

The Church

extract from Proposition X § i-v

§ i. The subject of this thesis is what makes or constitutes a minister of the Church, what his qualifications¹ ought to be, and how he ought to behave himself. But it may seem preposterous to speak of the distinct offices of the Church when nothing has been said about the Church in general. So, though nothing is said about it in the thesis, I will briefly summarize something about the Church and then proceed to the specific members of it.

§ ii. It is not my plan to meddle with the many tedious controversies with which the Papists and Protestants tear each other up concerning this subject. Rather, according to the Truth manifested to me, and revealed *in* me by the testimony of the Spirit, and according to the measure of wisdom which has been given to me, I plan to set out the things which I and my brethren believe concerning the Church, as a necessary introduction to the subject of the ministry, and to the subject of worship which immediately follows it.

. . . . The Church is the society, gathering, or congregation of those whom God has called out of the world and the worldly spirit, to walk in his Light and Life. By this definition, the church should be thought of as including all that are truly called and gathered by God, both those who are still in this lower world and those who have already laid

¹ In the seventeenth century the word “qualification” had a meaning different from the modern meaning. It did not refer to a list of requirements, training, or experience necessary for a specific task, but rather to the action of the Holy Spirit in the soul which formed a person who could serve as a minister. An example of this use is found in *The Holy City*, by John Bunyan (1665): “John’s qualification, whereby he was enabled to behold this Holy City.”

down the earthly tabernacle and have passed into their heavenly mansions. Together they make up the One catholic² Church (concerning which there is so much controversy). We freely acknowledge that outside this Church there can be no salvation, because under the name of this church are included all people who become obedient to the holy Light and testimony of God in their hearts, so that they become sanctified by the Light and cleansed from the evils of their ways. It does not matter what nation, kindred, tongue or people they belong to, nor whether in the outward world they are strangers to those who profess Christ and Christianity in words and have the benefit of the Scriptures. For this is the universal or catholic Spirit by which many are called “from the four corners of the earth and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”³ By this Spirit the hidden interior life and virtue of Jesus is conveyed into many that are far away, just as the life is conveyed from the head and heart to the most extreme parts by the blood that runs into the veins and arteries of the natural body. Therefore members of this catholic Church may be found among heathens, Turks,⁴ Jews, and all the various sorts of Christians. These men and women of integrity and simplicity of heart may perhaps be somewhat blinded in their understanding and burdened with the superstitions and formalities of the various sects to which they belong. Still, since they are upright in their hearts before the Lord; their chief aim and endeavor is to be delivered from iniquity, and they love to follow righteousness. They are brought to life by the secret touches of the holy Light in their souls and by it they are secretly united to God; through this means they become true members of the catholic

² Barclay uses the word “catholic” in its most basic meaning of “universal” without referring to the Roman Catholic Church.

³ Isaiah 11:12

⁴ It was common in the seventeenth century to call all Muslims “Turks.”

Church. In this sense the Church has existed in all generations, because God has never lacked such witnesses for him, although they have often been slighted and ignored by this world. . . .

§ iii. Secondly, the Church can be thought of as signifying a certain number of people gathered by God's Spirit, and by the testimony of some of his servants whom he has raised up for that purpose, who come into belief in the true principles and doctrines of the Christian faith. Because their hearts are united by the same love and their minds are informed by the same truths, they gather, meet, and assemble together to wait upon God, to worship him, and to bear a joint testimony for the Truth against error, and they suffer persecution* for its sake. Through this fellowship they become like one family and household in certain respects, and they each watch over, teach, instruct, and care for one another, according to their various gifts and attainments. The churches of primitive times gathered by the apostles were like this, of which we have several mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. But with respect to the visible Church, there has been a great interruption since the days of the apostles because of the apostasy.

§ iv. To be a member of the catholic [universal] Church, a person needs the inward calling of God by his Light in the heart, needs to be leavened into its nature and spirit, so as to abandon unrighteousness and turn to righteousness; in the inwardness of the mind, to be cut out of the wild olive tree of our own first fallen nature and ingrafted into Christ by his Word and Spirit in the heart.⁵ This may be done in those who are ignorant* of the history (since God did not see fit to make it known to them) as has already been proved in the fifth and sixth proposition.

⁵ see Romans 11:24

To be a member of a specific church⁶ of Christ, this inward work is indispensably necessary, and it is also necessary to profess outwardly and believe in Jesus Christ and those holy truths delivered by his Spirit in the Scriptures.⁷ The testimony of the Spirit recorded in the Scriptures answers the testimony of the same Spirit in the heart, just as “face answers face in a mirror.”⁸ And so the inward work of holiness and abandoning iniquity is necessary, in every respect, to being a member of the Church of Christ; the outward profession is necessary to being a member of a particular gathered church, but not to being a member of the universal Church. Still it is absolutely necessary where God has granted the opportunity of knowing it; the outward testimony is to be believed where it is presented and revealed.

§ v. On the contrary, the devil, who has worked and still works in the “mystery of iniquity,”⁹ has taught his followers to say that no one, however holy, is a member of the Church of Christ without the outward profession, and that he must be initiated into the church by some outward ceremonies. Also, he teaches that those who have made the outward profession, though inwardly they are unholy, may be members of the true Church of Christ, and should be considered as such. This is plainly putting “light for darkness and darkness for light,”¹⁰ as if God preferred

⁶ With the lower case letter “c” the word “church” refers to a local congregation and not to the universal Church.

⁷ The Latin text adds this sentence: *cum internum Lumen & Spiritus testimonium naturaliter inclinabit & coget sibi subjectos & obsequentes ad assentiendum & credendum veritatibus in Scripture traditis*, “Since the inner Light and the testimony of the Spirit naturally collects and inclines obedient subjects to assent and believe in the truths found in Scripture.”

⁸ Proverbs 27:19

⁹ 2 Thessalonians 2:7

¹⁰ Isaiah 5:20

words to actions and was more pleased with vain professions than with real holiness; these are things I have sufficiently refuted before. But let it be observed that Antichrist has built his Babylonish structure upon this false and rotten foundation, and by this means the Antichristian church in the apostasy has reared herself up to the height and grandeur she has attained, so as to exalt herself “above all that is called God, and sit in the temple of God, as if she were God.”¹¹

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition X § ii-v (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 231-234 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 173-175.

¹¹ 2 Thessalonians 2:4