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# *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices: Medieval Domestic Devotion in the Seventeenth Century*

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**Abstract:** *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* was first published as a Catholic primer for worship between intimates, then reformed for individual Protestant worship, and then reformed again for Protestant worship between intimates. Each adaptation engages the so-called “ancient” quality of its offices, primarily medieval, as authorization for the kinds of domestic worship it promotes. I examine how the author and adapters of the text authorize their creative and adaptive devotional texts through a nostalgic interpretation of medieval worship practices as uniquely representative of the worship practices of the early church. While confessional debates had polarized discussions about the lineage of the church, this text represents a trend in seventeenth-century Protestant devotional primers attempting to reconcile spiritual divisions by re-introducing Protestant believers to pre-Reformation practices of domestic devotion.

**Keywords:** medieval; breviary; devotion; recusant; nonjuror; schismatic; women; early modern; restoration

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The Protestant response to the Catholic John Austin’s popular *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* first published in 1668 and adapted for Protestant worship in 1686 and 1700, highlights the continuing import of “ancient,” i.e., medieval, devotional methods in the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> Austin’s text creatively adapts the so-called “ancient way of offices” from the Catholic breviary for a seventeenth-century recusant community, but the model that his text provides for structured worship between intimates held much broader appeal. The text was popular across confessional boundaries and was republished in four more editions before Theophilus Dorrington took it upon himself to reform the text for Protestant worshippers in 1686. Dorrington drastically simplified the offices and published his devotional text as *Reform’d Devotions*. Dorrington’s adaptation was popular, but some objected to his redaction of the interpersonal emphasis of Austin’s liturgy. In 1700, Susanna Hopton, with the aid of her editor George Hickes, brought a second reformation of Austin’s *Devotions* to print. Hopton’s *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* returned the text to a near original state by retaining Austin’s method and removing only the most blatant references to Catholic beliefs. Hopton’s reformation was even more popular than its predecessor.

Hickes authorizes Hopton’s adaptation by defending the observance of devotional offices as “an ancient practice of Devotion, which was in use among the Jews and the Primitive Christians, among whom the distinction of Hours for Prayer was not the effect of Superstition, but a rational Institution, in which they agreed as it were by common Inspiration, as the best means of advancing Piety, and Devotion” (Hopton 1700, p. A8v). Hickes makes this defense of the liturgy’s ancient history because Dorrington, the text’s previous reformer, had removed the liturgical elements of Austin’s offices after declaring them to be a Romish innovation that counteracted true devotion. Dorrington’s text sought to

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<sup>1</sup> (Austin 1668), (Dorrington 1686), (Hopton 1700).

draw out only the “Sense with what those Rules suggested to be truth” (Dorrington 1686, p. A6v) by appealing to “the directions of the Holy Scripture, and the Articles of our Church which are drawn from thence, according to the usual Interpretation made of it by the most pure and primitive Ages of Christianity” (p. A6r). Dorrington believed only the sense of devotion communicated by Austin’s text to be inherited from an ancient and True Christianity and rejected almost all other aspects of Austin’s text. Ironically, both adaptations claim the authority of ancient and primitive forms of worship as the grounds for their adaptive process but with opposing results. Dorrington rejects the adaptation of pre-Reformation devotional practices for Protestant worship as an attempt to fracture the authority of the established church’s weekly worship, but Hickes embraces communal devotion as ideally suited to re-unify an English church split by schism.

Hickes and Dorrington’s disagreement over the “ancient” and “primitive” qualities of the faith promoted in the adaptations is a continuation of the argument incited by Austin naming his adaption of the catholic breviary method an “ancient way.” The character of the “True,” “primitive,” or “apostolic” church and its practices were at the heart of disagreements between the Roman and English churches in the early modern period. The early church was understood to be the purest manifestation of the True Church on earth and the Roman church had been believed to be the sole heir of that tradition until the Protestant Reformation. Austin’s references to ancient traditions signal an attempt to separate the practice of medieval devotional methods from the stigma of late Catholicism by reconnecting the breviary genre to the ancient church. By naming the observance of devotional offices an “ancient” method, Austin advanced the view that pre-Reformation devotional genres and the communities they fostered were an authoritative expression of universal Christian worship. In the second edition of Austin’s *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices*, Austin’s friend, John Sergeant, also a well-known advocate for the English recusant community, suggests that *Devotions* was popular because its ancient method was universally accessible to all believers (Austin 1672). These men attempt to build consensus between Roman Catholic believers and their Protestant adversaries by appealing to a like-minded desire for communities of faith.

Austin’s *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices*, its adaptations, and the paratextual links made between them demonstrate an attempt to parse the spiritual heritage of the early church in the devotional practices of the Roman Church for a Protestant audience. The authorization of *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* for Protestant worship hinges on a discussion of the extent to which medieval faith communities are uniquely representative of a universal Christian church as instituted by the apostles. Dorrington, a strong advocate for the established church, considered the kinds of alternate faith communities supported by Austin to be a threat to the authority of the established church. His adaptation of Austin’s “ancient way,” *Reform’d Devotions*, removes all trace of the communitarianism of Austin’s liturgy in favor of emphasizing the individual’s responsibility to reinforce their attachment to the universal (read, established) church through the performance of set prayers and meditations in private. Dorrington vehemently rejects what he believes to be the blatant Catholicism of Austin’s method and believes it utterly separable from its universal “Sense” (Dorrington 1686, p. A6v).

Hickes and Hopton were Protestant like Dorrington but they were also non-jurors who embraced Austin’s model for worship between intimates as a means to encourage dissident communities of faith.<sup>2</sup> Hopton had converted to Catholicism during the interregnum but returned to the church of England in the early 1660s after becoming thoroughly versed in the controversial writings of both Catholics and Protestants. In contrast to Dorrington’s adaptation, Hopton’s *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* returns the text to its liturgical roots by restoring its offices to near original state. Her meticulous reformation of Austin’s text illustrates her esteem for his method, but her multiple conversions also highlight her vested interest in reconciling with the Church of England’s Roman past. She attempts to

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<sup>2</sup> Non-juring clergy were relieved of their livings when they refused to swear the oath to William III and Mary II after James II and VII was deposed, but they often continued to serve independent congregations in the belief that they had been ordained by God.

harmonize her Protestant beliefs with an affinity for pre-Reformation methods by emphasizing an alternate history of medieval devotional techniques in which the Roman church is the faulty purveyor of those traditions, not their origin. In doing so, she finds comfort and support for the marginalized faith community of which she is a part. Hickes and Hopton, both staunchly anti-Catholic, become unlikely promoters of pre-Reformation devotional practices out of an affinity for the intimate communities of faith which those practices promote.

While scholarship has often focused on how confessional debates over the lineage of the church fractured its unity, this study explores how the adaptation of the Roman breviary for seventeenth-century worship attempted to reunite the body of Christ by reintroducing believers to pre-Reformation modes of worship. I examine the descriptions of the church's "ancient" and "primitive" character in the works of Austin and his editor, John Sergeant; in Austin's adaptations by Theophilus Dorrington and Susanna Hopton; and in the preface by Hopton's editor, George Hickes, in order to explore how appeals to the authority of the ancient church express which kinds of communities of worship are believed to be good and valid. In this debate over the "ancient" quality of the offices, sides are not drawn according to one's affiliation with the Protestant or Catholic church, but by one's reverence for or aversion to the established church.

John Austin converted to Catholicism some time before 1640 and soon after began agitating for religious toleration (Blom and Blom 2004). In his *Christian Moderator* series, Austin poses as a member of the Anglican Church considering whether Independents ought to be granted freedom of worship. As if by surprise, the author discovers that his arguments in favor of freedom of conscience can also be extended to Catholics. Warming up to his argument, the speaker wonders "who live more peaceably with their neighbours . . . who deal more justly with all men, then they? Who are more constant in their Religion, and more scrupulous in the observances of their Law, then they? Who suffer for their Faith more then they; nay at this time, who besides them?" (Austin 1651, p. 8). He concludes that those who have suffered so much in quiet humility should be allowed to conduct their faith in peace. Austin's *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* seeks to nurture the faith of a recusant community more directly. The impact of Austin's Counter-Reformation context can be seen in how his text defends the usefulness of the Roman church's ancient heritage by making it new again for contemporary believers. On the one hand, the text conserves the monastic tradition by following the example of the daily office quite closely. The text, over 500 pages in length, provides Matins, Lauds, Vespers, and Compline for each day of the week, as well as for various festivals. Each service is made up of versicles and responses, Bible readings, and metrical hymns, prayers, and psalms; but, as Alison Shell discusses in her chapters "Intimate Worship: John Austin's *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices*" (Shell 2012) and "Seraphic Discourse, Mystical Bodies" (Shell 2015), Austin's use of scripture is distinctly creative. Many of Austin's psalms were "original psalms," in which passages from the Psalms or other areas of scripture intermingle with original reflections (Shell 2015). Austin's original psalms are especially notable for the way that they encourage believers reciting them to a heightened awareness of the performativity of their worship. Summarizing the scholarship of Philip H. Pfatteicher, one of the few scholars to study Austin directly, Shell highlights the impact of the formal structure of Austin's original psalms: "the psalms direct the congregation to recite a biblical text, then articulate the orthodox response to it, and finally adjure the reader to mean what they have just said" (Shell 2015, p. 223).<sup>3</sup> In this way, Austin's text reveals him to be uniquely aware of the weaknesses of liturgy and guarded against accusations that set forms of worship lend themselves to mindless repetition (Shell 2012, p. 260).

*Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* provides a fascinating reinterpretation of Catholic liturgy given that, only a century before, John Christopherson, Catholic dean of Norwich, had objected to communal liturgy in the vernacular because it made believers negligent in their prayers.<sup>4</sup> In contrast

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<sup>3</sup> See also (Pfatteicher 1968).

<sup>4</sup> See "Common Prayer" in (Targoff 2001).

to this earlier renunciation of communal liturgy, Austin reworks the traditions of the monastic offices to nurture the underground communities of Catholic believers through communal worship. The first edition of *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* opens immediately with “Directions,” which provides a template for worship between two believers. Austin writes,

When one says his pray’rs alone, the circumstances are free to be govern’d by his own devotion. But if two say together ‘tis convenient they agree on some rules: for which purpose the following are propos’d; yet so as to be alter’d by their own discretion as they please.”  
(b1r)

He provides ample allowance for believers to contemplate their relationship with God privately by punctuating the directions with the admonition “secretly” or “thus far secretly,” but he also discusses the execution of responsive readings and hymn singing. Shell suggests that the directions might have also served to re-educate Catholic believers whose worship was “of necessity, undertaken at a distance from mainstream Catholic tradition” (“Intimate” 269). Austin’s “Directions” reveal that much of the focus of his liturgy is on making do. His instructions encourage believers to conduct the liturgy according to their discretion within their private Oratory or some other private or semi-private space and using a liturgy conducted primarily in English. Shell suggests that this form of worship hinges on an understanding of paradoxical spiritual intimacy—“a quasi-monastic ideal which also, pragmatically, made the most of small congregations” (“Intimate” 271). By developing worship practices that supported the development of spiritual intimacy, Austin relies on the timeless qualities of the medieval tradition reworked within a period of persecution to bind together a new generation of faithful believers.

The relevance of Austin’s approach was demonstrated by its widespread popularity. A preface to the second edition of Austin’s *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices*, written by John Sergeant, reveals that the text had circulated in manuscript for several years before Austin was forced to bring it to press to avoid an adulterated copy going public first. In his preface, Sergeant describes the widespread appeal of the text:

‘Tis a Book which Catholiks use with great Devotion and Benefit. The moderate Protestant will find nothing in it he can with reason dislike, nor the passionate Zealot which he can justly traduce. ‘Tis the most Substantial part of Divinity render’d usefully Practical. ‘Tis the ripe Production of an aredently inflam’d Will exprest by an excellently clear Understanding; yet so, that only the Heart seems to speak and not the Brain. In a word, ‘tis the Best Matter deliver’d in the Best Manner. (Austin 1672, p. A2v)

Sergeant’s preface makes clear that the text’s popularity is not faddish, but longstanding, and well-founded on the quality of its author’s devotion, and he highlights the ecumenicism of Austin’s devotions as an illustration of its quality. He affirms the possibility of an ancient, universal, Christian experience to promote Catholic devotional practices among Protestant readers.

Sergeant is not just paying lip service to the text’s reputation: *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* was reprinted again in 1684 and 1685 before being reformed by Dorrington and Hopton (among others) whose adaptations of the text also enjoyed significant popularity (Blom 1982; Smith 2010). Later adapters also maintained respect for the devotion that inspired the original work. George Hickes describes Austin as “the divine Author (so I cannot help but call him)” (Hopton 1700, p. A3r) and develops a significant case in defense of the sincerity of Roman Catholic believers’ devotion inspired by Austin’s devotion. Despite Sergeant’s assurances, the recurrence of reformed editions of *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* makes clear that Austin’s Catholicism stained the book’s reception among Protestant believers. In the preface to the 1686 reformation of the text, Dorrington argues, “I am justified in the reforming of this Book, and purging out those fore-mention’d Doctrines, by the Authority of our Nation, which did, for the sake of them, a few years ago condemn the Book to a publick burning” (Dorrington 1686, p. A7r). The burning of the book demonstrates that not all

Protestants were convinced of its ecumenicism. At least some, including Dorrington, saw Austin's liturgy as a continuing threat to English Protestantism.

Like Austin, Dorrington authorizes his edition according to ancient practices but flips the ancient and innovative associations of its devotion and liturgy. Dorrington rejects the suggestion that *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* employs an ancient mode, baldly describing it as "a Book of Devotions dispos'd into the Form and Method of the *Roman* Breviary" (p. A6r). The problem with the breviary, Dorrington explains, is that it emulates the bewildering mix of old and new doctrines of its church. Describing Austin's text, he writes "therein were the Truths of Christian Religion frequently mixed, as in the Belief of that Church, with those erroneous Doctrines which in latter Ages have been added to Christianity" (p. A6r). Dorrington remedies the breviary's misappropriation of Truth by retaining only those foundational truths that are indisputably Christian. Dorrington qualifies these truths as those which follow "the directions of Holy Scripture, and the Articles of our Church which are drawn from thence, according to the usual Interpretation made of it by the most pure and primitive Ages of Christianity" (p. A6v). Dorrington's repeated contrast of Roman "form and method" with the Truth of the "primitive Ages of Christianity" and the "truly ancient and Apostolick Church" illustrate his conception of the individual devotion of post-Reformation English believers as radically at odds with the corrupted liturgies of the Roman church. For him, medieval church practices like the observance of hours and monastic-like antiphonal readings are Roman innovations that are necessarily separable from the universal Christian devotion of the apostolic tradition, because the universal Christian experience instituted by the early church is a matter of one's heart and mind, not a particular set of practices. This reasoning is apparent in his defense of *Reform'd Devotions's* ecumenicism as even more universal than the original's. He argues that, "the leaving out those principles renders the book more generally useful, since now it is become so to those of our Church, while they will meet with nothing in it, but what they can assent to: And it may still, if they please, be useful to those of the other Communion, since the peculiar principles, which they have receiv'd are onely left out, and the remaining matter is what all sober Christians may agree in" (p. A9v). Disagreeing with Sergeant, who argued that even the most "passionate Zealot" can disagree with the universal appeal of "Best Matter deliver'd in the Best Manner," Dorrington finds both the matter and manner of Austin's breviary to be problematically Catholic.

Dorrington acknowledges that some might question the possibility of separating universal Christian principles from the Catholic form of Austin's breviary. To them, he responds,

It were a mistake therefore to imagine, that we must needs be beholden to any peculiar or distinct principles, not held by the truly ancient and Apostolick Church, for such a production as this. I think it may appear by the following book, that those principles are not necessary as a Foundation, nor any ways advantageous to the superstructure. (p. A10r)

Dorrington contracts the four offices of matins, lauds, vespers, and compline into two, an office for the morning and one for the evening. He also excises a number of the liturgical elements like the versicles, antiphon, and other responsories. Instead, Dorrington's offices consist of three meditations each, interspersed with hymns and petitions. But even though Dorrington objects to *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices's* use of the offices, he does not deny its stylistic appeal. Dorrington explains that he was motivated to preserve the text because "there was a great deal of it very good Sence, and that comp's'd in a very devout strain, and an ingenious style, and mixt with several curious Hymns" (p. A7r); but, ironically, the few elements which he preserves unadulterated from Austin's text, such as Austin's original hymns are, objectively, the most innovative. Shell remarks that "for much of Elizabeth I's reign it was, in practice, easier for an English writer to write secular verse than the wrong kind of religious verse" (Shell 2012, p. 265).<sup>5</sup> There is some evidence of hymn writing by earlier seventeenth-century

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<sup>5</sup> See also (Shell 1999).



writers, but the evidence also suggests that their use was still limited to private singing. Austin's hymns, based on scripture but written in a "highly allusive style" (Shell 2012, p. 266) and written for communal worship, were groundbreaking; but while Dorrington finds the affect of Austin's hymns irresistible, he again resists the hymns' communalism by constraining the use of them to private worship. The result is a text that emphasizes scriptural reading and individual meditation rather than responsive recitation of scripture and communal worship. Describing "Directions in the Use of it," Dorrington emphasizes meditation as the best means to affect devotion. He argues, "To revolve, and over and over consider, and reflect upon some divine Truths, that they may make impression on their minds, and raise them suitable Affections: This tends to make the temper of the mind, and the course of a Mans life conformable to Truth, which is the end every man should aim at in his private Devotions" (pp. A10r–A10v). For Dorrington, communal liturgy distracts believers from the real work of individually conforming one's heart to divine truth. Dorrington's message was well received. Alongside a fifth edition of Austin's *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* in 1687, Dorrington's *Reform'd Devotions* enjoyed five editions in the fourteen years between its first publication and 1700, proving that its simplicity held appeal.

However, the second reformation of Austin's *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* indicates that Dorrington's rejection of communal worship was not as universally acceptable as he had assumed it would be. Dorrington had concluded the justification of his text with the pronouncement, "I thought it was worthy of a Reformation, and as well too good to be thrown away whole, as too bad to be used whole" (p. A7r), but the criticism of his text that appears in George Hickeys's preface to Susanna Hopton's edition of *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* suggests that Dorrington had underestimated the appeal of the medieval methodologies he rejected. Hickeys tells of devout readers who,

chose to mark with their Pencils, whatever was amiss in the unreform'd Devotions, that they might use them for their own private Benefit in the Author's own Method, rather than in that of Mr. Dorrington, which in their judgement was not so enflaming, nor fitted for the great and delightful Benefit of mutual and alternate Devotions, for which the divine Author (so I cannot but call him) seemed principally to contrive his Book, though it is no less fit for solitary Devotions, than that of Mr. Dorrington is.

(Hopton 1700, p. A3r)

Where Dorrington had concluded that the communal worship practices of Austin's text were too closely related to Roman Catholic practices and therefore suspect, Hickeys champions Catholic adaptation of the ancient practice of set hours of devotion as the fruit of some piety in the Roman church (p. A12r). Hickeys counters the concern that set hours of devotion promote superstitious recital of psalms, prayers or hymns by highlighting the ancient wisdom motivating its practice. He argues that he recommends the use of set hours of devotion "to restore the ancient practice of Devotion, which was in use among the Jews and the Primitive Christians, among whom the distinction of Hours for Prayer was not the effect of Superstition, but a rational Institution, in which they agreed as it were by common Inspiration, as the best means of advancing Piety, and Devotion" (p. A8v). He defends choral response or alternate reading of scripture and the antiphons on the same grounds, pointing out that choral response is preferred by the Reformers as well as Austin, according to the tradition of the early church and scripture. He writes, "The Primitive Church had them both from the Synagogue; and there are many Examples of both to be found in the Book of Psalms" (p. A10v). Building upon Austin's discussion of the ancient character of the offices, Hickeys returns pre-Reformation devotional practices to Protestant worship by reconstructing them as a rational early Christian institution crafted upon the foundation of scripture.

Austin's counter-Reformation tactics also held appeal for Hickeys. In the twenty-first century, Hickeys is known as one of the foremost Anglo-Saxon scholars of the early modern period, but he was also a deprived bishop and a prominent non-juror who came to see himself as primarily responsible for the last remnant of the true apostolic church. Though he claimed his linguistic research was

bipartisan, his biographer suggests Hickes makes a political statement when he includes a Saxon coronation oath as historical evidence of divinely ordained kingship. Theodor Harmsen argues that such a claim would have “invalidated, in his view, Whig historians’ arguments about the ‘original contract’ between the king and his people as a basis of good government, a contract which justified resistance (or even active rebellion) if a king proved a tyrant” (Harmsen 2004). Hickes faced increasing persecution for his political outspokenness in the latter half of his life and, as he became increasingly marginalized, he became more enamored with devotional practices that promoted intimate worship between like-minded believers. He says as much when he praises the “Heaven-like Fellowship of alternate Devotion, to so much advantage as to Religious Societies, of whose Rise and Progress the World hath lately had an Account, by the Reverend Mr. Woodward, Minister of Poplar” (Hopton 1700, p. A4r). Josiah Woodward had published *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London* in which he catalogues a number of societies dedicated to the reformation of manners in restoration London (Woodward 1697; Spurr 2004). As in the recusant communities, the fostering of devotionality within these societies became a form of spiritual problem solving, in which communal liturgy helped to retrain believers who may have become separated from official forms of church governance. For Hickes, the restoration of social worship represented a return to the “best and purest Ages of Christianity;” but alternate worship also resembled “the Worship and Devotions of the great Choire of Saints and Angels in the Church Triumphant, that most glorious Jerusalem, which is above” (p. A3r). In this context, the adaptation of pre-Reformation devotional practices takes on an apocalyptic aura that promised to reinvigorate the English church’s failed reformation and usher in a new age of devout worship.

Despite Hickes’s investment in the promises held in trust by *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices*’s mode of worship, he did not reform the text himself. *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* was adapted by his friend and sometimes patron, Susanna Hopton. Hickes does not name the text’s reformer in the first edition of the book, but does describe her as having “a mighty genius for Divinity; and though never bred in Scholastick Education, yet by Conversation with learned Clergy-Men and reading the best Divinity Books hath attained to a Skill in the Sacred Science, not much inferior to that of the best Divines” (Hopton 1700, p. a4r). Throughout his description, Hickes refers to the reformer as “one who,” an awkward construct which becomes more understandable once, years after the publication of Hopton’s *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices*, he finally reveals “the reformer” to be a woman. Hickes reveals Hopton’s identity in a letter that he appends to *A Second Collection of Controversial Letters Relating to the Church of England, and the Church of Rome* (Hopton 1710). In the introduction to the letter “written by a Gentlewoman of Quality to a Romish Priest upon her Return from the Church of Rome to the Church of England,” Hickes reveals that the author who penned this letter had just passed away and in doing so released him to publish both her letter and her identity as the second reformer of *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices*.

In addition to revealing her identity as *Devotion*’s second reformer, Hopton’s letter also provides insight into her approach to the reforming of the Catholic text in the defense of double-conversion which she pens to her former confessor. Hopton had converted to Catholicism some time after the outbreak of the civil wars but became disillusioned and returned to the church of England around 1660. Soon after her conversion, she wrote a letter to her former confessor defending her return to the church of England. In her letter, Hopton harmonizes her second conversion with her first by describing the second as the completion of a sanctifying process initiated by her engagement with Rome but perfected by her return to Protestantism. Francis Dolan’s research has demonstrated that women faced significant risk when converting to Catholicism (Dolan 1999). Conversion made her vulnerable to accusations of inconstancy and spiritual promiscuity. A second conversion enhanced the potency of these accusations. These accusations must have been on Hopton’s mind when she urges her reader to not “impute my Change to the inconstancy of my Sex” (Hopton 1710, p. 119). In order to prove her constancy, she argues that she, too, has the “highest degree” (p. 119) of contempt for inconstancy and she combats her liability by reinterpreting her first conversion as a misdirection of her commitment to

an “ancient Catholick and Apostolick Truth” (p. 119). She argues that she became waylaid because, in a period of “Mists and Clouds of Error” (p. 119), her former confessor took advantage of “the Eclipse of the Church of *England*, and my own Youth; which was too weak to discern her as she is now, and then really was in her self” (p. 119) and he convinced her of the more catholic qualities of the Roman church. She writes,

There you made me believe I should find Unity without Division, Light for Darkness; Truth, even the ancient Catholick and Apostolick Truth, instead of Errors; Certainty and Satisfaction instead of Uncertainty and Doubts; and wholesome Food instead of Poison. And encouraged with these assurances, I entred in the simplicity of my Heart, into the Field of your Church, in which you persuaded me to expect nothing but pure Wheat without Tares. (p. 120)

Hopton’s letter highlights, again, the weight attached to the apostolic tradition within discussions about the validity of the Roman and English churches. An examination of Turberville’s controversial works makes it clear that he turned her desire for a connection with the ancient church against her. In the subtitle of Turberville’s *A Manual of Controversies* which he dedicates to Hopton, he promises to demonstrate “the Truth of Catholique Religion, By Texts of holy Scripture, Councils of all Ages, Fathers of the first 500 years, Common Sense and reason” (Turberville 1654). The frontispiece also quotes Deuteronomy 32:7, admonishing “Remember the Old days, think upon every Generation: Ask thy Father, and he will declare to thee; thy Elders, and they will tell thee.” Turberville clearly appeals to the ancient qualities of the Roman tradition to defend his religion and deploys its significance in his proselytizing.

Unfortunately, upon conversion, Hopton finds herself “greatly disappointed” (Hopton 1710, p. 120). She admonishes Turberville, “I have found Plenty, great Plenty of Tares there, which grow so thick, that in truth they almost choak the good Seed of God’s most holy Word” (p. 120). Motivated by her constant commitment to apostolic truth, she eventually rejects the present Roman church as a misbegotten iteration of the universal church based on its failure to deliver on the promises of ancient Catholicism. She argues,

I have done what I could to find out the Doctrines and Practice of the ancient Catholick Church, and have followed her Guidance in understanding the Scriptures, which I believe to contain all Verities necessary for Salvation. And I here declare, and profess that I believe all that the Universal Church taught and believed as Matters of Faith for the first Five Hundred Years; and particularly I believe all that is in the Confession of Faith made by Pope Gregory the First, in which I can find none of the Twelve new Articles that are in the Creed of Pope Pius IV. But I find that the present Church of Rome doth not agree with the Universal Church of God for the first Five or Six Hundred Years. She hath not Antiquity, Universality, and Succession of her side, nor can I believe her to be the Catholick Church. (p. 126)

Hopton’s response addresses the highlights of Turberville’s *Manual* point by point, negating its adherence to scripture, then the councils and the fathers of the first five or six hundred years, and all with a clear and reasonable tone. Her letter suggests that in returning to the church of England she has become even more catholic than when she was affiliated with the church of Rome because, now, she has truly aligned herself with the apostolic church, instead of its pretender.

And yet, she must still also account for the many years that she belonged to the Roman faith. Hopton reconciles those convictions to her present spiritual state through an examination of the parable of the weeds. In several of his parables, Jesus figures the gospel as a seed that must be sown in the hearts of believers. True believers are encouraged to demonstrate the flourishing of the seed of the gospel in their hearts through demonstrations of thankfulness that produce the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. Jesus contrasts the fruitfulness of those who receive the gospel with the infertility of the unfaithful. In the parable of the weeds, Jesus describes a man who sows his fields with good seed. Then, while he sleeps, his enemy



sows weeds among the fields. When the servants discover the treachery, they ask their master if they should tear out the weeds but the master declines saying, “Nay, lest while ye go about to gather the tares, ye pluck up also with them the wheat” (Matt. 13:29 (KJV)). Instead, he instructs them to allow both to grow until harvest when the instruction will finally be given to the reapers “Gather ye first the tares, and bind them in sheaves to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn” (Matt. 13:30). During the Reformation, this parable becomes crucial to discussions about the character of the true church: each church insisted that the others were the weeds and worthy to be burned; yet, the parable also confirmed that until the final day of reckoning, the weeds and wheat were intermingled and might be indistinguishable from each other, providing the theoretical justification for considered borrowing between traditions. Hopton applies this justification to her heart: as a passive actor, it is not culpable for the sewing of the weeds, and she is commended for waiting a period of time in order to be able to test between the fruit of the weeds and the wheat. By describing her conversion in terms of a field sewn with weeds and wheat, one that is growing and being harvested, and replanted, Hopton reimagines the process of conversion not as a dramatic change, but as a kind of adaptation and renewal.

We can see this methodology at work in her approach to carefully adapting the Catholic *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices*. The Wren Library at Trinity College, Cambridge UK holds a copy of Austin’s *Devotions* (classmark C.20.33) signed “Susanna Hopton her book.” The text is extensively annotated with underlining and marginal comments, as well as square brackets and marginal crosses marking doctrinally-suspect material. Julia Smith suggests that the annotations were made initially for Hopton’s private use as they do not always correspond with her published revisions and the text is not fully marked up as a copy-text; however, the latter half does contain instructions for an amanuensis on material to be included or left out, indicating that it served to some extent in the preparation of her text for publication.<sup>6</sup> Hopton is very light-handed in the editing of the text, but although she returns Austin’s voice to the edition, she does not return the text to its catholic roots. Hopton’s letter highlights the teaching of transubstantiation as a particularly egregious error in Catholic doctrine and her reform of *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices* reiterates that concern. In a hymn contemplating communion’s significance during Thursday Matins, Hopton brackets two verses in Austin’s version which reflect on its “mysterious Dictates” (Austin 1672, p. 145). She replaces the verses that meditate on transubstantiation with ones that celebrate how “That what appears in form but Bread, / By Consecration’s Holy made” (Hopton 1700, p. 193), but leaves the rest of the verses as she found them. These adaptations fit her letter’s attempt to realign a formerly Roman text with Protestant beliefs through a slight modification of the direction of its “Way.” In her letter, she defends her constancy:

No, I humbly thank my God, my love to that hath always been constant, though I have varied in the Opinion of Things that I thought best secured my eternal Happiness. Heaven was always the mark I ever aimed at; and though through mistake of the wrong for the right Way, I have for some time gone astray, yet my Heart was ever fixed there, and in the love and search of Truth. (Hopton 1710, p. 119)

For Hopton, the mistake of Catholicism comes in the varying of “Opinion of Things” that misdirects one’s good love of truth. Reconciliation occurs through the appropriate redirection of the heart’s way.

That Hopton cannot believe her Catholic devotion to be at fault becomes apparent in her support for the ancient and apostolic virtues of communal devotion. Hopton maintained an extensive network of theological correspondence in which she advocates for the support of intimate devotional communities. The entry for Susanna Hopton in *Orlando: Women’s Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present* describes an undated letter “sent by Mrs Hopton in her own name to her Bro[the]r Mr Geers a Serjeant at Law,” which survives in a collection of Nonjuring letters as Bodleian MS Eng. hist. b.

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<sup>6</sup> See (Smith 2010).

2, ff. 176–80 (Brown et al. 2006). In the letter, Hopton takes Thomas Geers to task for failing to stay loyal to the deprived nonjuring community in England. She had sent Geers a copy of John Kettlewell's *Of Christian Communion, to be kept on in the unity of Christs Church, and among the professors of truth and holiness fitted for persecuted or divided or corrupt states of churches when they are either born down by secular persecutions or broken with schisms or defiled with sinful offices and ministrations* (Kettlewell 1693) which discusses the responsibilities of the adherents of the true church to preserve the true church by continuing to worship together rather than participating in schismatic worship. Kettlewell defends his use of apostolic precedent to support his arguments, suggesting, "For we all know, that our Holy Religion doth not begin with us, and that we are not the First Christians, but only their Successors, and that too at a great Distance. We all profess to be their Followers, and should think we have best provided for our own Safety, when we have taken the Way to be found in their Company" (Kettlewell 1693, p. A3v). Geers disagreed with Kettlewell and Hopton, but Hopton's continued advocacy on behalf of the nonjuring community and the spiritual significance of their worship communities, in addition to her reformation of a work of communal devotion, highlights her investment in domestic worship practices as a means to sustain a remnant of the apostolic church in a time of schism.<sup>7</sup> In this way, she relies on pre-Reformation devotional practices to authorize a nonjuring definition of church unity based on their presumed reconstruction of early church practices. Despite the marginality of Hopton's personal beliefs, her text was well received as demonstrated by its widespread use. It became a standard component of the seventy-two-volume library dispatched to parishes by the Trustees for Erecting Parochial Libraries between 1710 and 1713 (Smith 2010). Several of its hymns were excerpted in collections like John Wesley's *Collection of Psalms* (Blom 1982). Hopton was also valorized in several collections of notable women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Smith 2010). That her text was so popular reinforces the authoritativeness of Austin's adaptation of the breviary and its interpretation of ancient faith communities and the pertinence of Hickes's and Hopton's introduction of it to Protestant believers plagued by schism. Even Dorrington eventually published *Family Devotions for Sunday Evenings*, in which he provides a series of sermons to be read, not as a replacement for Sunday worship, but as an educational supplement for those invested in the "Recovery of Religion among us" (Dorrington 1693, p. A3v).

In the twentieth century, the attribution of Hopton's texts has come into question (Wade 1932; Ross 2005; Smith 2009), but questions about her authorship do not negate the texts' illumination of the significance of medieval worship practices in seventeenth-century religious debates. These attempts to reclaim early church faith practices through the recuperation of medieval devotional methods in the seventeenth century illuminate another facet through which to understand how faith, politics, and history interact in seventeenth-century confessional debates. After examining the character of "ancient" faith in Austin's text and its adaptations, I began to notice references to the primitive church in many texts at the center of debates about the character of the English church. When John Cosin was commissioned to produce an English Protestant Book of Hours to help sustain the Protestant faith of the ladies of the Carolinian court, he compiled *A Collection of Private Devotions* (Cosin 1627) based on "the practice of the ancient chvrch, called The Hovres of Prayer. As they were after this maner published by Authoritie of Q. Eliz[abeth] . . . Taken Out of the Holy Scriptures, the Ancient Fathers, and the diuine Seruice of our own Church." Likewise, in an address to Charles I, Archbishop Laud defended high church ceremonialism by arguing that the Church of England derives its authority from her perseverance in "Church Government, as it hath beene in use in all Ages, and all Places, where the Church of Christ hath taken any Rooting, both in, and ever since the Apostles Times" (Laud 1639, p. \*1r). In Laud's opinion, high-church forms of governance demonstrate the church's allegiance to the "Ancient Catholike Faith" (p. \*1r). Appeals to apostolic tradition also appear in debates between

<sup>7</sup> Hickes also published several letters arguing with Geers, who he became acquainted with while Hickes hid from authorities in Hopton's home. See (Hickes 1716).

supporters of liturgy and prayer *ex tempore*. Following the publication of the liturgically lukewarm *Directory for Public Worship* in 1645<sup>8</sup>, Jeremy Taylor, a supporter of the episcopacy, published *A Discourse concerning Prayer Ex Tempore* in which he defends liturgy by describing it as an apostolic gift passed down through the ages in order to perfect devotion through daily worship (Taylor 1646). Several years later, in a defense of English liturgy in *A Collection of Offices or Forms of Prayer in Cases Ordinary and Extraordinary*, Taylor celebrates early English reformers who, in the course of their reforming during the reign of King Edward, “did rather retain something that needed further consideration, then reject any thing that was certainly pious and holy” (Taylor 1657, p. A6v). He continues, “onely in which the Church of Rome had pervaricated against the word of God, or innovated against Apostolic tradition, all that was par’d away” (p. A7v). Taylor’s appreciation for early reformers’ light-handed approach to removing popish invention from the liturgy suggests a perceived continuity between the apostolic tradition and the practices of the Church of Rome. His invocations of the apostolic tradition indicate an attempt to reclaim those practices from the Roman Catholic tradition by appealing to the perceived timelessness of their methods. Thus, adaptations of Austin’s recusant re-introduction of pre-Reformation devotional practices texts follow a tradition of attempting to parse the Christian inheritance in Roman traditions, a tradition which I have only begun to touch on in this article. More research is required. As is obvious from the tangled interactions between church and state governance in the seventeenth century, calls for church unity were not unpolitical, but it is interesting to note that, at least in the adaptations of *Devotions in the Ancient Way of Offices*, spiritual intimacy was seen as a primary means through which to affect the ancient unity which its adapters nostalgically craved.

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<sup>8</sup> (Parliamentary Subcommittee 1645).

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