

This volume is a well-conceived and executed call to BAM. May it ignite innovative, faithful witness to the good news of the redemption of all creation throughout the world.

Matthew C. Bingham, *Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution*. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 234 pages. ISBN: 9780190912369.

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Bingham's book aims to reassess Baptist seventeenth-century history in light of the actual sources: 'one finds that the seventeenth-century 'Baptist story' is not nearly as neat and tidy as some authors would suggest' (p. 2). In this way, the author continues and modifies the path set forth by Stephen Wright (*The Early English Baptists*, 2006). Bingham's central argument is that in the context of the English civil war, a time in which 'the established church had effectively collapsed' (p. 2), giving space to novel ideas and public religious experimentation, there was no such thing as an accepted and defined theological identity that was distinctly '(Particular) Baptist'. This construction of a coherent Baptist identity is, he observes, a nineteenth-century invention, projecting self-evident denominational labels back onto a much more diffuse past.

Bingham builds his argument in five chapters. First, he discusses the so-called 'London Confession' of 1644. The seven churches behind this confession are all in some way related to Henry Jacob's earlier separatist congregation. Bingham suggests the term 'baptistic congregationalists' instead of using 'Particular Baptists' (pp. 8, 33, 153) to identify this loose group of independents that advocated believer's baptism. These baptistic congregationalists favoured Calvinistic soteriology above believer's baptism as an identity denominator. Hence, those commonly known as 'Particular' and 'General' Baptists could in no way be understood as one group sharing one Baptist identity, as eighteenth-century author Thomas Crosby and many subsequent Baptist historians have claimed. Conversely, more significant to these

people was the ‘congregational way’ of being church. In the second chapter, Bingham continues to investigate the relations between these baptistic and independent congregationalists. He shows how notable baptistic representatives, like John Spilsbery and Henry Jessey, were part of a larger network of congregationally minded pastors, who disagreed about the practice of baptism but shared a Reformed orthodoxy. In the third chapter, Bingham delves more deeper into the ecclesiological issues and especially the reasons behind the transition to believer’s baptism. He highlights the strangeness of this move in the landscape of seventeenth-century puritan thinking, and locates the main source in the Protestant rethinking of sacramentology. Protestants placed baptism within ecclesiology rather than soteriology. So, with rejection of the *corpus permixtum* (‘visible saints’) among congregationalists, the adoption of believer’s baptism became the logical next step as the mark of true believers. In chapter 4, Bingham takes an outside perspective by reviewing the bad image of Anabaptism in England up to the Cromwellian settlement and explains the remarkable tolerance toward believer’s baptism only a couple of years afterwards. In the last chapter, he completes his book by offering evidence of friendly relations between paedobaptistic congregationalists and baptistic congregationalists, to further illustrate his case.

Bingham has written an excellent study and a must-read for everyone interested in seventeenth-century English church history and historiography, specifically regarding English nonconformity. It is a terrific example of historical investigation against the background of denominational identity construction. Strangely, in his first chapters, he continues to use the labels Particular/General Baptists which makes it somewhat confusing. Bingham’s general argument demands substantial reflection by those calling themselves ‘Baptists’, both in the way they tell their ecclesial story and engage in ecumenical conversation.