

Catechizing at Home, 1740-1870: Instruction, Communication and Denomination¹ Dates 1740-1870.

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The ‘Catechism as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer’ of 1549 was one of the, if not the, earliest forms of universal instruction in the Reformation English church, intended to induce conformity. All ‘youth and ignorant persons’ were to go to church on Sundays to be instructed, while heads of household were instructed to catechize their dependants.² The simplest version, in the Book of Common Prayer, included the Apostles’ Creed, Ten Commandments, Lord’s Prayer and Sacraments.³ While the Church Catechism had similarities to those written by Luther and Calvin,⁴ Dissenters also wrote their own versions, notably the ‘Shorter’ or ‘Westminster’ catechism of the Westminster Assembly from 1644 to 1648, and others by Baptists, Quakers, and Unitarians as well as Roman Catholics.⁵ Moreover, historians of the early modern period have argued that catechizing could involve informal questioning, facilitate the acquisition of literacy, and promote more advanced intellectual challenge.⁶

However, the historiography of catechizing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been less positive. Although it has been recognized that catechizing was an ‘important tool’

¹I am grateful to members of the Education in the Long Eighteenth Century Seminar, IHR, where this paper was presented on 4th November 2017, for their comments and questions, as well as to attendees at the EHS summer conference.

² Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), 191-3. The Prayer Book Catechism, of 1549 was enlarged in 1604 and revised in 1661-2. Ian Green, *The Christian’s ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England, c 1530-1740* (Oxford, 1996), 71-4, 122-3. William Jacob, *The Clerical Profession in the Long Eighteenth Century, 1640-1840*, (Oxford, 2007), 236-241.

³ Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 190. Scott Mandelbrote, ‘The Bible as Didactic Literature’, in Sara Pennell and Natasha Glaisyer, eds, *Didactic Literature in England, 1500-1800: Expertise Reconstructed* (Aldershot, 2003), 75-137, at 92.

⁴ Charles Wallace, Jnr, ‘Susanna Wesley’s child-rearing letter’, in idem ed, *Susanna Wesley: the Complete Writings* (Oxford, 1997), 367-376, at 371-372, 378. Green, *Christian’s ABC*, 17-21, 62, 71, 279.

⁵ Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 191-3; *Christian’s ABC*, 43, 83-86.

⁶ Green, *Christian’s ABC*, 266-274. Mandelbrote, ‘Bible’, 92-94.

of the eighteenth century church, and that most clergy were diligent about public catechizing, its frequent restriction to Lent, reinforced older historiographies of eighteenth century religious decline.⁷ A strong strand in nineteenth century educational history regarded catechetical teaching to labouring or working class children as a form of social control, at best tedious, at worst intended to reinforce Anglican hegemony.⁸ A dominant historiography of family religion has associated the ‘rise’ of Evangelical religion from the 1780s onwards with family prayers as the bedrock of domestic devotion, with no reference to catechizing.⁹

The chapter will call in question the frequent dichotomy constructed by literary scholars and historians of education, between teaching of the Anglican catechism, which has been regarded as dull and restrictive, and other forms of ‘more liberal’, conversational domestic education allegedly practised by Dissenters.¹⁰ Instead, it will show how all denominations had their own catechisms, and that pedagogy in Anglican households could include a questioning approach rather than mere rote-learning. While concurring with more recent authors that domestic religion persisted from the seventeenth century into the eighteenth, and

⁷ Phillip Tovey, *Anglican Confirmation, 1660-1780*, Liturgy and Worship Series, (Aldershot, 2014), 195-6, 230. W.M.Jacob, *The Clerical Profession in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Oxford and New York, 2007), 237-242. Michael Snape, *The Church of England in an Industrialising Society: the Lancashire parish of Whalley in the Eighteenth Century* (Boydell, 2003), 20-22

⁸ Philip McCann, ‘Popular Education and Social Control: Spitalfields, 1812-1824’, in Philip McCann, ed., *Popular Education and Socialisation in the Nineteenth Century* (Methuen, 1977), 1-40, at 24. S. Frith, ‘Socialisation and Rational Schooling: Elementary Education in Leeds before 1870’, in McCann, ed., *Popular Education and Socialisation*, 67-92, at 78. Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: the Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford, 1988), 33. Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London, 1870-1914* (London, 1996), 115. Pamela Horn, *The Victorian Country Child* (Kington, 1974), 134-5.

⁹ Christina de Bellaigue, ‘Faith and Religion’, in Colin Heywood, ed, *A Cultural History of Childhood and Family*, vol. 5: *The Age of Empire* (Oxford and New York, 2010), 149-66, 306. John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle Class Home, 1830-1914* (London and New Haven, 1999), 37, 91-3, 147. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class* (London, 1987), 89, 109. Sean Gill, *Women in the Church of England from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1994), 66. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989, Cambridge, reprint 1995), 66, 105.

¹⁰ Aileen Fyfe, ‘Reading Dissenting Children’s books in late eighteenth century England’, *Historical Journal* 43 (2002), 453-473, at 470. Marion Amies, ‘Amusing and Instructive Conversations: The Literary genre and its relevance to home education’, *History of Education*, 14 (2) 1985, 91-2. Michele Cohen, ‘The pedagogy of conversation in the home: “familiar conversation” as a pedagogical tool in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England’, *Oxford Review of Education* 41 (2015), 447-463, at 454. -

that Evangelicals' claims to have initiated the 'religion of the home' were exaggerated,¹¹ it will demonstrate how domestic catechizing continued into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Above all, this essay seeks to make a contribution to the history of children by recovering the perspectives of the young (however difficult the task) on a central aspect of eighteenth-century pedagogy. Gender issues will also be considered. Religious education has frequently been regarded as the preserve of females, while the respective roles of parents have also been regarded as significant in relation to ongoing debates about masculinity, motherhood, and gender roles.¹²

How was childhood understood in this period? The age of majority for those who had resources to inherit was twenty-one.¹³ Yet, pauper children as young as seven might be apprenticed. Anna Davin has noted, however, that children in service were likely to have been in a semi-dependent position: indeed, it has been argued that some people never attained full adult status.¹⁴ No typology exists of commonly held Protestant understandings of children's spirituality in relation to specific ages. By contrast, seven as the age of first communion has been perceived as a landmark for Roman Catholic children.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Protestant writers of catechisms and other devotional material for the eighteenth-century young showed an awareness of the differing cognitive and spiritual needs of children of different ages and, as discussed below, Isaac Watts and John Wesley adapted their

¹¹ William. M. Jacob, "'Conscientious attention to publick and family worship of God": Religious Practice in Eighteenth Century Households', in John Doran, Charlotte Methuen and Alexandra Walsham, eds, *Religion and the Household: SCH 50*, (Woodbridge, 2014), 307-317, at 312. Jeremy Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation and Reform, 1660-1828: the Archbishops of Canterbury and their Diocese* (Oxford, 2000), 238. Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Oxford, 2012), 46-7.

¹² Anthony Fletcher, *Growing Up in England: the Experience of Childhood, 1600-1914* (New Haven, 2008), 99-106, 245. For a reiteration of the 'separate spheres' thesis, see James Marten, 'Family', in Heywood, ed, *Cultural History*, 21.

¹³ Roy. Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth century* (, London, Repr 1988) 165-6..

¹⁴ Anna Davin, 'What is a Child?' in Stephen Hussey and Anthony Fletcher, eds, *Childhood in Question: Children, Parents and the State* (Manchester, 1999), 15-36, at 22.

¹⁵ Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: a Social History of Family Life* (1960, transl Robert Baldick, 1962, Harmondsworth, 1973), 122-4.

catechetical materials accordingly, particularly for younger children. While a systematic analysis of catechisms published for different age groups and educational levels is beyond the scope of this article, analysis of domestic practice can contribute to a broader understanding of shared ideas about children's spirituality and religious development.

Sources

My aim here is primarily to 'recover' family practices and children's experiences rather than document the production of texts and their contents. The problem with a routine practice such as catechizing is that it was frequently unrecorded.¹⁶ The sources used here cover many different parts of Britain, as well as overseas locations. The sources consulted include manuscript collections, home instruction schemes, and published editions of letters, diaries and childhood recollections. Many different Protestant religious denominations and types of Anglican churchmanship are represented, and the families of a number of clergy, ministers or missionaries are probably over-represented. Inevitably, memoirs and letters were more likely to survive from the middling and upper ranks, but collections of autobiographies have been particularly useful for accessing the experience of families in the labouring class.¹⁷ These memoirs, like the descriptions of pious children in missionary and other memoirs, are subject to the problems of retrospective reconstruction and genre writing;¹⁸ nonetheless, specific rituals and practices may provide a more definite focus for memory than more diffuse emotional experiences.

¹⁶ Jacob, 'Conscientious attention', 307-312.

¹⁷ Thomas Jackson, *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*, 6 vols, (London, 1838-64).

¹⁸ Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Children in History: Concepts of Nature and Society', in Geoffrey Scarre ed, *Children, Parents and Politics* (Cambridge 1989), 3-24, at 5. D.Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), 293-319.

Background

The period between 1740 and 1870 witnessed many religious changes, notably the Methodist Revival from the 1740s, the ‘rise’ of Evangelicalism from the 1780s, the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, and the Oxford Movement from 1833. Throughout these changes, catechisms were a benchmark for maintaining orthodoxy and could have enormous political significance.¹⁹ Controversies over the teaching of the Church Catechism have been regarded as crucial in the foundation of the National Society in 1811, and in preventing agreement about the nature of state-funded education in the nineteenth century, until the 1870 Education Act forbade the teaching of any specific creed or formulary in state-funded schools.²⁰ However, there is evidence of catechizing throughout the period. In the early 1700s, clergy distributed catechisms to the labouring poor, and in Kent, Lincolnshire, and Yorkshire, and reported that some parents were catechizing their children at home²¹ Indeed, Michael Watts argued that domestic catechizing in labouring and middling sort families laid the foundation for many Methodist conversions.²²

In Part One, I will aim to establish basic patterns such as age of instruction, when catechizing occurred, and by whom it was conducted. Part Two will address children’s responses, which will include the relationship of catechizing to religious experience, parents as pedagogues, and denominational difference. The focus will only be on catechisms designed for a religious purpose.

¹⁹ See Robert Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England, 1662-1962* (London, 1965), 171. Robert G. Ingram, *Religion, Reform and Modernity: Thomas Secker and the Church of England*, (Woodbridge, 2007), 81. Gregory, *Restoration*, 238. Green, *Christian’s ABC*, 43.

²⁰ Eric Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed: working class children in nineteenth-century England* (Manchester, 1994), 144.

²¹ Gregory, *Restoration*, 238. Jacob, *Clerical Profession*, 238. Green, *The Christian’s ABC*, 122.

²² Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: from the Reformation to the French Revolution I*, (Oxford, 1978), 423.

Part One: Ages, times and catechists

Susanna Wesley (1669-1742) was accustomed to begin religious teaching soon after her children began to talk. She thus started just after 1690, when her first child learned to speak. The Wesley children were taught the Lord's Prayer, a short prayer for their parents, a selection of 'some collects and short catechisms, and portions of Scripture... as their memories could bear'.²³ Adam Clarke's family were taught 'with the earliest dawnings of reason' to commit to memory parts of the Church Catechism and the Shorter Catechism.²⁴ Four was frequently mentioned in life-story writing as a significant age.²⁵ Two of the early Methodist preachers, born in 1738, Thomas Taylor (the Presbyterian son of a tanner) and George Story, both from Yorkshire, later claimed that they had been able to recite the Shorter Catechism or the Church Catechism to their respective ministers aged four.²⁶ Thomas Priestley asserted the same of his brother Joseph (b. 1733) for the Shorter Catechism.²⁷ Other references to four- or five-year-olds learning the Church Catechism can be found in the 1740s, 1760s, and 1840s.²⁸ The ages of six and seven were mentioned in the 1760s, the early 1800s and in 1870.²⁹ However, Henry Venn, author of the popular *Complete Duty of Man* (1763) did not approve of teaching very young children and only started 'formal instructions'

²³ Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 371, 8.

²⁴ James Everett, *Adam Clarke Portrayed* (London 1843), Vol I, 14-15, 38.

²⁵ Fletcher, *Growing Up*, 99.

²⁶ Jackson, *Lives*, V, 1-2, 218.

²⁷ *Memoirs of Dr Joseph Priestley to the year 1795, written by himself with a continuation to the time of his decease, by his son, Joseph Priestley, and observations on his writings, by Thomas Cooper...and the Rev William Christie. (To which are added, from posthumous discourses.)* (London 1809), 5.

²⁸ Fletcher, *Growing Up*, 249, 115, 117, for Hester Thrale's children. Francis Bamford, *Dear Miss Heber: an eighteenth-century correspondence* (London, 1938), 2. Manchester, John Rylands University Library, Fletcher-Tooth papers, MAM, Box 23, Pt 1, 1. Chester, Cheshire Record Office, Journals of William Charles Cotton, Vol XI, fol 3. June 1846 Microfilm 3.

²⁹ Florence White, *A Fire in the Kitchen: the Autobiography of a Cook* (London, 1938), 43. *Memoirs of Archbishop Temple by Seven Friends*, ed. Ernest Gray Sandford, 2 vols, (London, 1906), 19.

when they were eight.³⁰ Isaac Watts also believed that content should be age-related, and very concrete for children under seven.³¹

Learning and performing the catechism could develop across the child's life-cycle, with differing levels of difficulty. On Sundays, in the 1820s, five of the six children of the High Church Young family of Limehouse (born 1815-23), aged three to eight, had to learn or recite one of a series of catechisms, whilst the eldest, aged ten, had to learn or write the Collect.³² The younger children learned Watts' First catechism, the Church Catechism, Mother's Catechism, Crossman's Catechism and *Crossman's Questions*.³³ Mrs Young's schedule prescribed the most intensive weekday catechetical instruction (up to four or five times each week) for children between the ages of six and nine; her elder and younger children had less catechesis.³⁴ The diarist Emily Shore (1819-39) recorded how her mother taught her with her four younger siblings, three girls and two boys, born between 1819 and 1825, when they were aged between six and twelve.³⁵ The Free Church Catherine MacFarlane (1879-1946), who lived in Glasgow, noted that 'thirteen was a serious age' at which she could 'recite the Shorter Catechism and chapters of the Old and New Testaments'.³⁶

The Church Catechism had an end point and a purpose, as knowledge of it was a requirement for Anglican confirmation. While Phillip Tovey's case studies identify confirmation usually taking place at the age of fourteen, the age range could vary from ten, to

³⁰ *The Letters of Henry Venn, with a memoir by John Venn*, (1835, 1993 edition), 429. Henry Venn to Joseph Stillingfleet, Jan 25, 1785.

³¹ Green, *Christian's ABC*, 271-4.

³² London, Museum of London, Young Education Scheme, 48.85/6, 1825-31, Schemes of lessons.

³³ MOL, YES, 48.85/6, List of books. Henry Crossman, *The Catechism Broke into short questions to which is added a explanation of some words for the easier understanding of it* (1830).

³⁴ MOL, YES, 48.85/6, Schemes of lessons, 1825, 1827.

³⁵ Margaret Emily Shore, *The Journal of Emily Shore*, (London, 1891), 27-8, 23 December 1832.

³⁶ Catherine MacFarlane Carswell, *Lying Awake an unfinished autobiography and other posthumous papers* (London, 1950), 35.

fifteen to twenty-two.³⁷ In the diocese of London, fourteen was the expected age from the 1760s, rising to fifteen by 1798.³⁸ In the nineteenth century, fifteen to sixteen was a usual age. John Henry Newman (born 1801) recalled that ‘of course I was word perfect in the Catechism at the age of fifteen.’³⁹ Fanny Keats was confirmed in 1819, aged fifteen⁴⁰, and Charlotte Yonge was also fifteen when she was prepared for her confirmation by John Keble, by working through the Catechism and the Communion Service.⁴¹ The High Church Agnes Cotton was sixteen when she used her elder brother William’s catechetical lecture cards.⁴²

Unsurprisingly, catechizing is usually referred to as a domestic devotional exercise on Sunday across the period: for the 1750s, 1760s and 1770s, the early and late 1800s, and on Sunday evenings specifically, in the 1740s and 1820s.⁴³ On weekdays, it might comprise part of schoolroom exercises, as with the Youngs of Limehouse in the 1820s, schoolmaster Roger Langdon’s children in the 1860s and 1870s, and Lydia North Paget’s domestic teaching in the 1850s and early 1860s.⁴⁴

Whereas Luther assumed that mothers would be teaching their children, Anthony Fletcher argued that from the Reformation, catechizing was the father’s responsibility, and that many fathers were ‘warm, intimate and caring’, rather than harsh patriarchs.⁴⁵ There is some consensus that there was a transition from the educational importance of the father, with the

³⁷ Phillip Tovey, *Anglican Confirmation, 1660-1780*, Liturgy and Worship Series, (Aldershot, 2014), 199, 249, 257, 316, 334.

³⁸ Mary Clare Martin, “Children and Religion in Walthamstow and Leyton, 1740-1870”, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2000), 358-366.

³⁹ John Henry Newman, *Apologia per Vita Sua* (London, 1890), 1.

⁴⁰ Marie Adami, *Fanny Keats* (London, 1937), 277-9.

⁴¹ Christabel Coleridge, *Charlotte Mary Yonge: her Life and Letters* (London, 1903), 119.

⁴² Oxford, Bodl, Ms Acland, d.118, fol 113, Agnes Cotton to William Charles Cotton, 1844.

⁴³ Bamford, ed, *Dear Miss Heber*, 2. Everett, *Adam Clarke*, 14-15. Almyra Gray, ed, *Papers and Diaries of a York Family, 1764-1839* (London, 1927), 21. *Shore Journal*, 27-8, 1832

⁴⁴ MOL, YES, 48.85/6, Schemes of lessons, 1825-1828. Langdon, *Life*, 67. Jeanne Peterson, *Family, Love and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* (Bloomington, 1989), 36. ‘Reminiscences by Mrs S.H. Sarah Selwyn, 1809, 1867, with an introduction and notes by Edith Evans, Typed from a typescript held by the Library of the Auckland War Memorial Museum’, January 1892, 7. Coleridge, *Charlotte Mary Yonge*, 96. White, *Fire*, 43, Fletcher, *Growing Up*, 239, 228. *The Life of Roger Langdon, told by Himself. With additions by his daughter Ellen* (London, 1909), 23-26, 67.

⁴⁵ Fletcher, *Growing Up*, 130.

mother supplanting the father by the mid to late nineteenth century,⁴⁶ and some consider this led to a ‘crisis’ of masculinity.⁴⁷ However, family evidence is more complicated. In the eighteenth century, Mary Bosanquet and Faith Hopwood, while their mother was engaged in ‘nursing the young ones’, were catechized by their fathers.⁴⁸ The Free Church of Scotland Robert Haldane (1805-77), High Church Bishop George Augustus Selwyn (1809-1878), and Low Church Richard White (b. 1822), a London businessman, also catechized their children, from the 1830s to the 1870s.⁴⁹ Moreover, mothers might lead the process from the seventeenth century onwards.⁵⁰ These included the Presbyterian mother of Adam Clarke in the 1760s,⁵¹ Frederick Temple’s mother, in the Ionian islands, from 1821,⁵² Sarah Selwyn in New Zealand, in the 1840s, and the Free Church Mary Ann MacFarlane in the 1870s and 1880s.⁵³ In the 1840s and 1850s, the Congregational Mrs Henderson of British Guiana used to catechize her household on Sunday evenings on the sermon, and their Sunday school lessons, as well as the schoolchildren, who sat in the gallery in chapel.⁵⁴ Roger Langdon (b. 1829), the future scientist and stationmaster, learnt the catechism at a Sunday school run by both his parents.⁵⁵ Governesses also acted as catechists, notably for Georgina Sitwell (born in 1824), the daughters of Lady Ilchester in Somerset, and for the Strangeways children (aged ten, five and seven) from 1783.⁵⁶

⁴⁶ Tosh, *Man’s Place*, 90-93; Christina Hardyment, *Dream Babies: Child Care from Locke to Spock* (Oxford, , 1984), 31-45. Leonore Davidoff, Janet Fink, and Katharine Holden, *The Family Story: Blood, Kinship and Intimacy* (London, 1999), 125, 149.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ JRUL, MAM, Fl, Pt 1, 1. Gray, ed, *Diary*, 21.

⁴⁹ White, *Fire*, 43.

⁵⁰ Mandelbrote, ‘Bible’, 94.

⁵¹ Everett, *Adam Clarke*, 14-15.

⁵² Sandford, *Temple Memoirs*, 18.

⁵³ Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (New Haven and London) , 140, 47. Chester, Chester Record Office, WCC journals, Vol XI, June 1846, Microfilm 3,

⁵⁴ Thomas Henderson, *The Missionary’s Wife* (London, 1855), 99.

⁵⁵ Langdon, *Life*, 23.

⁵⁶ Fletcher, *Growing Up*, 239, 222, 228.

Siblings might also act as religious instructors.⁵⁷ In 1819, the poet John Keats sent his sister Fanny, aged fifteen very detailed answers based on the Church Catechism to help her with her confirmation preparation.⁵⁸ By 1828, it was reported by her parents that Emma Young of Limehouse (aged ten) ‘assists in instructing the little ones in their Catechism and map of Canaan.’ Horace (aged six) ‘repeats his catechism with Lucy and Sidney’ (aged seven and eight).⁵⁹ In the 1870s, Florence White’s elder brother (aged fifteen) and his friend (aged fourteen) used to help her learn the catechism on Saturday to recite on Sunday mornings, after which she received a cooked breakfast as a reward.⁶⁰ The catechism could also interest teenagers and adults. In 1846, Agnes Cotton wrote how, at prayers in Oxford, her brother-in-law, the future Professor of Medicine, Henry Wentworth Acland, ‘talks about the catechism guided by an old Exposition by Wm Bishop of Gloster when I know not. We all take a turn, in reading the texts referred to.’⁶¹ Catechism work could also form a part of sociability for younger children. In 1765, seven-year-old Mary Heber wrote to her father, ‘Last Sunday afternoon I went to church and when we came home and was (sic) reading our books and saying our catechism, in came my aunt and cousin Glencowe.’⁶² Grandparents might be involved. In 1858, Sarah Angelina (1849-1930), daughter of Henry Wentworth Acland, reported, ‘I am just going to say my catechism to Grandmamma.’⁶³ In the 1890s, the grandmother and aunt of Captain Edward Kenyon’s children insisted on hearing them try to

⁵⁷ Linda A. Ryan, *John Wesley and the Education of Children: Gender, Class and Piety* (London and New York, 2018), 44.

⁵⁸ Adami, *Keats*, 71-72. The Keats siblings were orphans after the death of their father in 1804 and of their mother in 1810.

⁵⁹ MOL, YES, 48.85/6, 1825.

⁶⁰ White, *Fire*, 43.

⁶¹ Bodl, Ms Acland, d. 189, fol 114, Agnes Cotton to William Charles Cotton. Sun 7 Feb 1847.

⁶² Bamford, *Dear Miss Heber*, 2.

⁶³ Bodl, Ms Acland, d. 106, fol 36. Sarah Angelina Acland to Mrs Sarah Acland, Walwood, 2 May 1858

recite parts of it.⁶⁴ Ministers might come and teach it at home.⁶⁵ No clearly gender differentiated pattern of catechizing emerges across the period.

PART 2: Pedagogy and children's responses

Many historians and literary scholars have considered catechizing as a routine practice of repetition in contrast to the more experimental educational approaches used, by, say, the Edgeworths.⁶⁶ Yet, although catechisms were written in a question and answer format, and despite the recognition that much learning occurred through 'familiar conversation',⁶⁷ recent historians and literary scholars have represented Anglican catechizing as rigid. Aileen Fyfe, for example, argued that 'in the catechism the child had no flexibility or autonomy' whilst children had more freedom in Dissenting education.⁶⁸ Yet, while the *Shorter Catechism* was taught by Dissenters, both Anglicans and Nonconformists argued for the importance of understanding.⁶⁹ Isaac Watts, who in 1730 produced a series of catechisms aimed at different educational levels, wrote: 'The business and duty of the teacher is not to teach words, but things. Words written in the memory, without ideas or sense in the mind, will never incline a child to his duty, nor save his soul.'⁷⁰ Watts 'thought catechizing was an ideal medium of instruction for the young', as it 'broke material into short segments, the questioning stimulated curiosity and a reply, and this to-and-fro was familiar' like a conversation'.⁷¹ Anglicans also produced differentiated texts: for example, John Lewis, whose catechism,

⁶⁴ Taylor, 'Memoirs', I, 23-5.

⁶⁵ Louisa Clara Meyer, *The Author of the Peep of Day* (1908), 8. Green, *Christian's ABC*, 228.

⁶⁶ Alan Richardson, *Literature Education and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge, 1994), 64-77.

⁶⁷ Cohen, 'Pedagogy as conversation', 447-463.

⁶⁸ Fyfe, 'Reading', 470. Amies, 'Amusing and Instructive Conversations', 91-2.

⁶⁹ Mandelbrote, 'Bible as Didactic Literature', 92. Tovey, *Anglican Confirmation*, 197, 231

⁷⁰ Isaac Watts, *Catechisms: or instructions in the principles of Christian religion and the History of Scripture, Compos'd for Children and Youth, : to which is prefix'd a short discourse on the way of instruction by catechisms*, (1730), 17. Green, *Christian's ABC*, 271.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 272. There were no 'proofs' or scripture references in his version for young children.

written specifically for the ‘poor and unlearned’ of Kent, had gone into 34 editions by 1778.⁷² John Wesley wrote a simpler version of the Church catechism in his *Instructions for Children*, as he regarded the Church catechism as too complex.⁷³ Clerics argued for the importance of understanding,⁷⁴ as did some parents,⁷⁵ though it was reported in 1704 that some thought rote-learning sufficed.⁷⁶ The sections that follow will discuss the links between catechisms and religious experience, parents as pedagogues, and texts and denominationalism.

Religious experience

Teaching the Church catechism could provide an opportunity for religious experience, stimulated by personal interaction. Thus, the Anglican Mary Bosanquet, recalled ‘On Sabbath-evenings, my dear father used to instruct us in the Church catechism. At those seasons I can remember asking many questions ... I wished to know whether anyone ever did love God with all their heart, and their neighbour as themselves.’⁷⁷ Bosanquet recounted subsequently being converted to Methodism aged eight, with the assistance of a servant girl, but against the wishes of her family.⁷⁸ In this narrative, her early experience of learning the catechism was the starting point for her spiritual autobiography, not unlike the labouring class examples cited by Michael Watts.⁷⁹ Mary Bosanquet’s concerns closely resembled those of Faith Hopwood, born in 1751 in York, who came from an Evangelical background.

Hopwood’s diary recalled ‘being required to repeat the catechism, collects and portions of

⁷² Sylvia Stevens, *Quakers in Northeast Norfolk, 1690-1800* (Lampeter, 2012), 273. Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 371. Gregory, *Restoration*, 273-8. Green, *Christian’s ABC*, 228.

⁷³ [John Wesley] *Instructions for Children*, 4th edn, (Dublin, 1744).

⁷⁴ Cited in Jacob, *Clerical Profession*, 237. William Wilson, *The Instructor: conducted by the Parochial Ministers of Walthamstow* (London, 1836-7), Vol I, 10 (Oct 1836), 210.

⁷⁵ MOL, YES, 48.85/6, Rule 1, 1825.

⁷⁶ Green, *Christian’s ABC*, 122, 228.

⁷⁷ JRUL, MAM, Fl, Box 23, Pt 1, 1

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 4,5.

⁷⁹ Watts, *Dissenters*, I, 426-8.

Scripture,' which 'occasionally led to serious examination whether I loved God with all my heart' as well as to fears about her future state.⁸⁰ Richard Hill (1732-1808), the first Evangelical MP, was repeating the Catechism one Sunday evening as a child of eight or nine, when 'I found my heart sweetly drawn up to heavenly objects.' The *Evangelical Magazine* of 1799 contained an 'Anecdote' in which a youth 'was convicted by being catechized'.⁸¹ After learning the Assembly's catechism in the 1850s, one seven-year-old Henderson child, daughter of a Congregational missionary in Jamaica, asked searching questions about the doctrine of assurance and God's love, which surprised her mother.⁸² Thus, asking questions or spiritual enlightenment could occur across the period, as a result of catechetical engagement in different denominations, and be perceived as assisting the spiritual development of adults.

Parental engagement

Some parents were so dedicated to their task as religious educators that they wrote catechisms for their own children. Susanna Wesley wrote an exposition of the Apostles' creed and the Ten Commandments.⁸³ The biographer of the High Church Nonjuror John Bowdler (1746-1823), recalled his mother's 'peculiar turn for conveying instruction', and how she drew up a 'comprehensive' and 'plain' explanation of the catechism that anyone could understand.⁸⁴ The Quaker Abiah Darby wrote an introductory catechism for her own children in 1754, and those of her Quaker meeting, which was printed in 1763.⁸⁵ The father of Mary Elizabeth

⁸⁰ Gray, ed, *Papers*, 21.

⁸¹ Cited in Paul Sangster, *Pity My Simplicity: the Evangelical Revival and the Religious Education of Children, 1738-1800* (London, 1966), 41-2.

⁸² Henderson, *Missionary's Wife*, 100.

⁸³ Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 371.

⁸⁴ Thomas Bowdler, *Memoir of John Bowdler, Esq* (London, 1825), 20.

⁸⁵ Stevens, *Quakers*, 273. Abiah Darby, *Useful Instruction for Children, by way of Question and Answer* (London, 1763), iii, v-vi.

Haldane (1825-1925) ‘wrote two catechisms for us, which we learned; one was on the Lord’s Prayer, the other on the general doctrines of the Bible. I think now that both were rather beyond us.’⁸⁶

Children’s reactions and experiences clearly varied. Adam Clarke, son of a schoolmaster and small farmer based in Ireland, whose mother started with the Apostles’ Creed when he was six, recalled ‘I had a godly puritanic mother. For my mother’s religious teachings, I shall have endless reason to bless my Maker.’⁸⁷ Emily Shore, a clergyman’s daughter, recorded, how every Sunday evening, after tea, they said ‘some parts of the Catechism, mamma commenting as we go on in the simplest manner. I believe none of us are taught anything which is not thoroughly explained and I am afraid this is too unusual.’⁸⁸ By contrast, the children of Octavius Temple, commandant in the Ionian Islands and later Lieutenant-Governor of Sierra Leone, were expected to read the Catechism with no explanation. Frederick (1821-1902), the future archbishop, recalled: ‘My six year old birthday was a far more terrible day than the earthquake’, as he and his siblings were all expected to say the catechism by heart. ‘I succeeded, and got what was then a large sum of money – sixpence.’⁸⁹ Children, nevertheless, might take control of the process. It was reported of Leslie Stephen that ‘after one short struggle’, he ‘submitted with much docility to Watts’ *Catechism*, but had a curious way of insisting on giving answers in his own words before he would give those that had been cut and dried.’⁹⁰ In 1846, Bishop Selwyn’s son Willie, aged four or five, was ‘saying his catechism to Mrs S.’, and ‘on the question being put, rehearse the Articles of thy belief, he wanted to open his prayer book and read the Athanasian creed instead of repeating

⁸⁶ *Mary Elizabeth Haldane, 1825-1925, a record of a hundred years*, edited by her daughter (London, 1925) ,45.

⁸⁷ Everett, *Adam Clarke*, 14-15.

⁸⁸ *Shore Journal*, 27-8. 23 December 1832.

⁸⁹ Sandford, *Temple Memoirs*, Vol I, 16, 19. There were eight surviving children, born between 1806 and 1823.

⁹⁰ Frederic W. Maitland, *Life of Leslie Stephen* (London, 1906), 25.

the apostles' ... he said the rubric orders the former to be said on Trinity Sunday... he is never so happy as when reading the Prayer Book.'⁹¹

Not all children enjoyed learning the catechism. Augusta Drane, a future Catholic convert and prioress, from a High Church family, recorded how their religious education in the schoolroom was 'dry in the extreme': 'We said the Church Catechism, but I cannot call to mind any explanation ever being given on religious subjects.'⁹² Although Charlotte Yonge claimed, 'In religious knowledge I was forward. We always said the Catechism every Sunday ...,' she also 'always wished everything of the kind, except teaching the school children, to be over as fast as possible.'⁹³ Nonetheless, she remembered being prepared for Confirmation by John Keble as 'an especial blessing'.⁹⁴ Captain Edward Kenyon (1854-1937), son of a Queen's Counsel, recalled: 'My mother used to teach us the catechism and read Sunday books to us, especially Miss Yonge's on the Collect, Catechism, etc.'⁹⁵ As a father, he did not wish to repeat this, but relatives insisted on hearing the children recite parts of the Catechism, to the children's dismay.⁹⁶

Texts and denominationalism

The 'Assembly's' or Shorter Catechism was taught across the period in Dissenting households.⁹⁷ Betsey Doddridge (1731-6), daughter of the prominent Nonconformist minister, was described as trying to teach a catechism to her dog, indicating this could be a child-initiated activity.⁹⁸ Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), could allegedly repeat the whole of

⁹¹ Chester, Chester Record Office, WCC Journals, Vol XI, fol. 3, June 1846, Microfilm 3.

⁹² Rev Father B. Wilberforce, *Mother Frances Raphael, O.S.D. (Augusta Theodosia Drane): A Memoir* (1895), xx.

⁹³ Coleridge, *Charlotte Yonge*, 17.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*,

⁹⁵ Edward Ranulph Kenyon, *Letter to My Grandchildren* (Canberra, privately printed), 5, author's possession.

⁹⁶ Frances Margaret Taylor, 'Memoirs, Book I, 1894-1927', 23-25, author's possession.

⁹⁷ Waltham Forest Archives, Joel Johnson memoir, Acc No. 10185, 1731. Green, *Christian's ABC*, 80-83.

⁹⁸ Malcolm Deacon, *Philip Doddridge of Northampton, 1702-51* (Northampton, 1980), 67, 158, note 67.

the Shorter Catechism when he was four.⁹⁹ The Westminster Shorter Catechism contained a far greater number of biblical references, or ‘proofs’ supporting the statements of doctrine than the Prayer Book Catechism of the Church of England.¹⁰⁰ Abiah Darby thought that the absence of these from her catechism would make it easier, although there were still 106 questions.¹⁰¹ The future Unitarian minister Eliezer Cogan (1762-1855) learnt the ‘Assembly’s catechism’ as a child, though ‘its stern theology had by that time lost its hold of his father’s mind, who told him, “he need not learn the proofs”’.¹⁰² Others considered them useful. In the 1810s, the Congregational minister Mr Collison wished the young Anglican Bevans, who attended his chapel in Essex, ‘to learn this and called sometimes to hear them repeat it.’¹⁰³ Their niece later asserted, ‘The Scripture proofs it contains were of great use to them.’¹⁰⁴ Although their Anglican uncle George Bevan initially violently disapproved, he later relented. Many Congregational missionaries’ families, such as the Hendersons in the 1840s and 1850s, also learned the Shorter Catechism.¹⁰⁵ Annie Small (b.1857), daughter of a Free Church of Scotland missionary based in India, learned ‘the first question and answer of the Shorter Catechism’.¹⁰⁶ However, by 1892 the Congregational missionary James Kennedy regretted its ‘setting aside’ by families.¹⁰⁷

There were sometimes surprising connections between the texts used by Anglicans and Dissenters. Since Adam Clarke’s father was Church of England, and his mother Presbyterian,

⁹⁹ Priestley *Memoir*, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Mandelbrote, ‘Bible as Didactic Literature’, 92.

¹⁰¹ Darby, *Useful Instruction*, iii, v, vi,

¹⁰² *Memoir of the late Eliezer Cogan, from the Christian Reformer for April 1855*, (London, Hackney, 1855), 5; Priestley, *Memoir*, 5.

¹⁰³ Meyer, *Author*, 8-9.

¹⁰⁴ Meyer, *Author*, 8-9.

¹⁰⁵ Henderson, *Missionary’s Wife*, 100.

¹⁰⁶ Olive Wyon, *The Three Windows: the Story of Ann Hunter Small* (London, 1953), 10.

¹⁰⁷ James Kennedy, *Memoir of Margaret Stephen Kennedy* (London, 1892), 235.

they were taught both the Church catechism and the Shorter Catechism.¹⁰⁸ Although the Hackney Phalanx prevented the SPCK from publishing Isaac Watts' catechism in 1831,¹⁰⁹ it was used even in High Church families, for instance by the Youngs, as well as by the Evangelical Stephens.¹¹⁰ Some Anglicans never learnt the Church catechism, even when confirmed: the former Evangelical G. W. E. Russell (1853-1919) was taught the Nonconformist Shorter Catechism instead: he suspected because the Church Catechism was 'too Sacramental'.¹¹¹

Yet, other evidence indicates domestic catechizing in the Church catechism was still considered *de rigueur* by Anglicans. The religious education of William Sharpe in the early 1800s was influenced by his Unitarian relatives, and his Anglican schoolmaster felt his 'education in church matters, catechism etc.', had been neglected.¹¹² When the Quaker Eliza Fox, at school in Chichester, about 1800, explained 'Please, ma'am, I never say catechism! ... the whole school turned their open eyes upon me' and the children asked questions such as 'What church did I go to on a Sunday? And did we say Catechism and the Belief?'¹¹³ Leslie Stephen's biographer claimed that 'his first days at Eton were made laborious by the Anglican catechism, as he had been brought up on Watts', again indicating that knowledge of the Church Catechism was an expectation in Anglican establishment circles. Stephen later wrote of its 'most irritating explanation of the Lord's Prayer'.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Everett, *Adam Clarke*, 14-15.

¹⁰⁹ Edward Churton, *Memoir of Joshua Watson*, Vol II, (London, 1861), 11-16.

¹¹⁰ MOL, YES, 48.85, 1825, List of books.

¹¹¹ George W.E. Russell, *The Household of Faith: portraits and essays* (London, 1902), 240-241.

¹¹² The National Archives, Sharpe Papers, William Sharpe memoir Box 13/91, fol. 33.

¹¹³ Mrs E. J. Fox, *Memoir of Mrs Eliza Fox: to which extracts are added from the letters and journals of her husband W. J. Fox* (London, 1869), 8-9. Fletcher, *Growing Up*, 254.

¹¹⁴ Maitland, *Stephen*, 25.

Conclusion

This essay has explored an almost wholly neglected aspect of the churches and education in the modern era. It indicates that domestic catechizing could be a consistent aspect of family life in Anglican and Nonconformist households throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Teaching of both the Church Catechism, and Nonconformist Shorter Catechism frequently began by the age of four and could be extended through a developmental programme of catechetical learning. This might be promoted by parents creating schemes of instruction or writing catechisms themselves. Some memoirs indicate that catechetical learning could lead to spiritual experience, and that children might exercise active roles in asking questions, or devising their own responses, rather than merely rote-learning.

The evidence supports a perspective of continuity rather than abrupt change in family religious practice over the period 1740 to 1870. Moreover, it suggests that the notion of a distinct shift in gender roles, in relation to religious practice, over the period 1740 to 1870 is problematic. While children might be catechized by fathers or mothers throughout the period, parental engagement was supplemented by governesses and siblings by the nineteenth century. Both sexes learnt one or more of the many available catechisms, with few references to gender difference, and elder brothers as well as sisters might help younger siblings.

Evidence from schools indicates that knowledge of the Anglican 'Church' catechism was an expectation in many quarters, while for many Nonconformist families the Shorter Catechism was learned. Domestic catechizing could constitute a form of familiar conversation, rather than be qualitatively different. While a quantitative assessment of its frequency is impossible to attain, given that such a routine practice may not have been recorded, this essay has opened up possibilities for future study, for example more details about how children actually learned the catechism. It also draws attention to the need for more studies of religious practice across

the *longue durée*, to make it more feasible to assess continuities across the early modern and modern periods.