I. Introduction

Robert Barclay (1648-90) is considered the foremost theologian of the Quaker movement.¹ After his conversion to Quakerism in 1667, Barclay became an eloquent defender of Quaker faith. Though he died at a relatively young age, Barclay left an enduring imprint not only on Quakerism, but also on the thinking of John Wesley, particularly on his doctrine of prevenient grace.

II. Background of the Apology

Robert Barclay’s Apology was first published in Latin in 1676 in Amsterdam, an English edition appearing in England two years later.² Its influence on both sides of the Atlantic was widespread. By 1800, the Apology had been reprinted nine times in England, three in Ireland, three in Philadelphia, and three in New England.³ It became

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²The full name of Barclay’s treatise was Apology for the True Christian Religion, as the Same is Set Forth and Preached by the People Called in Scorn “Quakers.” Burkill, 277.


⁴Frost, 503, fn. 2.
the standard book given to inquirers about the beliefs of the Quakers, also known as the Society of Friends.\textsuperscript{5}

III. Structure of the work

The \textit{Apology} opened with a brief statement of fifteen “propositions.”\textsuperscript{6} The first six propositions included discussion of knowledge, revelation, the Scriptures, the Fall, Universal Redemption, and Spiritual Light, respectively.\textsuperscript{7} After presenting the propositions, Robert Barclay systematically considered each proposition at-length, carefully developing the historical and Scriptural basis of each.

The following pages will examine a handful of themes related to prevenient grace that appear in propositions five and six. The discussion will conclude with an analysis of John Wesley’s 1741 tract \textit{Serious Considerations on Absolute Predestination as Extracted from a Late Author}, an abridgement of the early section of the \textit{Apology}. By discovering what Wesley kept and what he excised, some appreciation of what ideas Wesley accepted and rejected will be gained.\textsuperscript{8}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item[$\textsuperscript{5}$]Frost, 2.
\item[$\textsuperscript{6}$]The 1780 version of the \textit{Apology} referenced in this thesis is by Kessinger Publishing’s Rare Mystical Reprints (www.kessinger.net) and was entitled \textit{An Apology for the True Christian Divinity Being an Explanation and Vindication of the Principles and Doctrines of the People Called Quakers}; hereafter, all references are to the Kessinger edition.
\item[$\textsuperscript{7}$]Capitalisation here reflects the usage in the \textit{Apology} and not current conventions.
\item[$\textsuperscript{8}$]The same procedure was followed by Herbert Boyd McGonigle, \textit{Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley’s Evangelical Arminianism} (Carlisle, Cumbria, and Waynesboro, Georgia: Paternoster Press, 2001), 131-36.
\end{itemize}
IV. The Nature and Activity of the Light of Christ

Robert Barclay’s Proposition Five was entitled: “Concerning the Universal Redemption by Christ, and also the Saving and Spiritual Light, wherewith every Man is enlightened.” The proposition itself claimed:

God, out of his infinite love, who delighteth not in the death of a sinner, but that all should live and be saved, hath so loved the world, that he hath given his only Son a LIGHT, that whosoever believeth in him should be saved, John iii.16. who enlighteneth EVERY man that cometh into the world, John i.9. and maketh manifest all things that are reproveable, Ephes. v. 13 and teacheth all temperance, righteousness, and godliness; and this Light enlighteneth the hearts of all for a time, in order to salvation; and this is it which reproves the sin of all individuals, and would work out the salvation of all, if not resisted. Nor is it less universal than the seed of sin, being the purchase of his death, who tasted death for every man: for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive, 1 Cor. xv. 22.

On the basis of this proposition, as interpreted in reference to Proposition Six, what can be said about the light of Christ?

A. The light of Christ was universal in reach. Robert Barclay framed his arguments in contrast to Calvinistic teaching. The marginal note at the beginning of his extended treatment read: “Absolute probation, that horrible and blasphemous doctrine, described.” On the other hand, the light of Christ reached all because the death of Christ was for all. Barclay asserted: “This doctrine of universal redemption, or Christ’s dying for all men, is of itself so evident from the Scripture testimony, that there is

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9The term, “light of Christ,” is characteristic of the writings of George Fox, William Penn, and Robert Barclay, and thus more accurate than “Inner Light.” The former was chosen by Elton Trueblood for the title of chapter nine of his biography of Robert Barclay. On the concept itself, he wrote: “This basic theology may rightly be called the theology of the Holy Spirit.” Trueblood, 163. Trueblood further remarked that, while appealing to the Logos doctrine was nothing new, Barclay “was the first Christian thinker to make it both explicit and central” (p. 155).

10Apology, 6-7, 108.

11Apology, 7-8, 109-10. The length of Proposition Six precludes reproducing the full text.

12Apology, 110.
scarcely found any other article of Christian faith so frequently, so plainly, and so positively asserted.”\textsuperscript{13} Demonstrating his propensity for syllogisms, Barclay affirmed:

“Those for whom our Saviour gave himself a ransom, to such salvation is possible. But our Saviour gave himself a ransom for all; therefore, salvation is possible.”\textsuperscript{14} At the end of Proposition Six, Barclay explicitly tied together the universality of both the redemption and the light of Christ. Though appreciative of their correction of Calvinism, he criticised Holland’s remonstrants for not having “placed the extent of this salvation in that divine and evangelical principle of light and life wherewith Christ hath enlightened every man that cometh into the world…”\textsuperscript{15}

The language was taken from John 1:9, what Barclay called “the Quaker Text.”\textsuperscript{16} The three adjectives that Barclay ascribed to “light” were “supernatural,” “saving,” and "sufficient.”\textsuperscript{17} In addition, it shone upon all, without exception:

It is plain there comes no man into the world, whom Christ hath not enlightened in some measure, and in whose dark heart this light doth not shine; though the darkness comprehend it not, yet it shineth there; and the nature thereof is to dispel the darkness, where men shut not their eyes upon it.\textsuperscript{18}

Elsewhere, Barclay affirmed that “God hath communicated and given unto every man a measure of the light of his own Son, a measure of grace, or a measure of his Spirit.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{13}Apology, 118.
\textsuperscript{14}Apology, 121.
\textsuperscript{15}Apology, 110.
\textsuperscript{16}Apology, 160. Regarding the prologue to John’s Gospel, including John 1:9, Jackson Cope remarked: “No amount of repetition seemed able to dry the spiritual marrow out of those verses for the early Quakers, who adapt them to every circumstance.” Jackson I. Cope, “Seventeenth Century Quaker Style,” PMLA 71:4 (September 1956), 729. This passage was also John Wesley’s preferred proof-text when referencing the doctrine of prevenient grace.
\textsuperscript{17}Apology, 162.
\textsuperscript{18}Apology, 161.
As the sin of Adam had universally negative effects upon humankind, so Christ’s “coming in the flesh,” his “whole obedience” and his “sufferings” allow “many…to feel the influence of this holy and divine seed and light, and to be turned from evil to good by it…”

B. Though universal, the light of Christ could be resisted. The last phrase of the citation above – “where men shut not their eyes upon it” – indicated another truth regarding this light, namely, that it was resistible. To the words “seed” and “light,” Robert Barclay added “grace.” Every human being “hath a measure of it, which strives with him in order to save him…” Adopting the synonymous language of the “seed,” defined as an “invisible principle, in which God, as Father, Son, and Spirit, dwells,” Barclay portrayed the seed as that “which of its own nature draws, invites, and inclines to God.” Unfortunately, not all submitted to the salutary influence of the seed: “And as every unrighteous action is witnessed against and reproved by this light and seed, so by such actions it is hurt, wounded, and slain, and flees from them; even as the flesh of man flees from that which is of a contrary nature to it.”

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19 Apology, 132. This quote coupled the metaphor of “light” with the language of grace and pneumatology. Trueblood observed: “The Holy Spirit is not spirit in general, but that which is consistent with Christ’s earthly life, teaching, death, and resurrection. The historic revelation of Christ gives precision; the revelation of the Holy Spirit in each contemporary life gives universality; and it is the combination which makes vital Christianity possible.” Trueblood, 163.

20 Apology, 141-42.

21 This is an important point that distinguished Puritan from Quaker theology: “The Calvinist could not stop God; the Quaker could.” (Frost, 513).

22 Apology, 137.

23 Barclay’s description of “seed” blurred the line between the unbeliever, upon whom the light of Christ shone, and the believer, in whom God the Holy Spirit dwelt. When Barclay described “this seed, light, or grace” as “a real spiritual substance,” he introduced ideas that exceeded biblical warrant.

24 Apology, 138.
arguments with those of early Christians, Barclay quoted Chrysostom on John 1:9, arguing the possibility of resisting God’s grace:

If he enlightens every man coming into the world, how comes it that so many men remain without light? For all do not so much as acknowledge Christ. How then doth he enlighten every man? He illuminates indeed so far as in him is; but if any of their own accord, closing the eyes of their mind, will not direct their eyes unto the beams of this light, the cause that they remain in darkness is not from the nature of the light, but through their own malignity, who willingly have rendered themselves unworthy of so great a gift. Why believed they not? Because they would not. Christ did his part.  

C. The doctrine of the light of Christ attributed all good to God. As was clarified previously regarding the human condition after the fall, Robert Barclay rejected the optimistic Socinian and Pelagian interpretation of the natural capacity of the human being for the things of God. How then could one explain what appeared to be good tempers or actions performed by one who makes no profession of Christian faith? The Apologist replied: “It (the light of Christ) exalts above all the grace of God, to which it attributeth all good, even the least and smallest actions that are so; ascribing thereunto not only the first beginnings and motions of good, but also the whole conversion and salvation of the soul.” Virtue in the unbeliever, according to Barclay, was not a sign that human nature was good, rather indicative of the enlightening grace of God, as mediated by the Holy Spirit.

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25 *Apology*, 138. On the contrary, for the one in whom “the seed is received in the heart,” in whom there is no resistance, “Christ comes to be formed and raised, of which the Scripture makes so much mention, calling it the *new man, Christ within, the hope of glory*."

26 *Apology*, 126.

27 No one can act, move, or work on his or her own “until he first be quickened, raised up, and actuated by God’s Spirit.” *Apology*, 134.

28 *Apology*, 133-4.
D. The light of Christ protected the justice of God. Unlike the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination – which Robert Barclay protested made God “the author of sin”30 through the Christ light, “the mercy of God is excellently and well exhibited, in that none are necessarily shut out from salvation; and his justice is demonstrated, in that he condemns none but such to whom he really made offer of salvation, according them the means sufficient thereof.”31 Salvation wholly depended upon the grace of God, while condemnation was entirely the responsibility of the individual.32

E. The light of Christ offered salvation to those lacking gospel preaching. Robert Barclay thought deeply about the fate of those who were born prior to Christ, or lived in parts of the earth untouched by the preaching of the gospel. The “old philosophers” might have been saved, said Barclay, “if they receive and resist not that grace, a manifestation whereof is given to every man to profit withal.”33 Elton Trueblood observed:

Unless we accept some such position as that stated by Barclay, we cannot escape the conclusion that Socrates is in hell! But, if Barclay’s thesis is accepted, the gospel is indeed good news, since it means that Socrates, when he listened obediently to the inner voice, clearly had what Barclay calls his “day of visitation”… if the new insight is a valid one, the absolute barrier to belief in God’s outgoing love is removed.34

29In a convoluted passage (pp. 142-43), Barclay attempted to explain in what sense Christ is in all persons, even the unbeliever. While he insisted that Christ is in all as a “seed” or “light,” these can be “pressed down” or “crucified.” Still, only the “saints” know “union” with Christ or can speak of his “inhabitation.”
30Apology, 112.
31Apology, 133.
32Apology, 134.
33Apology, 109.
Not only did the Christ light explain problems of time; it also addressed difficulties of geography and opportunity. Those “living in parts of the world where the outward preaching of the Gospel is unknown” still had the possibility of salvation.\(^{35}\)

In an extended passage, Barclay addressed the importance of the light of Christ doctrine for those whom he called “infidels”.\(^{36}\)

> It wonderfully commends us as well the certainty of the Christian religion among infidels, as it manifests its own verity to all, in that it is confirmed and established by the experience of all men; seeing there was never yet a man in any place of the earth, however barbarous and wild, but hath acknowledged, that at some time or another, less or more, he hath found *somewhat* in his heart reproving him for some things evil which he hath done, threatening a certain horror if he continued in them, as also promising and communicating a certain peace and sweetness, as he has given way to it, and not resisted it.\(^{37}\)

With such a strong understanding of the light, one may question what value Robert Barclay placed upon preaching. If the light of Christ was sufficient for the salvation of those who did not resist it, was preaching superfluous? Was knowledge of the Christ event, i.e. his birth, life, miracles, sufferings, resurrection, and ascension optional? Not at all; the value of preaching, even to those who have come to Christ through his universal light, was threefold:

1) they were strengthened in their faith;
2) knowing the story of Christ was a great comfort;
3) only through knowledge of Christ could one become Christlike, and follow in his footsteps.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{35}\) *Apology*, 109.

\(^{36}\) Barclay reflected the occasionally insensitive use of language typical of his era.

\(^{37}\) *Apology*, 134.

\(^{38}\) See discussion in *Apology*, 141-42. Though he did not use the word, Barclay was discussing the work of sanctification, which he made dependent upon preaching.
Barclay concluded in a flurry of wit: “The history then is profitable and comfortable with the mystery, and never without it; but the mystery is and may be profitable without the explicit and outward knowledge of the history.”

F. The light of Christ was not to be confused with reason or conscience. Reason was one of the “faculties” of the human being. It was a “natural and rational principle” useful in learning many things, such as the “arts and sciences,” but in things spiritual, may have proven a hindrance rather than a help:

Indeed the great cause of the apostasy hath been, that man hath sought to fathom the things of God in and by this natural and rational principle, and to build up a religion in it, neglecting and overlooking this principle and seed of God in the heart; so that herein, in the most universal and catholic sense, hath Anti-Christ in every man set up himself, and sitteth in the temple of God as God, and above every thing that is called God.

Robert Barclay illustrated the relationship between the divine light and reason by comparing the sun with the moon. The sun was the greater light, and illuminated the moon. Likewise, “the light of (God’s) Son, a spiritual and divine light” enlightened human reason. While reason might prove “useful” in spiritual things, it was “still subservient and subject to the other.”

Beyond reason was the question of conscience. How was conscience related to the light of Christ? The two should not be equated. “Conscience” was defined as “that knowledge which ariseth in man’s heart, from what agreeth, contradicteth, or is contrary

39 Apology, 142.  
40 Apology, 144.  
41 Apology, 144-45. William Frost commented: “Both Friends and Puritans required the necessity of something besides reason in religion, but with this difference: the Puritans defended all possible tools of man in learning about and communicating the contents of revelation; the Friends admitted only supernatural means in evaluating supernatural matters.” Frost, 507.  
42 Apology, 145.
to any thing believed by him, whereby he becomes conscience to himself, that he
transgresseth by doing that which he is persuaded he ought not to do.”  
Barclay spoke of
a Turk who is taught that drinking wine is wrong, but that keeping concubines is lawful.
Should such a man drink wine, his conscience would “reprove” him, but would leave him
undisturbed when he commits “fornication.”  
The content of conscience, therefore, was
determined by socialisation; as such, it could be “defiled and corrupted.”  
It was
culturally conditioned and subjective, varying according to the environmental factors by
which it was formed. These factors differed depending upon the milieu in which one was
educated. Though conscience, “when rightly informed and enlightened,” might serve as a
lanthorn to magnify the light of a candle, it was not the candle itself.  

What then was the “candle” that enlightens the conscience? The candle was the
light of Christ.  
Whereas conscience was subjective and culturally conditioned, the
Christ light was objective and consistent across cultures. Returning to the illustration of
the Turk, Robert Barclay noted that where conscience might leave him undisturbed, the
light of Christ would not:

Whereas if the light of Christ in him were minded, it would reprove
him, not only for committing fornication, but also, as he became
obedient thereunto, inform him that Mahomet was an imposter; as
well as Socrates was informed by it, in his day, of the falsity of
the heathens (sic) gods.  

Barclay observed that a lanthorn was only useful when “a clear candle burns and
shines in it.”  
The light of Christ served a three-fold purpose: 1) it removed the blindness

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43 Apology, 146.
44 Apology, 146.
45 Apology, 145. Barclay cited Titus 1:15 to buttress his claim.
46 Apology, 147.
47 Apology, 147.
48 Apology, 146.
of the judgment; 2) it opened the understanding, and 3) it rectified the judgment and the conscience. As such, the light of Christ was “a most certain guide unto life eternal.”

V. **The Apology and John Wesley’s Serious Considerations**

John Wesley abridged relevant portions of Barclay’s work, publishing it in 1741 under the title *Serious Considerations on Absolute Predestination.*

At the height of the unfortunate controversy over predestination with George Whitefield, Wesley distributed the abridgement not only to his own adherents at the Foundry in London, but also to Whitefield’s followers at the Tabernacle.

Just twenty-four pages long, *Serious Considerations* was drawn mostly from Robert Barclay’s treatment of his Fifth and Sixth Propositions, grouped under the title “Of Universal and Saving Light.” John Wesley edited out most of Barclay’s confusing description of the “seed” but kept a reference to the parable of the sower. Clearly, he preferred the metaphor of “light,” including large swaths of Barclay’s discussion of the light of Christ, especially from Johannine writings.

Equally important in both Robert Barclay’s Apology and John Wesley’s abridgement were the concepts of the *universality* and *resistibility* of grace. For Barclay, the “day of visitation” represented the active striving of the Spirit of God with an individual, calling all unbelievers to repentance. However, refusal of the salvation

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49 *Apology*, 147.
50 *Apology*, 146-47.
51 *Apology*, 147.
53 Coppedge, 83.
54 John Wesley, *Serious Considerations*, 22-23.
55 *Serious Considerations*, 20-22.
offer was an option. After examining numerous passages of Scripture, Barclay concluded:

If there was a day when the obstinate Jews might have known the things that belonged to their peace, which, because they rejected it, were hid from their eyes; if there was a time wherein Christ would have gathered them, who, because they refused, could not be gathered; then such as might have been saved do actually perish, that slighted the day of God’s visitation towards them, wherein they might have been converted and saved.57

Robert Barclay argued from the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 that the talents symbolised God’s grace in Christ extended to all.58 Though in the parable not all the servants received the same number of talents from the master, “yet there is given to all that which is sufficient, and no more is required than according to that which is given.”59 John Wesley included this passage in Serious Considerations, thus acknowledging the validity of Barclay’s hermeneutical link between the availability of grace and the metaphor of talents.60

John Wesley’s Serious Considerations ended with a paragraph that did not appear in Robert Barclay’s Apology. In it, he gathered up the threads, affirming again that:

1) the gospel is good tidings of great joy for all people;
2) ministers were to preach to all;
3) Christ died for all;

56 Apology, 153-160.
57 Apology, 160. In Serious Considerations, Wesley devoted pages 15-24 to excerpts from Barclay explaining both God’s indiscriminate offer of salvation (the “day of visitation”) and the insistence that Christ died for all.
58 Apology, 167.
59 Apology, 167.
60 Serious Considerations, 23. The talent metaphor was most fully developed by John Fletcher in his Third Check to Antinomianism. See Joseph Benson, ed., The Works of the Rev. John Fletcher, Late Vicar of Madeley (9 vols.; London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1877), 2:405-406; also 4:295-299.
4) God gives to all a day or time of visitation;

5) a measure of saving grace is available to all;

6) those who might have come to Christ but did not had their
   blood on their own heads.\textsuperscript{61}

Through his careful elucidation of the \textit{logos} doctrine, Robert Barclay provided
an alternative system to the strong Calvinism of his day.\textsuperscript{62} When the predestinarian
controversy arose in his own time, John Wesley did not hesitate to adapt the arguments
that the Quaker theologian had made years before. Though at the time of the first
predestinarian controversy (1739-41) Wesley’s conception of prevenient grace was not
fully developed, Barclay’s doctrine of the universal light of Christ had already left its
mark. The “Quaker text” (John 1:9) became Wesley’s favourite passage when
confronting the inroads of predestinarian ideas among his Methodist societies.

\textbf{VI. Conclusion}

In Robert Barclay’s \textit{Apology}, John Wesley encountered ideas that resonated
with his own developing understanding of the economy of God’s grace. The light of
Christ, universal in scope, was a compelling metaphor that he employed in the sometimes
heated discussions with those who limited saving grace to the elect. Indeed, like Barclay,
for Wesley, “light” was to become the most important metaphor for explaining the
universal reach of the grace of God. While Wesley may have eventually developed this
emphas\textup{is} on his own, Barclay’s \textit{Apology} was a convenient systematic reflection that
appears to have been a catalyst in the development of Wesley’s mature doctrine of
prevenient grace.

\textsuperscript{61}\textit{Serious Considerations}, 24.
\textsuperscript{62}See full discussion in Trueblood, 154-56.
-Sources cited-


