

THESES THEOLOGICÆ

To the clergy of every sort¹ into whose hands this may come, but more particularly to the doctors, professors, and students of divinity in the universities of Europe* and of Great Britain, whether episcopalians, presbyterians,² or any other kind, ROBERT BARCLAY, a servant of the Lord God and one of those who in derision are called Quakers,³ wishes sincere repentance which leads to the acknowledgment of the Truth.

FRIENDS:

I offer you these following propositions in which, if you read and consider them in the fear of the Lord, you may perceive that simple naked truth which human wisdom has made so obscure and mysterious that the world is burdened with the large and voluminous treatises which are fabricated* about it and their empty wrangling and commentaries which make the truth a hundred times more dark and intricate than it really is. This great learning (so called) — that is, your scholastic theology which takes almost a man's whole lifetime to learn — doesn't bring anyone a bit nearer to God, nor does it make anyone less wicked or more righteous than he was. Therefore God has put aside the wise and the learned and the disputers of this world.⁴ Instead he has chosen a few despised and

¹ The Latin adds: *totius Christiani orbis*, "of the whole Christian world"

² Latin: *pontificiis sive protestantibus*, "Catholics or Protestants"

³ This phrase is not included in Latin. Although nowadays it is borne with pride, in the early days of the Society of Friends the name Quaker was considered an insult.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:19

uneducated instruments (with regard to literacy⁵) as he chose the fishermen in ancient times, to publish his pure and naked Truth and to free it from the mists and fogs the clergy has clouded it with so that the common* people will admire and support them. God has chosen several people to make these things known, and among them I also have received, in measure, the grace to proclaim the same Gospel, and it seems good to me, and according to my duty, to offer these theses to you. Though short, they are weighty and encompass much; they declare what the true ground of knowledge is, that knowledge which leads to Life Eternal. I witness to it here, and leave that testimony to the Light of Christ in all your consciences.

Farewell.
R. B.

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 8-9 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676).

⁵ Latin: *literaturam Scholasticam*, "scholastic literature." In English, the reference is to illiterate people; in Latin, to people without theological training. This is a good example of the way Barclay adjusts his text to different audiences.