

*Apology* — Robert Barclay — Letter to King Charles II

To Charles the Second  
King of Great Britain  
and the Dominions which belong to it:  
ROBERT BARCLAY, a servant of Jesus Christ,  
whom God has called to the proclamation of the Gospel  
which is now revealed again,  
and which God has commanded to be preached to all  
nations  
after a long and dark night of apostacy,  
wishes that you may have health and salvation.

The status of kings and princes exposes them to the view and observation of the world more than other people. As Cicero observes, none of their words nor actions can be hidden. There are times when it pleases God, the great King of kings, to make known to humanity in a particular way the wonderful steps of his inscrutable providence. At such times the kings who act in the theater of this world are particularly watched, and posterity more diligently studies their lives and actions. This is especially true if the events not only relate to the outward transactions of this world, but also are notable because of the revelation of the knowledge of God in spiritual and religious matters. These are the things which made noteworthy the lives of Cyrus, Augustus Caesar, and Constantine the Great in times past, and of Charles the Fifth and some other princes more recently.

Among the things which God has been pleased to permit for the glory of his power and the demonstration of his wisdom and providence, no period shows us things so strange and marvelous, in both civil and religious matters, as the things that have happened within thy lifetime.

Although not yet arrived at thy fiftieth year, thou<sup>1</sup> hast witnessed stranger things than what happened in many past ages. Let us consider the various troubles thou foundest thyself in when thou hadst scarcely emerged from infancy; the many different problems which men of thy circumstances generally do not experience; the strange and unparalleled fate that befell thy father; thine own narrow escape and the exile from which it was highly improbable that thou wouldst ever return (at least without a great struggle and lengthy combat); or finally thine inability to accomplish a return, given the strength of those who had seized thy throne and the terror which they had caused in other countries. And yet after all this thou wast restored without a blow of the sword, without the help of other countries or the contrivances of human policy. All this clearly shows that it is the Lord's doing, which is marvelous in our eyes and will be a source of wonder and astonishment to generations to come. If it is considered correctly, it will be sufficient to refute and confound the atheism which is so common in this age.

The vindication of the liberty of conscience was a principal cause of these troubles and revolutions (since thy father tried to restrain it to some degree, giving way to the demands of the clergy, whose cruel\* and unrighteous will has often proved hurtful to rulers who have tried to satisfy them). The pretense of conscience was what continued the revolution and brought it to the extremes that it came to. No doubt some who participated in the revolution had good intentions, at least in the beginning, although they were always wrong in their method, their use of carnal weapons.

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<sup>1</sup> Following the distinctive Quaker custom, Barclay addresses the King with the familiar "thou" rather than the formal "you," which at that time was required when speaking to someone of high rank, as a form of respect. To address the King with the familiar "thou" was considered a serious mark of disrespect. Barclay explains this Quaker testimony in Proposition Fifteen, § v.

But as soon as they had tasted the sweetness of the possessions of those they had turned out, they quickly began to do exactly the same things of which they had accused others. Their hands were full of oppression, and “they hated the reproof of instruction, which is the way of life.”<sup>2</sup> They treated the messengers of the Lord very badly, beating and imprisoning his prophets and persecuting his people,<sup>3</sup> whom he had gathered and called out from among the rest, whom he had commanded to “beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks” and not to study carnal war any more.<sup>4</sup> Instead he raised them up and armed them with spiritual weapons, with his own Spirit and power. By that strength they testified in the streets and highways, in the public markets and synagogues<sup>5</sup> against the pride, vanity, immoderate desires, and hypocrisy of that generation who were righteous in their own eyes, although they were often cruelly treated for giving this testimony. They faithfully prophesied and foretold of the judgment and ruin of that generation, which later happened;\* these warnings are recorded in several letters delivered to Oliver and Richard Cromwell, the Parliament, and other powers of the time.

Most people in this island know that, after it pleased God to restore thee, this people have suffered oppression, banishment, and evil treatment at the hands of men who pretend to have thy authorization and who cover up their mischief with thy name. This is especially known in England, where there is scarcely any prison that has not been filled with this people, nor scarcely any judge before whom they have not been brought, though they were never found guilty of anything which might deserve such treatment. No doubt the recognition of their innocence was

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<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 6:23

<sup>3</sup> Barclay frequently uses “people” to mean the Quakers.

<sup>4</sup> See Isaiah 2:4

<sup>5</sup> That is, in the places dedicated to worship.

a large part of what moved thee, three years ago, to free several hundred of them. Indeed their sufferings are unusual, and obviously different from all the others who live under thy rule in these two respects:

First, because no one whom this people recognizes as belonging to them<sup>6</sup> has been found to be guilty in any of the plots which others have contrived against thee since thy return to Britain. Although many of them have been arrested and imprisoned for this kind of suspicion, they have always been found innocent and harmless, as is proper for the followers of Christ; not desiring or contending for the kingdoms of this world, but rather “submitting to every human ordinance for conscience’ sake.”<sup>7</sup>

Second, because in the hottest times of persecution and the most violent prosecution of the laws made against meetings,<sup>8</sup> this people, clothed in innocence, have boldly persisted in their testimony for God without creeping into holes or corners, or hiding themselves, as all other dissenters<sup>9</sup> have done. This people have met daily, as is their custom, in public places designated for that purpose,<sup>10</sup> so that none of thy officers can say that they have surprised them in a corner, overtaken them in a private meeting, nor caught them lurking in secret rooms. The authorities never

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<sup>6</sup> The Latin simply says *nemo ex isto populo*, “none of this people.” In the English text Barclay implicitly admits that there could have been some guilty people who identified themselves as Quakers, but none of them were recognized by the Quakers as part of their people. This problem was one of the reasons that the Society of Friends began establishing formal lists of members.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 2:13

<sup>8</sup> A series of laws which prohibited religious meetings except those of the established Church.

<sup>9</sup> The dissenters or nonconformists were the religious groups which refused to participate in the worship of the established Church of England and worshipped in their own meetings, which were prohibited by law.

<sup>10</sup> See John 18:20

needed to send spies to catch this people, who could be found every day in their open assemblies, testifying for God and his Truth.

Those who have eyes to see<sup>11</sup> can observe in this people, more than in any other people who oppose them or differ from them, their union, their Christian patience and courage, constancy and suffering. And thou canst bear witness that, on one hand, in the midst of those troubles they never tried to detract from thee or to make thee and thy government odious to the people by anonymous and scandalous pamphlets. On the other hand, thou knowest that this people have not omitted to admonish, exhort, and reprove thee, and have faithfully expressed their consciences to thee without flattering words, in the same way as the true prophets in ancient times used to address the kings and princes under whose power there was violence and oppression.

Experience shows that it is best for both divine Truth and human policy to allow everyone to serve God according to their consciences. Nevertheless, the other sects, most of whom did not dare utter a peep in the times of persecution while these innocent people remained bold and faithful, are now joining in a confederacy to make us appear odious, uniting together despite their former discord and strife among themselves. They seek to twist our doctrine and words unfairly, as if they were inconsistent with both Christianity and civil society. To make their malice against us more effective, they have not been ashamed to accept the help and the efforts of some invidious Socinians<sup>12</sup> against us. This is how Herod and Pontius Pilate agree to crucify Christ.

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<sup>11</sup> See Ezekiel 12:2 and Mark 8:18

<sup>12</sup> Socinianism was a radical seventeenth-century theology which denied the Trinity the divinity of Christ, and original sin.

But thou knowest by experience that our practice is more consistent with Christianity and civil society and the peace and welfare of this island than the practice of those who accuse us. This is sufficient protection against these slanders, and we can indeed appeal to the testimony of thy conscience as a witness for us before the nations.

These things moved me to present to the world a brief but true account of this people's principles in some short theological theses, which proved successful beyond my expectation, according to the will of God. Some readers have been satisfied and many others have felt a wish to be more informed about us, as a people who are criticized everywhere. Likewise there has been public opposition by some,<sup>13</sup> which will always happen as long as the devil "rules in the children of disobedience."<sup>14</sup> Because of all this I was further moved in the liberty of the Lord to present to the world this Apology for the Truth held by these people. Because of thy interest<sup>15</sup> in them and theirs in thee, as a people who first appeared and mostly increased in the nations under thy rule, I am emboldened<sup>16</sup> to present this unto thee.

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<sup>13</sup> Latin: *ad quorundam satisfactionem, & ad excitandum in compluribus desiderium adhuc copiosius de nobis nostrisque dogmatibus audiendi & intelligendi: & quoniam ii sumus, quibus ubique contradicatur, non defuerunt adversarii, theses prædictas publice opugnantes, quam sortem veritas experietur semper, dum diabolus regnat in filiis inobedienti*, "to the satisfaction of some, and to the arousing in many a desire to hear and understand more about us and about our doctrines; and since we are a people who are everywhere criticized, there was no lack of adversaries publicly attacking these theses, which is what always happens to the Truth, while the devil reigns in the children of disobedience."

<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 2:2

<sup>15</sup> Latin: *jus*, "legal right"

<sup>16</sup> Latin: *non dubito*, "I do not hesitate"

Thou knowest and hast experienced their faithfulness towards their God, their patience in suffering,<sup>17</sup> their peaceableness towards the king, their honesty, plainness and integrity in their faithful warnings and testimonies addressed to thee. If thou wilt take enough time to read this thou mayest see how much their principles conform to Scripture, Truth, and right reason. Because of the simplicity of their behavior, their general condition of being poor and illiterate,<sup>18</sup> their procedures lacking in the wisdom and policy of this world, many conclude that they are fools and madmen and dismiss them as being incapable of reason. This people consider it their crown to be thought of in this way<sup>19</sup> by the wise and the great and the learned of this world, and rejoice<sup>20</sup> to be considered fools<sup>21</sup> for Christ's sake, but recently some of those whom the world considered wise and learned have begun to judge them differently, and conclude that this people professes ideas which are very consistent with Scripture, reason, and true learning.

To use this epistle as an instrument of flattery is far from my intention and inconsistent with the Truth I bear, although flattery is the usual purpose of such things. Therefore I can neither dedicate the book to thee nor ask for thy patronage, as if such things would give me more confidence in presenting it to the world or hope for its success. To God alone I owe what I have, and especially in spiritual matters; and therefore to him alone, and to the service of his Truth, I dedicate whatever works he produces

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<sup>17</sup> Latin: *patientiam eorum in persecutionibus*, "their patience under persecution"

<sup>18</sup> In Latin this phrase is added: "& *generis quoad sanguinem externum humilioris*, and of humble class, according to outward blood. (worldly descent)"

<sup>19</sup> Latin: *derideri*, "made fun of"

<sup>20</sup> Latin: *jure merito gaudeant*, "with good reason they rejoice"

<sup>21</sup> See 1 Corinthians 1:25-29

through me; the praise and honor belong to him alone. His Truth does not need the patronage of worldly princes, since it is propagated, established and confirmed only by his arm and power. But I was moved in my spirit to present this book to thee, so that, as thou hast often been warned<sup>22</sup> by several of this people who live in England, thou mayest not lack a seasonable admonishment from a member of thine ancestral kingdom of Scotland, and so that thou mayest know (a thing which I hope thou wilt not have reason to feel disturbed by) that God is raising up and increasing this people in that nation also. Also, the nations shall know by means of this book that the Truth we profess is not a work of darkness, nor is it propagated by stealth, and that we are “not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ” because we know that it is “the power of God for salvation.”<sup>23</sup> And they shall know that we are not at all so opposed to government, nor are we disturbers of the peace as our enemies have tried to make the world believe by their slanders. For all this I am bold to appeal<sup>24</sup> to thee as a witness of our peaceableness and Christian patience.<sup>25</sup>

That singular step of Divine Providence which restored thee to thy throne without outward<sup>26</sup> bloodshed will not be more wondered at by generations to come than they shall wonder at the increase and progress of this Truth without all outward help and against such great opposition, which will not be the smallest thing which will make thy memory remarkable. God has done great things for thee;<sup>27</sup> he has

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<sup>22</sup> Latin: *te hortati sunt*, “they have urged you”

<sup>23</sup> See Romans 1:16

<sup>24</sup> Latin: *appellare possumus*, “we can appeal”

<sup>25</sup> Latin: *testem tranquillitatis & Christianæ nostræ conversationis*, “witness of our tranquility and Christian fellowship.”

<sup>26</sup> This use of the term “outward” is similar to that in the Quaker declaration to King Charles II in 1660: “We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons.”

<sup>27</sup> See Psalm 126:3



sufficiently shown thee that it is by him that princes rule,<sup>28</sup> and that he can pull down and set up at his pleasure.<sup>29</sup> Since he restored thee to thy royal dignity, he has often faithfully warned<sup>30</sup> thee by his servants, so that thy heart might not become self-indulgent against him, forgetting his mercies and providence towards thee; so that he might not let thee be lulled and fall asleep in thy sins by the flattery of court-parasites, who by their fawning are the ruin of many princes.

There is no king in the world who can testify from experience as thou canst, about God's providence and goodness; neither is there any who rules so many free people, so many true Christians. This makes thy government more honorable, and thyself more respected, than the inheritance of many nations filled with slavish and superstitious souls.

Thou hast tasted of prosperity and adversity; thou knowest what it is to be banished from thy native country, to be subjugated<sup>31</sup> as well as to rule and sit upon the throne; having been oppressed, thou hast reason to know<sup>32</sup> how hateful the oppressor is to God and to man. If after all these exhortations and warnings thou dost not turn to the Lord with all thy heart, but rather forget him who remembered thee in thy distress and give thyself over to immoderate desire and vanity, surely thy condemnation will be great.

Against that snare, as well as the temptation of those who feed thee and incite you to evil, the most excellent and powerful remedy will be to apply thyself to the *Light of Christ, which shines in thy conscience*. The Light cannot flatter thee in any way; it cannot allow thee to be at ease in

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<sup>28</sup> Proverbs 8:16

<sup>29</sup> Latin: *possit detrudere & evehere quos vult, & quando vult*, "he can pull down and lift up whom he wishes, and when he wishes."

<sup>30</sup> Latin: *te hortatus est*, "he has exhorted you."

<sup>31</sup> Latin: *opprimi & sub iugo esse*, "to be oppressed and subjugated."

<sup>32</sup> Latin: *ignorare non potes*, "you cannot be ignorant"

thy sins. The Light will deal plainly and faithfully with thee, just as those that follow it have also done.

May God Almighty, who has so notably visited thee with his love, touch and reach thy heart before the day of thy visitation expires,<sup>33</sup> so that thou mayest convert to him with all thy soul, so that in thy place and position thou mayest make every effort for the promotion of his glory.<sup>34</sup> That is the wish and prayer of

Thy faithful friend and subject,  
Robert Barclay

From Ury, the place of my pilgrimage,<sup>35</sup>  
in my native country of Scotland  
the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month called November,  
in the year 1675.

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 1-7 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676)

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<sup>33</sup> Barclay explains the day of visitation in this way: "God . . . has given to every man . . . a certain day or time of visitation; during which day or time it is possible for them to be saved, and to partake of the fruit of Christ's death." Proposition 5&6, § xi.

<sup>34</sup> Here we follow the Latin: "*ut ex animo ad eum convertaris, ita ut in loco & statione tuâ ad gloriam ejus provehendam te exerceas*," The English is less clear, but could be translated: "so that thou mayest turn to him effectively, so as to make use of your place and position for his name."

<sup>35</sup> Psalm 119:54