

Richard Baxter (1615-1691): A Model of Pastoral Leadership for Evangelism and Church Growth

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Introduction

In his autobiography, nineteenth century preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon records a conversation he had with his wife one Sunday evening: "I fear I have not been as faithful in my preaching today as I should have been; I have not been as much in earnest after poor souls as God would have me be. . . . Go, dear, to the study, and fetch down Baxter's *Reformed Pastor*, and read some of it to me; perhaps that will quicken my sluggish heart."¹

Spurgeon was not the only one helped by the seventeenth century British Puritan's writings. Baxter has been called the greatest of all English preachers, the virtual creator of popular Christian literature, and "the most successful preacher and winner of souls and nurturer of won souls that England has ever had."² Who was this man? What does he have to say to us today?

Dr. William Bates, who preached Baxter's funeral message, recognized the difficulty of summarizing the life of this man:

I am sensible that in speaking of him I shall be under a double disadvantage: for those who perfectly knew him will be apt to think my account of him to be short and defective, an imperfect shadow of his resplendent virtues; others, who were unacquainted with his extraordinary worth, will, from ignorance or envy, be inclined to think his just praises to be undue and excessive.³

And one biographer warns of trying to compress Baxter's life into a few pages, saying, "Men of his size should not be drawn in miniature."⁴

Early Life

Richard Baxter was born November 12, 1615, at Rowton, a village in Shropshire, England.⁵ It was his destiny to live and minister throughout most of the seventeenth century, a watershed in English history. Before his death in 1691, he would witness the English Civil War, the beheading of Charles I, the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell, the Restoration of the monarchy under Charles II, the persecution of Nonconformity, the Great Ejection of some two thousand Puritan pastors from their churches, and the struggle for toleration, which culminated in the Act of Toleration of 1689. Baxter was no passive observer of these events, no idle bystander. As a prominent religious leader, he actively participated in the numerous political and ecclesiastical struggles of his day.

When viewed in light of his later influence, Baxter's early years were far from auspicious. No one could have guessed that this boy, born to Richard and Beatrice Baxter, would amount to much of anything. He was forced to live until the age of ten with his maternal grandfather because of his father's gambling debts.⁶ His early schooling proved a great disappointment. In six years he had four differ-

ent schoolmasters, all of them “ignorant” or “drunkards.”⁷

After his father’s conversion, young Richard returned to his parental home at Eaton Constantine.⁸ Unfortunately, however, his return brought no improvement in his educational environment. The vicar there, who was over eighty and “never preached in his life,” brought forth a motley assortment of substitutes to fill in for him: among them a day-labourer, a stage-player, a common drunkard.⁹ The condition of the area clergy and churches was so low that little or nothing could be expected from them in the way of spiritual nurture.¹⁰

The crude and meaningless manner of his confirmation at age fourteen only made matters worse. The bishop did not examine any of the boys who were present as to their spiritual condition. Instead he quickly lined them up and passed down the line, laying his hands on them and uttering a few words of a prayer that neither Baxter nor the other boys could decipher. And as Baxter later would lament, “He was esteemed as one of the best bishops in England!”¹¹ Baxter’s comments demonstrate that the Puritans had legitimate complaints about the spiritual state of the Church of England.

Conversion and Education

Despite the lack of piety in the established church, young Richard was not left without spiritual guidance. Through his father’s example and by the reading of some Christian books, Baxter recounts that at about age fifteen “it pleased God to awaken my soul.”¹² The role that books played in his conversion was not lost on Baxter, and he would write numerous treatises on conversion to help others find the way of salvation through Christian literature.

He passionately desired university training but had to settle for private tutoring at Ludlow Castle under Richard Wickstead. Wickstead, however, all but neglected Baxter, forcing him to begin what proved to be a lifetime of learning through independent study. Baxter’s greatest regret was the neglect of languages in his education: “Besides the Latin Tongue, and but a mediocrity in Greek (with an inconsiderable trial at the Hebrew long after) I had no great skill in Languages.”¹³ Stephen argues that Baxter was guilty of understatement, claiming that Baxter was “ignorant of Hebrew—a mere smatterer in Greek—and possessed of as much Latin as enabled him . . . to use it with reckless facility.”¹⁴

Though not formally tutored, Baxter made good use of the excellent library at Ludlow Castle.¹⁵ He was a vociferous reader, with one biographer arguing that Baxter probably read more books than any human being before him.¹⁶ While that claim would be impossible to verify, one is overwhelmed by Baxter’s incessant citation of other sources in his own writings, often from memory.

Baxter’s lack of formal training refined his logical mindset, independent thinking, and his eclecticism. He was beholden to no particular school of thought; he felt free to borrow from them all, and to critique them all. When criticized for taking a position against the common consensus on a particular issue, Baxter replied that he valued theologians by “weight, not by number.”¹⁷

Ordination

A growing desire to be used in the conversion of others led him to seek ordination within the Church of England. Immediately after his ordination Baxter served for nine months as a schoolmaster in Dudley while preaching in vacant pul-

pits on Sundays. In the autumn of 1639 Baxter left Dudley for the position of curate (assistant pastor) in Bridgnorth, where he remained for nearly two years.

While Baxter was at Bridgnorth, the parishioners of Kidderminster¹⁸ threatened to petition Parliament against their vicar and his assistant on charges of incompetence and drunkenness. (Baxter records that the vicar's preaching was so terrible that his own wife would leave the services in shame.¹⁹) To avoid the scandalous consequences of exposure from such a petition, the Vicar of Kidderminster agreed to dismiss his assistant and offered to give up his pulpit to any lecturer whom the parishioners might select.²⁰ The parishioners formed a "selection" committee of fourteen members, and in March, 1641, they invited Baxter to be their lecturer.²¹

Pastoral Ministry

Baxter accepted the position of lecturer at Kidderminster in 1641. Here in a township of three or four thousand, Baxter exercised his pastoral ministry first for fifteen months, and then, after a five year interruption because of the English Civil War, for fourteen years. It is ironic that the very thing for which Baxter is now renowned, his pastoral work, was not foremost on his heart when he accepted the charge. In fact, one of the great attractions of this position to him was that at Kidderminster he would have no official pastoral obligations outside of merely preaching each week.²²

When the Civil War broke out in 1642, Baxter was forced to withdraw from his parish. Though loyal to the monarchy, he had already intimated his sympathy with the Parliamentary party, regarding it as the champion of religion and liberty. Baxter's sympathies with Parliament inflamed the

Royalists of the town against him. The entire county had declared openly its support for the king, and Kidderminster was entirely under the influence of Royalist families living there. So despite his efforts to remain aloof from the struggle, after one of the townspeople had publicly denounced him as a traitor, Baxter found he could only remain there at the risk of losing his life.²³

When he left, Baxter fully expected to return within a few weeks, thinking the war would come to a speedy end. Actually, he was away for nearly five years. He first went to Coventry, where he preached once a week to the soldiers. Three years later he accepted a chaplaincy in Cromwell's army, a post he held for two years.

He was forced to resign his chaplaincy because of poor health, and for five months Baxter languished near death at the home of friends, Sir Thomas and Lady Jane Rous. During these months in 1647 he took up his pen and wrote most of *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*.

Baxter notes in the dedication that he wrote the book with "one foot in the grave." His account of the origin and progress of the work is interesting:

The second book which I wrote . . . was that called *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*. Whilst I was in health I had not the least thought of writing books, or of serving God in any more public way than preaching. But when I was weakened with great bleeding . . . and was sentenced to death by the physicians, I began to contemplate more seriously on the everlasting rest which I apprehended myself to be just on the borders of. And that my thoughts might not too much scatter in my meditation, I began to write something on that subject . . .²⁴

The Saints' Everlasting Rest, eventually

published in 1649, was a runaway best-seller, bringing Baxter immediate fame. In ten years it went through ten editions, selling thousands of copies.

Baxter maintains, "Weakness and pain helped me to study how to die; that set me on studying how to live."²⁵ Baxter believed that his sickness provided numerous benefits including greatly weakening temptations, keeping him in a great contempt of the world, and teaching him to highly esteem time.²⁶ Most significantly, Baxter claims that his illness, "made me study and preach things necessary, and a little stirred up my sluggish heart to speak to sinners with some compassion, *as a dying man to dying men.*"²⁷

This phrase became his motto, a guidepost for his life and ministry. He uses the phrase over and over in his works. His life was a continual struggle against death. He was harassed by a constant cough, frequent bleedings from the nose, migraine headaches, digestive ailments, kidney stones, gall stones, etc., etc., etc. He has been referred to as a virtual "museum of diseases."²⁸ Living in an era before painkillers, Baxter tells us that from the age of twenty-one onwards that he was "seldom an hour free from pain."²⁹ Eayrs notes that Baxter was "at death's door twenty times."³⁰ John Brown asserts, "If Richard Baxter had done nothing but take care of himself as an invalid, no one would have had the heart to blame a man to whom life was thus one long and weary battle with disease."³¹

After "recovering" from his illness he returned to his ministerial duties³² at Kidderminster in June 1647, where his life became a model of ministerial consistency and faithfulness. In addition to his regular parish work between 1647 and 1660 he still found time to write and publish fifty-seven

books, including *The Reformed Pastor*, *A Treatise on Conversion*, and *A Call to the Unconverted*.³³

He also served as the catalyst in forming the Worcestershire Association of Ministers in the area around Kidderminster. They met together regularly for mutual edification and to co-operate in furthering the gospel in their county. When once asked to which church he belonged, Baxter replied:

I am a Christian, a Meer Christian, of no other Religion; and the Church that I am of is the Christian Church, and hath been visible where ever the Christian Religion and Church hath been visible: But must you know what Sect or Party I am of? I am against all Sects and dividing Parties: [As a Meer Christian] . . . [I follow] *Meer Christianity*.³⁴

C. S. Lewis acknowledges his indebtedness to Baxter for the title of his famous work, *Mere Christianity*. In the Preface, Lewis explains the scope and intention of *Mere Christianity*. His book, he says, offers "no help to anyone who is hesitating between two Christian denominations" since he is not seeking "to convert anyone to my own position." Lewis says he is concerned not with controversial matters in dispute between different communions but with the exposition and defense "of what Baxter calls 'mere Christianity.'"³⁵

One of Baxter's favorite quotations was "unity in things necessary, liberty in things unnecessary, and charity in all."³⁶ The phrase, though not original with Baxter, was popularized by him, not only in Great Britain, but also on the European Continent.

Baxter's success at Kidderminster is legendary. Initially he recorded the names of all his converts, but they became so numerous that he was obliged to discontinue the

practice. He writes, “in the beginning of my ministry, I was wont to number them as jewels; but since then I could not keep any number of them.”³⁷ (An amazing admission by a pastor/evangelist!) And lest we think his task was easy, note carefully John Brown’s observations on pre-Baxter Kidderminster:

If I were asked what, in the year 1646, was one of the most unpromising towns in England to which a young man could be sent, who was starting his career as a preacher and pastor, I should feel inclined to point at once to the town of Kidderminster in Worcestershire. With a population at that time of between three and four thousand, mainly carpet-weavers, it had been, morally and spiritually, so grossly neglected as almost to have sunk into practical heathenism.³⁸

Baxter describes the transformation that God brought to the city:

The congregation was usually full, so that we were fain to build five galleries after my coming thither . . . Our private meetings also were full. On the Lord’s Days there was no disorder to be seen in the streets, but you might hear a hundred families singing Psalms and repeating sermons as you passed through the streets. In a word, when I came thither first, there was about one family in a street that worshipped God and called on his name, and when I came away there were some streets where there was not passed one family in the side of a street that did not do so; and that did not by professing serious godliness, give us hopes of their sincerity . . .³⁹

And the fruit remained! Illustrative of the quality of his ministry is the following statement, written some six years after he was forced to leave Kidderminster:

. . . though I have now been absent

from them for about six years, and they have been assaulted with pulpit-calumnies, and slanders, with threatenings and imprisonments, with enticing words, and seducing reasonings, they yet stand fast and keep their integrity . . . not one, that I hear of, are fallen off, or forsake their uprightness.⁴⁰

But Baxter’s ministry was not limited to Kidderminster. After King Charles I was beheaded in 1649, Baxter preached before Cromwell, the Lord Protector of the newly formed Commonwealth. After the service, the Protector asked him to a meeting. Cromwell proceeded to enter into a lengthy exposition and justification of his policy and the changes in the government which he said God had made. Baxter’s reply was blunt: “I told him that we took our ancient monarchy to be a blessing and not an evil to the land.”⁴¹

While he wrote freely upon Cromwell’s faults, Baxter forthrightly acknowledged that under his rule religion had prospered: “I bless God who gave me, even under an usurper whom I opposed, such liberty and advantage to preach his Gospel with success, which I cannot have under a king to whom I have sworn and performed true subjection and obedience.”⁴² Baxter believed no previous era in English history had afforded such opportunities for the spread of the gospel.

After Oliver Cromwell’s death in 1658 and the short rule by his son, Richard, Parliament voted on May 1, 1660 to recall Charles II. Baxter was in London at the time, working for religious reconciliation and concord.

On the day before this crucial decision, April 30, Baxter preached before the members of the House of Commons in St. Margaret’s, Westminster. His subject was Repentance; his text, Ezekiel 36:31.⁴³ He

also preached on May 10th at St. Paul's Cathedral before the Lord Mayor. The day had been appointed by the House of Commons as a Day of Thanksgiving for General Monk's success, and the prospective restoration of the monarchy. The point of Baxter's sermon was too obvious to be missed. Titled *Right Rejoicing*, his text was Luke 10:20, "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."⁴⁴

After King Charles II's coronation, Baxter became one of his chaplains. He preached before the King⁴⁵ and for a time, exercised considerable influence at Court. Charles would later offer him the bishopric of Hereford, which he declined rather than give up his Nonconformist views. These days at Court were to prove but the calm before the storm. Twenty years of brutal oppression would soon begin, during which Baxter would be harassed by spies, fined, and imprisoned under the rule of this same king.

The Nonconformists were largely Puritans who could not in good conscience subscribe to all the tenets of the Church of England—some of which were remnants from Roman Catholicism, especially the prescribed use of the Prayer Book. On May 19, 1662 the Act of Uniformity established these doctrines and practices as the official position of the Church of England and officially removed from their ecclesiastical assignments or places of ministry all who disagreed and refused to "conform." Not waiting until the August 24th deadline when the Act would be enforced, Baxter let it be known immediately that he would not conform, leaving the Church of England on May 25th.⁴⁶ Two thousand of his fellow ministers would follow soon thereafter.

Marriage

The disappointment of his "silencing" (as he called it) was somewhat tempered by an unexpected but blessed event: on September 10, 1662, Baxter married Margaret Charlton.⁴⁷ In the earlier period of his ministry, Baxter had resolved not to marry so that he might pursue his pastoral and ministerial duties without interruption.⁴⁸ Because of his clear belief that most clergy should not marry due to the demands of ministry, Baxter notes that his marriage caused quite a stir: "And it everywhere rung about, partly as a wonder and partly as a crime . . . And I think the king's marriage was scarce more talked of than mine."⁴⁹ After his ejection, however, having no specific pastoral responsibilities, he thought himself sufficiently free to take a wife.

Margaret served as a beautiful helpmeet to Richard. She was in every sense a woman of God in her own right. Friends noted that they had never known anyone with a more fervent prayer life. She kept a skull on her nightstand to remind her of the brevity of life. (One side note about their relationship: If Baxter had gotten his way, he would have spent virtually every waking hour in his writing ministry. Margaret forced Richard to put down his pen and come to the table for his meals, and to there talk about "mundane matters bearing no relation to theology.")

Writing Ministry

During the three years of his residence in London, two before and one after his "silencing," Baxter preached in various places as opportunities presented themselves. In July 1663 he moved from London to the country village of Acton, that he might devote himself more fully to study and writing.

He was one of the most voluminous writers in English history, writing between 141 and 200 books, depending on how one divides his writing. (I argue for the number 168). Baxter wrote treatises on grace and salvation, apologetics, "popery," antinomianism, the sacraments, millenarianism, ethics, nonconformity, devotion, conversion, politics, and history, not to mention a systematic theology (in Latin). Someone has observed: "To ask Baxter for a reason for the faith that was in him was to invite an answer in three volumes." Yet he had not only quantity, but also quality. N. H. Keeble says, "The influence of his books is incalculable: from the early 1650's they enjoyed greater sales than those of any other English writer."⁵⁰

As he continued his writing ministry, people continued to desire his preaching and teaching. Despite the recently enacted Coventicle Act, Baxter held meetings in his home. The Coventicle Act of 1664 forbade the assembly of more than five persons who were above sixteen years of age for purposes of worship, otherwise than by the forms of the Church of England. Baxter felt he could continue to hold meetings in his home despite this Act, because his activities (preaching, praying and singing Psalms) were in agreement with the forms of the Church of England.⁵¹

During his residence at Acton, the Great Plague of London burst forth with tremendous fury. Beginning in December, 1664, this pestilence raged for over a year. Yet Baxter recognized God's providence even in this horrible event. Many of the ejected ministers seized the opportunity of preaching in the neglected or deserted pulpits with good results:

when the plague grew hot most of the conformable ministers fled, and left their flocks in the time of their

extremity, whereupon divers Non-conformists, pitying the dying and distressed people that had none to call the impenitent to repentance, nor to help men to prepare for another world, nor to comfort them in their terrors, when about ten thousand died in a week, resolved that no obedience to the laws of mortal men whatsoever could justify them for neglecting of men's souls and bodies in such extremities. . . . Therefore they resolved to stay with the people, and to go into the forsaken pulpits, though prohibited, and to preach to the poor people before they died; also to visit the sick and get what relief they could for the poor.⁵²

The conditions were ripe for a significant response:

The face of death did so awaken both the preachers and the hearers, that preachers exceeded themselves in lively, fervent preaching, and the people crowded constantly to hear them. And all was done with so great seriousness, as that, through the blessing of God, abundance were converted from their carelessness, impenitence, and youthful lusts and vanities; and religion took that hold on the peoples hearts as could never afterwards be loosed.⁵³

To make matters worse, scarcely had the plague ceased when the great London fire began. Seeing earthly goods go up in flames only increased Baxter's awareness of the vanity of this world.⁵⁴

Initially, no action was taken against Baxter for his preaching at Acton. But his services became so popular, with people crowding in and out of his house to hear, that it could no longer be ignored. The authorities issued a warrant for his arrest in June 1669 on charges of holding services contrary to law. Baxter was imprisoned for six months in the New Prison at Clerkenwell.

His imprisonment, Baxter says, was "no

great suffering to me.” He had a good jailer, a large room, and Margaret had the freedom of visitation. He notes that, except for the interruption of his sleep, the accommodations at the jail were better than the lodgings he stayed in during his frequent trips to London!⁵⁵ When someone suggested that his views might change somewhat due to his imprisonment, Baxter replied, “truth did not change because I was in a Gaol.”⁵⁶

After being released from prison, Baxter settled back into his writing ministry, moving to a new home in Totteridge and then to London to escape the continual threat of arrest at Acton. He considered that the “vows of God were upon him,” and that he must continue to preach wherever Divine providence opened a door for him. Therefore, despite continual harassment and persecution, he continued to preach at every available opportunity.

He spoke at various churches in the city, facing constant harassment and confiscation of his property. On one occasion, the authorities even took Baxter’s bed from underneath him, despite the fact that he lay there sick! But Baxter kept it all in perspective: “Naked came I into the world, and naked must I go out. But I never wanted less what man can give, than when man had taken all away. . . .”⁵⁷

He would also note:

... I am more apprehensive that sufferings must be the Church’s most ordinary lot, and Christians indeed must be self-denying cross-bearers, even where there are none but formal nominal Christians to be the cross-makers.⁵⁸

He was a powerful preacher, and it is recorded on one occasion, when he was preaching a sermon on judgment, that the officials in the audience who had come to spy on him fled in terror!

The coming of James II to the throne upon Charles II’s death in 1685 boded ill for the Nonconformists, especially for Baxter. James was a pronounced Roman Catholic who saw his strongest opponents among the Nonconformists. Baxter was again imprisoned, this time for eighteen months, beginning in 1685.⁵⁹ His prison sentence was based upon the ludicrous charge that his *Paraphrase of the New Testament* was an attack on the established church and the state.

The charge was sedition: the way Baxter had paraphrased some of the verses was seen as an attack on England’s rulers.⁶⁰ (Baxter later commented that by the same logic, he could have been indicted for uttering the words “deliver us from evil”).

The unjustness of his trial is legendary in English history. Judge Jeffries ridiculed Baxter and his supporters, saying to Baxter, “you are full of poison and deceit; I can see it in your face.” Baxter replied, “Oh, I did not realize that my face was a mirror.”⁶¹ Baxter appeared for sentencing on the 29th of June. Jeffries wished him to be publicly whipped, but the other judges would not consent that a man to whom a bishopric had been offered should be punished as a felon. Baxter was fined five hundred marks, and imprisoned until it was paid.

He refused to pay the fine imposed upon him, because he knew that it most likely would be repeated and enforced every time he attempted to preach, or whenever he wrote anything that could possibly be objected to by the Court. He also refused, on principle, to petition for his release from an unjust imprisonment. He was finally freed on November 24, 1686. Upon his release Baxter continued his writing ministry, as well as assisting Matthew Sylvester in his ministerial labors. He continued to preach until his body could no

longer take the strain, with William Bates observing that the last time he preached he “almost died in the pulpit.” Bates says, “It would have been his glory to have been transfigured on the mount.”⁶²

Even on his deathbed, Baxter did not abandon his calling. He was the same in his life and death; his last hours were spent preparing others and himself to appear before God. To some who came to visit him, he remarked

You come hither to learn to die; I am not the *only person* that must go this way. I can assure you that your whole life, be it never so long, is little enough to prepare for death. Have a care of this *vain, deceitful world*, and the lusts of the flesh. Be sure you choose *God* for your portion, *heaven* for your home, *God's glory* for your end, *His Word* for your rule; and then you need never fear but that we shall meet with comfort.⁶³

A few hours before his departure, Baxter was asked how he was. His reply? “Almost well.”⁶⁴ On December 8th, 1691, the great preacher entered into that “everlasting rest” of which he had so often and so confidently spoken.

Legacy

What legacy did this great man of God leave to us? He was ahead of his time in terms of encouraging support for missions. He corresponded regularly with John Eliot and said, “No part of my prayers are so deeply serious as that for the conversion of the infidel and ungodly world.”⁶⁵ His poetical works and hymns have also blessed believers. “Ye Holy Angels Bright” and “Lord, It Belongs Not to My Care” are two of his more prominent works.

Baxter’s ongoing influence has largely been through his Practical Works, especially *The Reformed Pastor*, *Call to the*

Unconverted, and *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest*. Alexander Gordon says, “Richard Baxter, in his best days, was a stronger power with the religious people of England, than either the Westminster Assembly or the Parliamentary leaders.”⁶⁶

The influence of *The Reformed Pastor* was great in his own day and has continued to the present. Its contemporary influence is reflected in the extant correspondence of Baxter. Numerous letters from fellow ministers testified as to its influence in their lives. Phillip Jacob Spener, Wesley, Rutherford, and Asbury all spoke in glowing terms of the book’s impact on their lives. J. I. Packer suggests that every pastor should read *The Reformed Pastor* every single year of his ministry.

So what about us today? What can we learn from the life and ministry of this man? In typical Puritan fashion, I would like to end with application, or what the Puritans would call “uses.”

Exhortation to the Contemporary Church

Let me begin this section with two disclaimers. First, Baxter was far from perfect, especially from a Baptist perspective. As Southern Baptists, we would want to help Baxter with a few of his formulations, especially his emphasis on infant baptism, his views on episcopacy, his lack of emphasis on equipping the saints for the work of ministry, and certainly his views on the benefits of a celibate clergy.

Second, we need to remember that Baxter lived in a very different world than we do today. Kidderminster was part of a parish system, where all the inhabitants of the city saw Baxter’s church as their church. Kidderminster was also prominent as a carpet-weaving town, and most people worked in their homes. Those realities gave

Baxter great freedom to pursue the home visits for which he is widely remembered.

Despite the differences in theological perspectives on some issues, and the distance of time and culture, I believe Baxter still has a great deal to say to the contemporary church. While most of my observations will deal with pastoral leadership, the implications should not be lost on those of us involved in training persons for pastoral ministry. If these were the standards to which Baxter would hold pastors, how much more significant are these issues for those of us involved in training persons for ministry!

I mentioned earlier that Baxter served as the catalyst in forming the Worcestershire Association of Ministers in the area around Kidderminster, the first association of its kind in England. This association provided the context for the writing of what many consider to be Baxter's most influential work, *The Reformed Pastor*.

The members of the Association had committed themselves to adopt Baxter's plan of systematic catechizing. They fixed a day of prayer and fasting to seek God's blessing on the undertaking, and asked Baxter to preach. When the day came, however, Baxter was too ill to go; so he published the material he had prepared, a massive exposition and application of Acts 20:28: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

By "reformed" Baxter means, not Calvinistic in doctrine (though he was basically in the Reformed camp), but renewed in practice. He sought a renewal in how pastors envisioned their calling and ministry.

I will conclude this paper by setting

forth eight exhortations, taken largely from *The Reformed Pastor*, that I am convinced Baxter would want to give to the contemporary church and to the pastors of today.

Focus on Conversion

Baxter's emphasis in ministry was on conversion. Other Puritans wrote on conversion, but Baxter wrote more than any other, and apparently was read more than any other writer on this topic. His *Call to the Unconverted* was the most popular book of its day in all of England.⁶⁷ It sold 20,000 copies the first year (which is significant even by today's standards!) He received letters virtually every week from people converted through reading the book.⁶⁸ John Eliot, the great missionary to the Indians, translated *Call to the Unconverted* into Algonquian as soon as he had finished translating the Bible. Orme suggests that the overall effects of this book in the conversion of people "have been greater probably than have arisen from any other mere human performance," and that its influence is "beyond all calculation."⁶⁹

Baxter understood the necessity of conversion. "It is the very drift of the gospel," Baxter claimed, "the main design of the whole Word of God, to convert men from sin to God, and build them up when they are once converted. . . . Conversion is the most blessed work, and the day of conversion the most blessed day, that this world is acquainted with."⁷⁰

He challenged ministers, therefore, to focus on conversion in their ministries:

We must labour, in a special manner, for the conversion of the unconverted. The work of conversion is the first and great thing we must drive at; after this we must labour with all our might. Alas! the misery of the unconverted is so great, that it calleth loudest to us for compassion.

. . . He that seeth one man sick of a mortal disease, and another only pained with the toothache, will be moved more to compassionate the former, than the latter; and will surely make more haste to help him, though he were a stranger, and the other a brother or a son. . . . I confess, I am frequently forced to neglect that which should tend to the further increase of knowledge in the godly, because of the lamentable necessity of the unconverted. . . . O, therefore, brethren whomsoever you neglect, neglect not the most miserable! . . . O call after the impenitent, and ply this great work of converting souls, whatever else you leave undone.⁷¹

As a further application of focusing on conversion, Baxter would lament our common use of the term “unchurched,” insisting instead that we call persons “lost.”

Understand the True Nature of Conversion

Baxter taught that conversion was a process. People lie dead in sin and cannot respond until God moves them to do so through effectual grace. But this does not mean that they are to sit by idly and wait for God to work. They should prepare themselves through seeking God and listening to his word (though Baxter avoided saying that such preparation makes God beholden to an individual, a position sometimes erroneously attributed to him).

Some recent interpreters have characterized the Puritans as teaching that all must follow a set pattern of experiences to be converted. Baxter knew from Scripture and observation that this was not the case and taught that “God breaketh not all men’s hearts alike.”⁷² Breaking them, however, in the sense of causing inbred love of sin to shrivel up so that love for Christ and holiness can blossom is something that God

must do and does, one way or another, in every case of genuine new birth.

Baxter anticipated, in a way, the current debate about “lordship salvation.” “Faith entereth at the mind,” he taught, “but it hath not all its essential parts, and is not the gospel faith indeed, till it hath possessed the will. The heart of faith is wanting, till faith hath taken possession of the heart.”⁷³ Christ must be believed in with all a person’s heart, soul, and strength:

you must receive and close with Christ entirely, in his whole office, as he is to accomplish all these works, or else you cannot be united to him. He will not be divided: you shall not have Christ as justifier of you, if you will not have him as guide, and ruler, and sanctifier of you. He will not be a partial Saviour: if you will not consent that he shall save you from your sins, he will not consent to save you from hell.⁷⁴

Baxter would challenge the contemporary church to carefully to examine her understanding of the nature of conversion.

Guard Your Own Heart

Baxter began his exhortation in *The Reformed Pastor* with Paul’s opening phrase in Acts 20:28, “Take heed to yourself.” He notes that before we can take heed to the flock, we must first take heed to ourselves. He writes, “Content not yourselves with being in a state of grace, but be also careful that your graces are kept in vigorous and lively exercise, and that you preach to yourselves the sermons which you study, before you preach them to others.”⁷⁵

He reflects on the importance of protecting our own walk with God:

When I let my heart grow cold, my preaching is cold; and when [my heart] is confused, my preaching is confused; and so I can oft observe also in the best of my hearers, that

when I have grown cold in preaching, they have grown cold too; and the next prayers which I have heard from them have been too like my preaching. We are the nurses of Christ's little ones. If we forbear taking food ourselves, we shall famish them . . .⁷⁶

Perhaps Baxter's greatest challenge to contemporary pastors guarding their hearts would be in the area of pride. He asks,

Is not pride the sin of devils—the first-born of hell? Is it not that wherein Satan's image doth much consist? and is it to be tolerated in men who are so engaged against him and his kingdom as we are? The very design of the gospel is to abase us . . . Humility is not a mere ornament of a Christian, but an essential part of the new creature. It is a contradiction in terms, to be a Christian, and not humble.⁷⁷

Baxter would give his hearty agreement to James Denney's observation that, "No man can bear witness to Christ and to himself at the same time. . . . No man can give at once the impression that he is clever and that Christ is mighty to save."⁷⁸

For Baxter, the key is not what you do but who you are. "We must study as hard how to live well," he argued, "as how to preach well."⁷⁹

Preach the Word

Inscribed on Baxter's pulpit in Kidderminster are the words from 2 Corinthians 4:5, "we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." Baxter would give two specific exhortations for contemporary preaching.

First, *preach with passion*. In his *Poetical Fragments* he gives his perspective on preaching:

Still thinking I had little time to live,
My fervent heart to win men's souls

did strive;
I preached, as never sure to preach
again,
And as a dying Man to dying Men.⁸⁰

Baxter would challenge us to preach "as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men." He believed most preachers needed more passion in their preaching:

If we were heartily devoted to our work, it would be done more vigorously, and more seriously, than it is by the most of us. How few ministers do preach with all their might, or speak about everlasting joys and everlasting torments in such a manner as may make men believe that they are in good earnest!

O sirs how plainly, how closely, how earnestly, should we deliver a message of such moment as ours, when the everlasting life or everlasting death of our fellow-men is involved in it! . . . What! speak coldly for God, and for men's salvation? Can we believe that our people must be converted or condemned, and yet speak in a drowsy tone? In the name of God, brethren, labour to awaken your own hearts, before you go to the pulpit, that you may be fit to awaken the hearts of sinners. . . . Oh, speak not one cold or careless word about so great a business as heaven or hell. Whatever you do, let the people see that you are in good earnest.⁸¹

A second exhortation Baxter would give to contemporary preachers is to *preach with balance*. Our culture disdains what is termed "fire and brimstone preaching." But Baxter emphasized, "fear must drive, as love must draw."⁸² Baxter would tell us we must challenge people not only to flee from the wrath to come, but to flee to the One who bore that wrath for lost and guilty sinners. Baxter would exhort us to make sure our preaching is balanced between fear driving and love drawing.

Minister to Individuals

The key to Baxter's pastoral method was personal care of individuals, based upon intimate knowledge of their daily lives, prompted and sustained by an unaffected and impartial love for all. At first he was content to catechize only "in the Church," and to talk with individuals "now and then." He discovered, however, that for his preaching to be fruitful he must follow it up with direct personal discourse with every family in his parish. He urged pastors to take up this ministry of personal instruction with this heartfelt plea:

I study to speak as plainly and movingly as I can, and yet I frequently meet with those that have been my hearers eight or ten years, who know not whether Christ be God or man, and wonder when I tell them the history of his birth and life and death, as if they had never heard it before. . . . I have found by experience, that some ignorant persons, who have been so long unprofitable hearers, have got more knowledge and remorse of conscience in half an hour's *close discourse*, than they did from ten years' public preaching. I know that preaching the gospel publicly is the most excellent means, because we speak to many at once. But it is usually far more effectual to preach it privately to a particular sinner, as to himself: for the plainest man this is, can scarcely speak plain enough in public for them to understand; but in private we may do it much more.

. . . I conclude, therefore, that public preaching alone will not be sufficient . . . Long may you study and preach to little purpose, if you neglect this duty [of personal instruction].⁸³

Baxter had approximately eight hundred homes in his parish, and found that by visiting fifteen or sixteen families each week, each year he could discern the spiritual condition of each person in the com-

munity.⁸⁴ He developed adult catechisms, basic material on Christian growth, to give to persons in various stages of spiritual development.

Baxter would exhort us today to develop a "data base" of the spiritual condition of persons in our church. What if our church is too large for us to fulfill this task by ourselves? Then get help, Baxter would say. (He brought on an assistant to help him with his visits due to his continual ill health.) To shepherd properly the flock we must know the spiritual condition of each person.

Pursue Family Reformation

Baxter would exhort us today to make family ministry a high priority. "We must have a special eye upon families," he said, "to see that they are well ordered, and the duties of each relation performed."⁸⁵ Why the emphasis on family ministry? Baxter shares what he has learned through experience:

You are not like to see any general reformation, till you procure family reformation. Some little religion there may be, here and there; but while it is confined to single persons, and is not promoted in families, it will not prosper, nor promise much future increase.⁸⁶

Keep Your Heart in Heaven

Baxter wrote much on the topic of meditation, particularly in *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*. He believed meditation was a vital discipline to motivate the heart for vigorous prayer and subsequent vigorous obedience. He especially advocated meditating on "the hope of glory." Meditation on heaven was for Baxter less an occasional activity than a way of energizing one's spiritual life.

Baxter's method was to focus the

believer's mind on the greatness and goodness of God. He said, "The most covetous man will let go silver, if he might have gold instead of it." Listen to his pointed remarks:

If thou wouldst have light and heat, why art thou no more in the sunshine? For want of this recourse to heaven, thy soul is as a lamp not lighted, and thy duty as a sacrifice without fire. Fetch one coal daily from this altar, and see if thy offering will not burn. . . . In thy want of love to God, lift up thy eye of faith to heaven, behold his beauty, contemplate his excellencies, and see whether his amiableness and perfect goodness will not ravish thy heart. As exercise gives appetite, strength, and vigour to the body, so these heavenly exercises will quickly cause the increase of grace and spiritual life.⁸⁷

We use the expression today that some people are "too heavenly-minded to be of any earthly good." Baxter would say to us, "unless you are heavenly-minded you will not be of much earthly good." Baxter maintains, "As digestion turns food into nourishment for the body, so meditation turns the truths received and remembered into warm affection, firm resolution, and a holy lifestyle."⁸⁸

Maintain a Balance of Head and Heart

Last, but not least, Baxter would argue that we need both *head* and *heart* in our ministry, both doctrine and practice. Some in our day seem to make a keen mind antithetical to a warm heart, and a focus on theology antithetical to a commitment to practical ministry. As Carl F. H. Henry said in 1967, "in these next years we must strive harder to become theologian-evangelists, rather than to remain content as just theologians or just evangelists."⁸⁹ Henry's challenge mirrors James Denney's famous

dictum: "If evangelists were our theologians or theologians our evangelists, we should at least be nearer the ideal church."⁹⁰

Richard Baxter was such a man, and reminds us we should be as well. We would all do well to heed the words of Spurgeon and "Go fetch Baxter!"

ENDNOTES

¹C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography: The Early Years (1834-1859)*, rev. ed., originally compiled by Susannah Spurgeon (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976) 417.

²A. B. Grosart, *Representative Non-Conformists* (London, 1879) 137.

³Dr. William Bates, *A Funeral Sermon . . . for Richard Baxter* (London: Brab. Aylmer, 1692) 86.

⁴Grainger, *Biographical History*, cited in J. M. Lloyd Thomas's "Introduction" to *Baxter's Autobiography* (London: J. M. Dent, 1925) xxiv-xxv.

⁵The starting point for any consideration of Baxter's life must be his own autobiography, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696), published by his friend and colleague Matthew Sylvester. This was issued in abridged form in 1925 by J. M. Lloyd Thomas, and reissued in 1974 by N. H. Keeble under the title *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons). Citations in this paper are from Keeble's edition (hereafter cited simply as *Autobiography*) except where the account only appears in the *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (cited as R.B.). The best biography is G. F. Nuttall's *Richard Baxter* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), surpassing F. J. Powicke's two works, *A Life of the Reverend Richard Baxter, 1615-1691* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1924), and *The Reverend Richard Baxter Under the Cross, 1662-1691* (Lon-

don: Jonathan Cape, 1927). Nuttall has filled in numerous gaps in our knowledge of Baxter's life by utilizing historical references scattered through Baxter's other published works and especially in his manuscript correspondence, which Nuttall was the first to calendar and read in chronological order.

⁶*Autobiography*, 3. Ladell speculates that "the boy's mother was not strong enough to attend to her child, and his father was too busy with pressing financial difficulties to care to have him under his roof." See A. R. Ladell, *Richard Baxter: Puritan and Mystic* (London: S.P.C.K., 1925) 36. Powicke places young Richard's mother with him in Rowton for these ten years, both then being apart from his father (*A Life*, 15). Unfortunately Powicke gives no justification for this departure from Baxter's straightforward declaration: "And there I lived from my parents with my grandfather . . . [emphasis added]" (*Autobiography*, 3).

⁷*Autobiography*, 3.

⁸Baxter's father was converted "by the bare reading of the Scriptures in private, without either preaching, or godly company, or any other books but the Bible" (*ibid.*, 4). Eayrs notes that copies of the Scriptures were rapidly multiplied after the new translation of 1611. See George Eayrs, *Richard Baxter and the Revival of Preaching and Pastoral Service* (London: National Council of Evangelical Free Churches, 1912) 8.

⁹*Autobiography*, 4-5. These men "read Common Prayer on Sundays and Holy-Days" and "taught school and

tipped on the weekdays."

¹⁰Baxter says, "Only three or four constant competent preachers lived near us, and those (though conformable all save one) were the common marks of the people's obloquy and reproach, and any that had but gone to hear them, when he had no preaching at home, was made the derision of the vulgar rabble under the odious name of a Puritan" (*ibid.*, 4). Nuttall notes that it later became one of Baxter's primary aims to "assist in the effective remedying of such a state of affairs" (*Richard Baxter*, 8).

¹¹Baxter, "Confirmation and Restauration, the Necessary Means of a Reformation and Reconciliation, for the Healing of the Corruptions and Divisions of the Churches" (1658), in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter* (London: George Virtue, 1838) 4:316.

¹²*Autobiography*, 7. Baxter's account of his conversion, taken from the *Autobiography*, is included in *Conversions: The Christian Experience*, ed. Hugh T. Kerr and John M. Mulder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 29-33.

¹³R.B., 1:6.

¹⁴*An Excerpt from Reliquiae Baxterianae, with an Essay by Sir James Stephen on Richard Baxter*, ed. Francis John (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910) 68-69.

¹⁵Baxter gives some account of his reading: "[I] read a multitude of our English Practical Treatises, before I had ever read any other Bodies of Divinity. . . Next [to] Practical Divinity, no Books so suited with my Disposition as Aquinas, Scotus,

Durandus, Ockam, and their Disciples; because I thought they narrowly searched after Truth, and brought Things out of the darkness of Confusion: For I could never from my first Studies endure Confusion!" (R.B., 1:6).

¹⁶Eayrs, 131.

¹⁷The precise quotation is, "I never thought that my faith must follow the major vote; I value Divines also by weight, and not by number." See Richard Baxter, *Aphorismes of Justification* (London: Francis Tyton, 1649), "Appendix," 12.

¹⁸Barbara Stewart provides an excellent discussion on the town of Kidderminster in her work, "Richard Baxter: The Beloved Pastor of Kidderminster" (unpublished Masters thesis, Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, April 1985) 18-32. See also Powicke's treatment in *A Life*, 35-46.

¹⁹Powicke, *A Life*, 84.

²⁰That the vicar took the people seriously can be seen in the financial arrangements he offered. The new lecturer would be paid a sum of £60 per annum out of the £200 which the vicar's living provided. The vicar secured the agreement by posting a bond of £500.

²¹Nuttall, 24.

²²At the time of his ordination, while professing that "a fervent desire of winning Souls to God was my motive," Baxter acknowledges that he "had no inclination" to "a Pastoral Charge." See the Preface in *Plain Scripture Proof of Infants Church-Membership and Baptism* (London: Robert White, 1653).

²³Davies argues that "from the begin-

ning to the end of the civil troubles Baxter was a Royalist at heart." John Hamilton Davies, *Life of Richard Baxter of Kidderminster: Preacher and Prisoner* (London: W. Kent, 1887) 98. Nuttall claims that "Baxter's political hopes were to be disappointed, and he never ceased to condemn the execution of the King; but at the beginning of the war so convinced a Puritan could not do otherwise than side with the Parliament" (31-32). Baxter himself says that "both parties were to blame" and that he "will not be he that shall justify either of them" (*Autobiography*, 36-37).

²⁴*Autobiography*, 94. Baxter apologizes for the lack of marginal citations, noting that he wrote most of the book when he had no resources but a Bible and a Concordance. Yet he says, "I found that the transcript of the heart hath the greatest force on the hearts of others" (*ibid.*, 95). Later editions would include such marginal citations.

²⁵From a letter to Anthony O. Wood, cited in J. M. Lloyd Thomas's "Introduction" to Baxter's *Autobiography*, xxv.

²⁶See R.B., 1:21 for Baxter's complete list of how his illnesses benefited him.

²⁷*Autobiography*, 26 [emphasis added].

²⁸Timothy Beougher and J. I. Packer, "Go Fetch Baxter," *Christianity Today*, 16 December 1991, 27.

²⁹*Autobiography*, 76.

³⁰Eayrs, 49.

³¹Brown, *Puritan Preaching in England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900) 168.

³²He returned to his previous position

as lecturer (curate), refusing to accept the vicarage, but Eayrs notes that "Baxter was vicar in all but name and emoluments" (23). Powicke relates the story of how the townspeople, without Baxter's knowledge or approval, had petitioned the Westminster Assembly to appoint Baxter to the position of vicar. Baxter served three years as Lecturer before he found out what the people had done. He did not regard it as making any difference to his position. "In his own eyes," Powicke says, "he was, and remained to the last, simply Minister, or Preacher of the Gospel, at Kidderminster" (*A Life*, 83).

³³The *Treatise on Conversion and Call to the Unconverted* were originally preached. Baxter wrote his pulpit notes in shorthand. Thomas Baldwin, who lived with him and took over the ministry at Kidderminster when Baxter was ejected, learned to decipher Baxter's shorthand notes, and transcribed many of his sermons for the printer.

³⁴Baxter, Preface to *Church-History of the Government of Bishops and their Councils Abbreviated* (London: John Kidgell, 1680).

³⁵C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952) 6.

³⁶Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1649), in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, vol. III (London: George Virtue, 1838) 3.

³⁷R.B., 1:84.

³⁸See Brown, 165-166.

³⁹R.B., 1:84-85.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 86. In fact, on December 1, 1743, George Whitefield visited Kidderminster and wrote to a

friend: "I was greatly refreshed to find what a sweet savour of good Mr. Baxter's doctrine, works and discipline remain to this day."

⁴¹*Autobiography*, 140.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 80.

⁴³The House of Commons ordered the next day that the sermon be printed. See *A Sermon of Repentance* (London: Francis Tyton, 1660).

⁴⁴Baxter says the response was mixed: "The moderate were pleased with it, the fanatics were offended with me for keeping such a thanksgiving, the diocesan party thought I did suppress their joy" (*Autobiography*, 143). Stephen argues that the sermon "could not have been recited by the most rapid voice in less than two hours." See *An Excerpt from Reliquiae Baxterianae*, 93.

⁴⁵The sermon was published by a special command. See *The Life of Faith* (London: Francis Tyton, 1660).

⁴⁶Nuttall asserts that Baxter's immediate action had considerable influence on other ministers (92).

⁴⁷Margaret had been converted under Baxter's preaching at Kidderminster. Baxter tells the story of their marriage in his tribute to her titled *A Breviate of the Life of Margaret, the Daughter of Francis Charlton, of Apply in Shropshire, Esq; and Wife of Richard Baxter. For the use of all, but especially of their Kindred* (London: B. Simmons, 1681). It was reprinted in 1928 as *Richard Baxter and Margaret Charlton: A Puritan Love Story*, ed. John T. Wilkinson (London: George Allen & Unwin) and in 1997 as *A Grief Sanctified: Passing Through Grief to Peace and Joy*, ed. J. I. Packer (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant).

⁴⁸E.g., in his *Christian Directory*, Baxter claims that while it is not “unlawful” for ministers to marry, “so great a hinderance [sic] ordinarily is this troublesome state of life to the sacred ministration which they undertake, that a very clear call should be expected for their satisfaction” (*Works*, 1:400). Though this was not published until after his marriage (1673), it may be taken to be representative of his thought throughout his life. After his marriage he not only recorded his belief that for himself at Kidderminster “my single Life afforded me much advantage” but he continued to commend celibacy for ministers in general. He says that even Margaret “lived and died in the same mind” (*Breviate*, 101). See also my article, “The Puritan View of Marriage: The Nature of the Husband/Wife Relationship in Puritan England as Taught and Experienced by a Representative Puritan Pastor, Richard Baxter,” *Trinity Journal* 10 n.s. (Fall 1989) 131-158.

⁴⁹*Autobiography*, 174.

⁵⁰See Keeble, “Introduction” to *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1974) xiv.

⁵¹Powicke, *The Rev. Richard Baxter*, 23.

⁵²R.B., 3:2.

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴*Autobiography*, 199. His observations in the aftermath of the fire are worth noting: “It was a sight that might have given any man a lively sense of the vanity of this world, and all the wealth and glory of it, and of the future conflagration of all the world. To see the flames mount up towards heaven, and proceed so

furiously without restraint; to see the streets filled with people astonished, that had scarce sense left them to lament their own calamity; to see the fields filled with heaps of goods, and sumptuous buildings, curious rooms, costly furniture and household stuff, yea, warehouses, and furnished shops and libraries, etc., all on a flame, and none durst come near to receive anything . . .”

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 207-210. Yet he regretted his imprisonment for the interruption it caused his work, removing him from the “poor people in such hopeful beginnings of a common reformation . . .”

⁵⁶R.B., 3:59.

⁵⁷*Autobiography*, 252. He grieved most for the loss of the library he had carefully collected. Some of his books, saved from capture by the adroitness of his wife, were sent to Harvard University in America. See Davies, 368.

⁵⁸*Autobiography*, 121.

⁵⁹Baxter did not continue his autobiography beyond the year 1685. Biographers therefore must rely on other sources to fill in information about this time period.

⁶⁰The charge specifically brought against Baxter was that he reflected on the bishops of the Anglican Church in a manner that legally was seditious. The passages objected to were: Matthew 5:19; Mark 3:6; Mark 9:39; Mark 11:31; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 10:2; John 11:57; and Acts 15:2.

⁶¹See Lord Macaulay, *The History of England*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1913) 484-488 and William Orme, *The Life and Times of the Rev. Richard Baxter with a Critical Examination*

of His Writings, 2 vols. (Boston: Crocker & Breuster, 1831) 2:364-370. The following abbreviated account is from Orme, 2:368-369:

Lord Chief Justice Jeffries said: “Richard, Richard, dost thou think we’ll hear thee poison the court? Richard, thou art an old fellow, an old knave; thou hast written books enough to load a cart, every one as full of sedition, I might say treason, as an egg is full of meat. Hadst thou been whipped out of thy writing-trade forty years ago, it had been happy. Thou pretendest to be a preacher of the gospel of peace, and thou hast one foot in the grave; it is time for thee to begin to think what account thou intendest to give. But leave thee to thyself, and I see that thou’lt go on as thou hast begun; but, by the grace of God, I’ll look after thee. . . . Come, what do you say for yourself, you old knave?—come, speak up.”

Baxter responded, “Your lordship need not fear, for I’ll not hurt you. But these things will surely be understood one day; what fools one sort of Protestants are made, to persecute the other. I am not concerned to answer such stuff, but I am ready to produce my writings for the confutation of all this, and my life and conversation are known to many in this nation.”

⁶²Bates, 123.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 123-124.

⁶⁴Matthew Sylvester, *Elisha’s Cry after Elijah’s God* (1696), 15. This sermonic tribute to Baxter by Sylvester is bound together with my copy of the *Reliquiae Baxterianae*.

⁶⁵*Autobiography*, 117.

- ⁶⁶Alexander Gordon, "Richard Baxter as a founder of Liberal Nonconformity," in *Heads of English Unitarian History* (London: Philip Green, 1895) 65.
- ⁶⁷Sommerville's research demonstrates the enormous popularity of Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted*. See C. John Sommerville, *Popular Religion in Restoration England* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1977) 47-48.
- ⁶⁸R.B., 1:114-115. William Bates remarks that six brothers were at one time converted by this book, and that "every week he received letters of some converted by his books" (113).
- ⁶⁹Orme, 2:79.
- ⁷⁰Baxter, *A Treatise of Conversion* (1657), in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, 2:435, 399.
- ⁷¹*The Reformed Pastor*, 94-97.
- ⁷²R.B., 1:7.
- ⁷³Baxter, *Directions and Persuasions to a Sound Conversion* (1658), in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, 2:623.
- ⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 624.
- ⁷⁵*The Reformed Pastor*, 61.
- ⁷⁶*Ibid.*
- ⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 143.
- ⁷⁸James Denney, *Studies in Theology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895) 161.
- ⁷⁹*The Reformed Pastor*, 64.
- ⁸⁰Baxter, "Love Breathing Thanks and Praise," *Poetical Fragments* (London: T. Snowden, 1681).
- ⁸¹*The Reformed Pastor*, 147-148.
- ⁸²*The Life of Faith* (1669), in *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*, 2:665.
- ⁸³*The Reformed Pastor*, 196.
- ⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 43.
- ⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 100.
- ⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 102.
- ⁸⁷Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, edited with an Introduction by Timothy K. Beougher (Wheaton: Billy Graham Center, 1994) 23-24.
- ⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 58.
- ⁸⁹Carl F. H. Henry, "Facing a New Day in Evangelism," in *One Race, One Gospel, One Task*, ed. C. F. H. Henry and W. S. Mooneyham, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: World Wide Publications, 1967) 13.
- ⁹⁰James Denney, *The Death of Christ* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911) viii.