

Robert Barclay, Apology, THE ELEVENTH PROPOSITION

Concerning Worship

Editor's Note: This is an edited version of the Eleventh Proposition of *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* by Robert Barclay (about one-quarter of the length of the original). The purpose of the editing is to come up with a version that would be short enough for most people to read. I think this is an important text, because it provides guidance for Quaker worship. However, it is a bit inaccessible because at about 22,000 words the original takes several hours or even a full day to read and most people don't want to spend the time to do that. Barclay also repeats himself, goes on at undue length, and spends time on controversies which do not seem very relevant now. If anyone wants to read the full text, it is available on line (I have used the on-line text published by Quaker Heritage Press,* but this should be identical to printed early versions of the Apology.) I have made no changes to the language – only deleted material. Of course, the deletions are subjective, and another editor would have come up with a different version. I have focused on those parts of the text which provide a description of and guidance for meeting for worship. I encourage anyone intrigued by this material to give it a try and come up with your own version, or read the original in its full version. I understand the argument that a condensation loses the full version, but I would justify it on these grounds: (1) there are no edits here that modernize the language and therefore possibly distort the meaning; (2) the full original is available; (3) the places where deletions have been made are indicated, and (4) I think it is useful to publish a version which perhaps a number of people will have time to read, as opposed to having only the full original which very few will read. –Victor Thuronyi (2019). (Victor Thuronyi is a member of Adelphi Friends Meeting.)

* Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, 1678, online edition: Quaker Heritage Press: <http://www.qhpress.org/texts/barclay/apology/>. Friends might also be interested in a Pendle Hill pamphlet *Barclay in Brief* (Pendle Hill Pamphlet #28, 1945 <https://pendlehill.org/product/barclay-brief/>) and in *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, edited by Dean Freiday (Barclay Press, 1961, reissued 2000).

All true and acceptable worship to God is offered in the inward and immediate moving and drawing of his own Spirit, which is neither limited to places, times, nor persons: for though we be to worship him always, and that we are continually to fear before him, yet as to the outward signification thereof in prayers, praises or preachings, we ought not to do it in our own will, where and when we will; but where and when we are moved thereunto by the stirring and secret inspiration of the Spirit of God in our hearts; which God heareth and accepteth of, and is never wanting to move us thereunto when need is, of which he himself is the alone proper judge.

§I. . . . Now I come to speak of worship, or of those acts, whether private or public... whereby man renders to God that part of his duty which relates immediately to him; and as "obedience is better than sacrifice," so neither is any sacrifice acceptable, but that which

is done according to the will of him to whom it is offered. But men, finding it easier to sacrifice in their own wills than obey God's will, have heaped up sacrifices without obedience, and thinking to deceive God as they do one another, give him a show of reverence, honor and worship, while they are both inwardly estranged and alienated from his holy and righteous life, and wholly strangers to the pure breathings of his Spirit, in which the acceptable sacrifice and worship is only offered up....

[§II. Omitted]

§III. ... albeit I say that this worship is neither limited to times, places, nor persons, yet I would not be understood as if I intended the putting away of all set times and places to worship. ... To meet together we think necessary for the people of God, because so long as we are clothed with this outward tabernacle there is a necessity to the entertaining of a joint and visible fellowship, and bearing of an outward testimony for God, and seeing of the faces of one another, that we concur with our persons as well as spirits. To be accompanied with that inward love and unity of spirit doth greatly tend to encourage and refresh the saints.

But the limitation we condemn is that whereas the Spirit of God should be the immediate actor, mover, persuader and influencer of man in the particular acts of worship when the saints are met together, this Spirit is limited in its operations by setting up a particular man or men to preach and pray in man's will, and all the rest are excluded from so much as believing that they are to wait for God's Spirit to move them in such things; and so they neglecting that which should quicken them in themselves, and not waiting to feel the pure breathings of God's Spirit so as to obey them, are led merely to depend upon the preacher and hear what he will say.

.... But he hath hammered together in his closet, according to his own will, by his human wisdom and literature, and by stealing the words of Truth from the letter of the Scriptures and patching together other men's writings and observations, so much as will hold him speaking an hour while the glass runs, and without waiting or feeling the inward influence of the Spirit of God, declaims that by haphazard, whether it be fit or seasonable for the people's condition or no, and when he has ended his sermon, he saith his prayer also in his own will, and so there is an end of the business.

§IV. ... we know no moral obligation by the fourth command or elsewhere to keep the first day of the week more as any other, or any holiness inherent in it....

[§V omitted]

§VI. ... to come then to the state of the controversy, as to the public worship we judge it the duty of all to be diligent in the assembling of themselves together... and when assembled, the great work of one and all ought to be to wait upon God, and returning out of their own thoughts and imaginations, to feel the Lord's presence and know a "gathering into his Name" indeed, where he is "in the midst" according to his promise. And as every one is thus gathered, and so met together inwardly in their spirits as well as outwardly in their persons, there the secret power and virtue of life is known to refresh the soul, and the pure motions and breathings of God's Spirit are felt to arise, from which as words of declaration, prayers, or praises arise, the acceptable worship is known which edifies the Church and is well-pleasing to God, and no man here limits the Spirit of God nor bringeth forth his own cunning and gathered stuff, but everyone puts that forth which the Lord puts into their hearts: and it is uttered forth not in man's will and wisdom but "in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit and of Power." Yea, though there be not a word spoken, yet is the true spiritual worship performed and the body of Christ edified; yea it may and hath often fallen out among us that divers meetings have pas[sed] without one word, and yet our souls have been greatly edified and refreshed, and our hearts wonderfully overcome with the secret sense of God's Power and Spirit, which without words hath been ministered from one vessel to another. This is indeed strange and incredible to the mere natural and carnally-minded man, who will be apt to judge all time lost, where there is not something spoken that is obvious to the outward senses; and therefore I shall insist a little upon this subject, as one that can speak from a certain experience and not by mere hearsay, of this wonderful and glorious dispensation which hath so much the more of the wisdom and glory of God in it, as it's contrary to the nature of man's spirit, will, and wisdom.

§VII. As there can be nothing more opposite to the natural will and wisdom of man than this silent waiting upon God, so neither can it be obtained nor rightly comprehended by man but as he layeth down his own wisdom and will so as to be content to be thoroughly subject to God. And therefore it was not preached, nor can be so practised, but by such as find no outward ceremony, no observations, no words, yea not the best and purest words, even the words of Scripture, able to satisfy their weary and afflicted souls; because where all these may be, the life, power, and virtue which make such things effectual may be wanting. Such, I say, were necessitated to cease from all outwards and to be silent before the Lord, and being directed to that inward principle of Life and Light in themselves as the most excellent teacher, which "can never be removed into a corner," came thereby to be learned to wait upon God in the measure of life and grace received from him, and to cease from their own forward words and actings in the natural willing and comprehension and feel after this inward Seed of Life; that, as it moveth, they may move with it and be acted by its power and influenced, whether to pray, preach or sing. And so from this principle of man's being silent and not acting in the things of God of himself until thus acted by God's Light and Grace in the heart, did naturally spring that manner of sitting silent together and

waiting together upon the Lord. For many thus principled, meeting together in the pure fear of the Lord, did not apply themselves presently to speak, pray, or sing, &c., being afraid to be found acting forwardly in their own wills, but each made it their work to retire inwardly to the measure of Grace in themselves, not only being silent as to words but even abstaining from all their own thoughts, imaginations and desires, so watching in a holy dependence upon the Lord thus his Name comes to be one in all, and his glory breaks forth and covers all; and there is such a holy awe and reverence upon every soul that if the natural part should arise in any, or the wise part, or what is not one with the Life, it would presently be chained down and judged out. And when any are through the breaking forth of this power constrained to utter a sentence of exhortation or praise, or to breathe to the Lord in prayer, then all are sensible of it; ... And there being many joined together in this same work, there is an inward travail and wrestling; and also, as the measure of Grace is abode in, an overcoming of the power and spirit of darkness; and thus we are often greatly strengthened and renewed in the spirits of our minds without a word Now as many thus gathered together grow up in the strength, power, and virtue of Truth, and as Truth comes thus to have victory & dominion in their souls, then they receive an utterance & speak steadily to the edification of their brethren, and the pure Life hath a free passage through them, and what is thus spoken edifieth the body indeed. Such is the evident certainty of that divine strength that is communicated by thus meeting together and waiting in silence upon God, that sometimes, when one hath come in that hath been unwatchful, and wandering in his mind, or suddenly out of the hurry of outward business, & so not inwardly gathered with the rest, so soon as he retires himself inwardly, this Power, being in a good measure raised in the whole meeting, will suddenly lay hold upon his spirit, and wonderfully help to raise up the good in him and beget him into the sense of the same Power, to the melting and warming of his heart, even as the warmth would take hold upon a man that is cold, coming in to a stove, or as a flame will lay hold upon some little combustible matter lying near unto it; yea if it fall out that several met together be straying in their minds, though outwardly silent, and so wandering from the measure of grace in themselves... if either one come in, or may be in, who is watchful, and in whom the Life is raised in a great measure, as that one keeps his place he will feel a secret travail for the rest in a sympathy with the Seed which is oppressed in the other and kept from arising by their thoughts and wanderings; and as such a faithful one waits in the Light, and keeps in this divine work, God oftentimes answers the secret travail and breathings of his own Seed through such a one, so that the rest will find themselves secretly smitten without words, and that one will be as a midwife, through the secret travail of his soul, to bring forth the Life in them, just as a little water thrown into a pump brings up the rest, whereby Life will come to be raised in all and the vain imaginations brought down, and such a one is felt by the rest to minister life unto them without words; yea sometimes when there is not a word in the meeting, but all are silently waiting, if one come in that is rude and wicked and in whom the power of darkness prevaieth much, perhaps with an intention to mock or do mischief, if the whole

meeting be gathered into the Life, and it be raised in a good measure, it will strike terror into such an one, and he will feel himself unable to resist, but by the secret strength and virtue thereof the power of darkness in him will be chained down, ...For not a few have come to be convinced of the Truth after this manner, of which I myself, in a part, am a true witness, who not by strength of arguments or by a particular disquisition of each doctrine and convincement of my understanding thereby, came to receive and bear witness of the Truth, but by being secretly reached by this Life: for when I came into the silent assemblies of God's people I felt a secret power among them which touched my heart, and as I gave way unto it, I found the evil weakening in me and the good raised up, and so I became thus knit and united unto them, hungering more and more after the increase of this Power and Life whereby I might feel myself perfectly redeemed:....

§VIII. Our work then and worship is, when we meet together, for everyone to watch and wait upon God in themselves & to be gathered from all visibles thereunto. And as everyone is thus stated they come to find the good arise over the evil and the pure over the impure, in which God reveals himself and draweth near to every individual, and so he in the midst in the general. Whereby each not only partakes of the particular refreshment and strength which comes from the good in himself but is a sharer in the whole body, as being a living member of the body, having a joint fellowship and communion with all; and as this worship is steadfastly preached and kept to it becomes easy, though it be very hard at first to the natural man, whose roving imaginations and running worldly desires are not so easily brought to silence; and therefore the Lord oftentimes, when any turn towards him and have true desires thus to wait upon him, and find great difficulty through the unstayedness of their minds, doth in condescension and compassion cause his Power to break forth in a more strong and powerful manner; and when the mind sinks down and waits for the appearance of life, and that the power of darkness in the soul wrestles and works against it, then the good Seed, as it ariseth, will be found to work as physic in the soul, especially if such a weak one be in the assembly of divers others in whom the life is arisen in greater dominion, and through the contrary workings of the power of darkness there will be found an inward striving in the soul, as really in the mystery as ever Esau and Jacob strove in Rebecca's womb. And from this inward travail, while the darkness seeks to obscure the Light, and the Light break through the darkness (which it always will do if the soul give not its strength to the darkness) there will be such a painful travail found in the soul that will even work upon the outward man; so that oftentimes through the working thereof the body will be greatly shaken, and many groans and sighs and tears, even as the pangs of a woman in travail, will lay hold upon it;...; and thereby trembling and a motion of body will be upon most, if not upon all, which, as the power of Truth prevails, will from pangs and groans end with a sweet sound of thanksgiving and praise, and from this the name of "Quakers," i.e., *Tremblers*, was first reproachfully cast upon us, which though it be none

of our choosing, yet in this respect we are not ashamed of it but have rather reason to rejoice therefore, ...

§IX. Many are the blessed experiences which I could relate of this silence and manner of worship, yet I do not so much commend and speak of silence as if we had a law in it to shut out⁵ praying or preaching, or tied ourselves thereunto; not at all: for as our worship consisteth not in words, so neither in silence, as silence; but in an holy dependence of the mind upon God, from which dependence silence necessarily follows in the first place, until words can be brought forth which are from God's Spirit; and God is not wanting to move *in* his children to bring forth words of exhortation or prayer when it is needful, so that of the many gatherings and meetings of such as are convinced of the truth there is scarce any in whom God raiseth not up some or other to minister to his brethren, that there are few meetings that are altogether silent. For when many are met together in this one Life and Name, it doth most naturally and frequently excite them to pray to and praise God and stir up one another by mutual exhortation and instructions; yet we judge it needful there be in the first place some time of silence, during which every one may be gathered inward to the Word and Gift of Grace, from which he that ministereth may receive strength to bring forth what he ministereth, and that they that hear may have a sense to discern betwixt the precious and the vile, and not to hurry into the exercise of these things so soon as the bell rings, as other Christians do; yea and we doubt not but assuredly know that the meeting may be good and refreshful, though from the sitting down to the rising up thereof there hath not been a word as outwardly spoken; and yet Life may have been known to abound in each particular, and an inward growing up therein and thereby, yea so as words might have been spoken acceptably and from the Life; yet there being no absolute necessity laid upon any so to do, all might have chosen rather quietly and silently to possess and enjoy the Lord in themselves, which is very sweet and comfortable to the soul that hath thus learned to be gathered out of all its own thoughts and workings, to feel the Lord to bring forth both the will and the deed, which many can declare by a blessed experience, though indeed it cannot but be hard for the natural man to receive or believe this doctrine; and therefore it must be rather by a sensible experience, and by coming to make proof of it, than by arguments that such can be convinced of this thing, seeing it is not enough to believe it if they come not also to enjoy and possess it;....

§X. That to wait upon God, and to watch before him, is a duty incumbent upon all, I suppose none will deny.... But that it may be the better and more perfectly understood, as it is not only an outward silence of the body but an inward silence of the mind from all its own imaginations and self-cogitations, let it be considered according to Truth and to the principles and doctrines heretofore affirmed and proven, that man is to be considered in a twofold respect, to wit: in his natural, unregenerate, and fallen state; and in his spiritual and renewed condition; from whence ariseth that distinction of the "natural" and "spiritual

man" so much used by the apostle, and heretofore spoken of, also these two births of the mind proceed from the two seeds in man respectively, to wit, the good Seed and the evil. ...Also this spiritual wickedness is of two sorts, though both one in kind as proceeding from one root, yet differing in their degrees, and in the subjects also sometimes. The one is, when as the natural man is meddling in and working in the things of religion, doth from his own conceptions and divinations affirm or propose wrong and erroneous notions and opinions of God and things spiritual, and invent superstitions, ceremonies, observations, and rites in worship, from whence have sprung all the heresies and superstitions that are among Christians. The other is, when as the natural man, from a mere conviction of his understanding, doth in the forwardness of his own will and by his own natural strength, without the influence and leading of God's Spirit, go about either in his understanding to imagine, conceive, or think of the things of God, or actually to perform them by preaching or praying. ... For this kind of idolatry, whereby man loveth, idolizeth, and huggeth his own conceptions, inventions, and product of his own brain, is so incident unto him, and seated in his fallen nature, that so long as his natural spirit is the first author and actor of him, and is that by which he only is guided and moved in his worship towards God, so as not first to wait for another Guide to direct him, he can never perform the pure spiritual worship nor bring forth anything but the fruit of the first, fallen, natural and corrupt root. ... Since then man in his natural state is thus excluded from acting or moving in things spiritual, how or what way shall he exercise this first and previous duty of waiting upon God, but by silence, and by bringing that natural part to silence? Which is no other ways but by abstaining from his own thoughts and imaginations and from all the self-workings and motions of his own mind, as well in things materially good, as evil, that he being silent, God may speak in him, and the good Seed may arise. ... He, that cometh to learn of a master, if he expect to hear his master & be instructed by him, must not continually be speaking of the matter to be taught and never be quiet, otherwise how shall his master have time to instruct him? ... So also, if one were about to attend a great prince, he would be thought an impertinent and imprudent servant, who, while he ought patiently and readily to wait, that he might answer the king when he speaks, and have his eye upon him to observe the least motions and inclinations of his will, and to do accordingly, would be still deafening him with discourse, though it were in praises of him, and running to and fro, without any particular and immediate order to do things, that perhaps might be good in themselves, or might have been commanded at other times to others. Would the kings of the earth accept of such servants, or service?

Since then we are commanded to "wait upon God diligently," and in so doing it is promised that our "strength shall be renewed," this waiting cannot be performed but by a silence or cessation of the natural part on our side, since God manifests himself not to the outward man or senses, so much as to the inward, to wit, to the soul and spirit; if the soul be still thinking and working in her own will and busily exercised in her own imaginations, though

the matters as in themselves may be good concerning God, yet thereby she incapacitates herself from discerning the "still, small voice" of the Spirit, and so hurts herself greatly, in that she neglects her chief business of waiting upon the Lord; nothing less than if I should busy myself crying out and speaking of a business, while in the meantime I neglect to hear one who is quietly whispering into my ear, and informing me in these things which are most needful for me to hear and know concerning that business. This great duty then of waiting upon God must needs be exercised in man's denying self, both inwardly and outwardly, in a still and mere dependence upon God, in abstracting from all the workings, imaginations and speculations of his own mind, that being emptied, as it were, of himself; and so thoroughly crucified to the natural products thereof he may be fit to receive the Lord, who will have no co-partner nor co-rival of his glory and power. ...

[§XI omitted]

§XII. ...the excellency of this silent waiting upon God doth appear in that it is impossible for the enemy, viz. the devil, to counterfeit it, so as for any soul to be deceived or deluded by him in the exercise thereof. Now, in all other matters he may mix himself in with the natural mind of man, and so by transforming himself he may deceive the soul by busying it about things perhaps innocent in themselves, while yet he keeps them from beholding the pure Light of Christ and so from knowing distinctly his duty, and doing of it. For that envious spirit of man's eternal happiness knoweth well how to accommodate himself and fit his snares for all the several dispositions and inclinations of men; if he find one not fit to be engaged with gross sins or worldly lusts, but rather averse from them and religiously inclined, he can fit himself to beguile such a one by suffering his thoughts and imaginations to run upon spiritual matters and so hurry them to work, act, and meditate in their own wills, for he well knoweth that so long as self bears rule, and the Spirit of God is not the principal and chief actor, man is not put out of his reach; so therefore he can accompany the priest to the altar, the preacher to the pulpit, the zealot to his prayers, yea the doctor and professor of divinity to his study, and there he can cheerfully suffer him to labour and work among his books, yea and help him to find out and invent subtle distinctions and quiddities by which both his mind, and others through him, may be kept from heeding God's Light in the conscience and waiting upon him. There is not any exercise whatsoever wherein he cannot enter and have a chief place, so as the soul many times cannot discern it, except in this alone; for he can only work in and by the natural man and his faculties, by secretly acting upon his imaginations and desires, &c., and therefore when he, to wit the natural man, is silent, there he must also stand. And therefore, when the soul comes to this silence, and, as it were, is brought to nothingness, as to her own workings, then the devil is shut out; for the pure presence of God and shining of his Light he cannot abide, because so long as a man is thinking and meditating as of himself, he cannot be sure but the devil is influencing him therein, but when he comes wholly to be silent, as the pure Light of God

shines in upon him, then he is sure that the devil is shut out, for beyond the imaginations he cannot go, which we often find by sensible experience. For he that of old is said to have come to the gathering together of the children of God is not wanting to come to our assemblies, and indeed he can well enter and work in a meeting that is silent only as to words, either by keeping the minds in various thoughts and imaginations, or by stupefying them so as to overwhelm them with a spirit of heaviness and slothfulness; but when we retire out of all and are turned in, both by being diligent and watchful upon the one hand, and also silent and retired out of all our thoughts upon the other, as we abide in this sure place, we feel ourselves out of his reach; yea oftentimes the power and glory of God will break forth and appear, just as the bright sun through many clouds and mists, to the dispelling of that power of darkness; which will also be sensibly felt seeking to cloud and darken the mind, and wholly to keep it from purely waiting upon God.

[§XIII -- XV omitted]

§XVI. And though this worship be indeed very different from the divers established invented worships among Christians, and therefore may seem strange to many, yet hath it been testified of, commended and practised by the most pious of all sorts in all ages, by many evident testimonies might be proved, so that from the professing and practising thereof the name of mystics hath arisen, as of a certain sect generally commended by all, whose writings are full both of the explanation and of the commendation of this sort of worship, where they plentifully assert this inward introversion and abstraction of the mind, as they call it, from all images and thoughts and the prayer of the will; yea they look upon this as the height of Christian perfection, ...

§XVII. *Obj.* First, it seems to be an unprofitable exercise for a man to be doing or thinking nothing and that one might be much better employed either in meditating upon some good subject or otherwise praying to or praising God.

Ans. I answer, that is not unprofitable which is of absolute necessity, before any other duty can be acceptably performed, as we have shown this waiting to be. Moreover, those have but a carnal and gross apprehension of God and of the things of his kingdom, that imagine that men please him by their own workings and actings, whereas, as hath been shown, the first step for man to fear God is to cease from his own thoughts and imaginations and suffer God's Spirit to work in him...

Obj. Secondly some object, If your worship merely consist in inwardly retiring to the Lord and feeling of his Spirit arise in you, and then to do outward acts as ye are led by it, what need ye have public meetings at set times and places, since everyone may enjoy this at home? ...

Answ. ... God hath seen meet, so long as his children are in this world, to make use of the outward senses as a means to convey spiritual life, as by speaking, praying, praising, &c., which cannot be done to mutual edification but when we hear and see one another, but also to entertain an outward visible testimony for his Name in the world: he causeth the inward life (which is also many times not conveyed by the outward senses) the more to abound when his children assemble themselves diligently together to wait upon him; that as "iron sharpeneth iron,"^o so the seeing of the face one of another, when both are inwardly gathered unto the Life, giveth occasion for the Life secretly to rise and pass from vessel to vessel; and as many candles lighted and put in one place do greatly augment the light, and makes it more to shine forth; so when many are gathered together into the same Life, there is more of the glory of God, and his power appears to the refreshment of each individual for that he partakes not only of the Light and Life raised in himself but in all the rest; and therefore Christ hath particularly promised a blessing to such as assemble together in his Name, seeing he will be "in the midst of them"...

[§XXVIII - XXVII omitted]

§XXVIII. So that to conclude, the worship, preaching, praying and singing which we plead for is such as proceedeth from the Spirit of God and is always accompanied with its influence, being begun by its motion and carried on by the power and strength thereof, and so is a worship purely spiritual such as the Scripture holds forth (John 4:23-24; 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 6:18, &c.).