuinely catholic and orthodox. Therefore, over against the Dissenters, who required the omission of such consecration, Bingham brilliantly demonstrated that the consecration was rooted in church history. On the other hand, against the Roman Catholics who might deny the legitimacy of Anglican clergy offering the prayer, Bingham demonstrated that they should not argue about who consecrated the prayer. The effect of baptism did not depend on who offered the prayer. In either case, Bingham was able to argue from history that the Church of England was justified in its practice. The prayer to consecrate the water was significant in the entire theology of the church. The remission of sins and the inclusion of the baptized into the kingdom of God mystically happened through the ritual of baptism. The water of baptism as an element of baptism played an important role. Therefore, Bingham deemed it necessary to maintain this doctrine. Making a direct reference to Augustine was his best strategy.

Bingham also addressed the role of sponsors in infant baptism. Once again, he followed Augustine's view. He thought that, in most cases, the parents should be the sponsors for baptism. Indisputably, parents were responsible for their children's education

¹¹¹ Augustine, *On Baptism*, Book 3, chap. 10.

¹¹² *Works*, vol. 3, 579.

¹¹³ *Works*, vol. 3, 579.

¹¹⁴ *Works*, vol. 3, 579. Bingham takes Augustine's statement in *On Baptism*, Book 6, chap. 25.

¹¹⁵ *Works*, vol. 3, 579.

¹¹⁶ *Works*, vol. 3, 579.

¹¹⁷ *Works*, vol. 3, 580.

¹¹⁸ *Book of Common Prayer 1662*, 273, 287.

and instruction in the faith. They were obligated to do this by natural law — not because they were sponsors, but because they were parents.¹¹⁹ Augustine also insisted that ordinarily, parents must offer their children for baptism and answer the questions for them.¹²⁰ In special cases, children could be presented by others. This was true especially if their parents were dead and the children were brought up by a caregiver.¹²¹

In a letter to Boniface, Augustine said that the questions asked of the sponsors when the children were baptized should be similar to those asked to the person in adult baptism.¹²² He mentioned two most important questions: “Does the child believe in God?” and “Does this child turn to God?”¹²³ These two questions, Bingham said, were equivalent to an adult’s renouncing the devil and entering a covenant with Christ in adult baptism.¹²⁴ Again, Bingham supported the practice of the Church of England and its Prayer Book. According to the Prayer Book, the sponsors respond for the child as the adult is required to respond for himself.¹²⁵ In rejecting Pelagianism, Augustine emphasized that children, too, carried the guilt of original sin and needed pardon. He said that at baptism the questions were asked of and answered by the sponsors on behalf of the children. If properly answered, the children, through baptism, were freed from guilt and power of Satan.¹²⁶ Quoting Augustine, Bingham also emphasized that infants were baptized not because they already had the knowledge of good and evil in their young minds, not because they believed in God with their own knowledge, but because of the nature of the sacrament itself. Baptism was called the sacrament of faith, and infants were said in some sense to believe. Even though they did not yet have the knowledge or habit of faith, they nevertheless could believe and should be included in this sacrament.¹²⁷ In his treatment of infant baptism, Bingham specifically was able to bring the authority of Augustine and, by extension, the church fathers to bear positively on the Church of England’s accepted doctrine and liturgical practice.

Conclusion

The patristic scholarship of Joseph Bingham serves as a proof that interest in the writing of the church fathers, both scholarly and polemical or disputative, did not fade away at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. This interest remained a significant element in Protestant theology and churchmanship. As clearly seen through Bingham’s hard labor, patristic scholarship was one of the most important ways in which Anglican divines defended the doctrine and practices of their church. Writing in a time when religious tensions and attacks from several dissenting groups hit the established church hard, Bingham demonstrated through his patristic studies that the Anglican Church

¹¹⁹ *Works*, vol. 3, 552.

¹²⁰ *Works*, vol. 3, 552. See also, Augustine, *Letter to Boniface*, Letter 98, par. 1.

¹²¹ *Works*, vol. 3, 552.

¹²² *Works*, vol. 3, 555.

¹²³ *Works*, vol. 3, 555. See also, Augustine, *Letter to Boniface*, Letter 98, par. 7.

¹²⁴ *Works*, vol. 3, 555.

¹²⁵ See, *Book of Common Prayer 1662*, 271, and 286.

¹²⁶ *Works*, vol. 3, 555.

¹²⁷ *Works*, vol. 3, 555. See also, Augustine, *Letter to Boniface*, letter 98, par. 9.

had been faithful to the teachings and practices of the early church and thus maintained the truth in Christian worship, and by extension, that he was himself a faithful Anglican.

Bingham's Oxford education, with its emphasis on critical analysis and skillful rhetoric, prepared him for his future undertaking in patristic studies. The *Origines Ecclesiasticae* was a proof of his excellent scholarly work. Through the topical analysis of the writings of the church fathers, he was able to demonstrate that the Church of England had deep roots in Christian antiquity. This work also served as a verification of his own orthodoxy. Early in his Oxford career, he was accused of being a Trinitarian heretic by the university. By writing such a massive historical work in support of the teaching of his church, he showed that he was a true son of the church.

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