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## IN DEFENSE OF FOLLY

DEAN FREIDAY

Being baffled characterizes my reaction to the continued habit of some authors to cite the various Friends' Book Store (1908 and earlier) versions of *Barclay's Apology*. Somehow they think it would be "unscholarly" to cite the *Modern Edition* version, which I edited, perhaps in folly. Yet so far no one has pointed out any errors in "transphrasing." I used that term to make it clear that it was not a "paraphrase." Even interpolated words are as infrequent as they are in the KJV Bible. Perhaps I should have italicized them, as the KJV did.

No one seems to have any trouble quoting NEB, NJerB, NIV, REB, RSV, NRSV, NAB, TEV, CEV, etc. At least they don't regard it as sacrilege. And no one hesitates to quote the modern version of Calvin's *Institutes*. As the sole editor of *Barclay's Apology in Modern English*, I take pride in the care I used to keep as close as possible to Barclay's own original English translation in 1678 of his work first published in Latin in 1676.

A legion of scholars, or a battery of translators, or half a dozen updated preceding versions were not available to me as they were for drawing on to clarify John Calvin's *Institutes*. Like Barclay, Calvin made his own translation from his 1539 Latin edition into the vernacular, putting it in French in 1541.

Unlike Barclay's Englishing of the *Apology*, Calvin's French version has been "warmly praised for its style." It is undeniably the earliest work in which the French language is used as a medium for the expression of sustained and serious thought. It is remarkable that a book so creative in giving character to the language of the French nation should have been itself a translation by an author who from boyhood habitually thought in Latin.<sup>1</sup>

Barclay also thought in Latin, but his English sentences were often interminable, and for the most part had a very strange structure. Verbs were in the oddest of places (almost resembling German word order). Sr. Mary Loretto, RSM, who translated Barclay's *Reply to Arnoldus* (previously un-Englished) said that this odd sentence

structure was occasioned by his following his own Latin word order too closely.<sup>2</sup>

George Fox, not Barclay, was the early Quaker credited with having a major influence on the generally flowery and contrived style of seventeenth-century English. In general, he substituted remarkable conciseness and coupled it with a flair for vivid phrasing, which his *Journal* retains to this day. But his thought was far from systematic in style or conceptualization, and so far it has eluded all attempts to put it into modern English. Tracking down his biblical citations, allusions, and reminiscences is almost a life's work.

Returning to Barclay's *Apology*, I might well have said: "To bring to English readers this work of magnitude and importance, unimpaired in its energy and power, was a task to be approached with fear and trembling." Actually, it was said of Calvin's *Institutes*.<sup>3</sup> I could also have said: "The purpose held in view (in the footnotes) has been simply to clarify the work for the modern reader, and, by a selected minimum of serviceable information and interpretive comment, to give an impression of its theological and historical depth and range."<sup>4</sup>

While another prefatory comment refers to Calvin's Latin, it could well have been said of Barclay's English. The transphraser "has broken up many long sentences, so foreign to current English prose, and has avoided wherever possible the aridity of a heavily Latinate theological language—while at the same time honoring the precise distinctions of Calvin's thought....In recasting an ancient work in modern idiom, there is always a dilemma: how to balance faithfulness to the original over against due attention to the current ways of English speech."<sup>5</sup>

## NOTES

1. Introduction, p. xxxvi to Vol. I of *Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), Vol. XX of *The Library of Christian Classics*.
2. *Quaker History*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (Spring 1979): 20-32.
3. *Op. cit.* in Note 1, Editor's Preface, p. xix.
4. *Ibid.*, p. xxi.
5. *Ibid.*, Translator's Note, p. xxiii.