

Title: 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

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Digital full text: http://www.calvin.edu/library/database/dissertations/Thianto_Yudha.pdf

Call Number: BV4070 .C2842 2006 .T45

ABSTRACT

Joseph Bingham belonged to a group of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Anglican scholar-clergymen that endeavored to provide their contemporaries with a comprehensive picture of the practice and worship of the early church. Bingham's historical study is unique, since he presents the ancient church in a non-chronological method, but through a systematic and thematic investigation of the rites and ceremonies, together with other dynamic aspects of Christian antiquity.

This dissertation proposes to situate Bingham in the context of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century English church, its scholarship, and its theological controversies. This understanding of Bingham will, in turn, reveal hitherto unexamined aspects of the development and alteration of Christian teaching in the midst of the political turmoil following the Glorious Revolution of 1688. A central thesis of this study is that the use of the church fathers as a secondary norm of Protestant teaching – indicative of the churchly orthodoxy of Protestantism – is characteristic of the Protestantism of the Church of England. This use of the church fathers, moreover, stands in continuity with many of models for theological formulation found among the Reformers and the orthodox Protestants, both British and Continental, of the seventeenth century. In discussing baptism in the *Origines Ecclesiasticae*, Bingham used the church fathers objectivistically, avoiding polemics as much as he could. However, as he approached the patristic material topically, he often had a theological solution in mind. Most of the time, he used the material to justify the practice of the Church of England.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation traces the life and scholarship of Joseph Bingham, with a focus on the investigation of his education at Oxford University and his years as a fellow and tutor at the university, as well as the Trinitarian controversy that occupied the history of Oxford University in the last decade of the seventeenth century. Chapter 2 provides historical background of Bingham's ministry and scholarship. Chapter 3 discusses Bingham's patristic scholarship and its reception among historians and theologians in the early eighteenth century. In chapter 4 the dissertation focuses on Bingham's explanation of the formulae of baptism in the early church and their connection with the practice of the Church of England. Chapter 5 discusses Bingham's view of infant and adult baptism in the ancient church and the Church of England. Chapter 6 discusses the issue of controversy regarding lay baptism and Bingham's use of the patristic material in his *Scholastical History* as a refutation against Roger Laurence who considered lay baptism invalid.