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*Orthodox Radicals: Baptist Identity in the English Revolution.* By Matthew C. Bingham. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. ISBN: 9780190912369. xi + 234 pp. £64.

In *Orthodox Radicals*, Matthew Bingham argues that historians have been mistaken to talk of ‘Baptists’, or even ‘Particular Baptists’ and ‘General Baptists’, when discussing mid-seventeenth-century England. He contends that these labels give the misleading impression that there was a cohesive Baptist identity during the English revolution. Instead, Bingham suggests that we should think of seventeenth-century Particular Baptists as ‘baptistic congregationalists’. This is no mere rebranding exercise: Bingham seeks to re-shape our understanding of the mid-seventeenth-century confessional boundaries by demonstrating that baptistic congregationalists’ closest interpersonal and theological connections were with paedobaptistic congregationalists, including those present at the Westminster Assembly, rather than with those who shared their sacramental views. As such, *Orthodox Radicals* is not a narrative history of the Particular Baptists’ origins, but a carefully argued re-interpretation of their identity.

Bingham sets out his stall in the book’s opening pages, claiming that historians of the seventeenth-century have been ‘unduly and unknowingly influenced’ by ‘denominational historians whose desire to tell their own “Baptist story” comes ‘at the expense of fidelity to the early modern record’ (p. 1). These remarks establish the tone for what follows, as Bingham proceeds to dismantle and reconstruct readers’ understanding of the group commonly known as the Particular Baptists.

Chapter one challenges the assumption of a pan-Baptist identity head-on, highlighting the Particular Baptists’ unequivocal opposition to Arminianism and consistent prioritisation of soteriological views over baptismal ones. Bingham stresses that there was a ‘complex religious landscape in which multiple doctrinal issues intersected’ resulting in ‘a diverse range of theological alignments’ (p. 22), arguing that historians have been mistaken to assume that there was a ‘coherent “baptist” communion’ (p. 36).

Chapter two emphasises the unity between baptistic and paedobaptistic congregationalists in the 1640s, noting that they were ‘held together by unquestioned adherence to Calvinist orthodoxy and the uncompromising logic of congregational polity’ (p. 40). Bingham highlights, for example, how Henry Jacob, a leading baptistic congregationalist, received counsel from paedobaptistic congregationalists like Thomas Goodwin and Jeremiah Burroughs, who he described as ‘honoured & Beloved Brethren’ (p. 44). Fascinatingly, Bingham argues that the ‘Dissenting Brethren’ at the Westminster Assembly may have even shared information with the baptistic congregationalists, enabling the swift publication of their own confession in October 1644.

Chapter three proceeds to show that these links were not simply interpersonal, but also theological. The baptistic congregationalists’ position on baptism was, as Bingham puts it, ‘sunk deep within the soil of congregational principle’ (p. 63). He argues that the adoption of a baptistic position from the late 1630s onwards cannot be explained by biblicism alone, but must also be understood within the context of congregationalists’ beliefs about the visible church, which they correlated with the visible saints. Bingham contends that this ecclesiological position paved the way for some congregationalists to reject paedobaptism.

The book shifts gears in chapters four and five, using the preceding reconstruction as a lens through which to examine religious identity in the 1650s. Chapter four explores why baptistic views were tolerated under Cromwell while Arminian and Socinian views remained beyond the theological pale, given that they were all perceived as erroneous in the preceding decade. Bingham argues that those with

Calvinistic baptistic views enjoyed religious toleration thanks to their longstanding ties to the congregationalists, who rose to prominence under Cromwell.

Chapter five examines baptistic congregationalists' self-identity in the Interregnum, arguing that they saw themselves as continuing the Puritan, and broader Protestant, pursuit of reform, viewing 'paedobaptism as simply one more "popish" barnacle that had inappropriately attached itself to the ark of Christ's church' (p. 136). In this context, Bingham argues that divisions between ecumenically minded and sectarian baptistic congregationalists were not simply about communion (and whether it should be open or closed), but reflected their broader disposition towards those who had not yet followed them in rejecting paedobaptism.

Readers might be surprised to find almost no discussion of the 'General Baptists'. Bingham unapologetically focuses on the 'Particular Baptists' because to incorporate the General Baptists alongside them would undermine his central thesis. Given his argument that Particular Baptists are better understood as baptistic congregationalists though, readers may wonder how best to describe the so-called General Baptists. This is addressed briefly in the conclusion where Bingham suggests the label 'baptistic separatists' (p. 153), but this is not explored in any detail. He has, however, examined the identity of this group in an article in *The Seventeenth Century* – 'English radical religion and the invention of the General Baptists, 1609–1660' (2019) – which readers may find a useful complement to *Orthodox Radicals*.

While Bingham's argument may irk those invested in preserving some sense of a pan-Baptist denominational identity, *Orthodox Radicals* makes the provocative and, in this reader's view, compelling case that these labels are anachronistic and misleading when applied to mid-seventeenth-century England. *Orthodox Radicals* is an important work that deserves a wide-readership amongst all those who desire to understand better the theological landscape of the English revolution.

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