

Seth D. Osborne

The Reformed and Celibate Pastor

Richard Baxter's Argument for Clerical Celibacy



Reformed Historical Theology

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List of Abbreviations

BLM	Richard Baxter, <i>A breviate of the life of Margaret, the daughter of Francis Charlton and wife of Richard Baxter</i> (1681).
CCRB	N.H. Keeble and Geoffrey F. Nuttall, eds., <i>Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter</i> , 2 vols. (1991).
CD	Richard Baxter, <i>A Christian directory, or, A summ of practical theologie, and cases of conscience</i> , 2nd ed. (1678).
CR	Richard Baxter, <i>Confirmation and restauration the necessary means of reformation, and reconciliation</i> (1658).
CSCC	Richard Baxter, <i>The character of a sound confirmed Christian as also 2. of a weak Christian, and 3. of a seeming Christian</i> (1669).
D.W.L.	Dr. Williams's Library.
FD	Richard Baxter, <i>Five disputations of church-government and worship</i> (1659).
HA	Richard Baxter, <i>Humble advice: or The heads of those things which were offered to many Honourable Members of Parliament</i> (1655).
HDGM	Richard Baxter, <i>How to do good to many, or, The publick good is the Christians life</i> (1682).
KFC	<i>A key for Catholicks, to open the jugling of the Jesuits</i> (1659).
PNT	Richard Baxter, <i>A paraphrase on the New Testament with notes, doctrinal and practical</i> (1685).
PF	Richard Baxter, <i>Poetical fragments heart-employment with God and it self</i> , 2nd ed. (1689).
RB	Richard Baxter, <i>Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of His Life and Times</i> (1696 and 2020)
RP	Richard Baxter, <i>Gildas Salvianus, the reformed pastor shewing the nature of the pastoral work, especially in private instruction and catechizing</i> , 2nd ed. (1657).
TOSD	<i>A treatise of self-denial</i> , 2nd ed. (1675).

A Note on Quotations and References

In all the primary resources used in the study, I have retained the original spelling, punctuation, capitalization and use of italics throughout the work. The only exception is the changing of the “long s” to an “s,” “v” to an “u,” and “u” to a “v.” However, when these spelling changes were retained in a critical edition of the work, I have followed the critical edition. Also, I have not altered any spelling, capitalization, or punctuation in the titles of works, apart from occasionally shortening the titles.

When quoting from Baxter’s manuscripts and letters, I have spelled out abbreviated words. For the dates of the letters, as well as the recipient and senders, I have drawn upon N. H. Keeble and Geoffrey F. Nuttall’s *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter*. Footnote citations of the letters from the Baxter manuscript collection at Dr. Williams Library are followed by the abbreviation CCRB with the volume and corresponding number of the letter in Keeble and Nuttall’s *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter*. For citations from Baxter’s autobiography, the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, I have cited the critical edition first, followed by the 1696 folio edition.

For the primary sources, I have chosen to use the last edition of the work published before the author’s death, unless there was no edition published before the author’s death.

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Seth D. Osborne
Louisville, Kentucky
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1. Richard Baxter: “The Late Seventeenth Century Scourge Of Matrimony”

1.1 Baxter, Controversy, and Clerical Marriage

Richard Baxter is arguably one of the most prominent Puritan pastors and theologians of seventeenth century England (1615-91).¹ His fourteen year pastoral ministry at Kidderminster (1647-61) was remarkable due to his claims of widespread spiritual revival which came to a people that had seen little effect from the Reformation.² His tenure there also witnessed his method of personally catechizing every parishioner, which J.I Packer judged to be his “main contribution to the development of Puritan ideals for the ministry.”³ Furthermore, the influence and sheer size of his literary corpus is “incalculable”; from the early 1650s, his books “enjoyed greater sales than those of any other English writer.”⁴ Reflecting on his assiduous labors, Packer extolled Baxter as “the most outstanding pastor, evangelist, and writer

1 Unless otherwise noted, all dates given in this study refer to the Common Era (CE).

2 At the conclusion of his parish ministry, Baxter reflected on how when he first arrived, “There was about one family in a street that worshipped God & called on his name, & when I came away [left Kidderminster] there were some streets where there was not past one family in the | side of a street that did not do so” (Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxter’s Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of His Life and Times*, vol. 1, eds. N.H. Keeble, John Coffey, Tim Cooper, and Tom Charlton [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020], 405 §136; Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxter’s Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of His Life and Times*, ed. Mathew Sylvester [London: T. Parkhurst, J. Robinson, J. Lawrence, J. Dunton, 1696], bk. 1, pt. 1, 84 §136).

Baxter was chosen as lecturer at Kidderminster in April 1641, but this first stint at Kidderminster was interrupted by his chaplaincy from July 1645 to February 1647. When he received an invitation to return as the vicar of Kidderminster in May 1647, he declined it in favor of accepting a lectureship. However, he was made the vicar without his knowledge in October 1647 by his parishioners who appealed to the Worcestershire County Committee.

3 J. I. Packer, introduction to *The Reformed Pastor*, by Richard Baxter, ed. William Brown (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2007), 13.

4 N. H. Keeble made this assertion based upon Baxter’s preserved letters, in which he was consulted by men of wide ranging stature and conviction on matters spanning from private vexations to national church problems (N. H. Keeble, introduction to *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter*, abridged by J. M. Lloyd-Thomas, ed. N. H. Keeble [London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1931; repr., Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974], xiv). For a complete listing of the works of Richard Baxter, including those published posthumously, see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Richard Baxter* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965), 131–36.

on practical and devotional themes that Puritanism produced."⁵ And Hugh Martin singled out Baxter in particular as "a representative of Puritanism at its central, moderate best."⁶ Martin's view has been echoed by many other scholars who viewed Baxter and his practical writings as ideal representations of English Puritanism.⁷ Indeed, Baxter has been called a great many things by both his contemporaries and later historians, not all of them charitable. However, he is far less frequently known by the title Alan Macfarlane bestowed upon him: "the late seventeenth century scourge of matrimony."⁸

Based on his reputation, it is not surprising Baxter would hold provocative views on marriage, since he was a catalyst not only for pious imitation but withering criticism. His life stretched nearly the entire breadth of the seventeenth century (1615-1691) and his writings touched upon on nearly all of the key theological, political, and ecclesiastical issues that engulfed England. Many of his theological works produced a storm of controversy almost immediately from the time of their printing.⁹ His eclectic soteriology – commonly portrayed as an attempt to find a middle path between Calvinism and Arminianism – has drawn the most substantial criticism out of all his doctrines.¹⁰ Rather than shying away from disagreements,

5 Packer, introduction to *The Reformed Pastor*, 9. However, J. William Black asserted that Packer and other historians have erred somewhat in seeing Baxter as the paragon of Puritan pastoral ministry (J. William Black, *Reformation Pastors: Richard Baxter and the Ideal of the Reformed Pastor*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought [Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2004], 5–13). Black's views will be discussed more fully in chap. 3.

6 Hugh Martin, *Puritanism and Richard Baxter* (London: SCM Press, 1954), 8.

7 W. Lawrence Highfill, "Faith and Works in the Ethical Theory of Richard Baxter" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1955), ii; James McJunkin Phillips, "Between Conscience and the Law: The Ethics of Richard Baxter (1615–1691)" (PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1959), v; Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 41; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, 2nd ed. [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976], 156).

8 Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction, 1300–1840* (New York: B. Blackwell, 1986), 173.

9 Writing even at the turn of twentieth century, John Stoughton stated that "his opinions have been a battle ground for critics ever since he left the world" (John Stoughton, *From the Opening of the Long Parliament to 1850, History of Religion in England*, vol. 4, 4th ed. [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901], 381). The last hundred years of scholarship over Baxter has substantiated this claim even further.

10 William Orme, for instance, gave the following comment which typified the attitudes of many towards Baxter's soteriology throughout the centuries: "He was inimical to all the existing systems of doctrine and discipline then contended for, or ever before known in the world; while he did not present any precisely defined system as his own. He opposed Calvinism; he opposed Arminianism" (Richard Baxter, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, ed. William Orme, vol. 1 [London: J. Duncan, 1830], 481–82). To sum up his opinion, Orme declared, "Baxter was probably such an Arminian as Richard Watson; and as much a Calvinist as the late Dr. Edward Williams" (*ibid.*, 484).

Baxter was, in the words of Tim Cooper, drawn to controversy like “a magnet.”¹¹ Thus, in an age where Protestants, and especially Puritans, sought to defend the nobility of wedlock, Baxter was not reluctant to distinguish himself by arguing that pastors usually were far better off serving God in the single state.

One might assume Baxter’s support of clerical celibacy signaled his sympathies to Roman Catholicism, but his position evades such a simplistic interpretation. To be sure, Baxter’s controversial soteriology had caused many to accuse him of being a crypto Roman Catholic, and this stigma clung to him for the rest of his life.¹² Nevertheless, like other Protestants and Puritans, Baxter adamantly affirmed the goodness of marriage and frequently wrote quite movingly of the intimate love shared by husband, wife, and children. Indeed, hundreds of pages in his massive *Christian directory* were devoted to extolling the benefits of godly families for the church and society.¹³ Furthermore, Baxter grasped the peril of sexual immorality and shrank back from the thought of pastors bringing their souls and ministries into disrepute: “I confess I would not have men lie too long under endangering strong temptations to incontinency; lest they wound themselves and their profession by their falls.”¹⁴ For this reason, he never favored a universal declaration forbidding marriage for pastors unable to live chastely in the single state. It was not that marriage was “*simply unlawful*” for clergy, nor that they should “*be tied from it by*

11 Tim Cooper, *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England: Richard Baxter and Antinomianism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), 46.

12 See the discussion of this perception in J. I. Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 260–61; Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter’s Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1993; repr., Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 322–28; Timothy K. Beougher, *Richard Baxter and Conversion: A Study of the Puritan Concept of Becoming a Christian* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 59–76; Cooper, *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England*, 66–67; Paul Chang-Ha Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity, Unity, and Liberty: Richard Baxter’s Puritan Ecclesiology in Its Seventeenth-Century Context*, *Studies in the History of Christian Traditions* 62 (Boston: Brill, 2004), 166–67; C.F. Allison, C.F. *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (New York, Seabury Press, 1966), 163. Most of these modern scholars dismiss allegations of Baxter’s dependence on Roman Catholicism, except for Allison.

13 Richard Baxter, *A Christian directory, or, A summ of practical theologie, and cases of conscience directing Christians, how to use their knowledge and faith, how to improve all helps and means, and to perform all duties, how to overcome temptations, and to escape or mortifie every sin*. 2nd ed. (London: Printed by Robert White for Nevil Simmons, 1678), pt. 2, 1–161.

14 Richard Baxter, *Gildas Salvianus, the reformed pastor shewing the nature of the pastoral work, especially in private instruction and catechizing: with an open confession of our too open sins, prepared for a day of humiliation kept at Worcester, Decemb. 4, 1655 by the ministers of that county, who subscribed the agreement for catechizing and personal instruction, at their entrance upon that work*. 2nd ed. (London: Printed by Robert White for Nevil Simmons, 1657), 239.

a law, as they are in the Kingdom of Rome, for *carnal ends* and *odious effects*." ¹⁵ Rather, as Baxter reasoned, the burdens of wedlock were usually so deleterious to pastoral work that an unambiguous call from God was required to justify marrying: "But so great a hindrance ordinarily is this troublesome state of life to the Sacred Ministration which [clergymen] undertake, that a very clear call should be expected for their satisfaction."¹⁶

Despite such measured statements, however, it is not without justification that Macfarlane dubbed Baxter "the late seventeenth century scourge of matrimony." Baxter was quite capable of lengthy, disparaging remarks concerning the onerous burdens of marriage and family life. He quipped, "wives and children" often "maketh men ill members of the church and commonwealth."¹⁷ One reason for this connection, among many others, was his conviction that marriage hindered Christians, and especially pastors, from charitable giving, since "*Wife and Children* are the devouring gulf that swalloweth all."¹⁸ Furthermore, the responsibilities of caring for wife and children were particularly distracting for clergyman. Pastoral ministry, Baxter insisted, demanded "a *Mind*" wholly "devoted to God," and the interferences of married life offered few accommodations for this: "The talking of women, and the crying of children, and the cares and business of the world, are ill preparations or attendants on [a pastor's] studies."¹⁹ Perhaps most surprisingly, Baxter's disparagement of women seemed a far cry from the Puritans and Protestant Reformers who praised the wife's divinely ordained role as helpmate. Baxter's opinion about women's spiritual, emotional, and intellectual abilities did little to encourage men to marry:

And it is no small patience which the *natural imbecility* of the *Female sex* requireth you to prepare. Except it be very few that are patient and man-like, Women are commonly of *potent Fantasies*, and tender, *passionate*, impatient spirits, easily cast into anger, or jealousy, or discontent; and of weak understandings, and therefore unable to reform themselves. They are betwixt a *man* and a *child*.²⁰

15 Baxter, CD, pt. 2, 9 §41. Baxter's reference to the "*odious effects*" of forced clerical celibacy was aimed at the history of fornication, whoredom, and adultery among many of the Roman Catholic clergy (Richard Baxter, *A key for Catholicks, to open the juggling of the Jesuits, and satisfie all that are but truly willing to understand, whether the cause of the Roman or reformed churches be of God; and to leave the reader utterly unexcusable that after this will be a papist* [London: Printed by R[obert] W[hite] for Nevil Simmons, 1659], 227–28).

16 Baxter, CD, pt. 2, 9 §41.

17 Ibid., pt. 4, 253, answer to question 9.

18 Ibid., pt. 2, 7 §25 and 9 §41.

19 Ibid., pt. 2, 9 §41.

20 Ibid., pt. 2, 7 §27.

On the surface, Baxter's startling language more closely resembles classical and medieval motifs of women and married life rather than the more positive picture painted in Protestant polemics. It is little surprise then that Levin L. Schucking claimed Baxter had relapsed "to the basic Catholic view" and likened him to a "medieval ascetic" who expressed a "fundamental hostility towards marriage."²¹

Baxter's personal actions add further intrigue to his puzzling argument for clerical celibacy. Despite his discouragement of clerical marriage and his faithfulness to that conviction through two decades of ministry, he shocked London in 1662 when he seemingly reversed his convictions by marrying Margaret Charlton (1636-81).²² The fact he was forty-six at the time of marriage and Margaret twenty-one years his junior did nothing to lessen the scandal. The same bewilderment has been expressed by scholars such as Schucking, Macfarlane, and Geoffrey F. Nuttall, who asserted that Baxter's decision to marry appeared to contradict his argument for clerical celibacy.²³ If his decision to marry seemed enigmatic, then the moving tribute he wrote to her (*A breviat of the life of Margaret*) "under the power of melting Grief" seems no less so.²⁴ On the one hand, he recounted his wife's profound piety and the tremendous effort she put forth to advance his ministry; indeed, she proved the Proverb "there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24).²⁵ And yet only a few pages later, he asserted that he had not altered nor contradicted his conviction that pastors should ideally be celibate. On the contrary, he once

21 Levin L. Schucking, *The Puritan Family: A Social Study from the Literary Sources*, trans. Brian Battershaw, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken Books 1970), 24.

22 According to Baxter, the rumors of his marriage in late 1661 prompted considerable outcry: "About this time also it was famed at the Court that I was married, which went as the matter of a most heinous Crime, which I never heard charged by them on any Man but on me. Bishop Morley divulged it with all the Odium he could possibly put upon it: telling them that once in Conference with him I said that Minister's marriage is [lawful, and but lawful], as if I were not contradicting my self. And it every where rung about, partly as a Wonder, and partly as a Crime, whilst they cried, [*This is the Man of Charity*]: little knowing what they talkt of. ... And I think the King's marriage was scarce more talked of than mine" (Baxter, *RB*, 2:184 §275; Baxter, *RB*, bk 1, pt. 2, 384 §275).

23 Schucking, *The Puritan Family*, 24; Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 173; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, "The Personality of Richard Baxter," in *The Puritan Spirit: Essays and Addresses* (London: Epworth Press, 1967), 108. In his earlier biography of Baxter, Nuttall did note how Baxter justified marrying, in spite of his stance on clerical celibacy, by pointing to his expulsion from pastoral ministry (Nuttall, *Richard Baxter*, 95). However, it seems Nuttall found this explanation somewhat unsatisfying.

24 Richard Baxter, *A breviat of the life of Margaret, the daughter of Francis Charlton and wife of Richard Baxter: there is also published the character of her mother, truly described in her published funeral sermon, reprinted at her daughters request, called, The last work of a believer, his passing-prayer recommending his departing spirit to Christ, to be received by him* (London: Printed for B. Simmons, 1681), A2v.

25 *Ibid.*, 98.

again launched into another description of the ways marriage hindered pastors and the many difficulties of living with a wife.²⁶ Scholars such as Frederick J. Powicke, Packer, Geoffrey F. Nuttall, Timothy K. Beougher, and J. T. Wilkinson have puzzled over how such a renowned pastor, writing a tribute to his deceased wife, would both praise the many benefits of his wife and in nearly the same breadth enumerate so many hindrances in clerical marriage.²⁷

Given this brief overview, one might be tempted therefore to portray Baxter as an ascetic, misogamist, or a crypto Roman Catholic. To be sure, his place among the Puritans as the sole advocate for clerical celibacy contributes even more to his reputation as one of the most elusive English Puritan theologians. But recent studies have shown Baxter to be a highly complex and independent thinker who escapes such simple categorizations.²⁸ A detailed examination of his views will shed considerable light on the man himself, his context, the influences shaping him, and finally his theology. However, larger issues surrounding the English Reformation, the unique ecclesiastical settlement it created, and the importance of the debate over clerical marriage also invite an exploration into Baxter's argument for clerical celibacy.

The Protestant Reformers, both continental and English, did not deem the issue of clerical celibacy to be a minor doctrinal quibble in comparison to weightier soteriological controversies such as justification by faith. Rather, they understood the exaltation of celibacy, but especially when connected with its imposition on the

²⁶ Ibid., 101–4.

²⁷ Frederick J. Powicke found it "strange" that one of the lessons Baxter drew from his marriage experience was the confirmation of his view that in normal parish ministry pastors would be better served by remaining single (Frederick J. Powicke, "A Puritan Idyll, or, The Rev. Richard Baxter's Love Story," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 4 [1918]: 461); J. I. Packer considered this a "lapse" and expressed puzzlement as to why Baxter would include these comments in the tribute written to his wife (J. I. Packer, *A Grief Sanctified: Passing through Grief to Joy and Peace* [Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1997], 183–85); Timothy K. Beougher noted his surprise that Baxter's exceptional marriage did not alter his convictions but made no attempt to resolve this tension in Baxter's thought (Timothy K. Beougher, "The Puritan View of Marriage: The Husband/Wife Relationship in Puritan England as Taught and Experienced by a Representative Puritan Pastor, Richard Baxter," *Trinity Journal* 10, no. 2 [Fall 1989]: 152; Nuttall noted Baxter's resilience in affirming clerical celibacy but could offer no attempt to resolve it apart from saying that, to the end of his life: "he preserved objectivity of judgment of a kind suggesting the detachment of a naturally celibate mind" (Nuttall, *Richard Baxter*, 93); J. T. Wilkinson also sees this feature of the *Breviate* as strange, though he does see it as more consistent with Baxter's absolute dedication to God (J. T. Wilkinson, introduction to *Richard Baxter and Margaret Charlton: A Puritan Love Story*, by Richard Baxter [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1928], 55–56).

²⁸ See for example Tim Cooper's work on Baxter, which I am greatly indebted to for helping deepen this study: Cooper, *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England*; Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter, and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

clergy, as woven into many of the vital issues disputed during the Reformation.²⁹ Helen L. Parish aptly summarized the connection.

The evangelical defense of clerical marriage was part of a broader effort to redefine the nature of priesthood and the clerical estate, to undermine the sacramental theology which underpinned the sacerdotal caste and demanded celibacy of those who served at the altar, to prioritize the word of God over the laws of man, faith over works, and to reclaim the history and heritage of the primitive church from the pages of monastic chronicles.³⁰

Like other Protestants, Early English Protestants believed the debate over clerical marriage converged with the key soteriological, ecclesiastical, and theological issues

29 For helpful book-length studies of the debate over clerical marriage during the period of the English Reformation, see Helen L. Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation: Precedent, Policy and Practice* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000); Eric Josef Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation, Family Sexuality and Social Relations in Past Times* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994); Muriel Porter, "The Defense of the Marriage of Priests in the English Reformation" (Ph.D. diss University of Melbourne, 1988). For articles, see Anne Llewellyn Barstow, "The First Generations of Anglican Clergy Wives: Heroines or Whores?" *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 52, no. 1 (1983): 3–16; Eric Josef Carlson, "Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation," *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 1 (January 1992): 1–31.; Carrie E. Euler, "Heinrich Bullinger, Marriage, and the English Reformation: *The Christen state of Matrimony* in England, 1540–53," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 34, no. 2 (2003): 367–93; Helen L. Parish, "'It was Never Good World Sence Minister Must Have Wyves': Clerical Celibacy, Clerical Marriage, and Anticlericalism in Reformation England," *Journal of Religious History* 36, no. 1 (March 2012): 52–69; Parish, "'Beastly is their Living and their Doctrine': Celibacy and Theological Corruption in English Reformation Polemic," in *The Medieval Inheritance*, ed. Bruce Gordon, 138–52, *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe* 1 (London: Scholar Press, 1996); Parish, "'By this Mark you Shall Know Him': Clerical Celibacy and Antichrist in English Reformation Polemic," in *The Church Retrospect*, ed. R. N. Swanson, 253–66, *Studies in Church History* 33 (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1997); Mary Prior, "Reviled and Crucified Marriages: The Position of Tudor Bishops' Wives," in *Women in English Society 1500–1800*, ed. Mary Prior, 118–48 (New York: Methuen, 1985); Muriel Porter, "The Debate about Clerical Marriage in the English Reformation," *Colloquium* 18, no. 2 (May 1986): 31–35; Peter Sherlock, "Monuments, Reputation and Clerical Marriage in Reformation England: Bishop Barlow's Daughters," *Gender & History* 16, no. 1 (April 2004): 57–82; Richard M. Spielman, "The Beginning of Clerical Marriage in the English Reformation: The Reigns of Edward and Mary," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 56 (1987): 251–63; John K. Yost, "The Development of a Reformist Approach to Marriage and Celibacy in Early English Humanism," *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis / Dutch Review of Church History* 57 (January 1976): 1–15; Yost, "The Reformation Defense of Clerical Marriage in the Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI," *Church History* 50, no. 2 (June 1981): 152–65; John Witte, "Anglican Marriage in the Making: Becon, Bullinger and Bucer," in *The Contentious Triangle: Church, State and University Triangle*, eds. Ronald L. Peterson and Calvin Augustine Pater, *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* 51 (Kirksville, MO: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1999), 242.

30 Helen L. Parish, *Clerical Celibacy in the West: c. 1100–1700*, *Catholic Christendom 1300–1700* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000; New York: Routledge, 2016), 144.

of the Reformation.³¹ Furthermore, across the breadth of Reformation Europe, the decision of clergy and laity to marry constituted an "important act of solidarity with the new Protestant cause," since it amounted to a deliberate breach of the governing decrees of canon law.³² In contrast, Eric Josef Carlson claimed the uniqueness of England's Reformation by arguing that Protestants there did not promote wedlock and condemn the celibate ideal with the same verve as Continental Reformers did.³³ However, Parish has argued quite convincingly that Carlson downplayed or ignored the vigor with which clerical celibacy dominated the polemics of English Reformers, the efforts Roman Catholics put forth to smear clerical marriage, and the literary involvement of many key Continental Protestant treatises in the debate.³⁴ "The polemical works of English and continental reformers," Parish insisted, "had established the lifting of the prohibition in clerical marriage as a central feature of a reformed religious settlement."³⁵ While not every Protestant clergyman necessarily married, the issue of clerical celibacy lay very much at the center of the issues dividing Protestants and Roman Catholics. Thus, it is vital to correctly understand Baxter's promotion of clerical celibacy, since his convictions appeared to resurrect

31 See Yost, "The Reformation Defense of Clerical Marriage in the Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI," 152–65. Yost's brief treatment was one of the first to draw attention to the immense output of Protestant literature on clerical celibacy during the English Reformation and the corresponding importance of the issue for the Continental Reformations. In her dissertation, Porter also argued for the centrality of clerical marriage to the reform efforts of English Protestants (Porter, "The Defense of the Marriage of Priests in the English Reformation"), as did Parish in her monograph (Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation*, 180 and 216), and Barstow in her article (Barstow, "The First Generations of Anglican Clergy Wives," 3–4). Spielman extended Yost's discussion by highlighting the focus on clerical marriage in official government and church during Edward's reign, as well as reactions against clerical marriage during Mary's reign (Spielman, "The Beginning of Clerical Marriage in the English Reformation," 251).

32 Witte, "Anglican Marriage in the Making," 242 and see also Parish, *Clerical Celibacy in the West*, 182–183. The events of the English Reformation have caused many scholars to debate whether clerical marriage had a specific link to Protestant beliefs among the clergy. Christopher Haigh and Bowker have challenged this link by pointing to the many Edwardian priests who left their wives under the Marian persecution (Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 227–228); Margaret Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: The Diocese of Lincoln under John Longland 1521–1547* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 173–74). However, Helen L. Parish has argued that while not all the clergy who married were convinced Protestants, the link between Protestant convictions and clerical marriage cannot be totally discounted (Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation*, 216–217).

33 Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation*, 3, 8; Carlson, "Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation," *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 1 (January 1992): 2–11, 29–31.

34 Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation*, 9–11.

35 Ibid., 180 and see also similar comments on 216.

a number of the errors Protestants saw as part of the warp and woof of Roman Catholicism's exaltation of celibacy.

Baxter's argument for a celibate ministry can also shed light on the Church of England's ambivalent attitude toward celibacy. According to Richard Schlatter, by the time Baxter had risen to prominence in the 1650s, English Protestants had nearly extinguished the notion that celibacy possessed any superior spiritual value over wedlock. "So far as marriage was concerned," Schlatter asserted, "the attack had succeeded in England; by 1660 the theory that virginity was especially virtuous was all but dead."³⁶ Nevertheless, esteem for celibacy did not die so easily. Even if English Protestants succeeded in eliminating notions of the single state's being inherently meritorious, it was not the end of the debate. Charles H. and Katherine H. George have noted how authors began to switch the basis for preferring celibacy from "moral or spiritual" reasons to "practical" appeals, based on the expediency and convenience it offered for serving God.³⁷ Indeed, in Elizabethan and Stuart England, one sees a shift away from the question of whether clergy *could* marry, to whether they *should* marry. Consequently, while celibacy may not have remained the ideal for most English Protestants, a significant contingent nevertheless believed marriage should be pursued only as secondary option.³⁸ As Levin L. Shucking pointed out, far into the seventeenth century, the proverb that "marriage fills the earth, but virginity fills the heavens" still persisted to the point that William Secker in 1658 felt compelled to retort by exclaiming, "How the heavens be full if the earth be empty?"³⁹ More recently, scholars have pointed to revivals of interest in celibacy long after the English Reformation. Sarah Apetrei observed how the spiritual value of virginity, though still contested, made a resurgence from 1660-c.1700 among certain Anglicans and religious radicals. These groups desired a more disciplined spiritual life, modeled after the early church, and saw celibacy as a means of achieving their

36 Richard Schlatter, *Social Ideas of Religious Leaders, 1660–1688* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940; repr., New York: Octagon Books, 1971), 11. Schlatter went on to say, "It was replaced by a belief in the positive and moral and religious values of marriage and family life" (ibid.).

37 Charles H. George and Katherine H. George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570–1640* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 267.

38 See the argument in chapter 2 of this book. Eric Carlson argued that celibacy was still seen as the ideal by most English Protestant clergy well into the Elizabethan era and even into the early Stuarts (Carlson, "Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation," 2–11, 29–31). While I am less sure as Carlson that a majority of clergy saw celibacy as preferable, there certainly was a significant number who did.

39 Schucking, *The Puritan Family*, 23; William Secker, *A wedding ring fit for the finger: or, The salve of divinity on the sore of humanity Laid open in a sermon at a wedding in Edmond* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1658), 22–23. George and George pointed to Richard Hooker, George Herbert, and John Cosin who continued to esteem celibacy higher than wedlock in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (*The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation, 1570–1640*, 266–67).

goal. According to Apetrei, the mixed attitudes of English Protestants toward early Christian asceticism reflected their continued ambivalence toward the place of celibacy in Christian piety, even so many years after the English Reformation.⁴⁰ Eamon Duffy came to similar conclusions in his study of Anglicans who connected celibacy with spiritual renewal after the Restoration of the English Monarchy in 1660.⁴¹ Furthermore, B. W. Young drew upon historical evidence to explain John Henry Newman's conversion to Roman Catholicism. Young argued that while the Church of England has upheld the virtue of clerical marriage, it simultaneously has always exhibited an "ambiguity" toward celibacy, which betrayed the "inherent tensions" between its "Catholic and Protestant dimensions."⁴² The debate over celibacy in the Church of England has historically been far more complex than one might think, and a nuanced treatment of Baxter's argument for clerical celibacy could shed additional light on the matter.

1.2 Baxter and Clerical Celibacy in Scholarship

Despite the historical and theological questions provoked by Baxter's unique argument for clerical celibacy, a book length treatment on the topic has been surprisingly lacking. This lacuna is all the more remarkable considering the substantial number of published scholarly works devoted to Baxter in the last century. Though it has been over fifty years since the last biography,⁴³ an extensive number of books,

40 Sarah Apetrei, "'The Life of Angels': Celibacy and Asceticism in Anglicanism, 1660–c.1700," *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 13, no. 2 (2011): 247–74. See also her study of the revival of celibacy among "enthusiasts" and "some High Church Circles" (Sarah Apetrei, "Masculine Virgins: Celibacy and Gender in Late Stuart London," in *Religion and Women in Britain, c. 1660–1760*, eds. Sarah Apetrei and Hannah Smith, 41–59 [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014; repr., New York: Routledge, 2016], 42, 50–58).

41 Eamon Duffy, "Primitive Christianity Revived: Religious Renewal in Augustan England," in *Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History*, ed. Derek Baker, Studies in Church History 14 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), 287–88.

42 B. W. Young, "The Anglican Origins of Newman's Celibacy," *Church History* 65, no. 1 (March 1996): 15. See also J.V.L. Casserley, "Clerical Marriage in Anglican Experience," in *Celibacy in the Church*, ed. William Bassett and Peter Huizing, Religion in the Seventies 78 (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 88–89. Carlson claims to trace a near unbroken strand of ambivalence toward clerical marriage from the Elizabethan clergy at least all the way back to Robert Barnes (Carlson, "Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation," 2, 29–31).

43 See Nuttall, *Richard Baxter*. Other scholarly biographical treatments include Frederick J. Powicke, *A Life of the Reverend Richard Baxter, 1615–1691* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1924; facsimile repr., LaVergne, TN: Kessinger Publishing, 2010); Powicke, *The Reverend Richard Baxter under the Cross (1662–1691)* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1927); Martin, *Puritanism and Richard Baxter*. However, a critical edition of Baxter's autobiography has been recently published: Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae*

monographs, and theses have elucidated his life and thought. The topics drawing greatest attention have been his controversial soteriology,⁴⁴ his pastoral ministry at Kidderminster,⁴⁵ and his ecclesiology.⁴⁶ However, a string of other topics have

Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxter's Narrative of the Most Memorable Passages of His Life and Times, 5 vol., eds. N.H. Keeble, John Coffey, Tim Cooper, and Tom Charlton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

- 44 See Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter*; Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn*; Beougher, *Richard Baxter and Conversion*; Cooper, *Fear and Polemic in Seventeenth-Century England*; Thomas Eugene Hicks, "An Analysis of the Doctrine of Justification in the Theologies of Richard Baxter and Benjamin Keach" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009).
- 45 Black, *Reformation Pastors*; Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity, Unity, and Liberty*; Charles F. Kemp, *A Pastoral Triumph: The Story of Richard Baxter and his Ministry at Kidderminster* (New York: Macmillan, 1948). See also the following unpublished dissertations and theses: Nathaniel Harrington Mair, "Christian Sanctification and Individual Pastoral Care in Richard Baxter: An Analysis of the Relation between Richard Baxter's Understanding of Christian sanctification and the Form and Content of His Individual Pastoral Direction" (ThD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1966); William Ross Shealy Jr., "The Power of the Present: The Pastoral Perspective of Richard Baxter, Puritan Divine: 1615–1691" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1966); Glenn Paul Kinder, "Richard Baxter's Understanding of the Cure of Souls as it Appears in *The Reformed Pastor* (1656): A Study in Historical Theology" (MA thesis, Graduate Theological Union, 1976); Zachary K. McCoy, "Acts 20:28 and the Scriptural Basis of Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor*" (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary 2012); John Sanders Pearsall, "An Investigation of Pastoral Care as Exemplified in the Life and Ministry of Richard Baxter with a Consideration of its Relevance for Today" (ThM thesis, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1953); Kenneth L. Roth, "The Cure of Souls in the Thought of Richard Baxter (1615–1691): A Study in Historical and Practical Theology" (ThM thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 1995); Thomas Loren Strong, "An Evaluation of Richard Baxter's Pastoral Ministry" (ThM thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978).
- 46 Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity, Unity, and Liberty*; Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter, and the Formation of Nonconformity*; Morgan Irvonwy, *The Nonconformity of Richard Baxter* (London: The Epworth Press, 1946); A. H. Wood, *Church Unity without Uniformity: A Study of Seventeenth-century English Church Movements and of Richard Baxter's Proposals for a Comprehensive Church* (London: Epworth Press, 1963); Glen J. Segger, *Richard Baxter's Reformed Liturgy: A Puritan Alternative to the Book of Common Prayer* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2014); Hans Boersma, *Richard Baxter's Understanding of Infant Baptism*, *Studies in Reformed Theology and History* 7 (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2002). See also the following unpublished dissertations: R. L. McCan, "The Conception of the Church in Richard Baxter and John Bunyan: a Comparison and Contrast" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1955); Gordon Livingstone Toombs, "The Puritan Idea of the Holy Communion with Special Reference to John Eliot and Richard Baxter" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1956); Travis Talmage Du Priest Jr., "The Liturgies of Jeremy Taylor and Richard Baxter: A Study of Structure, Language, and Rhythm" (PhD diss., University of Kentucky, 1972); Earl Kent Brown, "Richard Baxter's Contribution to the Comprehension Controversy" (PhD diss., Boston University School of Theology, 1956); Douglas, "Richard Baxter and the Savoy Conference of 1661" (PhD diss., McMaster University, 1972); Timothy Ronald Cooke, "Richard Baxter, Puritan Churchman" (PhD diss., University of Western Ontario, 1991); Donald George Miller, "A Critical Reappraisal of Richard