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**BARCLAY “EX-PROSED”:
ROBERT BARCLAY’S *APOLOGY* AS POETIC PRAYER**

BY
JAMES M. TOWER
BOX 7041

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Preface

As an alternative research project, I set out to capture the heart of Robert Barclay, the great Quaker theologian and apologist, in poetry. His systematic work referred to as his *Apology* outlines 15 propositions written to defend Quaker theology's orthodoxy in the face of its critics, who often confused Quakers with other—often stranger—radical religious sects of Cromwell's England. Barclay does not focus on things Quakers held in common with Catholics and other Protestants, such as the Trinity or Incarnation. Instead of reaffirming these things, Barclay sought to clarify Quakerism's uniqueness. I have appropriated and removed his carefully crafted apologetic arguments, distilled his thought and heart, and transformed his theology into a corporate prayer that follows the original order of his categories. I thought this form would best express both the experiential and communal nature of his theology, as well as make his thought accessible in a way that hopefully may be used to renew interest in his *Apology*.

The poem itself is numerically tagged to show how it corresponds to Barclay's propositions. His propositions, in categorical form, are presented below for the aid of the reader:

Barclay's 15 propositions (by category)

1. Foundation of Knowledge
2. Immediate Revelation
3. The Scriptures
4. Condition of Humans after the Fall
5. Potential Universal Redemption
6. The Saving and Spiritual light
7. Justification
8. Perfection
9. Perseverance and the Possibility of Falling from Grace
10. Ministry
11. Worship
12. Baptism
13. Communion
14. Civil Authority
15. Faith Lived Out in Society (Friends Testimonies)

The *Apology* as Poetic Prayer

(1) At the core of our being is Your truth, shining amidst the shadows.
From where else could we begin to grasp the heights of the eternal?
Or the depths of the pure, living waters of Your love,
The source and foundation of all that is real?

(2) For You give clarity to the eyes of our hearts even now.
Who could deny the holy visions You have set before us?
How You reveal Yourself not only by Your word but by Your presence,
That woos us and draws us as a gentle hand tugging our hearts.

(3) Your written words guide us, but Your Spirit, their Author still speaks.
We have seen how law's letter kills without Your spirit's breath giving life.
The entirety of Your love is not captured in ink and parchment,
But rends open our hearts for Your righteousness, tattooing Your truth within.

(4) As Adam we all—eventually—take hold the fruit and bite it
His seed of blindness lives on in us, yet it is our own guilt that You call to account.
We were all dead; our hearts and ears closed up from Your Truth,
Flailing...until Your Light broke through to meet us.

(5) Some mock Your grace and mercy, teaching You actually hated the world;
That You pushed Adam to fall, and intended most people to suffer wrath.
Yet You do not delight in torture but desire good to all,
And it is good news to *all* that You died and rose, not bad news to most.

Your gospel is not robbed its power to reconcile.
Your cross was sufficient for every sin everywhere.
And, Your coming was not to condemn—but to save—Your world;
To reveal Your mercy and grace; Your desire for all people to be redeemed.

(6) Your Light is coming to visit everyone and make their sin exposed.
No one will stand before You saying Your mercy to them was insufficient,
That it was not they that shut their eyes and resisted Your grace.
Or, that their heart was not sown with Your parable's seed of life.

As the oak's potential is present in the acorn, so is Your salvation in the heart.
Even the philosophers searched out truth by Your light, and may yet have found You.
Outside the hearing of even Your story, or the travel of Your bride, still You are there drawing;
And even there, You listen to the cry of those who sincerely seek Your face!

(7) And to those who honestly receive You, and do not resist You, You birth a new creature.
Not by the will or works of mere people, but by Your seed growing in us.
Your seed grows and produces holiness, righteousness and purity as fruits.
And all this by Your mercy, for You are not only the Giver but the Gift.

(8) Your fruits mature and thrive in us, nurtured by our obedience to Your Truth.
We grow and keep growing by Your grace, even as the weeds of sin wilt and die.
We unite with Your body broken on the cross, and are made new in freedom,
Finding through death and resurrection perfect love pruned in our hearts.

(9) As You work the soil of our hearts, we can still resist in foolishness.
We can refuse to drink Your water or to feed on Your Light, perhaps even
Cause Your fruits to be stillborn. Yet we can also through obedience,
Allow You such stable purchase in our hearts that nothing can uproot us from Your Vine.

(10) From this vibrant connection, You bless us all with unique expressions
Or gifts; Many ways we can uniquely steward Your love in us.
However clever or educated we imagine ourselves, without Your Light we serve blindly.
Rather than comparing ourselves to each other, help us to receive and share freely from You.

(11) Move through us and draw us to worship You in spirit.
Not through empty forms or hollow rituals, but stilling ourselves to feel Your breath.
Let us wait simply seeking Your face, not hindering or confining You to our conventions.
May we inwardly share of Your Spirit, gathered together in holy dependence.

(12) Foreshadows of Your Spirit's seal have intercepted its reality; and oh how we bicker and
Fight over methods of water, like a bride who cares more for her ring than its promise!
The greater baptism—and we are called only to one—is not water but Spirit; Your holy fire
Blazing inside us, calling us to death and resurrection with You, let that alone seal us to You.

(13) A flashy dance of guilt and obligation has been made of Your remembrance.
Yet in the mysterious depths of Your presence, You speak life and salvation—with examination!
How can we partake of this cycle of priestly privilege, with Your touch regulated by caste?
Your body and blood, oh Christ untrapped by food and drink, freely chases intimacy within.

(14) Not at the expense of another—but by Your mercy, we humbly take liberty's gift.
For our Lord Christ did not force others to believe Him, nor uproot heretics by sword.
When Your buildings are torn down Your church freely worships on their rubble.
For Your freedom reigns within—dancing, untouched by force of human law.

(15) Vanity has us chasing titles and honors, bowing and swearing to magnify class.
Though equals, in blindness many posture and peck beneath Your sweeping eye,
Justifying flattery and dehumanizing violence so as not to suffer the least inconvenience.
But Truth sounds Its alarm; Its triumph casts our careless vanity aside—

Uncaged by society's sick mold. Like a centrifuge, Your image presses into us.
Your Inner Word demanding our obedience to break free this cracked shell.
Let us stand as the world rages against Your truth; Not as a bowl covering Your Light's spread.
May simplicity confound the broken wisdom of our age, as Your kingdom in us is unveiled.
Amen

Selected Bibliography

Bales, Dorlan. “*Barclay's Apology in Context: The Quaker Understanding of Revelation in Seventeenth-Century England.*” D. Phil. diss., University of Chicago, 1980.

This University of Chicago doctoral dissertation was by far the greatest key to understanding Barclay’s writings, providing both the narrative timeline and occasion for his every apologetic letter and work. Bales provides excerpts from Barclay’s critics as well as his responses to them, and explains the historical and relational context underlying what Barclay wrote. Some of the more interesting material recounts the potpourri of Quaker thought before the *Apology*, his relationship with George Fox, and the occasions of his imprisonment. This work is a great resource for understanding the setting from which Quakerism arose, the evolution of Quaker theology, and the man Robert Barclay himself.

Barclay, Robert. *Truth Triumphant Through Spiritual Warfare*. London: T.Northcott, 1692.

Truth Triumphant is a combined three-volume set of Barclay’s works published after his death, featuring many of his apologetic letters and other writings before and after the *Apology*. The George Fox library has only two of the three volumes, which were republished in 1802 and sit in a locked case. I spent an hour digitizing the portions I thought would give the least amount of overlap with the *Apology*, focusing on some of his apologetic letters. One of his major works contained within it is *Truth cleared of Columnies*, an open letter (really a whole book) addressing one of Barclay’s fiercest critics, George Mildrum, in response to the latter’s critique of the *Apology*. It has concise and detailed condensations of Barclay’s teaching on the light within, knowing the suffering of Christ within, outward and dynamic knowledge of God, Christ’s atoning blood, resisting God’s grace, the fall and its relation to two natures within people, the Friends understanding of the authority of Scripture, and prayer. The *Apology* is not as apologetic as this work, and in comparison seems more like a systematic theology. These obscure and often neglected works give clear a window into the mind of the apologist, and exactly how he shaped Friends beliefs through articulation.

_____. *A Catechism and Confession of Faith*. Philadelphia, PA.: Friends Book Store, 1878.

Robert Barclay’s *Catechism and Confession of Faith* was written to ambitiously defend the Friends theology with Scripture alone. He organizes it with the needs of a new Christian in mind and intentionally begins with simpler matters. After reading every question, I was amazed how comprehensive his undertaking was. His structure flows first from knowledge of God, to the role of the Scriptures, the incarnation, conversion, the scope of the inner light, faith justification and works, freedom from sin, perseverance, the church and ministry, worship, the sacraments, Christian life, governance, and the resurrection. It is clear from his questions how he interprets the scriptures and uses them to defend his theology. In the second part, his statement of faith is a condensed version of the former, which using only scriptural text proclaims faith in this Friends understanding. I found his volume to be a great window into Barclay’s hermeneutic and a natural complementary text to his *Apology*.

_____. *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*. Newberg OR: Barclay Press, 1991.

Barclay's Apology is the closest thing to a Quaker systematic theology, though it was written to defend Quakerism from its many critics. Barclay has 15 propositions that he defends with a great deal of references to the Scriptures, early church fathers, reformers and even philosophers. I reread propositions four through seven on the condition of humanity after the fall, the universality of potential salvation (in two propositions), and Barclay's understanding of justification, which are the heart of his *Apology*. Barclay's unique theological contributions stem from a response to Calvinism and its picture of God as the author of sin, citing many firsthand quotes and proposing a truly middle ground response (third way) to the Calvinist/Arminian debate. The *Apology* reveals Barclay's logical argumentation as well as his scholarship. I especially enjoyed this version's modern English, which made some of his more tedious arguments from the original biblical languages more accessible. The footnotes also explained who many of the more exotic people he references are and posthumously cites their works, something neither Barclay nor the editors of previous versions ever did well. I used this work primarily to examine Barclay's Soteriology in a broad way, and to reengage with the fluidity and coherence of his thought.

Dandelion, Pink, ed. *The Creation of Quaker Theory: Insider Perspectives*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub Ltd, 2004.

Pink Dandelion, a notable English Quaker, is central editor of this compilation of modern Quaker Scholars from varying strains, who seek to understand afresh the place of Quaker theology. Some are skeptical of the Quaker founders, as well as each other's positions of understanding the Quaker movement and its theology. I found it contained wonderful comparisons of the divergent Christology's of early Quaker leaders, such as Barclay, Fox and Penn, as well as revealed some of the messiness of Quaker history that has been largely redacted away. Its view of *Barclay's Apology* as it relates to Fox's radicalism is especially enlightening because as an Evangelical Quaker, I have never heard much variance from Barclay's orthodoxy, of which there seems to be much. How Barclay truly fits his description as a Melanchthon-to-Luther figure is well expressed in this slender volume. Carol Spencer's chapters on Barclays' view of perfection are also especially rich. There is also much discussion of some of the holes in Barclay's argument in light of modern criticisms, as well as a clarion call to both reexamine and build afresh a systematized theology to meet the needs of Quakerism today.

Keiser, Melvin. "Touched and Knit in the Life: Barclay's Relational Theology and Cartesian Dualism." *Quaker Studies* 5, no. 2 (2001): 141-64.

This first-rate journal article reveals the strengths of Barclay's theology by articulating its relational, as opposed to rational, nature. The author goes to great lengths to show that the predominant scholarly charge of Cartesian dualism is falsely attributed to Barclay's theology, and that he used Cartesian categories primarily for apologetics with non-Quakers. I found "Touched and Knit in the Life" challenging many of my preconceived notions of Quaker language, and revealing how, in their original context, words like "inward" and "outward" were grounded in

direct personal and corporate spiritual experience with God, and not an unhealthy understanding of *soma* and *sarx*, or platonic leanings.

Kelly, Charles. *A Little Apology (the Gist of Barclay's)*. Newberg OR: Barclay Press, 1964.

This handy volume prunes the thought and flow of Barclay's argument of many of its rabbit trails, as well as making it concise and fluid for a modern audience. Much of the weight of his scholarly arguments and exegetical endeavor is removed, yet it gives the reader a crisper overview of Barclay's system, in which Barclay still quotes at length many reformers, church fathers, contemporaries and even philosophers. I read the work in its entirety and found it to be a faithful rendition, which I would recommend to anyone with interest. This work helped me to see how a poem that condensates the heart of Barclay's theology could be written for a more modern audience, without either putting words in his mouth or getting lost in the forest of his answering nearly every contemporary criticism of his day.

Nakano, Yasuharu. "*Self and Other in the Theology of Robert Barclay*." D. Phil. diss., University of Birmingham, 2011.

Yasuharu Nakano's massive doctoral thesis explores how Barclay expected to have his theology lived out in the world by examining both his context and his unique contributions to theology in relations to others such as Luther, Calvin, Arminius, and Wesley, as well as the church fathers. I read Nakano widely concerning Barclay's contributions of the concepts of inward Light, day of visitation, passiveness to his Soteriology, his Ecclesiology as the basis of the Peace Testimony, and his understanding of the relationship between church and state. Nakano's work is truly comprehensive, with comparisons and contrasts not only to people like Augustine and the reformers, but also modern liberal Quakers, and Barclay's modern critics (like Reinhold Niebuhr) from other traditions. Nakano even posits how Barclay would answer his modern critics by examining and sourcing his various works and the flow of Barclay's logic and thought.

Pyper, Hugh S. "Resisting the Inevitable: Universal and Particular Salvation in the Thought of Robert Barclay." *Quaker Religious Thought*, vol. 29, No. 1. (1998): 5-18.

Hugh S. Pyper, a critic of Barclay, briefly summarizes some of the weaknesses he sees in Barclay's (and many others') understanding of the universal and particular aspects of Soteriology. Pyper charges Barclay with Cartesian dualism, circular reasoning, opaqueness, and a deficient understanding of the differing works of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Pyper also explores the charges of Barclay as a Universalist, identifying him as closer to a Calvinist in his understanding of differing portions of grace for all in his view of potential salvation. I found Pyper an interesting counterpoint to Keiser and Nakano on the relevance of Barclay's theological innovations, with the latter pointing out positives he brought to bear on his context, and the former pointing out the negatives he saw in what Barclay brought to our context.

Smith, Daniel. "Political Authority and the Holy Spirit." Master's thesis, George Fox College, 1977.

This George Fox dissertation attempts to provide a framework and identity for the political challenges of modern Quakers by looking to the models of its early days, especially Barclay's vision of how church and state function in his theology. Barclay sought to give ultimate authority to the Holy Spirit, yet ceded power to the state up to the point of encroaching on the human conscience. The dissertation spends a great deal of focus on the political context from which Barclay arose, and examines many of his opponent's arguments against his view of magistracy in relation to his pacifism and refusal to swear oaths. Smith also examines his letters to those in power and his own work as governor of East Jersey. Barclay truly believed that it was possible to both live within the high ethical standard of the kingdom of God and serve in the political arena in this world, and he did so personally with integrity.

Spencer, Carole Dale. *Holiness: The Soul of Quakerism- An Historical Analysis of the Theology of Holiness in the Quaker Tradition*. Colorado Spring, CO: Paternoster, 2007.

Spencer examines many aspects of holiness and shows the many ways in which Wesley drew from Barclay's work. Her work acts as a bridge that connects Barclay's experiential theology both to the early church and to the Holiness Movement that would later overshadow him. In a few brief sections on Barclay, she also reveals a connection between Barclay's vision of perfection, "a never ending growth in grace," as corresponding with Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of *epiktasis*, a spiritual journey that perpetually moves forward, finding room for growth and never "arriving." Spencer sees Barclay as teaching an uncloistered equivalent of monastic perfection, as well as rooting evangelism in the concept of worship. Spencer also sheds light on his concept of *vehiculum dei*, a strongly Trinitarian understanding of the divine mystery of the indwelling of the Inner Light. *Vehiculum dei* is the only extra-biblical term Barclay uses to describe his experience with salvation, and is often misunderstood by critics as not encompassing the entire Godhead, though it does.

Trueblood, D. Elton. *Robert Barclay*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.

Trueblood's work on the life of Robert Barclay was written out of a deep desire to remedy the fact that Barclay was one of the few major Quaker figures not to keep and publish a journal. Through his study of Barclay's writings and letters, Trueblood found reference to a little black book that Barclay carried, which Trueblood discovered only to find it written in an ancient shorthand that could not be discerned. Trueblood found a person who was an expert at 17th century shorthand and could immediately read the journal, but the person refused to translate it until Trueblood himself retired. This content, contained within the appendices of his book, is by far the most revealing of who Barclay was as a person, and while they are not focused on his theology, they give great understanding to the experiences from which it arose. In Trueblood's chapter on the doctrine of the Inner Light, he goes to great length to show the points of agreement and disagreement, as well as personal similarities, between Calvin and Barclay. Trueblood outlines the logic behind Barclay's departure from Calvin, and has attempts at a middle way that "exonerates God" in regard to his justice in damning people. He also explains Barclay's rationale for why universal salvation is both possible and not actual, and delves into

the dilemma of people who have not heard the message of the historical Christ. Trueblood also, using the example of Socrates, shows links with Barclay's apologetic to that of Justin Martyr.

Wragge, J. Phillip. *The Faith of Robert Barclay*. London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1946.

Similar to "Barclay in Brief," this slender volume is set up in a topical fashion, in the order of *Barclay's Apology*, yet it is much more comprehensive and draws much of its content from the collection of his works and letters called "*Truth Triumphant*." While there is much overlap with other condensations of his work, unlike "Barclay in Brief" it retains more of Barclay's argument, keeping the logic and progression of his thought. Its chapters on church and state and Christian perfection are much fuller, drawing from many obscure letters of defenses against contemporary critics and sects like the Ranters. The author attempts to glean from Barclay some of his more relevant theological contributions, while keeping in mind the massive cultural shift from his time and place to something closer to our own. It is a useful gateway to finding more information about the topics raised in the *Apology* and provides ways to seek out the rest of his thoughts without reading the entirety of his works.

Webster, John B., Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 2007.

The revered *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology* briefly showcases Barclay's experiential theology alongside other great proponents of mystical experience, such as Teresa of Avila, Jonathan Edwards and Karl Rahner, placing Barclay's as a theology for reform within the church. Barclay's center of authority was the Holy Spirit who made Christ alive in the hearts of believers. Barclay's theology focused on unmediated mystical experience, even holding these as more authoritative than Scripture. Barclay's theology did, however, mine Scripture for what it told him about how to interpret those experiences. Barclay held that direct spiritual experience was a crucial aspect of authentic faith and revealing how the concept of illumination had echoed through a chain from Augustine, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, and Bernard of Clairvaux. I found the entry lacked explanation of how the two propositions it mentions regarding experience fit into Barclay's argument for the validity of that experience.

Mather, Eleanore Price. *Barclay In Brief: A Condensation Of Robert Barclay's Apology For The True Christian Divinity*. Whitefish Mt.: Literary Licensing, LLC, 2011.

Barclay in Brief, while still employing archaic English, drastically condenses the content of *Barclay's Apology*. While keeping the basic structure of his argument, the argument itself is removed, exposing the content of his *Apology* in an almost topical fashion. An easy read, it opens its reader to the thoughts of Barclay; Yet, without the arguments he presents and the reasons for his beliefs, it remains of limited value. The foreword by Howard Brinton explains much of Barclay's history, and also clues the reader in to some of the older English conventions Barclay employs. As an older version of something like *The Little Apology*, its contributions, while once sorely needed, have now become overshadowed by newer works. I found little new information within its covers.