

## ABSTRACT

### **From Martin Bucer to Richard Baxter: ‘Discipline’ and Reformation in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England**

by J. William Black

Richard Baxter (1615-1691) nearly succeeded in redefining English pastoral practice until the Restoration brought his experiment in pastor-led, parish-based reformation to a frustrating end. At the core of his efforts to bring reformation to Kidderminster lay his efforts to establish a parish-based system of church discipline that would preserve the integrity of the sacraments and thus rob separatists of one of their primary excuses for abandoning the parochial system. Devising and implementing a system of discipline for his parish proved Richard Baxter’s most daunting task as a pastor. This article seeks to place Baxter’s efforts to develop a strategy for an effective church discipline in its historical context. The precedents to the system which Richard Baxter developed for St. Mary’s parish will be considered first. Special attention will be given to Martin Bucer’s Reformation-era prescription for reforming the discipline of the church, and the intriguing possibility that Baxter’s strategy was actually a recovery of Bucerian pastoral emphases. Secondly, the evolution of Baxter’s own program for discipline will be traced, making use of his publications and letters. The final section will discuss the impact Baxter’s discipline had on his wider goal of reformation, both in his parish and beyond.

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