

## **Richard Baxter's Reformed Liturgy: A Puritan Alternative to the Book of Common Prayer**

**Review Number:** 1833

**Publish date:** Thursday, 24 September, 2015

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**ISBN:** 978-1-4094-3694-2

**Date of Publication:** 2014

**Price:** £58.50

**Pages:** 294pp.

**Publisher:** Ashgate

**Publisher url:** [http://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=637&title\\_id=11324&edition\\_id=11674&calcTitle=1](http://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=637&title_id=11324&edition_id=11674&calcTitle=1)

**Place of Publication:** Farnham

**Reviewer:** Benjamin M. Guyer

In *Richard Baxter's Reformed Liturgy*, Glen J. Segger offers us the first monograph-length study of a fascinating 'what if': the failed set of proposed liturgical changes composed by Richard Baxter in the early 1660s. Despite the subtitle of the book, which claims that Baxter's work was 'A Puritan Alternative', Segger amply demonstrates that in his day, Baxter cut a striking if confessionally unusual figure. His theology, like his liturgy, sought to split the differences between hard-line Anglicans and their equally hard-line opponents. This won him few friends, and in a rare instance of liturgical agreement, the *Reformed Liturgy* (also known as the *Savoy Liturgy*) was of equally little interest to both Anglicans and Nonconformists. But thankfully, and unlike many books on religion in the 1660s, neither triumphalism nor lamentation suffuse these pages. Segger's is a measured and dispassionate academic study. Six chapters, bookended by an introduction and a conclusion, are followed by a complete transcription of the *Reformed Liturgy*, making this volume not only an important study on Restoration-era religion, but a key contribution to Christian liturgical studies as well.

The first chapter provides a helpful overview of Baxter's life, times, and theology. The last of these is especially important, given that Baxter was among those few Presbyterians who sought a national church large enough to comprehend their own particular theology (if not always the theology of others). During the late 1650s, Baxter wrote several works concerned with Christian unity, and these provide the theological background for his later liturgical endeavors. Beginning with chapter two, each subsequent chapter offers a detailed, comparative explication of Baxter's liturgical work on five major themes: Sunday worship, the Lord's Supper, Baptism, general pastoral rites, and pastoral discipline. Throughout, the *Reformed Liturgy* is consistently placed in conversation with two other liturgies: the Westminster Directory, which was the 1645 Presbyterian substitute for the Book of Common Prayer, and the Anglican liturgical tradition, which here encompasses both the English and Scottish Books of Common Prayer published between 1549 and 1662. Importantly, the Irish Prayer Books are not discussed, and the 1615 Scottish Presbyterian Book of Common Order receives merely a passing comment (p. 21); apparently Baxter had little interest in it, whereas he was highly influenced by the Eucharistic liturgies of the 1637 Scottish Book of Common Prayer. This may sound odd if we think of Baxter as 'a Puritan', but it is rather less surprising if we think of Baxter as Baxter. The liturgical nuances of Baxter's work, so patiently elucidated by Segger, prove as fine and particular as any number of scholastic debates upon any number of scholastic distinctions.

Segger opens his study of Baxter's liturgy with Sunday morning worship, which enables Segger to discuss Baxter's basic attitude toward liturgy and its reform. In general, Baxter looked upon set forms of prayer as an aid for weaker ministers but as a hindrance to those who were 'gifted with the ability to extemporize' (p. 52). In the *Reformed Liturgy*, however, he took a different course by relying primarily upon a liturgical script that he hoped would aid 'the peace of the Church' (p. 53). As Baxter envisioned it, Sunday worship would begin with an opening prayer. This offers a good example for understanding Baxter's pursuit of compromise. The content of his invocation came from the Westminster Directory, but it incorporated the Book of Common Prayer's explicit Trinitarianism (p. 54). Thus, in his own unique way, Baxter crafted a liturgical *tertium quid*. It is far from clear that he had any particular method for combining or conflating the Presbyterian and Anglican liturgies, but it is very clear that he drew upon both.

Baxter's invocation points to a larger issue that presents itself time and again throughout these pages. Throughout the *Reformed Liturgy*, he aimed at providing participants with particular doctrinal content, among which were other explicitly Trinitarian prayers (e.g., pp. 78, 89, 180). Segger does not raise the question, but given the recent work of Sarah Mortimer and Paul C. H. Lim, it is worth considering that the rise of Socinian (Unitarian) theology in the 1650s led Baxter to explicitly eliminate the possibility that non-Trinitarian theology might find a place in the English church. Segger surveys and elucidates the thought of many of Baxter's various opponents, but the Socinians are conspicuously absent here. However, such a consideration raises two possibilities. The first is that Baxter was actually fighting a liturgical battle on at least three fronts: against some Anglicans, against some Dissenters, and against all Socinians. The second possibility pertains to the political implications of this theological debate. Simply stated, *no one* in the Restoration wanted a *fully* comprehensive national church. Rather, every argument for the comprehension of one particular group – e.g., so-called 'Laudians' or moderate Presbyterians of Baxter's stripe – was, at the very same time, an argument for the exclusion of other groups who thought differently. Given widely-held views at the time about the interrelationship of theological heresy and political rebellion, we should be open to the possibility that Baxter's creedal orthodoxy was also a blunt political message about the limits of the national church and, consequently, the nation itself. Consideration of this possibility would have been welcome.

Chapter two begins the discussion of Baxter's sacramental theology by looking at the most central of Christian rituals, the Eucharist or Lord's Supper. Chapter three turns to baptism and the fourth chapter looks at diverse pastoral rites. Several things stand out across these chapters. The first is Baxter's eclectically 'high' sacramental theology (p. 83). Quite against the popular assumption that Protestants were necessarily minimalist in their numbering of the sacraments at two (Baptism and Eucharist, also known as the dominical sacraments), Segger reveals that Baxter maintained the unusual position that there were five sacraments (p.

145). In addition to the dominical sacraments, Baxter held that confirmation, ordination, and confession were sacraments as well. It would seem therefore that the widespread historiographical distinction between sacramentally 'high' Laudians and 'low' Puritans should be questioned. If it is true that 'Laudians' led a revolt against a Calvinist consensus (which the present reviewer is not convinced of), and if this presumed consensus was partially defined by sacramental minimalism, one must wonder: where did Baxter's novel approach to the sacraments come from? Segger traces the influence of the 1637 Scottish Book of Common Prayer upon Baxter's doctrine of the Eucharist but otherwise does not pursue the question of origin. This is not a criticism; rather, this simply points to the fact that theological divisions were more complex than the historiography has often allowed.

The influence of Anglican liturgy upon Baxter can be seen in other ways throughout these same chapters. Most importantly, in his Eucharistic rite, Baxter included an *epiclesis* – a prayer to the Holy Spirit made during the consecration of the bread and wine (pp. 92ff.). In and of itself, this might seem like comparatively little, but looking at the larger history of debate surrounding the Anglican liturgies quickly illuminates its import. Archbishop Thomas Cranmer included an epiclesis in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, but it was removed in the revision of 1552; the former liturgy is often taken to have been more traditional and 'Catholic', whereas the latter is often taken to have been more radical and 'Calvinist'. Whatever the value of such labels and distinctions, the Elizabethan church did not return to the use of an epiclesis in its 1559 Prayer Book. Only in 1637, with the creation of a Scottish Book of Common Prayer, was an epiclesis again included in Anglican liturgies. However, the introduction of the Scottish Prayer Book set off a wave of protests throughout Scotland by the Scottish Covenanters, and these fed rapidly and decisively into the religious elements that animated the British civil wars. The new Scottish liturgies were widely but erroneously assumed to be the work of Archbishop William Laud, and still today many historians associate 'Laudianism' with a set of disruptive and destructive religious changes imposed by church and crown in the 1630s. The fact that Baxter incorporated material from the Scottish Prayer Book is thus highly interesting, given not just the ritual content of such prayers but their political connotations. Segger convincingly shows that Baxter's understanding of the Eucharist was identical to that of the 'Laudian' Anglican Herbert Thorndike (pp. 112–15). Yet again, Baxter emerges as an original 'Puritan' thinker.

The next chapter studies baptism. In it, Segger guides the reader through the turbulent waters of mid-17th-century theological controversy. Very little has been written on these debates, but (as Segger explains), when compared with the Eucharist, 'baptism ... was in many respects a source of even greater controversy' (p. 117). As elsewhere in the volume, Baxter appears to have maintained a distinctive middle ground between rival groups. Because Puritans maintained diverse covenantal theologies, baptism had little agreed-upon significance and meaning. Some, such as Thomas Blake, believed in baptizing infants even if their parents were not known to be devout. Baxter also accepted infant baptism but he demanded signs of the parents' faith. Others, such as John Tombes, wholly opposed infant baptism – a position that Baxter had once wrestled with, but came to reject (p. 121). A third position was maintained by those whom Segger denotes 'the Sacramentalists' (pp. 125ff.). Like the Book of Common Prayer, they maintained that baptism led to both the remission of sin and spiritual regeneration. Baxter differed from them too, by again emphasizing the need for a parental profession of faith. In the liturgical analysis that follows the delineation of this controversy, Segger points out that Baxter's liturgy was closer to the Westminster Directory than the Book of Common Prayer. The *Reformed Liturgy* removed most of the Anglican baptismal prayers, emphasized covenantal theology, and rejected the sign of the cross. Baxter's Eucharistic theology may have been quite at home in 'Laudian' circles, but his baptismal theology was evidently not.

Although chapter five also looks at sacramental matters, it can be well analyzed together with the chapter that follows it. Both are expositions of the various ways that Baxter envisioned the work of a reformed ministry. This was an issue near and dear to his heart, given his other writings on pastoral care, particularly his influential volume *The Reformed Pastor*. It is one of the curiosities of 'Puritanism' that, despite its sometimes-explosive political power, its pastoral appeal was limited to a minority of the English people. The same is true even of Baxter's more moderate ministry. In his first chapter, Segger writes that Baxter created the Worcestershire Association 'in order to bring unity, order and discipline' to the churches in the area (p.

32). Among other things, the Worcestershire Association gave church members the opportunity to voluntarily submit themselves to pastoral discipline. Such submission was required in order to become a full communicant in the church, but in Baxter's parish of 1,600, only 600 members chose to do so (p. 33). It is good to keep this in mind while reading through the fifth and sixth chapters.

In some ways, Baxter's pastoral services were closer to the Book of Common Prayer than to the Directory; for example, he allowed the use of wedding rings (p. 155), and he joined ministerial absolution to the confession of sin (p. 206). Nonetheless, the bulk of ceremonial elements – those things considered offensive by Puritans – were removed from the *Reformed Liturgy*. Baxter rejected the idea of marriage as a sacrament and consequently removed most of the traditional and even Biblical language from his marriage service (p. 158). In terms of holy days, he allowed only for the celebration of Easter – and thus, like other Puritans, rejected the celebration of Christmas (pp. 162–3). And because he was ambivalent about the value of set prayers, he granted ministers a significant amount of autonomy in not only liturgical practice, but in the imposition of pastoral discipline. Unlike the medieval church court structure that Anglicans retained, Baxter granted individual congregations a significant role in the discipline of individuals. However, the minister alone had the right to begin the process because he alone could initiate private admonition (p. 196). In this, Baxter was partially influenced by the *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum* (pp. 175ff.), Archbishop Cranmer's failed attempt at canon law reform in 1553, but more than anything, Baxter's approach to pastoral discipline was, as with so much else, his own creation.

One methodological matter deserves comment. Liturgists may find interesting the seeming parallels between Baxter and 20th-century liturgical concerns (pp. 98, 157), but for historians such concerns are at best presentist. Throughout the volume, Segger appeals to the recent liturgical concept *lex orandi-lex credendi* (for example, pp. 3, 79, 91, 117), but in doing so his analysis becomes anachronistic. As Segger notes, modern liturgical scholars treat this phrase as an 'axiom', although he also notes that liturgists disagree over which half of their catchphrase should primary: *lex orandi* (the rule of prayer), *lex credendi* (the rule of belief), or neither, such that each shapes the other (pp. 3–4). Given such incommensurable differences, the value of this formula for present liturgical scholarship is less than clear – and, therefore, it is wholly unclear that *lex orandi-lex credendi* aids our understanding of early modern liturgies. It would be one thing if Cranmer or Baxter appealed to *lex orandi-lex credendi*, but they did not, not least because they lacked the very concept. Theological scholarship would be well served to recognize that its *prescriptive* categories are not only historically contingent (and oftentimes of far more recent vintage than realized), but incapable of facilitating *descriptive* historical inquiry. Nothing is gained by imposing modern assumptions or values upon texts and authors who lived long ago. I am unconvinced that *lex orandi-lex credendi* helps us understand Baxter's *Reformed Liturgy*.

Notwithstanding this lone methodological caveat, *Richard Baxter's Reformed Liturgy* is an important contribution to both the study of early modern liturgy and the history of English religious controversy. It is a worthy and valuable addition to any library concerned with the same.

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