

True Christian Suffering

extract from Proposition XIV § vi

§ vi. As has been proved above, the basis of persecution is an *unwillingness to suffer*, because no one who will persecute someone else for his conscience would be willing to suffer for his own conscience if he could avoid it. His principles require him, when he has power, to establish by force what he believes is the Truth, and to force others to accept it. Therefore I think it is proper, for the information of all nations, to briefly add something here concerning the *nature of true Christian sufferings*. The witnesses whom God has raised up at this time have given a very faithful testimony in this regard, beyond what has generally been known or practiced for many generations since the beginning of the apostasy. I do not wish to detract in any way from the sufferings of the Protestant martyrs;¹ I believe they walked in faithfulness toward God according to the dispensation of the Light which appeared in their day and many of them were complete enemies to persecution, as is plain from their testimonies against it.

True, faithful, Christian suffering² is when people profess what they believe is right and worship God according to that belief, which is their true right; they neither do more because of outward human pressure, nor less because of their fear of human laws and actions. A Christian man who vindicates his rightful liberty with boldness and innocence

¹ The reference is probably to the Protestants who suffered in the early days of the English Reformation in the sixteenth century, recorded in the famous *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, (written by John Foxe).

² It seems to us that Barclay doesn't make an important distinction explicit. He doesn't speak about suffering itself, but rather about the Christian readiness to testify or to act according conscience, with the willingness to suffer if necessary, to accept good or bad consequences without wavering from obedience.

will in due time achieve peace, although blood may be shed. The current age has experienced this, in some measure, and there are many witnesses of it, and in the future this will be more well-known when Truth takes its place on the earth. People greatly sin against this excellent rule when they do not declare their own doctrine* in times of persecution as much as they would if there were no persecution.* Yet when they can get the magistrate on their side, these people not only extend their own liberty as far as they can, but also they seek to establish it by denying liberty to others.

However, the witnesses of God who are scornfully called Quakers have given clear proof of this excellent patience and suffering. As soon as God revealed his Truth among them, without regarding all opposition or what consequences they might incur, they went from place to place as the Lord moved them, preaching and spreading the Truth in marketplaces, highways, streets, and public temples, although they were daily beaten, whipped, bruised, arrested, and imprisoned. Wherever a church or assembly gathered, they taught them to hold their meetings openly, and not to shut the door or do it secretly, so that everyone would know about it and those who wanted to could enter. This fully removed all just cause of fear that they might be plotting against the government. Their courage and faithfulness in continuing to meet together (and most especially the presence and glory of God which was manifested in the meeting and was terrible to the consciences of the persecutors) wore out the malice of their adversaries, who often were forced to leave their work undone. When they came to break up a meeting, they were forced to take every individual out by force, for the Quakers did not feel free to give up their liberty by dispersing from the meeting upon command. When they were dragged out, unless they were kept out by violence they soon returned peacefully to their place. Sometimes when the magistrates pulled down their meetinghouses, they openly met on the

rubble the next day, innocently keeping their possession of the ground which was rightfully theirs, and not forfeiting their right to meet and worship God. When armed men have come to disperse them it was impossible to carry it out, unless by killing each and every one. They stood so close together that no force could move anyone to stir, unless dragged violently out of their place. When in their malice the persecutors took shovels to throw the rubble onto them, they stood there unmoved, being willing to be buried alive witnessing for the Lord, if he permitted it.

This patient and courageous way of suffering made the persecutors' work very heavy and wearisome. In their courage and patience, the sufferers did not resist in any way, did not bring any weapons to defend themselves, and did not seek any kind of revenge. This struck the hearts of the persecutors, and made their chariot wheels go heavily.³ To retell all these sufferings would make a book in itself which may at some time be published, because we have a record of them. After patiently bearing much suffering in many ways, we have obtained a kind of negative liberty. At present, for the most part, we meet together without disturbance from the magistrate.

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XIV § vi (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 425-427 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 328-330.

³ See Exodus 14:25.