DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, *AND THE* CHRISTIAN LIFE

PRACTICAL WISDOM FROM RICHARD BAXTER

Revised, Updated, and Annotated by

MICHAEL S. LUNDY, MD

Introduction by

J. I. PACKER

"Richard Baxter was a skilled psychologist as well as a theologian. In this book are some of his writings on depression. J. I. Packer is a modern theologian and lifelong student of Baxter. Michael Lundy is a clinical psychiatrist who has modernized the texts of Baxter. The result is an unusually instructive book of practical wisdom that will be a great help to pastors and others who are called to give counsel to the downcast."

Paul Helm, Professor of the History and Philosophy of Religion Emeritus, King's College, London; author, *The Providence of God*

"Here you will find two treasures for the price of one: consultations with a practicing psychiatrist (Michael Lundy—who, by definition, is a 'healer of the soul') and a distinguished theologian (J. I. Packer—who especially loves authors whose theology engages what used to be called 'the cure of souls'). But, in fact, it turns out to be three treasures for the price of one, as a doctor of medicine and a doctor of philosophy together highlight the wisdom of the remarkable pastor-theologian Richard Baxter. *Depression, Anxiety, and the Christian Life* is simultaneously a manual for pastors and counselors, a resource for study groups, and a thesaurus of wise spiritual counsel for those who struggle and for those who care about them. A few consultations with the soul-physician group of Packer, Lundy, and Baxter will be medicine for your soul!"

Sinclair B. Ferguson, Chancellor's Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary; Teaching Fellow, Ligonier Ministries

"A threefold cord is not quickly broken. In this book, J. I. Packer and Michael Lundy team up with the great Puritan Richard Baxter, who was truly a physician of souls, to offer Christians much-needed help on the thorny spiritual realities of depression and anxiety. Few, if any, Christians are unfamiliar with the pain of anxiety and depression. Few, if any, will fail to be immensely helped by the guidance offered in these pages."

Mark Jones, Teaching Elder, Faith Vancouver Presbyterian Church, Vancouver, British Columbia

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PREFACE

The following pages are a joint effort intended as a "threefold cord," as it were.[1] James Packer, a pastor-teacher, and Michael Lundy, a physician-psychiatrist, were drawn together by a shared admiration for Richard Baxter (1615–1691), a classic Puritan writer on the Christian life, perhaps best known for his work *The Reformed Pastor*. One of Baxter's main concerns as a pastor was to relieve depression. Resonating with Baxter's concern, Lundy and Packer came to think that a mini-treatise by Baxter that, at its heart, sought to serve the depressed would, if republished in a modern edition, be a valuable resource for pastoral care of depressed persons in today's churches. Hence this book. While it will be apparent that Dr. Packer drafted the first chapter introducing Baxter, and Dr. Lundy wrote the second and edited and updated the Baxter texts in part 2, both of us endorse everything affirmed here.

What Is Depression?

Depression is our focus, but what is that? Generalizing, we may say that the term pictures downward pressure squeezing out and draining away whatever modes of energy and eagerness were there before. For more than a century the word's

1. "A threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Eccles. 4:12).

chief use has been psychological. A recent dictionary defines depression as "a state of extreme dejection or morbidly excessive melancholy; a mood of hopelessness and feelings of inadequacy, often with physical symptoms such as loss of appetite, insomnia, etc."[2] Sooner or later most of us experience some form of this, maybe fleetingly as the product of trauma, strain, overwork, or something of the kind, maybe in a more long-term, habitual, deeper-rooted way, and we are told to expect that two-thirds of North Americans will at some stage need and seek treatment for depression. It is a condition that is apparently becoming increasingly common in our hustling, bustling, jostling, cacophonous culture, and seems set to continue to do so.

What happens in depression? Still generalizing, we say: fretful heaviness seizes the mind, sometimes slowing it down to a point of virtual paralysis where thought ceases, sometimes driving it into unfruitful randomness, or a fixed attitude of gloom, or an incessant harping on things felt to be incurably wrong. Depressed persons feel themselves isolated and distant from others—even their nearest and dearest—and from projects in which hitherto their hearts had been fully engaged. Conduct may become eccentric, randomness or inaction may set in, focused creativity may fade away, or sadness may become habitual. Feelings of anxiety, worthlessness, and hopelessness develop, and defensive pessimism takes over. Upset by others' cheerfulness, the depressed may seem cross-grained and combative. Some depressions are cyclical, low points in bipolar mood swings, where they may be followed by bursts of energetic overconfidence. What medication can do to modify these extremes varies from person to person.

2. *Canadian Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. Katherine Barber (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1998), s.v.

C. H. Spurgeon, England's greatest nineteenth-century gospel preacher, suffered periodic bouts of depression. Causeless as they seemed, their impact was heavy; fighting them was, as he put it, like fighting mist, and he had to wait till the "shapeless, undefinable, yet all-beclouding hopelessness" lifted from his heart.[3] The "black dog" of Winston Churchill's middle years seems to have been similar.[4]

When God let Satan have his way with Job, an extreme case of traumatic shock, bewilderment, frustration, misery, and hopelessness, with biting negativity toward his know-it-all friends resulted, as we are shown. All these qualities crowded together, as it were—each with its own pain—under the umbrella of depression formed an archetypal instance of this affliction.

For a full century depression has been intensely studied from various angles, and there are many books on it, reflecting predominantly post-Christian, secular perspectives. Our own standpoint, however, is somewhat different.

Our Standpoint

Our ideal for all Christians, ourselves included, is to live as far as possible in the outgoing love, stability, and joy—along with patience, kindness, faithfulness, and self-control[5]—that form the moral profile of Jesus Christ in his disciples. We see such living as true human flourishing, and the promotion of it as

3. C. H. Spurgeon, "Lecture XI: The Minister's Fainting Fits," in *Lectures to My Students*, vol. 1, *A Selection of Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Pastors' College, Metropolitan Tabernacle* (New York: Sheldon, 1975), 263.

4. For a brief read on Churchill's "black dog," see John H. Mather, "Winston Churchill and the 'Black Dog of Depression,'" review of *Churchill and the 'Black Dog' of Depression: Reassessing the Biographical Evidence of Psychological Disorder*, by Wilfred Attenborough, *The Churchill Project, Hillsdale College*, January 20, 2016, https://winstonchurchill.hillsdale.edu/winston-churchill-and-the-black-dog-of-depression-by-wilfred-attenborough/.

5. Our echo of Gal. 5:22–23 is not accidental: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."

central to all forms of pastoral care, church worship and fellowship, personal therapy, and Christian family life. And we see depression in all its forms as a prima facie obstruction to this, in which Satan regularly has a hand (see 2 Cor. 12:7).[6] We believe that in the wisdom of God thorns in the flesh—mental and emotional thorns included—may become means of spiritual advance that would not otherwise take place. And we believe that greater wisdom in this matter than we are used to is found in the pastoral heritage of seventeenth-century Puritanism. Supreme here is the wisdom of Richard Baxter, who in his day was viewed and consulted as a top authority regarding ministry to Christians afflicted by what was then called "melancholy," but would today be labeled depression. Our hope is that by presenting what Baxter wrote in this field we may contribute to wise pastoral care in Bible-believing, gospel-centered, Christ-honoring churches at this time.

The plan of this volume, following our introductory chapters, is to reproduce two addresses by Richard Baxter, as well as a shorter essay in the appendix, and to indicate how his wisdom may be brought into the twenty-first century to become a resource for ministry today. Chapter 3, "Advice to Depressed and Anxious Christians," offers an edited and updated version of Baxter's "Directions to the Melancholy about Their Thoughts," in his *Christian Directory*. Chapter 4, "The Resolution of Depression and Overwhelming Grief through Faith," edits and updates Baxter's "The Cure of Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow, by Faith." The appendix does the same for Baxter's "The Duty of Physicians," also in *A Christian Directory.*

For the past century and more the notion has been abroad in evangelical circles that the effect of being born again through

6. "So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited" (2 Cor. 12:7).

faith in Jesus Christ will always be a life marked by spiritual euphoria: constant cheerfulness, exuberance, confidence, and high spirits stemming from the knowledge that the God of grace, the sovereign triune Lord, is always actively on one's side. Indeed he is, and the picture drawn is an attractive and happy one—but see what it leaves out! Certainly triumphant joy in the Lord is a characteristic feature of a healthy Christian life. But Christians, like other people, live in and through bodies—bodies that from time to time malfunction, get sick, wear out, and finally die; and physical factors, with or without spiritual slippages, can at any stage bring on, among other things, depression in its various forms. Some in the past have gone so far as to diagnose depression in Christians as always a sign of unbelief or some other major sin, but this is not right.

For more than four centuries Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, one of the world's best sellers, has been reminding Christians that the normal Christian life involves not only assurances and joy but also battles: battles against sin in both one's heart and one's life; battles against temptation arising from circumstances; battles against despair, brought on by foolish missteps and failures; and battles against hopelessness, triggered by a sense of inadequacy that induces depression. All this Bunyan portrays in the characters of Mr. Fearing, Mr. Despondency, Mr. Feeble-Mind, and Mr. Ready-to-Halt. As today the truth that Christians only live by being constantly forgiven is constantly forgotten, and the truth of Satan's unending war with believers is rarely taken seriously, so the reality of depression as a recurring or abiding thorn in some Christians' flesh is often overlooked. We need help here, and in the estimate of the present writers, Richard Baxter is the man to give it.

J. I. Packer

PART 1

INTRODUCING RICHARD BAXTER

Chapter 1

RICHARD BAXTER, SPIRITUAL PHYSICIAN

J. I. Packer

Human nature does not change, but times and seasons do, and all humans are children of their own age to a greater extent than either they or those who look back to them, whether for praise or blame, tend to realize. This is notably true of the great Christian communicators of days past: Augustine, Luther, Bunyan, Whitefield, Wesley, Spurgeon, and their like. Rightly we hail as heroes our blood-brothers in the faith, and in so doing we fail to see them in terms of their own world. Richard Baxter is another such. While he transcended his time in many ways, he was very much a man of it, and we should begin our account of him by noting some key facts about the history and culture of which he was part.

Puritanism

In his adult life Baxter was called a Puritan, a term of disrespect, but one he accepted, though increasingly he referred to himself as a "meer Christian," a cautious friend to all creedal churches and their adherents, while yet showing an unqualified commitment to none of them. "Puritan," however, tagged him as involved in a sometimes impatient and imprudent left-wing Reformational movement that had been making waves in England ever since Elizabeth's reign began.

It had developed in two directions, political and pastoral. The political wing clamored, unsuccessfully, for a radicalizing of the Elizabethan settlement in a number of ways. From its ranks were to come the revolutionaries who, provoked beyond endurance by Charles I's autocracy and bad faith, finally fought and executed him and set up the well-meant but short-lived Commonwealth. Pastorally oriented Puritans, on the other hand, gave themselves to preaching, teaching, and what we would call evangelism. Their goal was the conversion of all England to vital biblical and Reformed faith. To this end they produced a steady flow of catechetical, homiletical, and devotional literature. This was Baxter's own prime field of ministry; while he dabbled in political concerns, his main contribution was as one of Puritanism's most gifted writers of didactic devotional material, as we shall see.

The Puritan pastoral purpose can be focused as the fostering of a Reformed brand of Augustinian piety, starting with a regenerative conversion (faith in Christ, Godward repentance, assurance of justifying acceptance and adoption into God's family, worshipful communion with the Father and the Son, and daily obedience to God's law by the power of the Holy Spirit). Christian life as such would then take the form of love and service (good works) in family, church, and society, monitored

by conscience pursuing its two concerns. Concern number one was the discerning of duty, that is, the specifics of God's biblically revealed will for each day's action. Concern number two was self-examination or self-search, the regular reviewing of one's motives and actions to make sure that one was living as a real believer and not a self-deluded "gospel hypocrite," as pew-sitting formalists were sometimes called. The Puritans viewed life as a landscape crisscrossed by many paths, of which one must always seek to discern and follow the most God-honoring, which will be the wisest and best for others and oneself. Casuistry was the Puritan name for study of the principles for making this choice each time, and conflict with the world, the flesh, and the Devil was understood to be involved in actually doing that. Baxter was an expert teacher in relation to all these concerns, and something like half of Kidderminster's two thousand adult inhabitants became Puritans under his instruction.

The Life of Baxter

Richard Baxter lived from 1615 to 1691. Though sickly from his late teens on, he never lacked mental energy and enterprise. He experienced the Civil War as an army chaplain, the Commonwealth as an urban pastor, the Restoration as a pastor ejected, the persecution that followed as one who, after years of avoiding arrest for unauthorized preaching, finally spent two years in prison, and the 1689 Act of Toleration following the Revolution as bringing him full freedom for ministry for the last two years of his life. He was born and raised in rural Shropshire, in England's west Midlands; he was the son of a village gentleman in the seventeenth-century sense of that word, that is, a property owner, in this case on a small scale. Baxter's father, having gambled away much wealth, had become a serious Christian. One day he bought a Puritan devotional, Richard

Sibbes's *Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax* (1630),[1] from a peddler at the door; his son Richard read it, and it was this more than anything else that brought Richard Baxter to a serious Christian commitment at some point in his teens. He did brilliantly at school, but his father unwisely diverted him from university; however, having resolved on pastoral ministry as a career, he secured ordination in 1638. Following a year as a schoolmaster he became a "lecturer" (supplementary preacher, privately funded), first at Shropshire's Bridgnorth and then in the Midlands weaving town of Kidderminster, where, as chief pastor from 1647, he enjoyed his great success.

Tall and thin, alert and friendly, Baxter was a quick thinker, an easy and fluent speaker, a passionate preacher, a formidable debater, and a very rapid writer on a wide range of topics. He soon became known for his remarkable productivity; Charles I knew of him and referred to him as "scrib[b]ling Dick." He hit the ground running with his first devotional book, over eight hundred large quarto pages long, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650), which quickly became a best seller and was reprinted annually for the first ten years of its life. During his pastorate he was in constant production on many subjects, and after his ejection from the Church of England pastorate under the 1662 Act of Uniformity he saw writing as his prime God-given kingdom task; for the last three decades of his life, therefore, he labored accordingly, becoming the most voluminous English theological writer of all time. Most significant pastorally was his completion of a series already begun for discipling church people from their first adult steps toward personal faith and devotion for the entirety of their Christian lives. Archbishop Usher had at one time encouraged him to attempt this, and Baxter came to feel

1. For one of several recent editions, see Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998).

that it was a mandate from God. The titles in this series up to its final item were as follows:

The Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience and Spiritual Comfort (1653)
A Treatise of Conversion (1657)
A Call to the Unconverted to Turn and Live (1658)
Directions and Persuasions to a Sound Conviction (1658)
The Crucifying of the World by the Cross of Christ (1658)
Christian Unity (1659)
A Treatise of Self-Denial (1660)
The Vain Religion of the Formal Hypocrite Detected (1660)
The Mischiefs of Self-Ignorance and the Benefits of Self-Acquaintance (1662)
Now or Never (1662)
A Saint or a Brute (1662)
The Divine Life (1664)
Directions for Weak, Distempered Christians (1669)
The Life of Faith (1670)

And the family handbook that had been planned to round off the series had swelled by 1673, its publication date, to (I give the full title):

A Christian Directory

or

A Sum of Practical Theology, 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 Mortify Every Sin.

In Four Parts.

I. Christian Ethics (or Private Duties)
II. Christian Economics (or Family Duties)
III. Christian Ecclesiastics (or Church Duties)
IV. Christian Politics (or Duties to Our Rulers and Neighbours).

(Let it be remembered that in the days before dust jackets whatever a writer wanted bookstore browsers to know about the contents of his book had to be put on the title page.) For range, size, and analytical coverage this work by Baxter was unique in its day, not to speak of ours; it is well over a million words long. During the years of his ejection Baxter also published two folios of systematic theology—one of them in Latin—and many smaller writings on church questions. His pen was never idle.

In 1662 he married Margaret Charlton, a dispossessed young gentlewoman, bright and highly strung, who after having her home destroyed in the Civil War came to assurance under Baxter's ministry. She was twenty-one years younger than Baxter, scarcely more than half his age, and they were both difficult people by ordinary standards, but it was a love match and their marriage was a happy one, something indeed of a model, as appears from the touching breviate (short account) of her life that Baxter wrote within weeks of Margaret's death in 1681.[2] Their life together was lived in and round London, where Baxter continued to live until his own death ten years later.

It was William Haller who, in 1938, first characterized Puritan pastors as physicians of the soul.[3] The phrase fits, particularly in Baxter's case. When he began his Kidderminster ministry, the town lacked a doctor, and he acted as one till he could recruit a qualified man to move there. He had evidently gained a good deal of medical knowledge from living with his own sickliness, and his sense of responsibility would have matched what he wrote in the *Directory* about "The Duty of Physicians."[4] But

2. Richard Baxter, *A Breviate of the Life of Margaret, the Daughter of Francis Charlton, of Apply in Shropshire, Esq., and Wife of Richard Baxter.* One edition of the breviate is J. I. Packer, *A Grief Sanctified: Through Sorrow to Eternal Hope* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002).

3. William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), chap. 1.

4. See Michael Lundy's updated version of "The Duty of Physicians" in the appendix, p. 169.

he would always have insisted that his job as a pastor required him to keep telling his people that their first task, like his, was to care for their souls, center their lives on God and the realities of eternity, seek the fullness of conversion, and aim at thorough discipleship to Christ according to the Scriptures. The pastor's God-given role as a guide in this should be seen as twofold: as a teacher and mentor in revealed truth through biblical instruction and systematic catechizing, and as spiritual health expert, able to diagnose and prescribe for spiritual well-being as need arose. By spiritual disorder Puritans meant any condition that sin in any form was shaping, while they equated spiritual health with love, service, communion with Christ, and a walk with God—in one word, *holiness*. It can fairly be said of his ministry from start to finish that Baxter was expressing in one way or another this sense of ministerial vocation, much of which he verbalized very vividly for himself and his colleagues in his 1655 classic, *The Reformed Pastor*.

Baxter's Ground Plan for Discipling

A fuller view of the first half of *A Christian Directory* is in order here. Baxter's gift for topical analysis serves him well as he goes through all that he sees to be involved in the proper conduct of one's personal spiritual life. This overview has masterpiece quality and authority; it is fundamental and constitutes the frame within which spiritual depression is to be discerned and treated.

Following the evangelistic and catechetical material with which the *Directory* opens (for Baxter is clearly thinking of the whole work on the model of a catechism course), Baxter sets out seventeen "Grand Directions" for a "Life of Faith and Holiness: Containing the Essentials of Godliness and Christianity."[5] Abbreviated, the list looks like this:

5. Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, pt. 1, *Christian Ethics*, chap. 3 (title).

1. Understand the nature, ground, reason, and order of faith and godliness.
2. How to live by faith in Christ.
3. How to believe in the Holy Ghost and live by his grace.
4. For a true, orderly, and practical knowledge of God.
5. Of self-resignation to God as our owner.
6. Of subjection to God as our sovereign King.
7. To learn of Christ as our teacher. The imitation of Christ.
8. To obey Christ our physician or Savior in his repairing, healing work.
9. Of Christian warfare under Christ.
10. How to work as servants of Christ our Lord.
11. To love God as our Father and felicity and end.
12. Absolutely to trust God with soul and body, and all.
13. That the temperament of our religion may be a delight in God and holiness.
14. Of thankfulness to God, our grand benefactor.
15. For glorifying God.
16. For heavenly mindedness.
17. For self-denial.

After these general "Grand Directions" come specific instructions to counter "the great sins most directly contrary to godliness":[6] unbelief, hardness of heart, hypocrisy, man-pleasing, and sensuality, plus guidance for governing one's thoughts and one's tongue, one's passions and senses, and for practicing some further forms of self-control. The work is then rounded off with detailed discussion of serving God at home and in church.

The relevance of this material for us is that it shows the quality of life to which Baxter, like other Puritans, sought to

6. Baxter, *Christian Ethics*, chap. 4 (title).

lead those whom he pastored, persons in depression along with the rest. Current culture sees depressives as healed when they can once more function well in society, but Puritans saw all humans as sin-sick and not in good inner health till they had learned to know Christ and to live in the manner sketched out above. Puritan counsel about depression, and about salvation, therefore, melded into one. (A fine example of this is Baxter's *The Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience and Spiritual Comfort*, noted above, p. 21.)

Three basic perspectives pervade all of Baxter's practical writings, each a guideline toward spiritual well-being as he understood it.

The first is the *primacy of the intellect*. All truth, so he says repeatedly, enters the soul via understanding. All motivation begins in the mind as one contemplates the realities and possibilities that draw forth affection and desire; all fellowship with Christ the Mediator also begins in the mind, with knowledge of his undying love and present risen life; all obedience begins in the mind, with recognition of revelation concerning his purpose and will. Calls to consider—to think, that is, and so get God's truth clear first in one's head and then in one's heart—are accordingly basic to Baxter's instruction. The heavily didactic, intellectually demanding quality that this imparts to his writings is, from his point of view, a necessity. It is the mind that must grasp and lead.

The second perspective is *the unity of human life before the Lord*. God made us to fulfill simultaneously two great commandments: to love God himself in his triune being, which part 1 of the *Directory* teaches us to do, and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, which parts 2–4, on role responsibilities in the home, the church, and the community, lead us into. Note, by the way, that neighbor love, which after all is a form

of charity, must begin at home; this is the biblical and Reformational emphasis. The family is mankind's primary society, and those who do not learn to love and serve their neighbors in the home—spouse, children, servants—remain hypocrites and failed disciples, however hard they may labor to serve others in the church and beyond. First things first!

The third perspective is *the centrality of eternity*. Heaven and hell are realities, and the greatness of the human soul consists partly, at least, in the fact that we will never cease to be, but must inhabit one or the other of these destinations forever. The purpose of life is to find out and follow the road to heaven, through conversion and sanctification in faith, hope, and love. In begging his hearers and readers to take eternity seriously, to think of it often, and so to run as to obtain heaven's glory, Baxter surely spoke a word that today's Christians, materially minded and this-worldly to a fault, badly need to hear. The sprawling, soaring devotional best seller mentioned above, which shot Baxter to prominence in 1650 and has been linked with his name ever since, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*, hammers away at this theme with great emphasis, and his evangelistic and pastoral writing thereafter never lost sight of it.

Counselor to Christians in Depression

For Puritans as a body, the good life was the godly life, and the godly life was a product of thought: thought about the framework of obligations (duties) that God has established in his Word, thought about the blood-bought forgiveness and acceptance by which Christians live, thought about God's gracious promises, thought about means to ends, and thought about the glory of God as the true goal of all created life. Puritan instruction in behavior and relationships was thus first and foremost a matter of teaching people to *think* (or, to use their

regular word for this, to *consider*): to reflect, that is, on how to serve and please God in response to the truth and grace he has made known in creation, and in and through Christ. Here, however, as the Puritans clearly saw, problems arose. They knew, of course, as did and does just about everyone in the Western world, that each human being is a psychophysical unit, in which the body and the mind, though distinct, are currently inseparable, and either may make its mark functionally on the other, for better and for worse. One problem here, whereby physical factors led to a measure of mental unbalance, was what the Puritans labeled melancholy. Differently diagnosed, it remains with us today.

The word *melancholy*, which nowadays is a simple synonym for sadness, was in the seventeenth century a technical medical term. It comes from two Greek words meaning "black bile." The theory was that the human body contained four "humors" in different proportions: namely, blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. One of these, by predominating, determines each person's temperament (another technical term in those days)—that is, one's behavioral and dispositional quality. A person could be sanguine (abounding in blood: hopeful, enterprising, and liable to overdo things), or phlegmatic (cool, detached, lethargic, perhaps chillingly so), or choleric (impetuous, aggressive, sometimes explosively so), or melancholic (gloomy, pessimistic, apt to run scared and to suffer from despairing, destructive fantasies).[7] Baxter's observant, analytical mind, which fitted him to function for a time as Kidderminster's amateur physician, equipped him to focus and describe melancholy with

7. Baxter's adherence to this view appears when he writes that Satan can "much easier tempt a choleric person to anger, than another, and a phlegmatic, fleshly person to sloth, and a sanguine or hot-tempered person to lust, and wantonness; so also a melancholy person to thoughts of blasphemy, infidelity, and despair" (Baxter, *Christian Ethics*, chap. 6, "Directions for the Government of the Thoughts," title 5, "Directions to the Melancholy about Their Thoughts," no. 26).

precision on the basis of firsthand observational and pastoral interaction. His description can be summarized as follows:

Melancholy, as Baxter perceived it, was a psychophysical reality, a "diseased craziness . . . of the imagination"[8] that might be caused by the body being out of sorts ("sorrows that come from your spleen"),[9] or by overload or overstrain on the mind, or perhaps both together. Its symptoms were at many points recognizable as distortions of Puritan ideas and ideals that pervaded the culture. They included fantastic fears: hell-centered, running riot in head and heart; also, delusive impressions of hearing voices, seeing bright lights, feeling touches, and of being urged to blaspheme and commit suicide. Bad dreams were frequent. Melancholics characteristically could not control their thoughts; they were unable to stop despairing about everything, or to begin a discipline of thanksgiving and rejoicing in Christ, or to concentrate on anything but their own hopelessness and felt certainty of damnation. They would cultivate solitariness and idleness; they would spend hours doing nothing. They would insist that others did not understand them, and that they were not sick but only realistic about themselves, and they would prove perversely obstinate in the matter of taking medication.

The treatment that Baxter as a pastor recommended boiled down to never letting melancholics lose sight of the redeeming love of God, the free offer of life in Christ, and the greatness of grace at every point in the gospel; not attempting to practice the "secret duty" of meditation and prayer on one's own, but praying aloud in company; cultivating cheerful Christian community ("there is no mirth like the mirth of believers");[10] avoiding idleness; and making good use of a skilled physician,

8. Baxter, "Directions to the Melancholy," introductory par.
9. Richard Baxter, *The Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience and Spiritual Comfort* (1653), direct. 2, no. 2.
10. Baxter, *Right Method for a Settled Peace*, direct. 2, no. 3.

a discerning pastor, and other faithful Christian mentors and friends, for support, guidance, and hopefully a cure.

Toward an Assessment

The measure of our appreciation of Baxter's ministry to depressed Christians will surely be the extent to which we go with his view of man, sin, and grace. There is no disputing that Puritan theology was generically Reformed, and Reformed theology was (and is) generically Augustinian, and Augustine's theology was generically Pauline and Johannine, on the basis of a view of Scripture as authoritative divine truth, unchanged and unchanging. Both Paul and John insist on the radical perversity of the fallen human heart, and the equally radical quality of the inward change that the Holy Spirit effects when he brings a person to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Tuning in to Ezekiel's imagery of the new heart and the new spirit (Ezek. 36:26),[11] Paul speaks of this change as a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17),[12] and John pictures it, as did Jesus himself, as a new birth (1 John 2:29–3:9;[13] see also John 3:3–12).[14] Puritan pastors as a body, like Baxter, saw everyone

11. "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26).

12. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

13. "If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

"Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God" (1 John 2:29–3:9).

14. "Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is

as naturally, deep down, in the grip of sin: that is, of rebellious, anti-God pride and self-centeredness. They took it as their business to present to sinners the truth about Jesus Christ the Savior, and the reality of Christ himself, the risen, living, present Lord; to call on them to respond to the good news of grace; and to guide faithful responders to glory by drilling them in clear-headed, wholehearted discipleship to their Master.

Baxter's own *Reformed Pastor* shows what this task meant for him personally, and Mr. Great-heart in the second part of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* profiles it in broadest terms. What we call depression and Baxter called melancholy, compounded as it is of nonrationality, delusion, the sloth of inaction, and the gloom of despair, keeps its victims from thoughtful, perceptive, resolute commitment to Christ, with hope, joy, and love, that the gospel calls for. So it should seem no wonder that Baxter saw the relieving of melancholy as a major task for the pastor, nor that he should prescribe for its relief a modified version of Christian devotional disciplines.

The approach to depression, however, that marks today's Western world parts company with that of Baxter and his Puritan colleagues all along the line. To start with, the historic Christian notion of community has been replaced by a secular, pragmatic, this-worldly mind-set which takes for granted that everyone's proper goal is a pain-free, well-socialized, self-fulfilling functional efficiency in whatever style of life one may

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old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.'

"Nicodemus said to him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?'" (John 3:3–12).

choose to embrace. Depression is viewed now not as a specific disorder of already disordered and misdirected human nature but as mental illness, a phenomenon on a par with physical illness, namely, the malfunctioning of an organ or process that is built into the human system. Clinical depression is a label for any state of diffused gloom and sadness that negates endeavor, achievement, and satisfaction with life, and breeds discontent and hopelessness in their place. It is nowadays linked with panic disorder, and aspects of schizophrenia and bipolar disease, as a condition that well-chosen medication should be able to relieve.

So far, no doubt, so true. My only point is that when Christians are in depression, this is not the whole story; for such depression is not ordinarily viewed as evidence that human nature in itself is fallen out of shape, nor as a reality with which pastors of churches or leaders of Christian groups are in any way qualified to deal. The assumption is that depressed persons should be guided to members of the medical, therapeutic, and helping professions, who will, it is hoped, through antidepressant drugs linked where necessary with structured counseling, succeed in restoring the victims of oppressive sadness to a life of rational, cheerful enterprise. Within this world of diagnosis and treatment all forms of religion are commonly suspect as unbalancing eccentricities, and Christian pastors in particular are in effect, sometimes explicitly, requested from time to time to keep their hands off.

Unquestionably, there is gain, within limits, in the modern development of depression therapy, but there seems to be loss too. Pastors in the Reformed, Puritan, and evangelical traditions see it as their business to keep teaching the truth about Jesus Christ, crucified and glorified, through whom the Holy Spirit will work moral-spiritual transformation in the lives of those who turn to him, seeking salvation from the guilt and

power of sin. Such pastors, serving people in this way, when faced with depression will surely wish to bring at least some of the thinking that Baxter exemplifies to bear on the situation. So, does there not seem to be need for a pattern of partnership between them and those psychiatrists who do not rule out religion as an element in the good life? This question requires further discussion. But for the moment we should stand aside and let Baxter speak for himself.

"Directions to the Melancholy" and "The Cure of Melancholy"

During his years of exclusion from the pastorate by the terms of the 1662 Act of Uniformity, Baxter, while living quietly in or near London, gained a reputation as a consultant on many spiritual disorders, melancholy being one. It should not surprise us, therefore, that when plans were made for a series of topical-textual lecture-sermons on pastoral problems, each to be given by a nonconforming clergyman and all to be published, Baxter should have been booked to preach to the question "What are the best preservatives against melancholy and overmuch sorrow?" and to do so with reference to 2 Corinthians 2:7, where the phrase "overmuch sorrow" (KJV) is found. Baxter was a treatise-minded thinker who always sought to say, however briefly, everything he knew about the topic he had in mind, and here he took the opportunity to spell out all he knew about the pastoral handling of depression in its various forms.

Twice previously (in the second "Direction" of his *Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience and Spiritual Comfort*; and in "Directions to the Melancholy about Their Thoughts," in his *Christian Directory*—rendered in our chap. 3 as "Advice to Depressed and Anxious Christians"), he had written an account of the melancholic condition, viewed as spiritual

malfunctioning. In "The Cure of Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow, by Faith" (rendered in our chap. 4 as "The Resolution of Depression and Overwhelming Grief through Faith"), he lays it out as a blockage to faith, hope, joy, and love. Having contextualized it as one form of "overmuch sorrow," he labors to cover all the bases of corrective and potentially curative pastoral ministration that the Bible affords.

PRACTICAL WISDOM FOR DEALING WITH DEPRESSION

Depression—whether circumstantial and fleeting or persistent and long term—impacts most people at some point in their lives. Puritan pastor Richard Baxter spent most of his ministry caring for depressed and discouraged souls, and his timeless counsel still speaks to us today. In this book, psychiatrist Michael S. Lundy and theologian J. I. Packer present Baxter's writings in order to comfort, instruct, and strengthen all who struggle with depression.

"A few consultations with the soul-physician group of Packer, Lundy, and Baxter will be medicine for your soul!"

Sinclair B. Ferguson, Chancellor's Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary

"Few, if any, Christians are unfamiliar with the pain of anxiety and depression. Few, if any, will fail to be immensely helped by the guidance offered in these pages."

Mark Jones, Teaching Elder, Faith Vancouver Presbyterian Church

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RICHARD BAXTER (1615–1691) was an English Puritan pastor, well known for his work *The Reformed Pastor* and for his care for depressed souls.

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