

Richard Baxter, *A Grief Sanctified*

- **Puritan Spiritual Autobiography**
- **Self-Examination, Doubt, and the Quest for Assurance**
- **A New, Protestant Model for Marriage**

Puritan spiritual autobiography=a personal memoir with a spiritual focus

- transition from medieval hagiography (saint→miracles, victory over demonic temptations, chastity/celibacy) to Protestant spiritual biography/autobiography (narration of spiritual experience to illustrate universal spiritual truths about God's grace to sinners, looking back to/drawing upon Augustine's *Confessions*)
- Individual's life gives an example of the working of grace in sinner's life (and his/her subsequent conversion and sanctification)--this serves as an exemplar/model template for other's lives

Puritan Self-Examination

- Note Margaret's self-examination on pp. 54ff., in which she finds no grounds for assurance of faith, but rather finds herself wanting
 - In examining her conduct, she does not find the fruits of grace (humility, love toward others, and love toward prayer and reading the Scriptures)
 - She therefore considers that she may be unconverted
 - She falls ill consumptive and coughing (tuberculosis feared)
 - Baxter/others pray and fast for her recovery
 - Thanksgiving for her recovery--a way of processing evils, physical suffering and recovery
 - agenda for the thanksgiving (to learn gratitude-p. 60)
 - renewal of her baptismal covenant with God (pp. 61-62)
 - writing as a way to process spiritual matters
 - Does one seek peace from comfort in creatures or from Christ alone?
 - One ought not to over-love (inappropriately/immoderately love) creatures or one will be unable to come to terms with their frailty and loss (pp. 63-64)
 - "Heaven is my home"

Narrating the Working of Grace through Pastoral Counsel

"Yet she continued under great fears that she had not saving grace because she had not that degree of holy affection which she desired" (p. 68)

- Baxter sends letter of pastoral counsel, of which she transcribes portions (p. 69), advising her to trust God and not to fear
- Believing that the godly take counsel with the pastor as best suited to advise them (p. 73), she comes to love and desire God and the means of grace instead of seeking comfort in human beings (p. 74).

- Trials and adversities are given by God to shape and strengthen one's resolution against sin and to help one learn self-denial (p. 75).
- Rather than looking to friends for kindness/honor (p. 78), one must have self-resignation and look to Christ (p. 79)

How Puritan Pastoral Counsel Works

- Understand the person's individual temperament and separate the physical and the spiritual causes of their condition
 - "She had a diseased, unresistable fearfulness; her quick and too sensitive nature was over timorous...a partly natural and a partly adventitious diseased fearfulness in a tender over-passionate nature, that had no power to quiet her own fears, without any other cloud on her understanding" (pp. 85-86; compare pp. 112-113).
 - One part physical (melancholy as a product of bodily humors) (p. 113: "more the malady of her body than her soul")
 - melancholy= a distemper arising originally/primarily from the body, so may be modified through diet, exercise, medical intervention
 - The danger of fear and mournfulness: One must make sure that mournful sadness does not counterfeit godly sorrow (p. 80).
 - One part experiences of illness/near approach of death
 - One part traumatic experiences of violence.
 - One part spiritual: "And in a word all the operations of her soul were very intense and strong: strong wit, and strong love, and strong displeasure. And when God showed her what holiness was, she thought she must have it in so great a degree as the ripest saints do here attain; and that because she had not as much heavenly life and sense and delight in God as she knew she should have and desired, she concluded of it that she had none that was sincere."
 - Cause: Original sin as a dynamic principle that corrupts a person's deepest (root) motivations and fundamental drives.
 - Cure: Through taking counsel with a pastor and/or reading edifying literature produced by pastors
 - Moving from repentance to faith, with sinful motivation (seeking to satisfy sinful drives) replaced by
 - a love for God
 - a desire for a holy life
 - glorifying and enjoying God→gratitude expressed through praise and worship (seeking one's happiness in the one who alone can truly satisfy)
 - Believer's acceptance with God dependent upon merits of Christ alone
 - Work of the Spirit inwardly renewing believer and assurance of acceptance with God

Constitution of human person (each person must move toward healing at all levels):

Reasoning:

- Higher (rationally informed) understanding and will
- Lower (practical/short-term but instinctive) understanding and will
 - Ignorance overcome through knowledge (teaching of the Word)
 - Challenge the supposed truth and benefits of counselee's old beliefs and behaviors
 - The real but provisional value of created things (which invites thanksgiving and should temper one's grief)
 - New beliefs bring truth to mind and motivate will to pursue a new, truer, better goal (instead of pursuing disordered/excessive desires and being controlled by them)
 - Holy Spirit touches down upon one's conscience to impress these truths deeply upon the soul, moving one to hate one's sin as an offense against God.
 - Obedience as the confirming of one's will to God's will
- Perceptions, memory, imagination and the sensitive appetite
 - damaged by sin
 - Fears, worries, anxieties, intrusive/accusing thoughts, leading to an overarching attitude of distrust/unbelief, pride (hardhearted resistance to the work of God and depression)
 - The imagining of evils, yet slow to think of what is holy and good
 - Fear replaced by new love, which drives out and fills the space of old love
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Puritan domestic piety--the Puritan family/household as a central place where sanctification is worked out

- Contrast with medieval emphasis on
 - religious ideal of singleness for total devotion to prayer in a monastic setting or priestly service vs.
 - secular ideal of extra-marital courtly love
- On the Puritan affirmation of marriage, see quotations on Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, pp. 44 (bottom), 45 (middle)
- Marriage as a relationship between two sinners, in which each must bear with the infirmities of the other and ask forgiveness of the other (Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, p. 51 [bottom])
- Besides the pleasure of companionship, Puritan marriage also emphasized not only the procreation of children but the need to raise children in the faith in an intentional way; see

Ryken, *Godly Saints*, p. 79 (top), 80 (top; bis) on discipline to root out evil, selfishness, see p. 82 (middle; bis) and on the power of example, p. 83 (middle; bis)

- *Family worship and the instruction of children in religion becomes a microcosm of the church (so Ryken, pp. 84-85), being shaped and informed not only by natural love but also supernatural love.
 - God, by his supernatural love steadies and stabilizes the family.
 - The natural love of the family also points to supernatural love and prepares one to ascend toward one's heavenly Father. See Ryken, *Worldly Saints*, p. 49 (middle and bottom; 2-1-3).