

# The Larger Catechism

# Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly



*Series Editors*

John R. Bower and Chad Van Dixhoorn

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THE WESTMINSTER  
ASSEMBLY PROJECT

# The Larger Catechism

A CRITICAL TEXT AND INTRODUCTION

by  
John R. Bower



**Reformation Heritage Books**  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

*The Larger Catechism*

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Published by

**Reformation Heritage Books**

2965 Leonard St., NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49525

616-977-0599 / Fax 616-285-3246

e-mail: [orders@heritagebooks.org](mailto:orders@heritagebooks.org)

website: [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org)

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bower, John (John R.), 1956-

The Larger catechism : a critical text and introduction / by John R. Bower.

p. cm. — (Principal documents of the Westminster Assembly)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-60178-085-0 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Westminster Assembly (1643-1652). Larger catechism. 2. Presbyterian Church—Catechisms. 3. Presbyterian Church—Doctrines. I.

Westminster Assembly (1643-1652). Larger catechism. 2010. II. Title.

BX9184.A3B69 2010

238'.42—dc22

2010004028

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## SERIES PREFACE

### *Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly*

In 1643, the Westminster Assembly was charged by the Long Parliament to formulate documents necessary to reform and unify religion in the three kingdoms. While this attempt to reform the Church proved an English failure, it was a Scottish and Irish success. The Directories, Confession, and Catechisms of the Assembly were officially adopted by the Church of Scotland and Presbyterian Church in Ireland, as was a revised form of the Assembly's Psalter. Through emigration and missionary activity, the ideals and teachings of the Westminster divines were spread around the world. Yale historian Sydney Ahlstrom judged that the Westminster Confession of Faith, in its original and altered forms, became "by far the most influential doctrinal symbol in American Protestant history." In fact, many consider the Assembly's Confession and Catechisms, commonly known as the Westminster Standards, as the finest and most enduring statements of early modern Reformed theology.

When the Westminster Assembly began revising the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England in July 1643, a search was made to uncover the most "Authentike" copies of the original text. Assembly members demanded textual accuracy before critically examining the Church's historic doctrinal formula. Nearly four centuries later, the Westminster Standards are now recognized in some fashion as the doctrinal formulas for Reformed and Presbyterian denominations worldwide. Nonetheless, a call today for the most authentic texts of these Standards would leave many librarians and curators perplexed. Accurate critical editions of these texts are either incomplete or do not exist. Best known is the work of S. W. Carruthers, the historian and bibliographer who produced critical editions of the Confession of Faith (1937) and Shorter Catechism (1957).

The series of texts in the Principal Documents of the Westminster Assembly differ from previous works in that they tell the story of a birth, rather than a life. Our intent is to reconstruct the principal documents of the Westminster Assembly

as they were originally intended in the seventeenth century. By scrutinizing and collating all available copies of the text immediately supervised by the Assembly, the critical edition strives to emend the inaccuracies of individual textual sources. Consequently, the resulting emended text emerges as an essentially unique edition. This differs from the editions of Carruthers and others in that no attempt is made here to trace the editorial history of the text after the time of the Assembly.

The proposed series includes the Assembly's six documents originally intended for establishing uniformity of religion: the Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, the Directory for Public Worship, the Directory for Church Government, and the Psalter. Each edition will include a historical introduction, the critical text, and parallel columns comparing original manuscripts and authoritative editions, retaining both the original spelling and punctuation. All texts are collated from original manuscripts and printed sources rather than copies.

We hope these critical texts will become the standard among historians and theologians for critical work on the Assembly, and the best base from which translators, commentators, and modern editors of the text can work.

John R. Bower  
Chad Van Dixhoorn

## PREFACE

The Larger Catechism stands as one of the Westminster Assembly's most important works. It is notable for being the Assembly's longest document and for containing some of its most advanced theological statements. Most importantly, the Larger Catechism was intended to serve as the premier tool for promoting and advancing the godly life. However, the pedagogical role of the Larger Catechism was quickly overshadowed by its condensed version, the Shorter Catechism. As a result, the Larger Catechism has suffered from chronic disuse and neglect, which is reflected in a general lack of attention over details such as textual accuracy. Since its publication in 1648, the Larger Catechism has been plagued by textual errors, which have accrued over nearly four centuries of editorial and ecclesiastical neglect. Despite occasional efforts to reverse this trend, the legacy of neglect remains clearly evident in the frequent, and sometimes substantive, errors common to modern editions of the Larger Catechism.

The intent of this critical edition is to restore the text of the Larger Catechism to its originally intended state and, for the first time, to provide an accurate source document for studies of this important and complex work.

This effort is due largely to the help of others. Sinclair Ferguson provided invaluable advice and encouragement in supervising the initial draft of the critical text as part of the Th.M. degree requirements for Westminster Theological Seminary (London). Jason Rampelt very graciously provided examples of John Wallis's handwriting for use in examining the Larger Catechism's manuscripts. The debt owed to Chad Van Dixhoorn in bringing this edition to fruition is incalculable. He has, throughout its gestation, freely provided resources, advice, and time, particularly with regards to the historical introduction. His recent transcription of the complete minutes of the Assembly is the touchstone for this study, as it will be for all future appraisals of the Assembly and its work. As this critical edition has entered its final stages, I wish to thank Reformation Heritage Books for undertaking this series and for the editorial labor and guidance of Joel

R. Beeke, Jay T. Collier, and their team at Reformation Heritage Books. Their efforts have considerably enhanced the content and usefulness of this work.

For the multiple collations, I have benefited from the advice and assistance of the rare book and special collections departments of the British Library, the Bodleian Library, Cambridge University Library, the University of Liverpool Library, the National Library of Scotland, New College Library at the University of Edinburgh, and the Beineke Library at Yale University. In particular I wish to acknowledge the special collections departments at Princeton Theological Library and Emmanuel College Library in Cambridge for their kindness in accommodating my schedule and providing reproductions of select pages. I especially thank Margaret Thompson who provided access to the manuscript collection at Westminster College, Cambridge and who assisted me in negotiating my way through the personal papers of S. W. Carruthers.

Lastly, and most importantly, this work was made possible by my wife and coworker, Dorothy, who has provided unfailing encouragement and, with a wonderful proficiency in reading early-modern texts, has joined me in proof reading the seemingly endless iterations of the critical and authoritative texts.

Introduction:  
The Making of the Catechism



## CHAPTER 1

# One Catechism For Three Kingdoms

### The Call for a Catechism

In 1643, the Westminster Assembly of Divines was called on by Parliament to serve as chief architect and advisor for an ambitious vision: uniformity of religion between England, Scotland, and Ireland. Amid a raging civil war, the two houses of Parliament were determined to affirm the Church of England's historic Calvinism and replace its old prescribed liturgy and Episcopal government with new forms, more agreeable to the Puritan party now in control. This change was particularly crucial since the king's compliance with the policies of Archbishop William Laud was one cause for the civil war. Now Parliament was free to chart a new course of reform for the Church and was anxious to provide it with the necessary guides.

But in order for Parliament to realize the fruit of any reform, its armies had to win the war and, in its opening years, such a victory was far from certain. To ensure success, help from the Scots became an imperative. As early as 1642, England's parliamentarians and Scotland's Presbyterians began negotiating an alliance that would include not only political ties, but also religious uniformity between the nations, including a call for "one catechism in all three kingdoms."<sup>1</sup> This alliance was formalized with the Solemn League and Covenant, which committed Scotland and England to form "the neerest conjunction and Uniformity in Religion, Confession of Faith, Form of Church-government, Directory for Worship and Catechizing."<sup>2</sup> With this development, the Westminster Assembly, which had convened only a month earlier to advise on reformation in England, was thrust onto a much larger stage and charged with formulating the documents necessary for covenanted uniformity of religion in three kingdoms.

Among the expected documents was one catechism that would provide common

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1. John Rushworth, *Historical Collections. The Third Part: in Two Volumes* (London: printed for Richard Chiswell and Thomas Cockerall, 169[2]), Vol. II: 392.

2. *A Solemn League and Covenant* (London: printed for Edward Hoshands, 1643).

religious instruction for the kingdoms.<sup>3</sup> Catechizing was the acknowledged educational tool of the church and, during the unsettled days surrounding the civil war, the church was desperately in need of instruction. Samuel Austin, writing in the preface to his catechism, summarized four chief ills of the day that called for renewed vigor in catechizing, declaring “the times are full of looseness and profaneness,” of “unchristian bitterness, divisions & c,” “full of slighting and neglecting of...divine Ordinances,” and “wherein men are much taken up in seeking after new notions and strange opinions.”<sup>4</sup> Catechisms offered, at least in part, an antidote to these social maladies. Taught by pastors, parents, and schoolmasters, they instilled the principles of the faith, promoted individual godliness, rehearsed the means of grace, and warded off doctrinal and moral error from an early age.

While catechizing was a familiar part of church life in both England and Scotland, English pastors were particularly adept in their composition and use. At least twelve Assembly members had published catechisms in England before 1643, and every clerical member was thoroughly acquainted with the duty and art of catechizing.<sup>5</sup>

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3. The wording used in the Solemn League and Covenant, a “Directory for Worship and Catechizing,” is vague. At first, the Assembly was hesitant whether they were to produce a catechism, a directory for instruction on catechizing, or both. However, negotiations during the previous year clearly stipulated that uniformity of religion included a common catechism; any ambiguity appears to have been quickly resolved. See Chad Van Dixhoorn, “Scottish influence on the Westminster assembly: A study of the synod’s summoning ordinance and the Solemn League and Covenant,” *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 37 (2007):78–79.

4. Samuel Austin, *A Practical Catechism* (London: printed for Thomas Underhill, 1647), [B1r].

5. Cornelius Burges, *A Most Compendius Direction* (London: printed by William Jones, 1622); Richard Byfield, *A Candle Lighted at the Lampe of Sacred Scriptures* (London: n.p., 1627); John Carter, *Winter-evenings Communication* (Cambridge: by printers of the University of Cambridge, 1628); Daniel Featley, *The Summe of Saving Knowledge* (London: printed by George Miller, 1626); Thomas Gataker, “A Short Catechisme for the Simpler Sort,” in *The Christian Mans Care* (London: printed by John Haviland, 1624); William Gouge, *A Short Catechisme* (London: printed by John Beale, 1615); John Jackson, *The Key of Knowledge* (London: imprinted by Felix Kingston for Robert Milbourn, 1640); Henry Painter (no copy is available, but the work is mentioned by Phillip Nye in *Beames of Former Light* [London: printed by R. I. for Adoniram Byfield, 1659], 82); Herbert Palmer, *An Endeavour of Making the Principles of Christian Religion* (Cambridge: printed by Roger Daniel, 1640); William Tisbe, *A Briefe Catechetical Exposition* (London: printed by I. N., 1633); George Walker, *The Key of Saving Knowledge* (London: printed by Thomas Badger, 1641); and Henry Wilkinson, *A Catechisme Contayning a Short Exposition* (London: printed by T. C., 1629).

Other members very likely had private manuscript forms that circulated, such as Anthony Tuckney.



### The Assembly Begins: the “Early Catechism”

Work on the Catechism first began in early 1643/4.<sup>6</sup> Herbert Palmer, by Robert Baillie’s account the “most noted catechist in England,” was the natural choice to draft both a catechism and a directory describing its use and was put to work immediately.<sup>7</sup> However, unexplained delays led the Assembly to add Stephen Marshall, Anthony Tuckney, Matthew Newcomen, and Thomas Hill with hopes of hastening the task.<sup>8</sup> Two months later, progress still lagged, so Edward Reynolds and Phillip Delme were added.<sup>9</sup> Finally, the committee was ordered to report on May 13, 1645. The ensuing debate made it clear that the Assembly was not impressed with the committee’s results. Part of the problem was Palmer’s method, which mimicked his own catechism, *An Endeavor of Making the Principles...Plaine and Easie*. First published in 1640, the work was probably in its fifth printing by 1644, testifying to its popularity, but not necessarily to its fitness as a national catechism.<sup>10</sup> While *An Endeavor* was quite traditional in content and organization, it superimposed an unusual array of subsidiary yes-and-no questions intended to aid both teacher and student.<sup>11</sup> The committee itself was far from unanimous as two of the seven members, Marshall and Reynolds, openly criticized their own committee’s report. Curiously, the Scots, who earlier expressed concern, were now supportive. Gillespie explained: “When we were lately in Scotland, in conference, we had occasion to speak of this way, and showed them the example of it, and they all liked it very well.” The example provided by Gillespie was likely a copy of Palmer’s published catechism.<sup>12</sup>

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6. Old Style dating is used throughout and reflects the use of the Julian calendar where the new year did not begin until March 25<sup>th</sup>. For certain dates the reader is alerted to this by a forward slash, with the New Style date following it.

7. Robert Baillie, *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle, 1841), 2:140. This letter was written sometime between January and mid-February, 1643/44.

8. Chad Van Dixhoorn, “Reforming the Reformation: theological debate at the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652” 7 vols. Vol. 1, “Reforming the Reformation”; vol. 2, “Appendix A”; vols. 3–7, “Appendix B, Minutes of the Westminster Assembly” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 2004), 4:14 (Sess:332). The volumes of this thesis are referred to collectively as the “Minutes.”

9. Van Dixhoorn, “Minutes,” 6:62 (Sess:376).

10. Herbert Palmer, *An Endeavour of Making the Principles of Christian Religion, Namely the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Sacraments, Plaine and Easie* (London: printed for Thomas Underhill, 1644).

11. Van Dixhoorn, “Minutes,” 6:118–120 (Sess:435). This is apparent from the unique “Yes” and “No” substructure and Palmer’s reticence to speak, observing that the matter so closely concerned him.

12. Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2:242. Comments made by Baillie in 1644 and early 1645 that “[t]he Catechise is drawn up” may have referred to Palmer or to other catechisms such as *The New Catechisme According to the Forme of the Kirk of Scotland* (London, 1644), which was published for the

Progress remained elusive and by May, the committee's disagreements reached an apparent impasse. On August 20, 1645, the Assembly called for a new "Committee of 3" in which Palmer, still as chairman, was joined by Edmund Stanton and Thomas Young, "to draw up the whole draught of the Catechisme with all convenient speed and make report to this Assembly."<sup>13</sup> Despite these changes and the Assembly's urging, work on the catechism failed to progress. Whether the fault lay with the committee's inertia or the Assembly's preoccupation with other matters is uncertain. The Scottish commissioner Robert Baillie, always quick to suspect the Congregationalists, attributed the delay to more than just the Assembly's usual slowness but also suspected "the Independents miserable unamendable designe to keep all things from any conclusion."<sup>14</sup> Baillie sought to counter these delaying tactics by appealing directly to Parliament through two friends, House members Zouch Tate and Francis Rous. While the legitimacy of Baillie's concern is uncertain, both Houses acted shortly afterward and urged the divines "to hasten the confession of faith & catechisme."<sup>15</sup> The Assembly complied and that day ordered the "Committees about the Confession of Faith: and the Committee for the catechism to meet." John Ward, member from Ipswich, was also added to help move the catechism committee forward. From this point, work on the Confession accelerated; by September 24, 1646, the first nineteen chapters were sent to the House of Commons. The remaining chapters followed on December 4. With the Confession well in hand, the Assembly again turned its attention to the catechism. From September 14 to January 4, 1646/7, fifty-five questions—nearly half of the catechism—were debated and approved.<sup>16</sup> Even at this late stage, the influence of Palmer's catechism was still discernible.<sup>17</sup>

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"generall good of both kingdomes." However, it seems likely, especially after August 1644 (following the General Assembly), that Palmer's model was viewed by the Scots as the prototype. See Alexander Mitchell, *Catechisms of the Second Reformation* (London: James Nisbet, 1886), xi–xiii.

13. Van Dixhoorn, "Minutes," 6:168 (Sess:491).

14. Baillie, *Letter and Journals* 2:378–379 (July 14, 1646). Baillie claims to have initiated the order from Parliament through his "good friends" Francis Rous and Zouch Tate in an effort to thwart the Congregationalists and hasten progress in the Assembly. Since the date of his letter predates Parliament's order to the Assembly by a week, he probably played some role in this affair. But Baillie's remark concerning the Congregationalists may be tempered by his overall distrust and suspicion concerning their motives.

15. Van Dixhoorn, "Minutes," 7:589 (Sess:677).

16. Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 3:2.

17. C. A. Briggs, "The Documentary History of the Westminster Assembly," *The Presbyterian Review* (Jan. 1880), 155–160.

### A Change in Course

In the end the Assembly's productivity with the catechism proved illusory. On January 14, 1646/7, the nearly completed catechism was abruptly discarded. Instead the Assembly adopted a new plan that called for two catechisms: a brief form for children and the uninstructed, and a larger work for those more advanced in the faith. Of the two, the larger would prove much more significant in terms of time and substance and in the end would be the Assembly's largest document. The Shorter Catechism would follow months later on the heels of the Larger and, although incorporating many unique features, was basically an abstract of its larger counterpart. Consequently, any proper understanding of the Shorter Catechism's history and development must first consider the Assembly's work on the Larger Catechism.

Before tracing the Larger Catechism's history within the Assembly, the seemingly sudden decision to abandon the early catechism deserves further attention, especially when its implications are considered. Implied in the decision was the abandonment of a work that was nearly complete, an act that ran counter to Parliament's clear instructions to hasten efforts. It also left continued calls for a reliable catechism unanswered for still another year. But perhaps the most important result was that it committed the Assembly to months of added labor at a time when some members were thinking the end of their work was near.

Only a month earlier, members were talking of dissolving the body, which necessitated the Assembly to offer reasons why such a consideration was premature.<sup>18</sup> Robert Baillie, who had returned home to Scotland two months earlier, left the Assembly confident in its progress on the catechism, writing, "[A] committee has drawn and reported the whole: the Assembly ere I came away had voted more than the halfe; a short time will end the rest; for they study brevitie." "This ended, we have no more adoe in the Assemblie, neither know we any more work the Assembly hes in hand but ane answer to the nine Queries of the House of Commons...."<sup>19</sup> Despite such optimism that an end was in sight, the Assembly's decision on January 14 came quickly and without recorded dissent, suggesting the motion was neither a surprise nor unwelcomed. What prompted this sudden change in course and galvanized the members to support it? What reasons were offered to silence talk of dismissing the Assembly? Undoubtedly, concerns over the catechism figured prominently in these discussions.

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18. Van Dixhoorn, "Minutes," 6:389 (Sess:759). Compare with Van Dixhoorn, "Minutes," 7:737 (Sess:949) when the question, "what the Assembly is to do when the catechism is finished," was raised a year later. At that time a committee of sixteen was appointed.

19. Baillie, *Letters and Journal*, 3:2.

While objections to the early catechism were probably many and varied, two themes likely dominated the discussions: first, the vitality of England's catechetical tradition, and second, the weakness of the catechism in hand. A brief examination of these two areas offers insight not only into why the Assembly started over, but—just as valuable—why their next efforts proved so successful.

### The Lessons of Catechetical Tradition

For nearly a century, the touchstone of catechizing within the Church of England was the 1549 Prayer Book Catechism. Included within *The Book of Common Prayer*, this simple form was to be learned by everyone before being confirmed by the bishop, and provided the first step in introducing children to the Christian religion and a godly life. This simple catechism was soon joined by a growing market of catechisms that targeted a wider audience. Some works supplemented the official catechism and were intended for younger children, while others offered intermediate and advanced forms suitable for older children and adults. One of the first advanced English catechisms was Alexander Nowell's *Catechismus, sive Prima institutio*.<sup>20</sup> Nowell's work had been translated into English that same year and approved by the Canons of 1571 for use in schools and universities. Apart from the 1549 Prayer Book Catechism, it was the only officially recognized catechism of the Church of England.<sup>21</sup> Its purpose was to supplement "the little catechism as written for very young children," with a larger catechism to provide "reasons and proofes" to "content and satisfie" the minds of students on the chief points of the Christian religion.<sup>22</sup> Nowell sought to provide a catechism "not contayning bare and naked affirmations onely, but shewing also some causes, and reasons to the same annexed."<sup>23</sup> He later modified and edited this "larger catechism" to produce a "middle catechism" for those who judged the shorter too simple and the larger too difficult. As a catechist, Nowell recognized the need to address "the diversities of ages, and capacities of wittes."<sup>24</sup>

While early catechisms such as Nowell's remained popular through the 1660s, the demand for both brief and advanced forms grew. Between the 1570s and

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20. Alexander Nowell, *Catechismus, sive Prima institutio, disciplinaque pietatis Christianae Latine explicata* (Londini: In officina Reginaldi Wolfij, 1570).

21. Alexander Nowell, *A Catechisme, or Institution of Christian Religion, to be Learned of All Youthe* (London, 1570), A2. See David B. Lowry, "Alexander Nowell, His Catechism and the Elizabethan Settlement of Religion" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1986), 10; Lynn Diane Durbin, "Education by Catechism: Development of the Sixteenth Century English Catechism" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1987).

22. Nowell, *A Catechisme*, A2.

23. Nowell, *A Catechisme*, A2.

24. Nowell, *A Catechisme*, A2.

1660s, catechisms were so popular that over five hundred new works were published, ranging from primers for toddlers to advanced textbooks extending hundreds of pages.<sup>25</sup> Ian Green has provided a comprehensive survey and analysis of English catechisms from this period in his impressive work, *The Christian's ABC*.<sup>26</sup> Included in his catalogue of catechisms are popular shorter forms such as Eusebius Paget's *Short Questions and Answers* (1579), Edward Dering's *A Brief and Necessary Instruction* (1572), Stephen Edgerton's *A Brief Method of Catechizing*, and Samuel Hieron's *The Doctrine of the Beginning of Christ* (1604). Numbered among the best-selling advanced catechisms are those by Arthur Dent, John Ball, Edward Elton, William Perkins, and Richard Bernard.<sup>27</sup>

The popularity of these works was part of a wider appreciation that the church must encourage a catechizing method that met the diversity of ages and levels of learning. A late-sixteenth-century directory for presbyterian church government proposed:

Let the Catechisme bee taught in every Church. Let there bee two sorts, one more large applied to the delivering of the summe of Religion, by a suite and order of certaine places of Scriptures, according to which some point of the holy doctrine may bee expounded every weeke. Another of the same sort, but shorter, fit for the examination of the rude and ignorant before they be admitted to the Lords Supper.<sup>28</sup>

Sometimes a longer catechism expanded elements of a simpler catechism, which offered a helpful guide for the teacher and a measure of consistency for the learner. Such an approach was followed by a wide number of intermediate and advanced works explaining the official Prayer Book Catechism. Among the most popular examples of this approach was Richard Bernard's *The Common*

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25. One catechism promoted itself as having been learned by a three-year-old. Anon., *A Short Catechisme for Little Children Learned by One at Three Yeares of Age* (London: printed by Thomas Dawson, 1589).

26. Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c.1530–1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Van Dixhoorn, "Minutes," 1:77.

27. Green, *Christian's ABC*, 550–750. John Ball, *A Short Treatise, Contayning All the Principall Grounds of Christian Religion* (London: printed for Edward Brewster, 1646); John Mayer, *The English Catechisme. Or A Commentarie on the Short Catechisme Set Forth in the Booke of Common Prayer... Profitable for Ministers in Their Churches, for Schoole-Masters in their Schooles, and for Housholders in Their Families* (London: printed for John Marriot, 1621).

28. [Walter Travers], *A Directory of Church-Government* (London: printed for John Wright, 1645), [8–9]. This work was reprinted in 1644, 1645, and 1646. Also cited by S. W. Carruthers, *Three Centuries of the Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Fredericton, New Brunswick: University of New Brunswick, 1957), 4.

*Catechisme*.<sup>29</sup> Other authors chose to create their own complementary brief and longer catechisms. One such example of dual catechisms was John Ball's *A Short Catechisme with an Exposition on the Same* (1617).<sup>30</sup> Here Ball supplements his brief form with extensive explanatory notes appended to each question. Edward Elton took the opposite approach by abstracting a shorter catechism from his already successful larger work.<sup>31</sup>

Advanced catechisms proved highly useful in a variety of settings, including the schoolroom, where they served as textbooks for a variety of age levels.<sup>32</sup> Weekly catechetical expositions offered another venue for catechisms that moved beyond simpler forms. While sometimes more the ideal than the practice, these weekly exercises were intended for Sabbath afternoons at the parish church prior to the evening service.<sup>33</sup> Cornelius Burges, later the Assembly's assessor, spoke warmly of the positive benefits that accrued from afternoon catechizing, the power of which was also testified by efforts to suppress the practice:

If a Minister would carefully and solidly open the severall heads of Catechisme, confirme them by Scripture, and bring them home by some short and familiar application most suitable to vulgar eares and Capacities; I hold it simply the most profitable exercise (at least for one part of the day) that can bee set up for the increase of sound knowledge and Pietie: and pitie it is that this is so much neglected. But this, say our new Masters, is worse than preaching. Therefore they enjoyn all to keepe onely to the bare Questions and Answers of the Childs Catechisme. And if any presume to adde any exposition or instruction, he is by some hurried from post to pillar, and censured as a pernicious Malefactor.<sup>34</sup>

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29. Richard Bernard, *The Common Catechisme* (London: printed by W. Sta. 1630). See Green, *Christian's ABC*, 142–143.

30. John Ball, *A Short Catechism. Contayning the Principles of Religion. Very Profitable for All Sorts of People* (London: printed for Edward Brewster, 1645); and, *A Short Treatise Containing All the Principal Grounds of Christian Religion. By Way of Questions and Answers, Very Profitable for All Sorts of Men, but Especially for Householders* (London: for E. Brewster & George Sawbridge, 1656).

31. Edward Elton, *A Forme of Catechising: Set Downe by Questions and Answers*. (London: printed by Edward Griffin, 1616).

32. Green, *Christian's ABC*, 170–204.

33. Green, *Christian's ABC*, 105–112; Margarite Patricia Hutchinson, "Social and Religious Change: The Case of the English Catechism, 1560–1640" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1984), 205–208.

34. Cornelius Burges, *First Sermon Preached to the Honourable House of Commons now Assembled in Parliament at Their Publique Fast. Novemb. 17. 1640* (London: printed for J. L., 1641), 52–53. It is important to note that the weekly expounding of the catechism described by Burges was not the regular preaching. Rather, he refers to the practice of devoting a portion of the Lord's Day to expounding the catechism prior to the sermon. Confusion over the use of the Larger Catechism in preaching is

Beginning in childhood, each English member sitting in the Assembly had been instructed in the Prayer Book Catechism, accompanied by at least one or more simple and advanced catechisms. Selecting catechisms to address differences in age and understanding had become an established staple of English catechizing designed to meet the diverse pedagogical needs of the day. Therefore, as the Assembly answered the motion to draft a shorter and a longer catechism, the call resonated among those Assembly members dissatisfied with the notion of addressing the Church's diverse instructional needs with only a single catechism.

### **The Problem of Mixing Milk and Meat**

Given the wealth of short, middle, and long catechisms available to the public, it is easy to appreciate the Assembly's concern that their single, modest catechism would not meet the varied catechizing needs of families, schools, and the church. This concern was summed up by the Scottish commissioner George Gillespie following his return home from the Assembly in August, 1647. After delivering a manuscript of the nearly completed Larger Catechism to the General Assembly, Gillespie offered a first-hand account of the London synod's decision regarding the catechism:

[T]he framing of this the assemblie have beine vere laborious in, and have found great difficultie how to make it full such as might be expected frome ane assemblie, and upon the other pairt how to condiscende to the capacities of the common & unlearned[.] Therefore they ar a makeing two distinct catechismes, a schort & plaine one for these, and a learger one for those of understanding[.]<sup>35</sup>

Samuel Rutherford offered a similar appraisal, citing the Assembly's concern that neither they nor anyone else were satisfied "to dress up milk and meat both in one dish."<sup>36</sup> Both accounts by the Scottish commissioners suggest not only that there was dissatisfaction with the limitations of a single catechism, but also that there was a problem with the catechism itself.

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discussed by W. Robert Godfrey and Van Dixhoorn. See Godfrey, "The Westminster Larger Catechism" in *To Glorify and Enjoy Him*, ed. John L. Carson and David W. Hall (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 131; Van Dixhoorn, "The Making of the Westminster Larger Catechism," *Reformation & Revival* 10 (2001), 101–102.

35. Report from George Gillespie to the General Assembly (Church of Scotland), August 5, 1647. Wodrow MSS Qu. XXVI.12, f.161v.

36. Alexander Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly, Its History and Standards* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1883), 418.



Rutherford specifically alludes to difficulties in satisfying the Assembly members themselves. As noted earlier, the catechism committee's first report was notable for the dissent it triggered, even among its own members. Baillie observed just prior to his departure on December 25, 1646, that they had "fallen into such mistykes, and endless janglings, about both the method and the matter, that all thinks it will be a long work"<sup>37</sup> But what fueled this discontentment? Rutherford's answer was that the catechism could not be adapted to meet the dual needs of brevity and exactness. However, this does not explain why the first catechism, which was succinct and nearly complete, could not serve as the briefer form. Perhaps the Assembly, conscious of the catechism's reliance on Palmer's own published work, was simply embarrassed by their partially imitative effort. Only a year earlier, Edward Boughen, a royalist clergyman, portrayed the Assembly members as "Journey-men to the Houses," declaring that the "Assembly have their lesson before hand."<sup>38</sup> To make matters worse, Boughen himself recently succeeded where the Assembly had not—in publishing a moderately long and well-admired catechism.<sup>39</sup> Such circumstances may have heightened the members' sensitivity to questions of originality and adequacy.

More importantly, the Assembly had grown increasingly aware of the catechism's need to reflect the Confession and was resolved "to have no matter in it but what was expressed in the Confession."<sup>40</sup> Compared to the newly completed Confession of Faith, the early catechism was woefully lacking. No mention was made of the decrees, predestination, the covenant, justification, sanctification, the mediatorial offices of Christ, or of His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. When compared with the Confession and its later catechisms, Gillespie's remark that it was not "such as might be expected from an Assembly" was an exercise in understatement.

The Assembly also faced practical concerns such as the public's reception of any new catechism. As the Assembly members were pondering this decision, the number of new catechisms appearing on the market soared; of the roughly ninety new short, middle, and long forms printed in the 1640s, nearly forty of these were printed in 1645 and 1646.<sup>41</sup> In addition, many older catechisms continued to appear with fresh editions. With this flood of catechisms, the Assembly was acutely aware of the risk it faced in authorizing a mediocre effort. Not only would

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37. Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2:416.

38. Edward Boughen, *Observations upon the Ordinance of the Lords and Commons at Westminster. After Advice Had with Their Assembly of Divines* (Oxford: printed by Leonard Lichfield, 1645), 3.

39. Boughen, *The Principles of Religion* (Oxford: Leonard Litchfield, 1646).

40. Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2:379.

41. Green, *Christian's ABC*, 51.



such a work fail to gain acceptance, even if imposed by Parliament, it would also inevitably invite ridicule from opponents.

One such opponent that bears mention is Henry Hammond, who clashed earlier with Assembly member Richard Vines at the convention at Uxbridge in January, 1645. At that time the subject concerned church government.<sup>42</sup> Now Hammond was involved in a direct confrontation with the Assembly over his new work, *The Practicall Catechisme*—a conflict that would conclude only a week before the Assembly's major reorganization of the catechism committee.<sup>43</sup>

Hammond, who had declined an invitation to attend the Assembly, was highly critical of Parliament and the Assembly for the Ordinance of 1645, which established the Directory for Public Worship and forbade the *Book of Common Prayer*. In this, Hammond charged, the Assembly left the "church bereft of a catechism" and offered nothing to replace it.<sup>44</sup> Hammond's own catechism was first published anonymously in 1644 and was an instant success. So impressed was Queen's College provost Christopher Potter after reading the draft that he personally offered to cover the costs of publication.<sup>45</sup> Published under the author's name in 1645, the work was followed by *Large Additions to the Practical Catechisme* in 1646. The popularity of his catechism drew the attention of Charles I and it was one of two books the king sent to his youngest son.<sup>46</sup>

But charges of error in *The Practicall Catechisme* eventually reached the Assembly, and Francis Cheynell and Anthony Tuckney were appointed to examine the work.<sup>47</sup> This investigation triggered an extensive and very public exchange between Hammond and Cheynell that dragged on from October 13 to November 23, 1646.<sup>48</sup> Hammond's *Practicall Catechism* was later cited in the London minister's catalog of errors, heresies, and blasphemies, which was endorsed by various

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42. Benjamin Brooks, *The Lives of the Puritans: Containing a Biographical Account of Those Divines Who Distinguished Themselves in the Cause of Religious Liberty, from the Reformation under Queen Elizabeth, to the Act of Uniformity, in 1662* (London: James Black, 1813; reprinted Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), 231. Quoted by Brooks from Wood's *Athenae Oxon*, vol ii, p. 159.

43. Henry Hammond, *A Practicall Catechisme* (Oxford: n.p., 1645).

44. Henry Hammond, *A View of the New Directory and a Vindication of the Ancient Liturgy of the Church of England* (Oxford: Leonard Litchfield, 1645).

45. Green, *Christian's ABC*, 200.

46. Robert Harrison, "Henry Hammond," *The Compact Edition of the Dictionary of National Biography* (London: Oxford UP, 1975), 1:885.

47. Van Dixhoorn, "Minutes," 6:214 (Sess:532). "Upon a complaint of Dr Hamonds booke of catechisme & conscience, that Mr Chanell & Mr Tuckney doe peruse them."

48. The substance of this debate was eventually published by Hammond in *A Copy of Some Papers Past at Oxford Betwixt the Author of the Practicall Catechisme and Mr. Ch[eynell]* (London: printed by R. Cotes, 1647). A notation of the title page reads May 4.

members of the Assembly, including Tuckney.<sup>49</sup> It is an interesting feature that Hammond's catechism opens in the same unique way that Tuckney's catechism had twenty years earlier, with questions on the covenant.

Catechisms such as Hammond's successful work made the Assembly members keenly aware of the need for an orthodox, advanced catechism to meet popular demand and, at the same time, counter error.<sup>50</sup> And while no catechism the Assembly produced would likely move opponents such as Hammond to admiration, a defective catechism would undoubtedly expose the Assembly to merited criticism and derision. Most importantly, the divines themselves had to be satisfied that the catechism was worthy of an assembly, for as one mild critic of the Assembly observed in 1647, "if the Assembly can hardly agree what to determine, people will not easily agree what to accept."<sup>51</sup> In the end, mediocrity was not an option and work on the catechism had to start afresh.

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49. *A Testimony to the Trueth of Jesus Christ and to Our Solemn League and Covenant* (London: printed by A. M., 1648). Hammond responded in *A Brief Vindication of the Three Passages in the Practical Catechisme from the Censures Affixt on Them by the Ministers of London* (London: printed for Richard Royston, 1648).

50. In an early debate on Sept. 14, 1643, Thomas Bayly expressed the desire that the Assembly correct the effect of erroneous catechisms "that doe pervert the people." See Van Dixhoorn, "Minutes," 3:91.

51. Nathaniel Ward, *The Simple Cobar of Agavvam in America* (London: J. and R. I., 1647), 84. This work was generally critical of both the Assembly and Parliament.