

CRAIG A SMITH

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# Richard Baxter: A Pioneer in Youth Ministry

**Continuing our series of articles examining evangelicals of the past and their value for today, Craig Smith here explores Richard Baxter's work among the young people of his day. He highlights the importance of this ministry both then and now, draws parallels between the world of the seventeenth century and today and suggests that Baxter's approach offers challenges for those developing a strategy for outreach to young people today.**

The Oxford Dictionary defines *problem* as 'a difficult question or task' or 'a thing hard to understand'. In light of this definition I suggest that one very large problem today is the lack of Christian ministry to young people in England. A quick survey of some of the statistics demonstrates the gravity of the situation. Children in their mid-teens and younger, comprised 26% of England's churchgoers in 1979.<sup>1</sup> But throughout the 1990s this group has been leaving the church at the alarming rate of 1,000 per week.<sup>2</sup> It has been estimated that by 2020, if this trend continues, only 4% of the church population will be under the age of fifteen<sup>3</sup> and there will be no children by 2030. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that two out of every five churches presently in England do not have any children's or youth ministry focused specifically on them in terms of Sunday School, youth clubs etc. It appears that resources for ministry to young people have been withdrawn at the very time when the need is greatest. Avoiding this issue is not an option. The tide must be turned. What follows is hopefully one push in this direction.

In this short article I will present Richard Baxter's perspective on the young people of his day, the problems they faced, and the method he used to reach them. I will contrast these with today's perspective, hopefully gaining some insight from the past on how to reach our young people today. I use the term 'youth' throughout this piece in the same way Richard Baxter understood it, referring to young people ranging from aged six to mid-teens. It is important to remember that there was no category called 'teenagers' in Baxter's day as one moved almost directly from childhood to adulthood.

## **Richard Baxter, an unlikely paradigm for youth and children's ministry?**

Looking at Richard Baxter's life and work with respect to the youth of his day may seem strange since he was a seventeenth-century (1615-91) Puritan clergyman.

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1 Brierley 2003: 16.

2 Wraight 2003: 4.

3 Brierley 2003: 16.

Baxter is usually remembered for his powerful preaching ministry in which he preached to thousands of people (including Cromwell) and he later became the chaplain to King Charles II. But, preaching was, to him, a 'recreation' representing 'the least part of a minister's work'.<sup>4</sup> He is also widely remembered because of the many books he authored. He wrote more than 130, the most famous being *The Reformed Pastor* (originally *Gildas Silvianus*) which is still in print today.<sup>5</sup> According to Baxter, however, it was neither his preaching nor his writing which had the greatest imprint of the Lord's hand. Rather he declares that 'the place where God most blessed my labours at Kidderminster [where he ministered for nineteen years from 1641 to 1660], my first and greatest success was upon the youth'.<sup>6</sup> To confess this seems astonishing in light of his other accomplishments.

Part of Baxter's success in reaching the youth was due to the primary focus he gave to them in his ministry. At a time when life expectancy was much shorter than it is today, he writes 'men live so short a time, that the work of educating the youth aright is one half of the great business of a man's life'.<sup>7</sup> This viewpoint is just as much needed today as then. Sadly, many clergy see reaching the youth as a less important ministerial function, considering it a responsibility for others in the church. Too often pastors seek to find a lay member or to hire a youth worker (both of which are good things to do) 'to look after the youth'. Pastors pawn this work to others so that they can 'get to the more important things of ministry'. But this kind of thinking would be anathema to Baxter who saw this work as a central part of the role of clergy. I am not espousing that pastors drop their other responsibilities to focus solely on the youth but I am arguing, like Baxter, that it is important for pastors to keep evangelism and pastoral care of the youth in the forefront of their minds when planning their church's strategies and to take advantage of any opportunity to reach the youth which may come their way.

## The importance of reaching the youth

### Baxter's personal experience

Why did Baxter consider reaching the youth of such importance? Partly this is born out of his own negative experience of the clergy, church and religious education while he was growing up. These encounters left him with a sense of alienation from God. Sound familiar? He was eager to reverse this experience for others in his parish.

Baxter spent the first ten years of his life living with his grandparents away from his working parents and this only served to heighten his sense of alienation. He says of the clergy in his area that they were 'ignorant' or 'immoral' or 'very old' or led 'scandalous lives' or were incapable to teach since they were not trained.<sup>8</sup> His experience of religious education was also negative. Baxter laments that his schoolmasters 'taught school and tiddled on the weekdays, and whipped the boys when they were drunk'.<sup>9</sup> When he was reunited at the age of ten with his mother

<sup>4</sup> The quotation comes from Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* cited in Purves 2001: 95.

<sup>5</sup> The most recent edition of this work is Baxter 2000 though perhaps the most commonly available in the UK is Baxter 1974. For further reading on Richard Baxter see Packer 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Baxter 1830b: 299.

<sup>7</sup> Baxter 1830b: 306.

<sup>8</sup> Kreeble 1974: 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> Kreeble 1974: 4.

and father he began to grow in his faith. His father, who had been converted during this time 'by the bare reading of the Scriptures in private, without either preaching or godly company, or any other books but the Bible',<sup>10</sup> subsequently 'taught [young Richard] to read the Bible so as to acquire a love for it, a benefit which ever afterwards he recalled with gratitude'.<sup>11</sup> Reading the Bible, coupled with his father's 'serious speeches of God and the life to come', created his 'first convictions, and approbations of a holy life, as well as of [his] restraint from the grosser sort of lives'.<sup>12</sup>

### **Forming Christian youth as fundamental for changing the world**

However, the main reason Baxter addressed his attention to the youth was because he saw their Christian formation as fundamental to the future of the world. In his book entitled *Compassionate Counsel to All Young Men* he concludes that

There is no man that ever understood the interest of mankind, of families, cities, kingdoms, churches, and of Jesus Christ the King and Saviour, but he must needs know that the right instruction, education, and sanctification of youth is of unspeakable consequence to them all.<sup>13</sup>

Baxter's point is clear: to change the future requires changing the youth in the present. He believed that if a person embraced Christ in their youth then the chances are that they would live for him in their later years. Jeremy Burroughes (1599-1646), a Puritan contemporary of Baxter,<sup>14</sup> writes what happens when the youth are not disciplined:

There is little hope for children who are educated wickedly. If the dye have been in the wool, it is hard to get it out of the cloth.<sup>15</sup>

### **Good time management**

Baxter further believed that sheer logic suggests that a minister should seek to convert the youth in order to save him the added effort needed later to deal with them and their entrenched sin patterns as unconverted adults. In other words, reaching out to the youth today is a good investment of energy and time well spent. Baxter believed that the sins of adulthood are often caused by the sins begun in one's youth and the ramifications of some of these sins can be felt until death.<sup>16</sup> His experience as a minister in Kidderminster confirmed this belief.

By much experience I have been made more sensible of the necessity of warning and instructing youth. The sad reports of fame have taught it to me; the sad complaints of mournful parents have taught it me; the sad observation of the willful impenitence of some of my acquaintances tells it me; the many score (if not hundreds) of bills that have been publicly put up to me to pray for wicked and obstinate children, have told it me; and by the grace of God, the penitent confessions, lamentations, and restitutions of many converts have more particularly acquainted me with their case.<sup>17</sup>

Baxter discovered the same lesson as the writer of Proverbs who saw life as a choice of two paths: wisdom which leads to life, and foolishness or wickedness which leads

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**10** Kreeble 1974: 4.

**11** Powicke 1924: 17.

**12** Kreeble 1974: 4.

**13** Baxter 1830b: 299.

**14** Tiller 1974: 169.

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**15** Thomas 1975: 42.

**16** Baxter 1830b:302 bemoans that 'the bitter fruit of your youthful folly may follow you in this world to the grave'.

**17** Baxter 1830b:299-300.

to death (Prov. 1:2-7). The purpose of parents, teachers and ministers is to set young people on the path of wisdom and to help them to reject the path of destruction (1:15). To do this requires discipline and training. The results are good and beneficial for, he writes, 'train young people in the way they should go and when they are old they will not turn from it' (22:6). To discipline young people is an act of love: 'parents who love their young people are careful to discipline them' (13:24). Failure to discipline young people or their rejection of this discipline may mean that they 'come to poverty and shame' (13:18). Here we see that Baxter's concern for reaching the youth had strong biblical roots.

### **The wider-reaching ramifications of youth ministry**

Baxter also saw reaching the youth as an evangelistic tool for getting the gospel to their parents and grandparents. Baxter smilingly observes:

Many children did God work upon at fourteen, or fifteen, or sixteen years of age; and this did marvelously reconcile the minds of the parents and elder sort to godliness. They that would not hear me, would hear their own children. They that before could have talked against godliness, would not hear it spoken against when it was their children's case. Many that would not be brought to themselves, were proud that they had understanding, religious children. And we had some old persons, of near eighty years of age, who are, I hope, in heaven, and the conversion of their own children was the chief means to overcome their prejudices, and old customs, and conceits...and when God had touched the hearts of young men and girls with a love of goodness, and delightful obedience to the truth, the parents and grandfathers, who had grown old in an ignorant and worldly state, did fall into a liking and love of piety, induced by the love of their children, whom they perceived to be made by it much wiser and better, and more dutiful to them.<sup>18</sup>

Reaching out to the youth not only has the advantage of avoiding having to deal with their compounded problems as adults but the added blessing that the minister is provided with an army of evangelists. What parish could not do with a few extra evangelists?

### **The context of Richard Baxter's ministry**

Baxter lived and ministered in seventeenth-century England. This was a turbulent time in English history, a time of upheaval politically, religiously and socially. Yet it was in the midst of this difficult context that Baxter had a successful ministry to the youth.

#### **Political context**

During the prime years of Baxter's ministry, England was caught up in a civil war (1642-54) which led to a short reign of the Puritan Parliamentarians and the eventual restoration of the monarchy (1660-85). A good deal of fighting occurred in his area with significant loss of life.

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<sup>18</sup> Thomson 1998: 50, 54.

### Religious context

The religious climate of the 1600s was also quite heated as the Puritans were trying to influence Anglicanism toward a more Calvinist stance. The Laudian party, under the influence of Archbishop William Laud (1633-1641), sought an Anglicanism that emphasized Arminianism and High Church ceremonialism. Simpson writes ‘the dispute between the Laudians and Puritans was the religious counterpart of the conflict between Charles I and Parliament’.<sup>19</sup> Laud’s influence was brought to a halt in 1641 when he was imprisoned, later being executed for treason in January 1645. But with the restoration of Charles II in 1660 came the return of the Laudian style Church of England. Baxter was not untouched by all this. In 1661 he created a revised version of the Book of Common Prayer for Nonconformists and the approval of the Act of Uniformity in 1662 resulted in his exclusion from the Church of England and the loss of his ecclesiastical living. Nevertheless, he continued to preach until 1685 when he was imprisoned for two years for doing so.

### Social context

The social situation of Baxter’s time was grim. Poverty was a major problem with youth being abandoned and left to fend for themselves. For two years, from 1665-66, England was ravaged by the bubonic plague and many young people died from this disease. Many others were orphaned, left without one or both parents, and forced to live with extended family members or in orphanages.

It is clear that Baxter lived and ministered in difficult times and yet he had a vibrant, successful ministry among the youth. His context and success have, I believe, earned him the right to be heard on the issue of ministering to the youth in our present context especially given the similarities between today and some of the issues the youth of his day faced.

### Issues for the youth of seventeenth-century England

Some might wonder if it is appropriate to draw from Baxter’s thinking and practice since his time and ours at the start of the twenty-first century are so different. Many might say that the situation which young people face today is much more pressurized and complex than that of seventeenth-century England. But is this true? In reality, the youth of Baxter’s times faced issues very much like those our youth face today.

Baxter is quick to say that some of the problem with the youth is due to ‘the immediate parent’s sins’,<sup>20</sup> using King David as an example. But he does not blame parents for all the problems young people have. He squarely addresses the issues which must be owned by every young person. In *Compassionate Counsel to Young Men*,<sup>21</sup> he lists six sins that young people face and which keep them from the true life found in Christ.

### Love of sport

The first sin is what Baxter called the love of sport. By this he means amusement in the form of gambling and stage-plays.<sup>22</sup> Of these two, the former has more

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<sup>19</sup> Simpson 1974: 343.

<sup>20</sup> Baxter 1830b:311.

<sup>21</sup> Baxter 1830b: 312-16.

<sup>22</sup> Baxter 1830b: 312.

relevance to today's youth. Gambling is becoming an increasingly significant issue among young people today. The Harvard Medical School Division on Addictions estimated in 1997 (the last official survey) that 5.7 million adolescents in the USA had a gambling problem and 2.2 million had a pathological problem.<sup>23</sup> The general feeling among researchers is that this level is increasing dramatically. The main causes are the easy access to internet gambling, the increased number and accessibility of casinos (particularly in urban centres) and general ideological acceptance of gambling within society. One positive contemporary response to this is found in educational websites such as [www.teenage-gambling-addiction.org](http://www.teenage-gambling-addiction.org).

### Love of drinking

Love of drinking was named by Baxter as the second sin.<sup>24</sup> During Baxter's time there was no age restriction on drinking. This, coupled with the fact that a child moved almost directly to adulthood, meant that drinking would be a rite of passage (certainly for boys although less so for girls). In 2003, Martin Plant, Professor of Addiction Studies at the University of West England, published the results of the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Drugs. He found that 25% of boys and 29% of girls questioned among 15-16 year-olds (in a sample of 2000 pupils) admitted to binge-drinking in the previous month.<sup>25</sup> The rate of binge-drinking among girls in England has been continuing to rise since the last survey in 1999. A study published in the October 2005 edition of the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* about the relationship of binge drinking, sex and drugs on adolescents<sup>26</sup> revealed that boys who indulged in binge drinking were 4.5 times more likely to become depressed than the abstaining group. Likewise, depression was three times more likely to be experienced by those who smoked marijuana than those who did not. The study also found that girls who had taken drugs or dabbled in sex were two to three times more likely to be depressed than those who abstained.

### Idleness

Of idleness, Baxter says, it 'becomes the nursery of temptation and all other vices, as well as a constant sin of omission and loss of hasty, precious time'.<sup>27</sup> Idleness is no less a problem today than in Baxter's time. The truancy rate in English secondary schools rose by 10% from 2003-4 to 2004-5. This translates into the fact that 55,000 students are missing school each day despite the government having spent over £900m on curbing this problem. A survey by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) revealed that Britain ranked only twenty-second out of thirty countries for those remaining in education after the age of 16.<sup>28</sup> The social experts 'warn that youngsters who drop out of school at 16 face a lifetime of higher unemployment, low wages, lower productivity, higher crime and ill-health'.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.oagaa.org/html/statistics.htm>

<sup>24</sup> Baxter 1830b: 312-13.

<sup>25</sup> A summary of Plant's work is found in Lucy Ward's article in *The Guardian* (Nov. 26, 2004) at <http://society.guardian.co.uk/drugsandalcohol/story/0,8150,1360230,00.html>.

<sup>26</sup> The results were published in English 2005 and on-line at <http://christianitytoday.com/lyris/wiu/archives/07-03-2006.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Baxter 1830b:313.

<sup>28</sup> See [www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/youthdropout.html](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/youthdropout.html).

<sup>29</sup> See Mark Townsend's article in *The Guardian* (Aug. 24, 2003) at <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/education/story/0,,1028501,00.html>.

## **Pride**

Baxter defined the sin of pride as having to be 'in the mode and fashion, whatever the cost' because 'they must be somebody to their sottish friends'.<sup>30</sup> It appears that this problem was as real then as it is now when advertising agencies flourish, bombarding the youth with messages that they need designer clothes, certain cell-phones, specific sunglasses and shoes etc. in order to be approved and have worth.

## **Lust**

Fleshly lust which 'entangleth them...into filthy fornication'<sup>31</sup> is an age old problem and it is not surprising to find it as an issue in both the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries. It is interesting that Baxter suggests that the youth combat this problem by seeking pleasure through reading books, good company of friends and serving God.

## **Greed and idolatry**

Baxter lumps together greed and idolatry as the sixth sin. He defines this as people setting themselves 'wholly to rise in the world'.<sup>32</sup> Jesus exposed the idolatrous nature of money, concluding that one 'cannot serve both God and money' (Matt. 6:24) but money buys choice and offers power. Idolatrous greed is an infectious disease which has found ideal conditions in the twenty-first century to flourish and spread unabated.

It is, I believe, fair to say that the situation of the youth which Baxter faced has strong parallels with the situation faced by ministers today almost four centuries later. It therefore seems fair to examine Baxter's strategy for reaching the youth and, in so doing, hopefully to gain some wisdom which we can apply to our own context.

## **Baxter's threefold strategy for reaching the young people**

We have already seen the priority Baxter placed on reaching the youth, how he was firmly resolved to do so because of the many temptations and problems they faced and because he believed that their conversion and inclusion into the church was the key to the church's future growth. For these reasons he made a concerted effort to minister to the youth with a threefold strategy from which we can learn today.

### **Youth groups**

First, Baxter started what today would be called *youth groups*. He divided the youth into two sub-groups. Baxter took one group which was comprised of 'some of the younger sort [probably 6-10 or 11 years old] who were not fit to pray in so great an assembly [i.e. with the main congregation]'<sup>33</sup> and this group he met with once a week for three hours. No social events, just three hours of prayer. Those youth who were fit to pray in the great assembly (i.e. 11 or 12 years of age and older), he gathered together on Saturday evening in various homes to hear again the sermon of the previous week, to pray and to prepare themselves for the following Lord's Day. The tone of these meetings was often evangelistic as Baxter believed

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**30** Baxter 1830b: 314.

**31** Baxter 1830b: 315.

**32** Baxter 1830b: 316.

**33** Baxter quoted in Powicke 1924: 92.

that 'the great task, within and through all pastoral work "is to be the guide for sinners to heaven"'.<sup>34</sup> To neglect this call and to fail to make it a priority spells disaster for the church. He therefore exhorts the minister and parishioner alike to 'labour in a special manner for the conversion of the unconverted [because] the work of conversion is the first and great thing we drive at; after this we must labour with all our might'.<sup>35</sup>

These groups probably seem extreme to our sensibilities and we might balk at the notion of meeting with children of this age for such an extended period of time. However, there are important elements of Baxter's strategy which need to be taken on board. Clearly Baxter saw these young people as spiritual persons who were very capable of praying. In this way he saw them no differently than adults. He was able to harness their energy into prayer and keep their attention. Today, 24/7 prayer rooms are also clear proof that young people can and will respond in prayer, particularly when they are seen by adults as equals in this task.

Baxter was direct and intentional in his approach whereas much youth ministry today is indirect in its approach. While there is an understandable fear of 'turning young people off Christianity' there has been an overly cautious response to this fear with the result that much youth ministry is simply designed to create a place for kids to hang out. There has been a tendency for youth events to become merely a baptized form of the secular equivalent with an expectation that the youth will discover Christ by osmosis. While it is important to create accessible contexts for youth - I will be the first one to create a skateboard and BMX area and support *kickin' bands* to reach the youth! - there is also a need for a more direct approach in terms of evangelism and teaching. Young people are still looking for direction and for people to come alongside them in their journey. Prayer, worship and teaching are still basic to spiritual formation. Baxter had these clearly in focus and with a drastically shrinking youth population in the church we might do well to modify our approach.

### Family catechism

The second element of Baxter's strategy was to catechize the kids through weekly family conferences. He and his assistant set aside two days each week to meet fourteen different families for a one-hour catechesis. It is estimated that between them Baxter and his assistant visited about 800 families or approximately 4,000 people each year.<sup>36</sup> Baxter says 'how small a matter is it to speak to a man only once a year...yet we are in hope of some fruit'.<sup>37</sup>

Drawing on Acts 20:28, Baxter emphasized time and again that pastoral care is a fundamental role of a pastor. According to him, even though preaching is important it is pastoral care that will bring about heart transformation.<sup>38</sup> By starting with children when they are young and moulding a Christ-centred context for them

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<sup>34</sup> Purves 2001: 109.

<sup>35</sup> Baxter 1974: 94.

<sup>36</sup> See Thomson 1998: 49 and Purves 2001: 113.

<sup>37</sup> Baxter 1974: 184. It is interesting to note that here if pastors need an assistant in order to provide adequate pastoral care and there is not sufficient funds then they should pay for one out of their own pocket.

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<sup>38</sup> Baxter's rhetorical question is pertinent today: 'Will preaching a good sermon serve the turn, while you never look more after them, but deny them that closer help is necessary, and alienate that maintenance to your own flesh, which should provide relief for so many souls?' (Baxter 1974: 156).



to grow up in, Baxter believed that the flock would grow strong. Experience had taught him that wisdom does not come to a person quickly but depends on hard, time-consuming preparations throughout childhood and adolescence.<sup>39</sup> Being born into a Christian family is not a safeguard against sin and moral failure since 'a Christian's child is born with no more knowledge than a heathen's and must have as much labour and study to make him wise'.<sup>40</sup> Discipleship for Baxter begins at baptism and it is worth noting that he was a proponent of infant baptism so believed in getting an early start.

When Baxter came to a home of the unconverted his aim was to lead each man, woman and child to sincerity of faith. If he visited a home of the 'truly converted' then his goal was their 'confirmation, progress, preservation and restoration'. In both cases he was concerned about their spiritual formation and moral education, matters which Purves notes 'still today receive scant attention'.<sup>41</sup> Baxter therefore spoke directly to his parishioners and focused his discussion on matters of their salvation. When he entered a home he allowed only family members to participate in order to prevent gossip and bashfulness. His approach was pedagogical<sup>42</sup> because he likened the pastor's role in the church to a schoolmaster's in a school: 'to teach and to take account of everyone in particular'.<sup>43</sup> To aid him in this ministry Baxter used the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, which he called his 'daily bread and drink'. Young and old had to know what they believed and to experience what they professed. His method was therefore clearly prescriptive. He stressed that every person should know who they are, from where they have come, to what end they have been made and what means must be used to attain this end.<sup>44</sup> These are the basics of life. If Baxter succeeded as a teaching elder then the family would continue his work by becoming like a school, training up a succession of people to follow God's calling for their good and the good of the public.<sup>45</sup>

Implementing this strategy today would be difficult, especially for families. In our hectic society, in which one child is going to ballet while the other is off to football and both parents work, it would be difficult to get the whole family together in one place and at one time. The fact it would be difficult does not, however, mean that this is not needed even though it would mean a major paradigm shift for church members. It is certainly true that people were less mobile in Baxter's time but it is also true that it is ultimately a choice to live a hectic lifestyle and this is quite often driven by fear, greed and status.

Clergy might find applying this sort of strategy difficult too. It would mean rearranging priorities by putting greater stress on evangelism and spiritual formation in the early foundational years of childhood and adolescence. It would mean taking a long-term approach to pastoral care and leading whole families to maturity (Baxter stayed in Kidderminster for nineteen years). It would mean putting more resources towards developing the family as the focal small group as opposed to the many other groups which make up the church today.

**39** Baxter 1830a: 303.

**40** Baxter 1830a: 305.

**41** Purves 2001: 105.

**42** Before being ordained to the ministry Baxter spent three years as the school master at Free Grammar School at Bridgport. These

years were formative in his pedagogical strategy to reach the youth.

**43** Baxter 1974: 180.

**44** Baxter 1830a: 10.

**45** Baxter 1830b: 307.

These changes are not huge changes for either Christian families or clergy and if they are made churches might find they experience the same fruit which Baxter reaped and have the same problem he had – going through several building programs.

### **Youth ministry education**

Each Thursday Baxter would give a lecture on some aspect of the Christian life but once a month he would commit this Thursday lecture to speaking to the youth and those who educated the youth.<sup>46</sup> This initiative again reflects the priority Baxter put on the youth and the gravity of the situation. Thomson notes that, according to Baxter, ‘the religious education of the youth is of infinite importance to families and to a nation’.<sup>47</sup> Thomson points out that once more we see Baxter’s emphasis on education stemming from his belief that ‘education is God’s ordinary way for the conveyance of his grace’.<sup>48</sup>

As a Christian minister it can be daunting to read about Baxter since he seems a tireless worker who was prolific in writing, speaking and pastoral care. To be required to give a lecture once a month on youth ministry when it is not your area of expertise can seem like a ‘bridge too far’. However, this is one aspect of Baxter’s strategy that could be accomplished as increasingly there are websites and programmes on youth ministry (though Britain is lagging far behind North America in this field). There remains a great need for more theological colleges offering youth ministry courses and programmes (Ridley Hall now has a Centre for Youth Ministry and Oak Hill a Youth and Children’s Ministry Training programme). Equally, denominations could provide far more in the way of support in this ministry as currently it is the para-church groups which are the leaders in this field. It is time to learn from Richard Baxter and put youth ministry in the forefront of the church’s mission.

### **Conclusion**

Today’s statistics make crystal clear to us that the situation concerning the youth in our churches is critical. The importance Baxter placed on ministering to the youth in order to change the world shows us the need and importance of reaching out to young people now. He impresses on pastors to make young people a higher priority in their theological and practical understanding of pastoral care since ‘they are the hopes of his [or her] ministry’.<sup>49</sup> Strange as it seems it might therefore be fair to say that a fresh expression of church in England today could be an old well-tested Puritan remedy.

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<sup>46</sup> Thomson 1998: 55.

<sup>47</sup> Thomson 1998: 55.

<sup>48</sup> Thomson 1998: 17.

<sup>49</sup> Thomson 1998: 55.

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