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Barbara E. Addison

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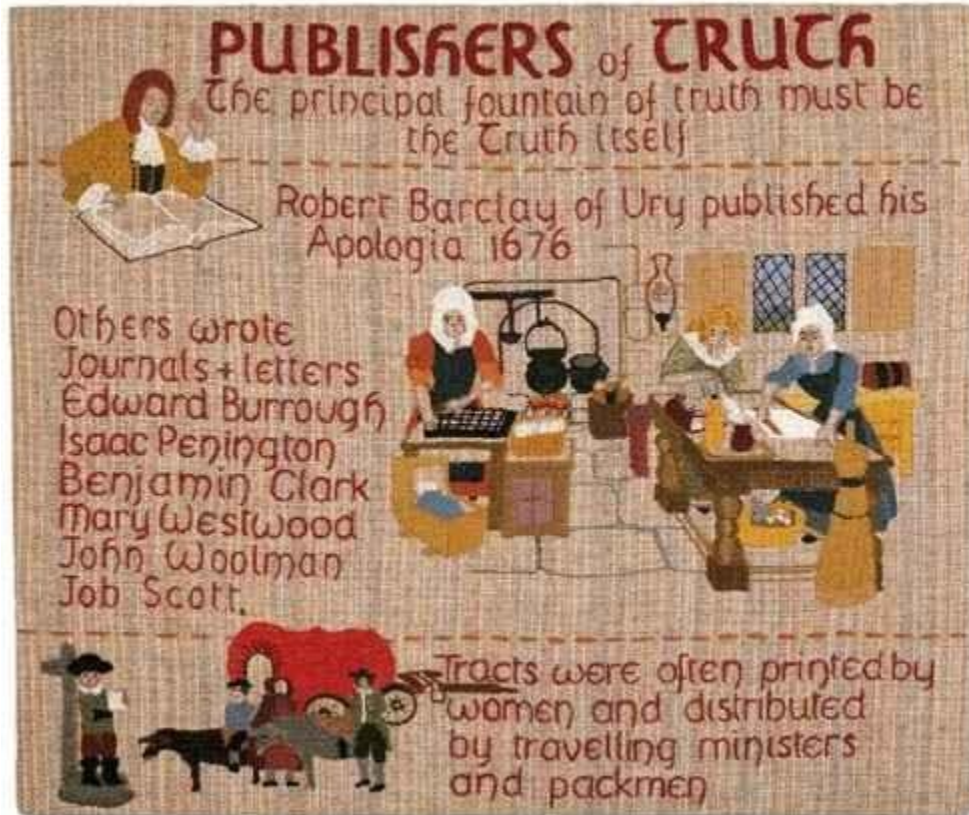
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Robert Barclay, The First Quaker Theologian: Works About Robert Barclay (1648-1690) and His *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*

Written and compiled by Barbara Addison
October 2002



The Quaker Tapestry at Kendal¹

¹ Permission to use this illustration, "Publishers of Truth" (panel B4) has been graciously given by The Quaker Tapestry at Kendal. The Quaker Tapestry is a community textile of 77 embroidered panels made by 4,000 people from 15 countries. Further information may be obtained from: The Quaker Tapestry Exhibition Centre, Friends Meeting House, Stramongate, Kendal, Cumbria, LA9 4BH England. Telephone & Fax: +44(0) 1539 722975, e-mail: info@quaker-tapestry.co.uk, <http://www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk>.

Chronology of the Life of Robert Barclay²

All dates are "new style".

- **1610**: Birth of David Barclay (later Colonel Barclay), Robert Barclay's father
- **1648 December 23**: Birth of Robert Barclay at Ury in Scotland
- **1659**: Sent to Scots' Theological College (Roman Catholic) in Paris where his uncle was Rector
- **1663 March**: Death of Robert Barclay's mother, whose dying request was that Robert return to Scotland
- **1663 August ?**: Robert brought back to Scotland
- **1665**: Colonel David Barclay became a Quaker
- **1667**: Robert Barclay became a Quaker
- **1670 February**: Robert Barclay married to Christian Molleson
- **1670**: *Truth Cleared of Calumnies* published
- **1672 March**: Robert Barclay walked through the streets of Aberdeen in sackcloth and ashes
- **1672**: Barclay's first brief imprisonment in the Tolbooth of Montrose
- **1673 or 1674**: First attendance at London Yearly Meeting
- **1673?**: *Catechism and Confession of Faith* published
- **1674**: *Theses Theologicae or Some Solid Positions of Sound Divinity Asserted* published in Low Dutch and Latin
- **1675**: *Theses Theologicae* published in English early in the year
- **1675**: Completion of the Latin edition of the *Apology*; the address to King Charles II was dated November 25, 1675
- **1675**: *Quakerism No Popery* published
- **1676**: *Anarchy of the Ranters* published
- **1676**: *Quakerism Confirmed* published (written with George Keith)
- **1676**: *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity As the Same is Held Forth and Preached by the People Called in Scorn Quakers* published in Latin
- **1676 November 7**: Imprisonment in Aberdeen
- **1677 April 9**: Release from prison
- **1677 July 26**: Embarked on ministerial tour of Holland and Germany with George Fox, William Penn and others
- **1678**: Barclay's English translation of the *Apology* published
- **1679 November 4**: Last imprisonment, at Aberdeen

² Partially adapted from the chronologies of D. Elton Trueblood, *Robert Barclay* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 250-251 and J. Philip Wragge, *The Faith of Robert Barclay* (London: Friends Home Service Committee, 1948), p. 15-18.

- **1682 September:** Appointed non-resident Governor (for life) of East New Jersey in the American colonies
- **1683 August:** Barclay attacked by highwaymen north of London
- **1686 October 12:** Death of Colonel David Barclay
- **1690 October 3:** Death of Robert Barclay at Ury, Scotland
- **1692:** Barclay's collected works published under the title *Truth Triumphant Through the Spiritual Warfare, Christian Labours and Writings of That Able and Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ, Robert Barclay*
- **1724:** Death of Christian Barclay

Robert Barclay's *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* in Context

Robert Barclay, the first and greatest of Quaker theologians, systematized the charismatic message of George Fox. Barclay's most recent biographer, D. Elton Trueblood, asserts that Barclay "saved the Quaker movement from extinction by giving Fox's preaching an intellectual form, capable of rational defense."³ Barclay's best-known work, *The Apology for the True Christian Divinity* expressed the early Quaker theological consensus of Friends' beliefs as Barclay heard it preached by Fox and by other Friends. Dean Freiday considers the *Apology* to be a "thinking through" of Barclay's own religious journey, from the strict Calvinism of his youth, through the Roman Catholicism of his education in Paris, to his Quaker conviction.⁴

The *Apology* was completed in 1675 and published in Latin in 1676 (later translated by Barclay into an English edition which was first published in 1678). Barclay, who was himself of aristocratic lineage, prefaced the *Apology* with a letter to King Charles II, saying that he wished to explain Friends' theological principles to the King and his people, so that they might find the Quakers to be both wise and learned, and to understand that they held "beliefs agreeable to scripture, reason and true learning." Barclay wished to persuade his non-Quaker readers that, though Quakers dissented from Great Britain's established church, they were a peaceful people who should not be persecuted for their beliefs. In the letter, Barclay asserts that: 1) in all the conspiracies contrived against the King, the Quakers had never been found guilty of plotting against him or the government; 2) in the "hottest times of persecution," the Quakers stood boldly for their faith, and had never hidden from the authorities, "as all other Dissenters have done"; 3) they had never sought to make the King or his government "odious" to the people; rather, their practice was consistent with Christianity and civil society.⁵

³ D. Elton Trueblood, *Robert Barclay* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) p. 20.

⁴ Dean Freiday (ed.), Introduction to *Barclay's Apology in Modern English* (Alburtis, Pa.: Hemlock Press, 1967) p. 3.

⁵ Robert Barclay, "To Charles II, King of Great Britain..." in *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (New York: S. Wood & Sons, 1827), p. i-ix.

As a statement of Quaker belief, Barclay's *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* has been accepted by Friends as a reliable summary of their faith. "From its first publication, it has received the unqualified approbation of the Society of Friends, as containing a just and correct exposition of their faith and principles... [the *Apology*] is the only book which has been given by the Society to many of the public libraries in Europe, as well as to some sovereigns and ambassadors, for conveying a correct information of their principles, and for counteracting those misrepresentations with which adversaries... have endeavoured to impress the public mind."⁶ The Latin edition was considered especially valuable for distribution to the learned men of Europe.

In the introduction to the most recent (2002) edition of the *Apology*, Peter Sippel explains that "Barclay's education enabled him to understand academic theology. Most early Quaker publicists used a distinctive Quaker vocabulary which was often misunderstood by educated theologians, whom the Quakers misunderstood in turn. Thus in early debate literature, Friends and their opponents often talked past each other, taking the same words in different senses. Barclay bridges this gap, defending Quaker usage while clearly explaining it for the benefit of those who were accustomed to a different vocabulary."⁷

The *Apology* takes the form of fifteen propositions, following the general pattern of the Westminster Catechism. Barclay had already published and debated the propositions as *Theses Theologicae* (published in 1674 and 1675) before putting them into a more complete form in the *Apology*. Besides the two Latin editions (1676 and 1729) it has been reprinted/reissued 48 times in English: 16 in Great Britain, three in Ireland, and 29 in the United States; there have two editions in Dutch, four editions in German (one published in Germantown, Pennsylvania), one edition in Spanish, three editions in French, one edition in Danish, two in Norwegian, and two editions in Arabic. The Pennsylvania German language edition, published by Christoph Saur in 1776, was authorized by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1774 (with the strong encouragement and advice of London Yearly Meeting) to promote the "spread of knowledge of the Principles of Truth, as much as may be in the remote settlements."⁸ The most admired edition seems to have been the 1765 edition printed by John Baskerville in Birmingham, due to the beauty of its printing.

Two deliberate changes in the texts of the earlier editions have been noted. In the seventh edition (London: W. Richardson and S. Clark, 1765) was first omitted a sentence on page 340, respecting the imposition of tithes.⁹ A more important excision was made in 1779, when the Morning Meeting declared that the next reprint of the

⁶ "Introduction to the Present Edition," *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (New York: S. Wood & Sons, 1827) section 7a.

⁷ Peter Sippel, Introduction to *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (Glenside, PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) and <http://www.qhpress.org/texts/barclay/apology/>.

⁸ Monthly Meeting for Sufferings Held in Philadelphia and New Jersey, Minutes, 1774, p. 410-413.

⁹ Joseph Smith, *Catalogue of Friends Books* (London: J. Unwin, 1849), p. 182.

Apology was to omit Barclay's account of a figure named Hai Eben Yokdan, which had been proven to be false. The story of Yokdan, a "noble savage" somewhat like Robinson Crusoe, was used by Barclay to demonstrate the working of the Inner Light even upon an individual who had been separated from other humans since birth. Most editions after 1779 omitted this story.¹⁰

There have been numerous versions of extracts from and abridgements of the *Apology*. In 1815, George Harrison formed an abridgement chiefly from the 1780 edition, but with references to the Latin original. Quotations from the *Apology* received wide circulation with the vast reprinting of a work by Mary Brotherton Brook (ca. 1726-1782): *Reasons for the Necessity of Silent Waiting, in Order to the Solemn Worship of God: to Which are Added, Several Quotations from Robert Barclay's Apology* was first printed by Mary Hinde in 1774, and was reprinted 25 times in English, once in German, and once in French, in editions published in London, Philadelphia, and Dublin, from 1774 through 1877.

The *Apology* came under attack in 1678 by John Brown (1610?-1679) a prominent Scottish theologian. In 1679, Barclay published a thorough and forceful answer to Brown: *Robert Barclay's Apology for the True Christian Divinity Vindicated From John Brown's Examination and Pretended Confutation Thereof, in his book, called, Quakerisme the Path-way to Paganisme...*, a book which Trueblood considers to be in some ways more thoughtful and careful on many questions than the *Apology* itself.¹¹ Other non-Quakers were more complimentary. Voltaire praised the *Apology* as "a work as well drawn up as the subject could possibly admit."¹² Sir Leslie Stephen, writing of the *Apology* in his article on Barclay in the *Dictionary of National Biography* considers it "one of the most impressive theological writings of the century."

Barclay's *Apology* has been the final court of theological appeal for Quakers throughout their history, even during the Society's separations and heresies.¹³ Barclay covered his topics so comprehensively that all sides of a controversy were able to quote the *Apology* in support of their position. Barclay did have Quaker critics, notably the Beaconites and other Evangelicals in the 19th century, who felt that Barclay underemphasized and disparaged the Bible. In the early 20th century, criticism from the opposite wing was led by Rufus Jones, who believed that Barclay lacked value to the modern world because of inconsistency in his thought and his use of outworn and discredited forms. Jones charged that he had led the Society of Friends to Quietism, that he had spent too much effort in attacking doctrines such as predestination which were now irrelevant, and that he de-emphasized the goodness of man. Jones believed it was most regrettable that Barclay's "early formulation of Quakerism should have been

¹⁰ For a discussion of the Hai EbenYokdan controversy, including its theological implications and its demonstration of the influence of George Keith on Barclay, see Trueblood, *Robert Barclay*, p. 158-161.

¹¹ D. Elton Trueblood, *Robert Barclay* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) p. 60.

¹² D. Elton Trueblood, *Robert Barclay* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968) p. 1.

¹³ Christopher Densmore, "The Works of George Fox (1831): a Legacy of the Hicksite Separation."

made as an adjustment with the Augustinian and Calvinistic system instead of following the fresh and transforming path which the spiritual reformers, the real forerunners and progenitors of 'the Children of the Light,' had discovered."¹⁴¹⁵ Yet all of Barclay's major works were published within George Fox's lifetime, and were given hearty assent by him and by others of the first generation of Quakerism. After Barclay's death in 1690, in a preface to *Truth Triumphant* (the collected works of Barclay published in 1692) Fox eulogized him as a man who was "a wise and faithful minister in Christ, and writ many precious books in the defence of the Truth...he was a scholar and a man of great parts...a man of repute among men, and preacht the everlasting Gospel of Christ freely, turning people from darkness to light."¹⁶

Increasingly throughout the twentieth century, Quaker scholars began to appreciate again the value of Barclay's writing. Howard Brinton, in his introduction to Eleanore Price Mather's *Barclay in Brief*, praised him for the "balance which he maintains in distinguishing between the human and the divine, and herein lies his principal message for the present day."¹⁷

Bibliography of all editions of *The Apology* from 1676 through 2002

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¹⁴ Rufus Jones, Introduction to *The Second Period of Quakerism* by William Braithwaite (London: Macmillan, 1919). Jones's introduction was removed from the second (1961) edition.

¹⁵ For an extensive discussion of Barclay's 20th century critics, see Trueblood, *Robert Barclay*, p. 9-18 and Dorlan Bales, *Barclay's Apology in Context: the Quaker Understanding of Revelation in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago, 1980) p. 6-24.

¹⁶ George Fox in a letter prefacing *Truth Triumphant*... (London: Printed for T. Northcott, 1692), p. [xxxix].

¹⁷ Howard H. Brinton, Introduction to *Barclay in Brief: A Condensation of Robert Barclay's Apology for the True Christian Divinity* by Eleanore Price Mather (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1942), p. 3.

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¹⁸ Originally attributed to David Barclay [grandson of the Apologist], this work is now believed to have been written by a group of Quakers, of whom Joseph Gurney Bevan was the chief author/editor.

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