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Question 27. *What do you understand by the providence of God?*

The almighty and ever-present power of God whereby he still upholds, as it were by his own hand, heaven and earth together with all creatures, and rules in such a way that leaves and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and unfruitful years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty and everything else, come to us not by chance, but by his fatherly hand.

Question 28. *What advantage comes from acknowledging God's creation and providence?*

We learn that we are to be patient in adversity, grateful in the midst of blessing, and to trust our faithful God and Father for the future, assured that no creature shall separate us from his love, since all creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they cannot even move.

Question 65. *Since, then, faith alone makes us share in Christ and all his benefits, where does such faith originate?*

The Holy Spirit creates it in our hearts by the preaching of the holy gospel, and confirms it by the use of the holy Sacraments.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM (1563)

THE MAKING OF THE WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM

Chad B. Van Dixhoorn

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* is one of the most loved and well-used of all the Catechisms of the Reformation, and the most famous document of the assembly that met in Westminster Abbey from 1643-1649. The *Westminster Confession of Faith*, in its original and altered forms, became "by far the most influential doctrinal symbol in American Protestant history."² The *Westminster Larger Catechism*, by contrast, is neither loved, often used, or influential.

The *Larger Catechism* has long been neglected by Presbyterians and by evangelicals at large. One measure of indifference to the *Larger Catechism* can be found in a comparison of commentaries. Two dozen or more commentaries or study guides have been written on the *Shorter Catechism* over the past 350 years, and without any trouble I have collected seven commentaries written on the *Confession of Faith*. Yet only one person, Thomas Ridgley, has penned a commentary on the *Larger Catechism*—and that was in the early 1730s.³ Many of the commentaries on the *Shorter Catechism* and the *Confession* are still in print; Ridgley's work has not been reprinted since 1855. Perhaps this indicates that everyone finds the *Larger Catechism* easy to understand; more likely, it indicates that the *Catechism* is rarely used.

Closer to home, another index of the relative unpopularity of the *Larger Catechism* among conservative Presbyterians may be its absence from their hymnals. The *Larger Catechism*, so far as I can see, has never been printed in a major

Presbyterian Hymnal, while both the *Confession* and *Shorter Catechism* are regularly included. Añd G. I Williamson, a minister of my own Presbyterian communion, wrote helpful studies on the *Shorter Catechism* and the *Confession* but has not (yet) graced the *Larger Catechism* with a study guide. Things are little different in evangelical living rooms: many families have memorized part of the *Shorter Catechism*, and some have taken forays into the *Confession*, but only rare individuals memorize or even read the *Larger Catechism*.

The main purpose of this article is to trace the history and outline the theology of the *Larger Catechism*. In addition, because the *Larger Catechism* deserves further use in homes and churches, this article also aims to function as a belated public relations effort for the Westminster Assembly and tries to raise the profile of the *Larger Catechism* by showing its importance and usefulness for the church today. To these ends, then, we will approach the *Catechism* from three angles. First we will ask why the *Larger Catechism* was written in the first place. The Westminster Assembly obviously thought there was a purpose to the *Larger Catechism*; understanding this historical purpose may let us see one reason why the *Larger Catechism* might be worth studying today. Second, we will look at the *Larger Catechism* and compare it with previous catechisms. This may let us see what the Assembly thought was lacking in other catechisms and aid us in spotting the unique contribution of the *Larger Catechism* compared to those catechisms. Third and last, we will ask if the *Larger Catechism* teaches us anything which the Westminster Assembly's *Shorter Catechism* and *Confession* do not.

THE HISTORICAL PURPOSE OF THE WESTMINSTER CATECHISMS

In 1642 the world, or at least Britain, was turned upside-down. English noblemen, barons, knights, gentlemen, citi-

zens, burgesses, commoners of all sorts, and ministers of the gospel took up arms against their king, Charles I. Some of their complaints were similar to those raised by Americans a hundred and thirty years later, but many of their grievances were specifically religious. Some of their number were reckless libertarians; many were Puritans, wanting a change in worship and theology that Protestant King Charles and his Roman Catholic wife strenuously opposed.

By 1643 the English Parliamentarians were losing too many battles to the royalist forces and appealed to the North, asking the equally unhappy Protestant Scots to help them against the king. The majority of Scotland, though traditional enemies of the southern kingdom, agreed to help so long as the English would subscribe to a six-point document titled, "The Solemn League and Covenant." The first point of the Covenant stated that the churches in both countries were to be Reformed in "doctrine, worship, discipline, and government." To achieve this unity, the English Parliament's Assembly, appointed earlier in 1643, was to produce a "confession of faith, form of church-government, directory for worship" and, they added, a directory for "catechising." The Assembly, now no longer English, but British, began the work almost at once.⁴

THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD THE CATECHISM

Thus the first purpose of the proposed catechism for the Westminster Assembly was, like every one of its documents, religious unity. Other catechisms existed and the Scots had their own catechisms, but both sides recognized the value in using identical confessional and catechetical documents. Of course, many ministers and members of both churches would have worded things differently if they were drafting a personal expression of their own faith, but they realized that they needed a document for credal, ecumenical purposes.

At least a dozen of the English ministers (or “divines”) at the Assembly were already famous catechists prior to the beginning of the Assembly, and so the Westminster divines requested that one of these catechists, Herbert Palmer, write a first draft of the catechism. We know very little about Palmer’s views on catechizing, but one comment that he makes in the unpublished minutes of the Assembly suggests that he thought a good catechism (and confession) would be a short one.⁵ His reason? A brief catechism would necessarily be a broad one that more people could subscribe to.⁶

For some reason, Robert Baillie and the other Scottish delegates to the Assembly found Palmer’s work disappointing. Although he called Palmer “the best catechist in England,” Baillie spoke for himself and his fellow Scots when he stated bluntly: “we no ways like it.”⁷ The Assembly promptly handed the catechism over to the Scots, who were left to correct its shortcomings. Beginning in December of 1643, the catechism committee of the Assembly worked on this catechism, reporting frequently back to the Assembly for public discussion. Other debates side-tracked the Assembly, and other committees made better speed: the divines completed the *Confession of Faith* first, and handed it over to Parliament for their perusal in December of 1646. The catechism, though, continued to be delayed.

THE FORMING OF TWO CATECHISMS

Finally, in January of 1647 the Assembly gave up on the idea of making one catechism suitable for all purposes. As Professor W. Robert Godfrey pointed out in a recent essay, Richard Vines, an English divine at the Assembly, spotted the problem and made a motion for “the Committee for the Catechism to prepare a draught of two Catechisms in which they have an eye to the Confession of Faith, and to the matter of the Catechism already begun.”⁸

Mr. Vines’ motion, accepted by the Assembly, has been understood in different ways. Most popular has been the interpretation of Robert Baillie, who focused on the phrase, having “an eye to the Confession of Faith.” Baillie stated that “the Assemblie . . . voted to have no other head of divinitie into [the catechisms] than is sett doune in the Confession.”⁹ The important thing, Baillie inferred, was that no doctrine would be in the *Larger* or *Shorter Catechisms* which was not already in the *Confession*. The catechisms, therefore, would only be a distillation of the *Confession*.

The Scottish commissioners, in a report that they gave to their church back home, supplied a further reason for writing two catechisms rather than one: it was too hard to “dress up milk and meat both in one dish.” In their view, this difficulty prompted the Assembly to make one catechism “more exact and comprehensive,” and the other “more easie and short for beginners.”¹⁰ In terms of efficiency, it certainly does seem that this was a good decision: by October fifteenth of that year the Assembly completed the *Larger Catechism* and a month before Christmas the divines presented the *Shorter Catechism* to Parliament.

Both catechisms, then, were (1) to be used on an ecumenical, or creedal, level to promote religious and political unity between England and Scotland and, (2) on a theological level, to instruct God’s people in matters of faith and duty, with the *Larger Catechism* giving the more exact and comprehensive instruction.

A CATECHISM FOR PREACHING?

Philip Schaff, the well known nineteenth-century historian, and J. R. Pitman, the editor of one of the divines’ works, have both stated that the *Larger Catechism* was also to be used for preaching. Schaff wrote that the Assembly produced “a larger [catechism] . . . for the public exposition

in the pulpit, according to the custom of the Reformed churches on the continent."¹¹ Godfrey has observed that the evidence for this claim is lacking. He also points out that the Assembly's *Directory for Worship* (still used by some Presbyterians) explicitly points out that the preacher is to preach from a text.¹² This is an important point: if the minister was to preach from a biblical text, it is not likely that he was to use the man-made propositions in the *Larger Catechism* as the launching point for a sermon.

A reading of the unpublished minutes of the Assembly confirms Godfrey's point. In the middle of the Assembly's debates on preaching there is a somewhat cryptic statement: "Debate upon that text or argument because it gives liberty to preach without a text."¹³ In twentieth-century parlance, this means, "we debated about whether a preacher should preach from a text of Scripture, or from a doctrinal proposition (such as a catechism answer); we were concerned that a sermon based on a doctrinal argument could allow a minister to preach without expounding a text."

This statement of the Assembly reveals that the final declaration found in the directory was a deliberate one: the ministers at the Westminster Assembly did not think that the preacher should preach from a proposition, or argument, but only from the Scriptures themselves. As important as the catechisms were, the Westminster divines did not want to follow the practice of the Reformed churches on the continent who preached from the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Rather, keeping the original intentions of the authors of the *Larger Catechism* in mind, there seem to be two main reasons why it was written: (1) creedal unity and, (2) more fulsome instruction in the Christian faith; as the Scottish commissioners envisioned it, the chief beneficiaries of the *Larger Catechism* would be the adult Christians in both kingdoms who understood the doctrines and duties of the *Shorter Catechism* already, and needed "the meat of the Word."

THE LARGER CATECHISM IN DISTINCTION FROM OTHER CATECHISMS

Having outlined the historical purpose of the *Larger Catechism*, it still seems appropriate to ask why the *Catechism* had to be written. After all, respected teachers in Britain had composed good catechisms; Calvin's catechism was in the bookstores and so was the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Why could the Assembly-men not agree to use one of these catechisms for purposes of unity and instruction?

One answer has to do with the structure or format of earlier catechisms that the majority of Westminster divines did not like. In the eighth edition of *A Brief and Easie Explanation of the Shorter Catechism*, a young divine named John Wallis, explains the Assembly's unique method in setting up the catechism: "The Assembly was careful that all the Answers might be entire sentences by themselves, without depending for their sense upon the foregoing Question, being indeed so many distinct Aphorisms, containing briefly the grounds of Christian Religion." One benefit of this structure, in Wallis's view,

is that the learner is not necessitated to charge his memory with the Questions, that he may understand the Answer [sic]; nor is the like danger, as in many other Catechisms, of confounding the understanding by misapplying the Answer to a wrong Question. Their Questions also are so framed, that any one of them may be asked singly and distinctly, without dependance on the Question foregoing.¹⁴

Thus the Westminster Assembly's catechisms were intended to have a unique structure.

Certainly Wallis was not exaggerating when he mentions that "many" of the catechisms contained answers that only made sense with a question, or even a series of questions. All of the main catechisms of the day required the

user to memorize both question and answer in order to grasp the biblical doctrines of the catechism. Frequently one had to memorize a whole series of questions and answers, in order to grasp the doctrine under discussion. Take, for example, a series of questions early in *Calvin's Catechism*:

Minister: To consider these things in order, and explain them more fully—what is the first point?

Child: To rely upon God.

Minister: How can we do that?

Child: First by knowing him as almighty and perfectly good.

Minister: Is this enough?

Child: No.

Minister: Why?

Child: Because we are unworthy that he should show his power in helping us, or employ his goodness toward us.¹⁵

The content of the catechism is excellent, but the questions and answers, indeed, this entire section, requires knowledge of a long series of questions—a system hardly useful for memorization.

Quite possibly, the unique structure of Westminster's catechisms was an English invention. The six catechisms popular in Scotland all used the more cumbersome style of question-dependent answers.¹⁶ In any case, the final form of the *Shorter* and *Larger Catechisms* is unique.¹⁷

Aside from pedagogical issues, the Westminster divines had theological concerns with earlier catechisms that they tried to remedy. For instance, on the morning of September 14, 1643, Thomas Bayly mentioned the need "to correct the catechismes that doe pervert the people[,] as Mr. [William] Perkins" did on assurance.¹⁸ But although the Westminster divines found defects in the earlier catechisms,

they were nonetheless not departing from their fathers in any large way. In fact, studies trying to find out what older catechism or catechist may have influenced the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms* have shown that the bulk of the phrases in the *Westminster Catechisms* (and *Confession*) can be found word-for-word in earlier theological works.¹⁹ Thus the framers of the catechisms took what they thought was best expressed elsewhere, and brought them together.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

The main difference between Westminster's catechisms and earlier catechisms has to do with the *Apostles' Creed*. The standard practice of catechisms before the Assembly had been to expound the *Apostles' Creed*, phrase by phrase, just as they did the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. Breaking away from previous catechisms, the majority of the Westminster Assembly decided to exclude the *Apostles' Creed* from the confession because the creed, though scriptural, was not Scripture.

SCRIPTURE ALONE

Avoiding the *Apostles' Creed* has given both of the *Westminster Catechisms* two strengths. First, the catechisms are based explicitly on Scripture, which is consistent with the position found in the first chapter of the *Confession*: All our doctrine comes from Scripture alone. Second, every catechism that uses the *Apostles' Creed* reflects one of the weaknesses of the *Creed*—there is no mention of the importance of Christ's life.

THE LIFE OF CHRIST

This is very important. The *Apostles' Creed* speaks of "Jesus Christ" who "was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary"—and what is the next thing that is said? He "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified,

dead and buried." The *Heidelberg Catechisms*, following the *Creed*, also moves right from Christ's birth to his death. A similar sequence characterizes *Craig's Catechism* or the *New Catechism*, the latter written during the time of the Westminster Assembly.²⁰

Calvin actually notes this jump in the *Creed* between the birth and death of Christ and asks in question fifty-five of his catechism: "Why do you go immediately from His birth to His death, passing over the whole history of His life?" While this observation on his part is helpful, his answer is unusually disappointing: "Because nothing is said here about what belongs properly to the substance of our redemption."²¹ This is rather shocking, particularly from Calvin. Christ's life has a great deal to do with our salvation: he spent his life fulfilling all righteousness; he kept the law which the first Adam broke. It is because of Jesus' active, life-long obedience that God the Father sees us as righteous in Christ. While Calvin clarified this at a later point in his life, his catechism, at least in this regard, remained inadequate.²²

The *Larger Catechism* recognizes the importance of Christ's life because it takes a different approach altogether. Using another framework it speaks about the importance of Christ's birth in question forty-seven, his life in question forty-eight, and his death in question forty-nine, thus presenting a more balanced and biblical picture.²³ The *Shorter Catechism* does something similar, summarizing these three questions in one short answer.²⁴ The *Larger Catechism* may also recognize the importance of Christ's life, at least implicitly, in its statements on justification,²⁵ for though the imputation of Christ's active obedience was a matter of prolonged debate at the Assembly, the minutes record that when "The Question was put" to include the imputation of Christ's active obedience in their definition of justification, "three or four only [were] dissenting."²⁶

Comparing the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms* with previous catechisms is, then, a useful exercise. At the very least it reveals that these catechisms (1) explicitly base their teaching on Scripture alone, (2) emphasize Christ's life (and active obedience) as well as his death and resurrection, and (3) provide a distinct, if not improved, pedagogical structure by ensuring that each answer can stand alone as a biblical truth. For these reasons also, then, the *Larger Catechism* is very worthwhile.

THE LARGER CATECHISM COMPARED TO THE SHORTER CATECHISM AND CONFESSION

But does the church really need the *Larger Catechism* when it has the brilliant summaries of the *Shorter Catechism* on the one hand, and the depth and breadth of the *Confession* on the other? The answer is yes, and the reasoning for this answer is simple: the *Larger Catechism* is not a mere summary of the *Confession*, nor a verbose expansion of the *Shorter Catechism*, but an independent summary of the Christian faith.

At times the *Larger Catechism* asks unique questions. Sometimes these extra questions may not strike us as especially important, such as question sixteen, which asks about the creation of angels, or question nineteen, which inquires about God's providence toward angels. But other times the contributions are more obviously significant. The *Larger Catechism*, for example, presents rules to interpret and apply the law of God, and spells out the differences between justification and sanctification. The *Larger Catechism* also goes into more detail about our triune God than does the *Shorter Catechism*, and has more to say about Jesus Christ. The *Larger Catechism* has multiple questions on the mediatorial role of Christ, and Christ's humiliation and exaltation. Indeed, the *Larger Catechism* makes numerous contributions not covered by the *Shorter Catechism*, all supporting the idea that

the *Larger Catechism* was written to give us the profound and important matters of the Word of God.

THE CHURCH

But perhaps the largest remaining contribution of the *Larger Catechism* is one noted by Robert Godfrey. Godfrey points out that the *Larger Catechism* frequently speaks of the church, where the *Shorter Catechism* is concerned with the individual.²⁷ This is extremely important. The *Larger Catechism* makes frequent mention of ministers of the gospel and carries on extensive discussions about the outward and ordinary means of grace, where the *Shorter Catechism* says almost nothing on the same matters. The *Larger Catechism* broadens its lens in order to focus on the corporate, public, gathered people of God. Professor Godfrey suggests that “the decision to eliminate a doctrine of the church from the *Shorter Catechism* may have made sense in a context where it was assumed that catechumens would have moved on to the fuller instruction of the *Larger Catechism*” but he warns that “where the *Larger Catechism* no longer functions in that way . . . a very serious omission exists;” there could be a lack of teaching about the church, in the church.²⁸

Godfrey has hit the proverbial nail on the head. His observation may explain why so many people appreciate the *Shorter Catechism* and not the *Larger Catechism*: The *Shorter Catechism*, like much of North American evangelicalism, focuses on the individual; the *Larger Catechism*, on the other hand, is explicitly corporate and churchly. I think it is fair to add that in places the *Larger Catechism* appears more concerned with the church and the ordinary means of grace (such as preaching, the sacraments, and church discipline) than even the *Confession*.

Of course, if Robert Baillie’s earlier statement is correct, this should not be the case. Baillie thought that the *Cate-*

chisms would not say anything that the *Confession* did not. But it appears that the committee working on the *Catechism* did not always feel bound to follow the wording or content of the *Confession*. Professor John Murray suggested, for example, that the *Larger Catechism*’s teaching on the Covenant of Grace surpasses that of chapter seven, section three of the *Confession*, and that question twenty-two has a better discussion of the imputation of Adam’s sin than the *Confession of Faith*, chapter six, section three.²⁹

CONCLUSION

Whether Murray is right or not, it seems that there are many reasons why the *Larger Catechism* is worth our study. It unifies churches which use the same *Confession* and *Catechisms*. Initially the *Larger Catechism* was written to help unify the English and Scottish churches; now the *Catechism* joins the other two Westminster standards in bringing together all churches and Christians who will call these creeds their own. The *Larger Catechism* also gives us the meat of the Word of God. It effectively emphasizes and more fully explains neglected doctrines that maturing Christians need to hear. The *Larger Catechism* emphasizes aspects of the gospel and draws directly from Scripture in a way that other catechisms do not. And finally, the *Larger Catechism* emphasizes the church, the ministry, preaching, and the sacraments at a time when Presbyterians—and in fact all Christians—need to hear of them. For these reasons, at least, the *Larger Catechism* is worth our full attention.

Author

Chad Van Dixhoorn lives in Glenside, Pennsylvania, and recently received his Th. M. from Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia. He was previously granted the M. Div. by Westminster Theological Seminary (1999). He has contributed to several journals, including *Westmin-*

ster *Theological Journal* and *The Journal of Presbyterian History*. He is presently the associate editor (with Professor David F. Wright) of *The Minutes of the Westminster Assembly*, Volumes 1 and 2. This is his first contribution to *Reformation & Revival Journal*.

Notes

1. A shorter, popular form of this article first appeared in *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 21:9 (Oct. 2000) 11, 16-17. I am thankful for their permission to revise and republish the article here.
2. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale, 1972), 131.
3. Thomas Ridgley, *A Body of Divinity . . . Being the Substance of Lectures on the Assembly's Larger Catechism* (London, 1731-1733; 1814; Edinburgh, 1845; New York: R. Carter, 1855). Presbyterian and Reformed hopes to publish J. G. Vos's essays on the *Larger Catechism* later this year.
4. The assembly was not completely British: two Huguenot ministers were members of the assembly and actively participated in its debates.
5. What Palmer would have considered "short" involves a degree of conjecture.
6. After making a comment on the directory for worship, Palmer added that "For the catechisme[,] you will be [wise] to have that as short as may be. And for the confession of faith[,] you will be willing to make that short too. This Assembly is obliged to God to hould out soe much as will concerne the practises of all men." *Minutes of the Sessions of the Assembly of Divines from August 4, 1643 to April 24, 1652 in Three Volumes*, volume 2, transcribed into new MSS by E. Maunde Thompson (Edinburgh: New College Library, [1868-1869]), 565—hereafter "TM," *Minutes of the Sessions of the Assembly of Divines from August 4, 1643 to April 24, 1652 in Three Volumes*, volume 2, (London: Dr. William's Library), 290b—hereafter "MS." The timing behind Palmer's statement at this point in the Assembly's discussion is unclear.
7. Robert Baillie, *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*. Edited with a memoir by David Laing. (Edinburgh: Alexander Lawrie and Co. for Robert Ogle, 1841), 2:148.
8. W. Robert Godfrey, "The Westminster Larger Catechism," in *To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the Westminster Assembly*. Edited by John L. Carson and David W. Hall. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 130.
9. Baillie to his relative, William Spang, January 26, 1647, *Letters and Journals*, 3:2.
10. Alexander F. Mitchell, in *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (London, 1883; Edmonton, Alberta: Still Waters Revival Books,

- 1992), 418. Mitchell thinks these are the words of Samuel Rutherford, reporting on behalf of the Commission.
11. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Harper and Brothers, 1877; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1:784; See also J. R. Pitman's introduction to John Lightfoot, *The Whole Works of the Rev. John Lightfoot*. Edited by John Rogers Pitman. (London: J. F. Dove, 1824), xi.
12. "The Westminster Larger Catechism," 131.
13. TM 2:174; MS 2:89.
14. John Wallis, *A Brief and Easie Explanation of the Shorter Catechism Presented by the Assembly of Divines in Westminster, to both Houses of Parliament, and By them Approved. Wherein the Meanest Capacities may in a Speedy and Easie way be Brought to Understand the Principles of Religion, in Imitation of a Catechism*, formerly published by Master Herbert Palmer, B. D. and late Master of Queens College (eighth ed., London: for Jane Underhill, 1662), preface. I am grateful to Jason M. Rampelt for bringing this preface to my attention in conversation.
15. "Calvin's Geneva Catechism," in T. F. Torrance's *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Churches* (London: James Clarke, 1959), 6.
16. The six most popular catechisms in Scotland seem to have been *Calvin's Catechism* (1541), *The Little Catechism* (1556), *The Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), *Craig's Catechism* (1581), *Craig's Short Catechism* (1592), *The A, B, C or A Catechism for Young Children* (1641), and the short-lived *New Catechism* (1644). The latter three were Scots productions; the latter five had the official sanction of the Church of Scotland, at least for a time—*The A, B, C or A Catechism for Young Children* was condemned by the Scots General Assembly on the same date that the *Shorter Catechism* was approved: July 28, 1648 (*A True Copy of the Whole Printed Acts of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland* [n.p., n.d., 1682], Sess. 19:380).
17. It is worth noting that the Scots may have had some influence on the final form of the *Catechisms*, but Herbert Palmer still approved of the final product and provided the first "key" on the *Shorter Catechism*. The work begun by Palmer was completed by his protegee, John Wallis, mentioned above.
18. TM 1:106, MS 1:53b. After a member protested, Bayly clarified that "it was farre from my intent to asperse the name of Mr. Perkins" and his concern was only with a specific point in Perkins catechism relating to faith and assurance (TM 1:108, MS 1:54b).
19. For further discussion see A. F. Mitchell, *Catechisms of the Second Reformation* (London: James Nisbet, 1886).
20. A useful reference, at least with regard to the text of various catechisms is T. F. Torrance's *The School of Faith*. Torrance's lengthy introduction is less helpful; he approaches his material with twentieth-century Barthian questions quite foreign to his sixteenth and seventeenth-century subjects.
21. See *School of Faith*, 13.

22. The *Catechism* may only be the midpoint of a development in Calvin's thought on this issue. The first edition of Calvin's *Institutes*, printed in Basel in 1536, does not recognize the *Creed's* jump from Christ's birth to death (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated and edited by Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 50-55. The *Catechism* (1541) mentions the *Creed's* move and makes the above observation. The final edition of Calvin's *Institutes* (1559) does recognize, to a greater degree, the importance of Christ's active obedience. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics ed., vol. XXI. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II:xvi:5. I was too critical of Calvin in the popular version of this article. Since that time I have noted this apparent development and read R. A. Peterson's brief discussion of active obedience in Calvin's commentaries. In addition, Richard B. Gaffin Jr. pointed out in conversation that Francis Turretin, no mean Calvin scholar, holds this passage in the Calvin as an adequate treatment of Christ's active obedience. For R. A. Peterson's discussion, see his *Calvin's Doctrine of the Atonement* (Madison, New Jersey: Drew University, Ph. D. Diss., 1980), 83-85. For Turretin, see his *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Vol. 2*. Edited by James T. Dennison. Translated by George Musgrave Giger. (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R, 1994), 14:13:xxii:454-55.
23. *Westminster Larger Catechism* (WLC) 47: "How did Christ humble himself in his conception and birth? A. Christ humbled himself in his conception and birth, in that, being from all eternity the Son of God, in the bosom of the Father, he was pleased in the fulness of time to become the son of man, made of a woman of low estate, and to be born of her; with divers circumstances of more than ordinary abasement." WLC 48: "How did Christ humble himself in his life? A. Christ humbled himself in his life, by subjecting himself to the law, which he perfectly fulfilled, and by conflicting with the indignities of the world, temptations of Satan, and infirmities in his flesh, whether common to the nature of man, or particularly accompanying that his low condition." WLC 49: "How did Christ humble himself in his death? A. Christ humbled himself in his death, in that having been betrayed by Judas, forsaken by his disciples, scorned and rejected by the world, condemned by Pilate, and tormented by his persecutors, having also conflicted with the terrors of death and the powers of darkness, felt and borne the weight of God's wrath, he laid down his life an offering for sin, enduring the painful, shameful, and cursed death of the cross."
24. *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (WSC) 27: "Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist? A. Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time."
25. WLC 70, 71.
26. TM 1:89, MS 1:45. Justification was first debated in the context of revis-

ing the 39 Articles of the Church of England—the project of the Assembly prior to the signing of the Solemn League and Covenant. In the debates over justification and antinomianism at the Assembly, the majority of the divines argued that the imputation of Christ's active obedience is part of justification. One page of the minutes may suffice as a sample. Dr. Joshua Hoyle wound down his speech by reminding his fellow divines that "Adam's disobedience was an active disobedience[,] and soe [was] Christ's obedience." George Walker immediately concurred, adding that "you cannot separate Christ's active and passive obedience." Richard Vines questioned whether the doctrine was equally clear in both Testaments, but Theodore Bathurst rejoined that "making righteous is more than mere making Innocent." John Ley, the man in charge of the Assembly's committee for examining ministers, concurred (TM 1:25, MS 1:13). See also Anthony Burgess's discussion in his *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted and Vindicated from the Errours of many, and more Especially Papists and Socinians. Or, a Treatise of the Natural Righteousness of God, and Imputed Righteousness of Christ* (London: A. M. for T. Underhill, 1655). This work forms the second part of this *Treatise of Justification, Part II* (London: for Thomas Underhill, 1654). Burgess's book is essentially a treatise on the active obedience of Christ. The notable dissenting scholars, according to the Burgess and the minutes, seem to have been the older theologians such as William Twisse, Thomas Gataker, Richard Vines, and William Reyner.

27. Godfrey, "The Westminster Larger Catechism," 134-38.
28. Godfrey, "The Westminster Larger Catechism," 135; see also 135-38. Godfrey also discusses T. F. Torrance's allegations of the *Larger Catechism's* legalism (132-34, 142), and its lack of focus on the Holy Spirit (140, 142). Godfrey points out that the *Larger Catechism* speaks of the law about as much as *Calvin's Catechism*, and less than the *Shorter Catechism*. He further notes that the Holy Spirit is mentioned in eighteen percent of the *Larger Catechism's* questions—approximately double that found in *Calvin's Catechism* or the *Shorter Catechism* (142).
29. John Murray, "The Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith," in *Collected Writings of John Murray, 4: Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 258-63.