

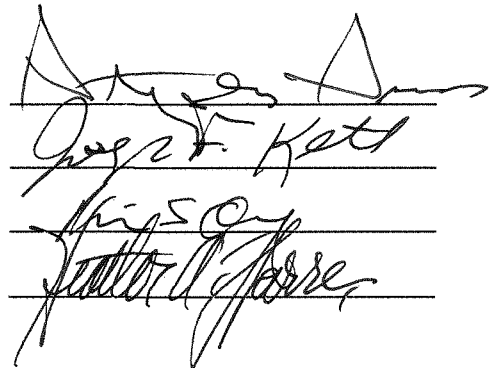
**"The Blessed Echoes of Truth":
Catechisms and Confirmation in Puritan New England**

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Three handwritten signatures are visible on lined paper. The top signature is a stylized, cursive name. The middle signature is 'Gregory Ketch'. The bottom signature is 'William J. Harrison'.

Abstract

This dissertation analyzes the role of catechesis in Puritan New England. Although other studies of early New England have noted the importance of catechisms, they stop short of a systematic examination of these documents and their usage. Placing New England catechisms in their European Protestant context, I examine the content and practice of this form of religious instruction. Employed in colonial churches, families, and schools, catechisms taught children the fundamental elements of Puritan theology, including the order of redemption, the right structure of the church, and the moral obligations of community life. Catechizing helped to build doctrinal literacy among the laity. As conversion narratives reveal, Puritans found catechisms important elements in the process of religious formation.

While religious instruction in New England substantially resembled the practice of other European Protestants, colonists departed from it in one important respect. Many early modern Protestants used catechizing to prepare youth for confirmation and full communion in their churches. Massachusetts settlers did not, at first, use catechisms this way. The Cambridge Platform did not include a confirmation ceremony. However, as ministers confronted problems surrounding children and the sacraments later in the seventeenth century, they reconsidered this rite. Some clergy looked to Protestant confirmation as a means to bring

baptized children nearer to adult membership. However, while the church context of catechizing varied among New England congregations, inside and outside of the meetinghouse, New England colonists employed catechisms to cultivate piety and transmit doctrine to each rising generation.

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Abbreviations

AAS - American Antiquarian Society
EIHG - Essex Institute *Historical Collections*
MHS - Massachusetts Historical Society
NEQ - *New England Quarterly*
PCSM - *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*
WMQ - *William and Mary Quarterly*

Now the first means [God] used to Convince me of my need I had of an interest of Christ was from a Question & Answer in a Catechize, thus. Q. If Damnation be the reward of Sin, then is a man of all creatures most miserable. A dog, a toad, when they die, all their misery is ended. But when a man dies then is the beginning of his WOE. Ans. It were so indeed, if there were no mean[s] of Deliverance. But God hath shown his mercie in giving a Savior to mankinde. Herein was life & death set before me.

--Conversion Relation of
Lt. John Mawdsley, 1679

Why do I delight in answering her questions? I remind me of Samantha, who used to come home from school letter-perfect in her catechism and ask me to hear her nevertheless.

"Why did God make you?" And she'd answer, faking a hestiation, slewing her eyes around me to gauge the suspense. She liked for me to ask and for her to answer. Saying is different from knowing.

--Walker Percy, *Love in the Ruins*

Introduction. New England Catechisms and the Education of the Saints

The way of the world even in Massachusetts was to be born, grow old, and die. In the process each generation had to beget the next; and children did not spring full grown and fully educated from their mothers' wombs. They had to be nursed and nurtured mentally and spiritually as well as physically until they were fit to stand by themselves.

--Edmund S. Morgan¹

Puritan emigrants to New England were keenly interested in the welfare of their children, even professing that they made the transatlantic journey, in part, for the spiritual betterment of their offspring. Further, these settlers knew that the long-term success of their holy society depended on their children's fidelity to the founding principles. Children in colonial New England had to be nursed and nurtured to fit into that godly society. They were not born with knowledge of congregational church polity or sabbath keeping; even elect children, brought to the meetinghouse to hear a sermon, would not suddenly be saved without previous preparation. Both the practice of piety and the experience of conversion assumed a base of religious knowledge that children had to possess before they could "stand by themselves" in New England churches or communities. Puritans devoted substantial efforts to educating each rising generation in the principles of the faith.

¹ Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* ([orig. New York, 1963]; Ithaca, 1965), 125.

Studies of colonial America acknowledge the efforts Puritans² made to teach their children. Indeed, the priority they placed on education--training up a literate laity, establishing schools, founding a college--is recognized as a characteristic feature of these settlers. They enlisted general education in the service of religion, but more particularly, Puritans also designed documents with which to transmit doctrine to the young. While treatments of Puritan culture note this education, they have not fully examined its place within the religious practice and church polity of New England.

Though colonial New England has suffered no lack of historical attention--to put it mildly--Puritans' efforts at religious education have not received the careful study accorded to other elements of religious experience, particularly conversion.³ Of course the regenerative

² While recognizing the contentions that surround the term "Puritan," I shall use it to describe New England's godly colonists, aware that there is imprecision to the term, and that not all residents of New England embraced the spiritual and cultural priorities of the eminent saints. For helpful, recent summaries of the problems in defining Puritanism in both old England and New England, see Stephen Foster, "Not What But How--Thomas Minor and the Ligatures of Puritanism," and Peter Lake, "Defining Puritanism--Again?" in *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith*, ed. Francis J. Bremer (Boston, 1993).

³ Literature on aspects of Puritan conversion is substantial. Some of the most noteworthy studies of conversion include Morgan, *Visible Saints*; Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (New Haven, 1966); Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (New York, 1983); Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience* (New York, 1986).

experience was important to New England Puritans. But as Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe demonstrates, Puritan piety extended beyond the occasion of conversion, through life-long patterns of devotion.⁴ Further, the labor that Puritans spent in religious instruction indicates that they thought pious habits would not be infused instantly at conversion, but had to be cultivated. Regeneration could give saints a truly obedient heart, but would not teach them how to worship God or love neighbors. That was the task of religious education.

Outside of the Bible itself, catechisms were Puritans' primary instruments of religious education. New England settlers adopted the genre, made popular by sixteenth-century European reformers, to teach men, women, and especially children the fundamentals of their faith. Puritans believed that elect and reprobate alike could and should learn about God's attributes and Providence, about the Trinity and the application of redemption, about the Ten Commandments and the right form of the church. The acquisition of such knowledge did not bring salvation. But that was no reason not to learn it; these New Englanders maintained that nothing human beings did could effect salvation. Puritans' belief in God's external covenant led them to insist that the right belief and behavior of all would promote the temporal good of the colony.⁵

⁴ Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, 1982).

⁵ On Puritans' understanding of this covenant, see Edmund

Religious instruction was not just an expedient for social order, however. As ministers promised and church members professed, catechizing could help Christians grow in faith and observance, and even could be a means of grace. Education would prepare the way for God's work. By teaching the order of salvation, it enabled hopeful saints to perceive regeneration in their course of repentance. Arguing that theological ideas help shape religious experience, Charles L. Cohen contends, "[a] soul raised 'evangelically' with no religious training might experience cycles of despair and joy, but they would not be conversions. One cannot turn to God if one knows not a god to turn to." Like sermons, catechisms provided a framework of knowledge in which the pious could build religious experience.⁶

Examining religious education uncovers a critical aspect of the process by which New England children were supposed to attain sainthood. Historical discussions of the Bay Colony's second and third generations tend to focus on their ability (or, more noticeably, their inability) to be converted and join churches, rather than their religious development from infancy on. While church records mark children's reception into membership, they do not cast much light on the course children were to follow between baptism

S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England*, rev. ed. (New York, 1966), 6-11.

⁶ Cohen's judgment comes in the context of evaluating Philip Greven's understanding of the "evangelical" temperament of Puritans. Cohen, *God's Caress*, 18.

and communion. Some historians follow the lead of Puritans' jeremiads, judging the disappointing admissions patterns of the late seventeenth century as evidence that children settled for lukewarm piety.⁷ This perspective shortchanges the religious experience that preceded the conversion experience or proceeded in hope of salvation. Godly parents did not expect their children to behave like unregenerates while they waited for grace.

Instead, parents--and ministers and schoolmasters--catechized children in the beliefs and mores of New England. Edmund Morgan calls attention to the importance of religious nurture in a chapter of *The Puritan Family* titled "The Education of a Saint."⁸ This is the subject of the present study. While Morgan demonstrates the significance Puritans

⁷ Perry Miller makes this point vividly: "The second generation were, for the most part, good people; but they simply did not have--they could not have--the kind of emotional experience that made them ready to stand up before the whole community and say: 'On Friday the 19th, I was smitten while plowing Deacon Jones's meadow; I fell to the earth, and I knew that the grace of God was upon me.'" Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA, 1956), 158. Patricia Caldwell argues that even in the 1640s, second-generation converts gave narratives that were more "secular-minded," that had "superficial tone and manner" and lacked "the heartfelt effusion" that their parents expressed. Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative*, 187-89. Robert G. Pope explicitly rejects declension, but his survey of church-admission patterns of the late seventeenth century reveals a rising generation that sometimes fell short of the conversions ministers anticipated. Further, Pope concludes his study by noting that piety seems to work in cycles, explaining that over time, "[s]pontaneity is lost, and experimental piety becomes routinized. Children cherish the past, imitate it, but cannot recapture it." Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton, 1969), 206-38, 278.

⁸ Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, chap. 4.

attached to teaching the young, he does not offer extensive discussion of that instruction. By examining catechisms and their content and use in New England, this study attempts to shed light on colonists' means of teaching their children to be New England Puritans.

Children and Family in New England Puritanism

Historians of New England have not found Puritan childrearing wholly praiseworthy. Late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century scholars deemed the culture inhospitable to the young. Alice Morse Earle regretted that New England piety "in its anxious and restricted religionism denied freedom to childhood." Sanford Fleming faulted Puritans for plaguing the young with adult concerns of heaven and hell. Arthur W. Calhoun lamented the doctrine of infant depravity, concluding that the young "were denied all the normal sources of joy and happiness." Other scholarship implied that Puritans hardly acknowledged childhood at all. In the wake of Phillipe Ariès's influential *Centuries of Childhood*, historians demonstrated that New England's young were "little adults." John Demos argues that Plymouth colonists viewed the child as a "miniature adult," and Michael Zuckerman maintains that in eighteenth-century New England "no clear distinction between child and adults" was made.⁹ Investigating the place of children in the "New

⁹ Alice Morse Earle, *Child Life in Colonial Days*, American Classics Edition (1899; Stockbridge, MA, 1993), 230-31, 239; Sanford Fleming, *Children and Puritanism: The Place of Children in the Life and Thought of New England*

England mind," Peter Gregg Slater concurs that the young did not fare well in these colonies: Slater is more impressed with New England ideas of childhood mortality than with the care of children who lived. Such harsh assessments sometimes have impeded careful evaluation of Puritans' efforts to teach faith to their children.¹⁰

Following the lead of Edmund S. Morgan's *The Puritan Family*, however, other studies consider more thoughtfully the religious training of children. Adopting Morgan's insights about the importance of the household, social historians in the early 1970s investigated the mechanics and

Churches, 1620-1847 (New Haven, 1933); Arthur W. Calhoun, *A Social History of the American Family from Colonial Times to the Present*, 3 vols. (Cleveland, 1917), 1: 107-111; Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York, 1962); John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970); Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1970), 73.

Ross W. Beales surveys this literature and contends that seventeenth-century colonists *did* have an understanding of childhood and youth. Beales, "In Search of the Historical Child: Miniature Adulthood and Youth in Colonial New England," *American Quarterly* 27 (1975): 379-383. David E. Stannard also insists, against the Aries-influenced literature cited above, that "there were indeed children at home and in the streets of Puritan New England and that their status as children was recognized--and never questioned--by parents, ministers, or other adults in the community." Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change* (New York, 1977), 47.

¹⁰ Slater's book on "children in the New England Mind" is divided into two parts: the first, covering the colonial period, focuses on childhood death and doctrines of infant depravity, while an examination of childrearing only comes in the second part, on the early national period. Justifying this division Slater declares, "[w]hen children lived, they had to be reared"--as if few lived and there were little concern about rearing them in the earlier period. Peter Gregg Slater, *Children in the New England Mind, in Death and in Life* (New York, 1977), 11.

demographics of New England families.¹¹ In a different kind of treatment, Philip Greven's *The Protestant Temperament* analyzes how colonists of three "temperaments"--evangelical, moderate, and genteel--raised their children, and argues that "evangelical" parents (including many Puritans) shaped children's spirituality by breaking their wills.¹² Gerald F. Moran and Maris A. Vinovskis examine Puritans' experience of religion at various stages in the life course, perceptively noting the roles godly parents played in teaching literacy and doctrine. In their study of lay interpretations of covenants and sacraments, Anne S. Brown and David D. Hall note that Puritans deemed the family so crucial to spiritual growth that "parents with young children were willing in the 1630s to risk the voyage to New England if doing so would enable them to bring their children up within a church that, unlike the corrupt Church of England, was founded on a true basis."¹³ Though the family was not the only institution that educated the young,

¹¹ Published in 1970 were several important social histories of New England, including Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*; Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, 1970); Kenneth A. Lockridge, *A New England Town, The First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York, 1970).

¹² Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York, 1977), 32-42, 159-169. Greven places some Puritans in his "evangelical" category, and names others "moderates."

¹³ Moran and Vinovskis, *Religion, Family, and the Life Course: Explorations in the Social History of Early America* (Ann Arbor, 1992), 5; Brown and Hall, "Family Strategies and Religious Practice: Baptism and the Lord's Supper in Early New England," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton, 1997), 51.

mothers and fathers did have considerable opportunity to train their children.¹⁴

Studies of New England religion and culture have recognized catechisms as key sources. Edmund Morgan notes their role in the early instruction of children. Francis Bremer marks catechizing as "another important facet in the religious life of the Puritans," and a chief means by which "the Puritan faith was reinforced among the saints and passed to a new generation." David D. Hall notes that "[a]part from the Bible (and especially the Book of Psalms), the crucial texts [introducing religion and literacy] were the primer and the catechism."¹⁵ While such discussions acknowledge the significance of catechisms, they do not consider the genre closely, generally taking it for granted as simply another sort of pious manual.

Several works have given more extensive treatment to these writings. Wilberforce Eames's 1898 *Early New England Catechisms* provides a bibliography of them, and George E. Brown's 1934 dissertation, "The Catechisms and Catechists of

¹⁴ Stephen Innes observes that parents in New England enjoyed "what may have been a historically unprecedented length of time to socialize their children, who--in sharp contrast to Chesapeake youth--typically lived with their parents until achieving majority." See Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth: The Economic Culture of Puritan New England* (New York, 1995), 13.

¹⁵ Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 98-102; Francis J. Bremer, *Shaping New Englands: Puritan Clergymen in Seventeenth-Century England and New England* (New York, 1994), 56-57; David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 66, 70. See also Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York, 1970), 156; Moran and Vinovskis 119, 129-134.

Early New England," describes the content of a number of them. Both works, however, call attention to the richness of these sources without providing analysis of their function and usage.¹⁶ James Axtell offers the most considerable recent study of catechisms in his *School upon a Hill: Education and Society in Colonial New England*. Axtell devotes most of a chapter to displaying New England's use of these manuals, but the focus of his work is not the means and ends of colonial religious education. Further, Axtell's study confuses the roles family, school, and church played in that instruction, mistakenly asserting that clergymen did not at first view catechizing as their responsibility.¹⁷ Sermons, long acknowledged as crucial elements of Puritan culture, have received careful analysis of form and content.¹⁸ Catechisms merit similar scrutiny. What was a catechism supposed to be and do? How was it supposed to work in the development of a godly child in New England?

Like many works written for children, catechisms display more clearly what adults taught than what children actually learned. Yet this is itself useful: adults reveal a good deal in what they want to teach children. The doctrines deemed most essential were those they presented to

¹⁶ Eames's *Early New England Catechisms* (1898; Reprint, Detroit, MI, 1969); George E. Brown, "Catechists and Catechisms of Early New England," (D.R.E. diss., Boston University, 1934).

¹⁷ Axtell, *The School upon a Hill: Education and Society in Colonial New England* (New Haven, 1974), 5-50.

¹⁸ See, for instance, Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York, 1986).

the young; the moral and behavioral standards needed to sustain the community were those they inculcated in the young. Stephen Innes demonstrates that the "culture of discipline" that Puritans inhabited not only valued particular behaviors but presumed a way of thinking about work, time, covenants, and callings.¹⁹ Various institutions and media cooperated to inculcate these theological assumptions in each generation but catechisms were among the most important, providing the foundational knowledge of the culture's beliefs and mores.

Catechizing was one crucial way that New England parents, ministers, and schoolmasters helped children grow into faithful members of the holy commonwealths. It not only presented theological tenets to be memorized, but encouraged learners to take the material personally, to employ it in their own process of growth in grace. As it taught children to distinguish between true and false doctrine, catechizing developed in learners a *Weltanschauung* colored by Puritan ideas of Providence and redemption. Though some present-day scholars might recoil at the austere worldview into which catechizing initiated children, it is important to recognize the significance of this religious education for those who grew up in the Puritan colonies. As Robert Middlekauff demonstrates in the cases of Cotton Mather and Samuel Sewall, Puritans' conception of the world

¹⁹ Innes examines the elements of the "culture of discipline" in Massachusetts, and the ways this culture was supported by colonial institutions. Innes, *Creating the Commonwealth*, chap. 3, 316n.

enabled them to cultivate and interpret their religious emotions and behavior. In catechisms, learners acquired a set of ideas that would guide their religious experience.²⁰

Children were the largest audience for this instruction, but these documents were also applied to adults. Ministers advised men and women that learning a catechism would help protect them from falsehood. Clergy conducted religious instruction for children but also preached on catechisms from the pulpit to the whole congregation. "Acquaint your selves with principles of Catechism, and be well grounded therein," Richard Mather warned his congregation, "for commonly they that fall to errour are defective in the knowledge of Catechistical points." Scholars have demonstrated that New England's residents combined magic and folk wisdom with the Reformed theology preached by their ministers; while the laity may have held beliefs outside of Puritan orthodoxy, the prevalence of catechizing suggests that many possessed at least basic grounding in this orthodoxy.²¹ Clergy used catechisms not only for those within their flocks, but to minister to those outside of them. Catechisms served as instruments of evangelism: when Native American converts

²⁰ Robert Middlekauff, "Piety and Intellect in Puritanism," *WMQ* 3d. ser. 22 (1965): 457-470.

²¹ Mather advised catechizing for adults and children in *A Farewel Exhortation* (Cambridge, MA, 1657), 6, 10-13. For testimonies revealing how catechisms figured in the conversions of Cambridge church members, see Mary Rhinelander McCarl, "Thomas Shepard's Record of Relations of Religious Experience, 1648-1649," *WMQ* 3d. ser. 48 (1991): 432-66.

adopted the perspective taught in catechisms, ministers noted, they arguably had begun experiencing grace.

Children, Catechisms, and Confirmation

New England settlers warmly endorsed religious education, but their innovative admissions and sacramental policies left them ambivalent about how catechizing would fit in their churches. While this study primarily turns attention to the context of catechizing in Massachusetts, analysis of its function in colonial religious culture is also broadly applicable to Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven. Significantly, New England churches at first did not offer children any privilege or change in status when they had mastered their catechisms. Considered in light of familiar assumptions about the New England Way, this policy may not seem surprising: churches that required adult members to relate conversion stories might not be expected to pass children onto communion with a mere doctrinal statement. When considered alongside contemporary Protestant practices, however, New England's treatment of church children appears anomalous and problematic.

During the sixteenth century, many Protestants who baptized infants created new ceremonies to bring children to full privileges of adult membership. Unlike Orthodox Christians, who continued to give baptism and communion together to infants, Christians in the West had, since the Middle Ages, expected of the baptized some additional

preparation--measured by age, knowledge, discernment, and obedience--before they admitted these to communion.²²

During the Reformation, Protestants turned to catechisms to prepare children for church maturity, and some adopted a version of confirmation to mark attainment of that status. Protestant confirmation required youth to recite a catechism and to accept the faith and oversight of the church. This ceremony honored baptism as children's initiation, but also affirmed that additional qualifications were necessary for communion.

Massachusetts Bay colonists followed reformed custom in catechizing children but abandoned the use of a catechetical test as an entree to communicant status. The Cambridge Platform decreed that baptized children could enjoy full communion only if they gave a relation of faith and repentance, and covenanted with the church "when grown up [u]nto years of discretion."²³ Though the platform omitted any coming-of-age rite for youth and congregations left undetermined the timing of children's advancement to adult status, New England retained traditional assumptions that maturity, in physical and intellectual aspects, readied

²² Richard L. DeMolen argues that "[f]or most Protestant reformers, spiritual maturity was equated with physical maturity. Their rites of Confirmation and the Eucharist became in effect twin rites of puberty--a public acknowledgement that the physically mature Christian was also spiritually mature and morally responsible." DeMolen, "Childhood and the Sacraments in the Sixteenth Century," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 66 (1975): 58.

²³ See the text of the Cambridge Platform in Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York, 1893), 224.

members for full privileges. Requiring "years" and "discretion" implied that age, knowledge, and understanding fitted a person to receive communion. Yet New England Puritans argued that only conversion qualified one for communion.

Recognizing the customary function of catechisms highlights a tension within the Cambridge Platform. Historians have noted the complications created by the Bay Colony's combination of an innovative, exclusive communion policy and a more traditional use of infant baptism. Describing the system of testified regenerate membership, Robert Pope notes that New England Puritans "failed to adjust their baptismal practices to the new test," and that "the regenerative experience now required placed a new barrier between the baptized children and the realization of full membership." Yet there was nothing new about placing a barrier between baptism and full communion; what was new was New England's use of the *same* barrier for adult converts and baptized children. Analyzing the problem of church children, Robert Middlekauff argues that the founders "had not realized the implications of having two methods of qualifying for church membership." In fact, the Cambridge Platform caused problems by *failing* to install two methods of qualifying for full church membership.²⁴

²⁴ Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 6; Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728* (New York, 1971), 49-56; Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 125-27.

It was not infant baptism or even the new policy of requiring conversion narratives, in themselves, that complicated admissions for children in New England churches. Rather, it was churches' failure to institute regular means for their youth to come up to adult membership. While cognizant that other reformed communities employed a separate ceremony for this purpose, Massachusetts church leaders demanded that baptized youth go through the same procedure they asked of outsiders--most notably, giving a conversion narrative. Ironically, New England's inspiration for demanding such narratives proceeded in part from reformed confirmation. Richard Mather and John Cotton both likened New England's peculiar "test" to the catechetical examinations familiar in English and continental Reformed communities. In colonial congregations, professions of experience came to overshadow professions of faith.

Examining confirmation as practiced by other Protestants makes more comprehensible some of the crises and adaptations colonial churches faced in the seventeenth century. The problems leading to the halfway covenant were predictable, not because biology inevitably trumped theology,²⁵ but because Puritans omitted a ceremony other reformed churches understood to be necessary for their children. The halfway covenant itself can be seen not so

²⁵ Edmund Morgan declares, "New England churches were eventually brought back to earth, not by the corruptions of the flesh, but by its biology." Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 125.

much as a clumsy expedient to preserve Puritan tribalism,²⁶ but rather as a belated inclusion of a confirmation ceremony--tailored, of course, to fit the New England Way. So too, the late-seventeenth-century debates about communion qualifications should be reconsidered in light of confirmation. Solomon Stoddard's communion policies reflected broader Protestant practice, while his opponents argued for the preservation of New England's compromise, the "covenant-owning" ceremony. However, Cotton Mather, colonial New England's most prolific producer of catechisms and perhaps its most enthusiastic catechist, was willing to go even further than Stoddard in advocating confirmation.

Assessing catechisms and their functions in New England reveals the confidence and constraints colonial Puritans assigned to religious education. Protestant experience had exhibited the multiple benefits of catechizing, and New England colonists esteemed the exercise. They believed that catechisms could foster not just a superficial acquaintance with doctrine, but could lead learners to understand themselves in Christian terms. At the same time, churches demanded religious experience, not "mere" knowledge, before they would invite members to the Lord's Supper.

Evaluating the Early Modern Catechism

Catechisms in seventeenth-century New England depended upon conventions of the genre established in Europe in the

²⁶ Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 173-86.

sixteenth century. Martin Luther pioneered their use for lay instruction, and Protestants eagerly adopted the form.²⁷ These manuals presented doctrinal basics in question-answer exchanges. Catechisms treated the standards of the faith: the Apostles' Creed or other credal material, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the sacraments. In the medieval church these staples summarized the faith that parents or godparents professed for infants at baptism. For Protestants, they articulated the minimum knowledge Christians ought to possess. Catechisms could take several lengths. Short forms were intended for memorization and recitation by the young or uneducated, and intermediate manuals presented more complex material for grammar-school students or mature readers. "Larger" forms provided clergy with doctrinal expositions to use in catechizing their flocks. Catechisms blended oral and written instruction, and could be used with the illiterate or could help students learn to read.

Historians have recognized the significance of catechisms in early modern Europe. Several important studies focus on ways these documents reflected and shaped the religion and culture of the period. Gerald Strauss's

²⁷ Roman Catholics also developed and used catechisms in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, partially in response to Protestants' success with these manuals. Catholic catechisms fall outside the scope of this study, which focuses specifically on the European catechisms that influenced New England Puritans. For a recent treatment of the development of Roman Catholic catechesis, see Berard Marthaler, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today: the Evolution of a Genre* (Collegeville, MN, 1995).

Luther's House of Learning examines catechisms' role in advancing the Reformation in Germany and in cultivating a population responsive to the authority of the state. In his extensive treatment of English catechizing in *The Christian's ABC*, Ian Green demonstrates that Protestants in England shared broad agreement on basic doctrine and succeeded in imparting at least some measure of religious knowledge to the people. Robert James Bast's *Honor Your Fathers* analyzes catechisms and catechesis from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, arguing that this form of religious instruction reinforced patriarchalism. Catechisms also receive substantial mention in numerous other studies of religion and society in the period.²⁸

These works establish the importance of catechisms in their early-modern context. However, two negative judgments often color commentary on these documents. Scholars frequently indict them as tools of indoctrination and take a low view of the memorization and rote expression involved in

²⁸ Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning: Indoctrination of the Young in the German Reformation* (Baltimore, 1978); Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c.1530-1740* (Oxford, 1996); Robert James Bast, *Honor Your Fathers: Catechisms and the Emergence of a Patriarchal Ideology in Germany, 1400-1600* (Leyden, 1997). In addition, catechisms are given briefer--but still substantive--treatment in other works, including Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 1983); Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society, 1559-1625* (Oxford, 1982); John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning, and Education, 1560-1640* (Cambridge, 1986); and C. John Sommerville, *The Discovery of Childhood in Puritan England* (Athens, GA, 1992).

their instruction. Gerald Strauss concludes that catechisms were foremost among Martin Luther's "works of popular indoctrination." The catechism, Strauss argues, "served the interests of church and political establishments who came to depend on catechizing as by far the most effective, efficient and above all the safest means of instilling in the multitude a reliable knowledge of religion--that is to say, of the official formulated creeds of the Lutheran state churches which were then being established." Similarly, John Morgan suggests that even the multiplicity of catechisms in use among English Puritans brought a dominant interpretation to prevail, making doctrinal responses "not a matter of thoughtful choice, but rather of conditioning." David D. Hall sees catechisms as contributing significantly to the shaping of the language and "set of story lines" of early New England, but asserts that "[u]nlike various other literary forms, catechisms were a clerical monopoly," which ministers deployed toward the "goal of limiting freedom of interpretation." Some scholars have dissented from this portrayal of catechisms. Steven Ozment argues that "[t]he Protestant catechism, so often deplored by modern scholars as an assault on the freedom and autonomy of children, may instead have been the chief means of their liberation from the internal bonds of authoritarian religion." Acknowledging catechisms' reputation as "a paternalistic

mediation of meaning," Patricia Demers presents them as positive aids in the process of religious development.²⁹

Early-modern methods of religious instruction also lend themselves to criticism. John Morgan condemns as "tedium" Richard Greenham's pedagogical practice, in which the minister had "the catechised often to goe over the same thing, as a knife doth the whetstone, and to repeate and iterate it, till he have made it his owne." Demers concedes that most scholars take "a dim view" of catechisms and the formulaic answers they instill. Lawrence Cremin notes that "the process of catechizing was dull and routinized, with repetition being the chief pedagogical technique."³⁰

Such criticisms, while not without merit, have limitations in assessing the place of catechisms in colonial New England. The function of these manuals in mediating the faith need not be viewed as inherently sinister. In any case, the genre was not unique in that regard. Early-modern church leaders generally did not encourage free speculation about scripture, and while New England clergy urged everyone to read the Bible, they did not invite men and women to

²⁹ Gerald Strauss, "Protestantism and Literacy in Early Modern Germany," *Past and Present* 104 (August 1984): 35, and *Luther's House of Learning*, chaps. 3 and 4; Morgan, *Godly Learning*, 153; Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 66, 70; Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, 172-73; Patricia Demers, *Heaven upon Earth: The Form of Moral and Religious Children's Literature, to 1850* (Knoxville, TN, 1993), 74.

In the English context, C. John Sommerville argues that the "plethora" of available catechisms opened up religious education. See Sommerville, "The Distinction Between Indoctrination and Education in England, 1549-1719," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983): 387-406.

³⁰ Morgan, *Godly Learning*, 153; Demers 52; Cremin 156.

invent novel interpretations of the text--as the experience of Anne Hutchinson evidenced. New England sermons "opening" doctrine favored a minister's interpretation just as catechisms did. Further, though rote learning and recitation do not suit all educational circumstances, they are not without merit. In his study of English catechisms, Ian Green points out that pedagogical theorists now concede that repetition "not only consolidates recently learned material and helps isolate possible confusions or difficulties, but also helps in the mastering of new material thereafter."³¹

Dismissing catechisms as mere means of indoctrination neglects the important functions they performed in New England culture. Catechisms introduced each member of a Puritan community to common beliefs and norms. Further, the exercise of memorizing and reciting the doctrine of the church could help one claim it for one's own: instead of bemoaning how tedious Richard Greenham's instruction must have been, we might be struck by his claim that the student who learned and spoke doctrine "made it his owne."³²

Catechisms gave learners an opportunity to grasp and articulate faith for themselves. As ministers noticed, catechisms requested a response from learners, even if this were simply a rote response. Increase Mather admitted that, "When Sermons are preached, men are sinfully apt to sleep

³¹ Ian Green reviews this pedagogical literature in his treatment of catechetical method. See Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 230-31.

³² Greenham quoted in Morgan, *Godly Learning*, 153.

and wander, which under this way of Catechising they cannot easily doe."³³ Of course these manuals proffered fixed interpretations of doctrine instead of rewarding original responses, and those who would find Puritan sermons ponderous and forbidding would find little appealing in catechisms.³⁴ But to New England children who would grow up godly, catechisms provided a key to the religious values current in the community. Because they placed authoritative statements in the answers, catechisms gave respondents the chance to make pronouncements about truth and error. Learning them invited students into dialogue about Christian doctrine and asked for their vocal participation. Instead of viewing these manuals as "imprisoning codifications," Demers offers a useful metaphor, comparing catechisms to "the declension and conjugation paradigms that all of us have probably struggled with in second-language classes: a necessary grid by which to verbalize, translate, and interpret."³⁵ As some conversion narratives illustrate, New England colonists found catechisms helpful in these

³³ Increase Mather, "To the Reader," in James Fitch, *The First Principles of the Doctrine of Christ* (Boston, 1679), sig. A2r.

³⁴ It is impossible to discern how many New England children received catechizing eagerly and how many dreaded it as dull or irrelevant. Several scholars have established correspondence between what ministers preached in sermons and what laypeople perceived and believed, showing that the laity embraced preachers' doctrines with adaptations of their own. What held true of sermons can also be applied to doctrine presented in catechisms. See Selement, "The Meeting of Elite and Popular Minds at Cambridge, New England, 1638-1645," *WMQ* 3d. ser. 41 (1984): 32-48; Cohen, *God's Caress*, chap. 6; Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 11-12.

³⁵ Demers 54.

respects: in translating doctrine into comprehensible terms, in interpreting their own religious experience, and in verbalizing their encounters with grace.³⁶

Puritans were not less wary than we of memorized religious responses. Rote recitations seemed to them susceptible to hypocrisy, able to show an appearance of religious devotion while the mind remained blank, the heart wicked, the affections disengaged. They knew it was easy to "parrot" memorized text, and in part for this reason they rejected prepared homilies, prayers, and creeds employed in the Church of England. Yet Puritans encouraged children to memorize and recite catechisms; ministers decided the benefits of this education overcame its potential liabilities. John Cotton argued that the Bible did not endorse set forms of prayer or liturgy, but that these expressions were lawful in catechisms because "the Apostle commandeth us to keep a forme of *sound words in faith and love*, that is, in the principles of Religion."³⁷

The Context of New England Religious Education

Colonial catechisms operated within broader assumptions about children and their capacities, about knowledge and its relation to grace. When parents, ministers, or schoolmasters taught "some orthodox catechism" to youth,

³⁶ Discussion of converts' reports of catechisms in the process of conversion appears in chapter five, below.

³⁷ Cotton, *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New-England* (London, 1645), in *John Cotton: The New England Way*. Library of American Puritan Writings, vol. 12 (New York, 1983), 74.

they did so inside a framework of current judgments about education. Instructors demonstrated their confidence in the utility and efficacy of this means of religious instruction.

Primary catechizing was to take place in families, where social expectation and parental solicitude encouraged Puritan mothers and fathers to perform this duty. The concern godly parents bore for their children made them willing to attend their spiritual as well as material needs. Not all parents may have accorded their offspring this care, but theology and practice both endorsed it. Regard for children was accentuated by perception of the precariousness of their lives. Parents were encouraged to begin religious instruction early, for children could not afford to delay consideration of their eternal condition.³⁸

Nor could they be suffered to continue long in their natural condition. Puritans perceived their children as fallen creatures. Infants were "Stained from birth with Adams sinfull fact," Anne Bradstreet wrote. Although an abstract belief in original sin could coexist with love for one's own children, Puritans believed infants were not innocents, and their childrearing methods reflected that supposition.³⁹ Children had to be corrected and instructed.

³⁸ Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 77, 91-2; C. John Sommerville, *The Discovery of Childhood in Puritan England* (Athens, GA, 1992), 98; Greven, *The Protestant Temperament*, 29-31. For analysis of how early death and belief in original sin affected parents' opinion of children, see Slater, *Children in the New England Mind*, and Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death*. Stannard argues that while parents loved their offspring, they might have restrained that love because of the likelihood that some children would die.

³⁹ As Slater recognizes, fathers and mothers "did not see

Parents had to teach children what they were--sinners needing grace--before the young could seek God. John Hull noted that Samuel Willard preached, "they are all born in Ignorance rom. 3.17. without the knowledge and fear of god they must have it by doctrine and institution." It was a matter of merciful and responsible parenting to teach one's offspring of their damnable estate and the way God had provided for deliverance. "Original sin was no fairy story with which to frighten little children," Edmund Morgan observes, but was to Puritans "an unpleasant but inescapable fact, and the sooner children became acquainted with it, the better."⁴⁰

Some historians have argued that the aim of Puritan child-rearing was "breaking the will." Greven names this the central task for "evangelical" parents, and John Morgan concurs that the godly in England set children "upon the path to salvation only by the breaking of their will as soon as it appeared." Sommerville, in contrast, suggests that English Puritans were more interested in disciplining the will. Moran and Vinovskis posit that seventeenth-century New England families typically "desired to bend, shape, and mold, the will, not to break it."⁴¹

vessels of sin and depravity every time they glanced at one of their infants." Bradstreet quoted in Slater 20-21; Greven, *The Protestant Temperament*, 29-31; Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 91-92.

⁴⁰ Quotations in Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 90, 93.

⁴¹ Greven, *The Protestant Temperament*, 32-42, and Greven, ed., *Child-Rearing Concepts, 1628-1861: Historical Sources* (Itasca, IL, 1973), 5; Morgan, *Godly Learning*, 144-145; Sommerville, *The Discovery of Childhood*, 94-99; Moran and Vinovskis 116-117.

Puritans' stress on early religious education seems more consistent with the goal of shaping or bending rather than breaking wills. Restraining the will was one task of education, early modern pedagogues maintained.⁴² Though humanists might offer more optimistic views of the goals of education, Protestants from Luther on viewed "restraint and control" as appropriate correctives to youth's urges and actions--one reason that memorization seemed a suitable teaching technique.⁴³ Demonstrating how catechesis accorded with prevailing pedagogical wisdom, Ian Green explains, "careful instruction could ensure that the right impulses reached the child's senses, while endless, repetitive practice would not only ensure that good habits of self-discipline and thought were formed while the child was still malleable, but also kept the child so busy that he or she would not have the time to give way to his or her naturally corrupt instincts." Educators thought children were teachable in spite of their weakness and fallibility, and suggested that early training could have good effects

⁴² This discussion of early-modern assumptions about learning and knowledge draws on Gerald Strauss, "The State of Pedagogical Theory c. 1530: What Protestant Reformers Knew About Education," in *Schooling and Society: Studies in the History of Education*, ed. Lawrence Stone (Baltimore, 1976), 69-94, and Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning*, chaps. 3 and 4; Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 230-276.

⁴³ Sommerville notes that Puritan writers "commonly remarked that vices seemed less rooted in the young because they had not yet blossomed into acts. Sin had not yet become habitual in children, so lusts could be stifled at their inception and correct habits fixed for life." Though some writers opposed the idea of the child as *tabula rasa*, others hoped that good teaching rather than Satan's stamp might be printed on the "blank papers" of their children. Sommerville, *Discovery of Childhood*, 87, 99-100.

for the long term. Because they believed that memory developed before judgment and conscience, they relied on rote learning and habit to form ways of thought. Filling the memory with sound doctrine would enable the understanding later to grasp those principles.⁴⁴

The understanding had a crucial role in salvation. Although the hard work of conversion ultimately was borne by the will, ministers agreed that the understanding first had to admit right knowledge. Cotton Mather explained that "Every Grace enters into the Soul through the *Understanding*."⁴⁵ One had to possess correct information about God, sin, and redemption to be saved. "Though knowledg may be without grace, yet there can be no grace without knowledg," John Norton declared. Conversion would not occur amidst ignorance. John Hull learned from a sermon that as

⁴⁴ Strauss, "Pedagogical Theory," 74, 81-84 and *Luther's House of Learning*, 73-84; Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 234-37. Green notes that English catechists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries valued "constant repetition and simple memorization," though by the early eighteenth century, some teachers were growing uneasy with this method, as evidenced by Isaac Watts' regret at the way the Westminster Shorter Catechism was "thrust" into minds without cultivating understanding.

⁴⁵ Norman S. Fiering shows that both "intellectualist" and "voluntarist" positions circulated in seventeenth-century New England, as Harvard's students and faculty debated whether the will was constrained to choose what the understanding presented. Fiering, "Will and Intellect in the New England Mind," *WMQ* 3d. ser., 29 (1972): 515-558, and *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard: A Discipline in Transition* (Chapel Hill, 1981); Cohen, *God's Caress*, 28-29; Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1939), 280-99; Strauss, "Pedagogical Theory," 72-75; Mather quoted in Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 89.

long as persons "remain in their naturall ignorance their is not hope of being freed from everlasting misery."⁴⁶

Puritans both exalted and limited the role of doctrinal knowledge. For a religious system that emphasized experience, New England Puritans placed substantial weight on knowledge. They rejected the antinomian and anti-intellectual tendencies of some radical Protestants, esteemed a learned ministry, and expected a high degree of theological savvy among the laity. Doctrine mattered, Puritans insisted: the godly in England and New England maintained that false opinions could foster idolatry and lead people to hell.⁴⁷ Though preachers delivered the Word in a plain style, their sermons were hardly simplistic.⁴⁸ Sermons and scripture reading were the regular means through which God would bring grace, Puritans suggested, but hearers had to understand their meaning in order to profit from these. Just as English catechists insisted before them, New England ministers knew sermons would be incomprehensible unless listeners first were grounded in the basic principles and terminology of the faith. Catechizing built these foundations.

⁴⁶ Norton quoted in Beales, "Historical Child," 386; Hull quoted in Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 90.

⁴⁷ For instance, William Perkins prefaced his catechism with a catalog of errors and offered his instruction as a corrective to these false notions. Perkins, *The Foundation of Christian Religion, Gathered into sixe Principles* (London, 1690), sigs. A3v-A4r.

⁴⁸ Cohen notes that "preachers broached any subject, no matter how intellectually demanding," in their sermons, including complexities of soteriology, God's existence and attributes, and the character of sin. Cohen, *God's Caress*, 167-68.

Knowledge also was to have a protective function in New England. Colonial ministers agreed that people well catechized would be less susceptible to heresies. Firm grasp of the true constitution of the church, the reasons for baptism, the order of regeneration, and the way of interpreting scripture would guard the laity from the wiles of Baptists, Quakers, and Catholics. Especially in view of Catholic threats in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, Puritan ministers offered catechisms to inoculate the people against Roman errors.⁴⁹

But Puritans remained painfully ambivalent about knowledge. They insisted that it was absolutely necessary for worship, obedience, and conversion itself, but just as vehemently asserted its insufficiency for salvation. They respected the capacity of reason but were careful to keep it within limits, and argued that experience provided what knowledge could not in the process of conversion.⁵⁰ In distinguishing between "historical" faith and "saving" faith, ministers belittled "mere" knowledge--doctrine that the mind held but the will did not act upon.⁵¹ Saving faith

⁴⁹ Cotton Mather's *Frontiers Well Defended* (Boston, 1709) presented a catechism for the purpose of strengthening learners in Protestant doctrine and pointing out Catholic errors.

⁵⁰ John Morgan examines Puritan views of the uses and limits of reason in *Godly Learning*, chap. 3.

⁵¹ Edward Taylor, for instance, denigrated this "mere" knowledge by reminding his opponent, Solomon Stoddard, that even "Divells" had this kind of knowledge of Christ. Taylor, "The Appeale Tried" in *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard: The Nature of the Lord's Supper*, eds. Thomas M. Davis and Virginia L. Davis (Boston, 1981), 181.

only came when one actively grasped the doctrines of salvation.

Puritans, Edmund S. Morgan observes, saw no "contradiction in asserting the inadequacy of education in one breath and the desirability of it in the next."⁵² Though religious education could make children better, New England ministers insisted that heaven was not reached by incremental improvement. Catechisms occupied a tense middle ground between "mere" knowledge and salvation. In substance, they offered the basics of "historical" faith. Yet because they could help learners claim and personalize doctrine, ministers promised that catechizing could yield more than that. Catechisms strove to teach self-knowledge, to acquaint the child with what he or she was before God and within a community. They could be a means of grace if the Spirit "quicken" the knowledge students learned in them.

Coming of Age and Conversion in New England

The covenant theology and baptismal policies of New England established separate courses of religious development for children born of church members and those whose parents were not visible saints. The former would be baptized as infants and included in the "federal covenant." They were to be educated in the probable hope that God would convert them; children of saints were more likely to be saved, though Puritans knew God was not bound to save all

⁵² Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 95.

their offspring. Church children were to improve the means of grace, in order that they might grow in grace and receive privileges of the church.⁵³

Ministers assumed that elect, church-nurtured children would experience conversion by the time they reached maturity. Assuring parents that God could save elect infants through extraordinary means if these never reached adulthood, ministers normally did not look for grace to be manifested in the first years. Some scholars hypothesize that Puritans anticipated conversion in young children, but others conclude that conversion before adulthood was rare in the seventeenth century. Surveying church-admissions data, Ross Beales, Philip Greven, Gerald Moran, and Maris Vinovskis discover that candidates rarely offered themselves before their twenties or thirties.⁵⁴ Beales points out that

⁵³ Massachusetts churches operating under the Cambridge Platform baptized only those infants who had at least one parent in full communion. The phrases "church children" and "children of the church" refer to those who were baptized by virtue of their parents' membership and grew up within the church; in this study it is applied both to actual children and to grown, baptized persons still in that church status.

⁵⁴ John Demos maintains that conversion was likely to occur in the crucial period between ages six and eight. Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 146. Moran and Greven both argue that church membership generally was sought by candidates in their twenties or thirties. See Moran, "Religious Renewal, Puritan Tribalism, and the Family in Seventeenth-Century Milford, Connecticut," *WMQ* 3d. ser. 36 (1979): 246-50; Moran and Vinovskis, *Religion, Family, and the Life Course*, chaps. 2 and 4; Philip J. Greven, Jr., "Youth, Maturity, and Religious Conversion: A Note on the Ages of Converts in Andover, Massachusetts, 1711-1749," *EIHC* 108 (1972): 119-34; Ross Worn Beales, Jr., "Cares for the Rising Generation: Youth and Religion in Colonial New England." (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 1971), and Beales, "Historical Child," 386-7.

George Selement contends that Puritan conversion was "an adolescent phenomenon," upholding the early twentieth

Thomas Hooker declared "the middle age is the fittest time" for the Lord to call the elect to preparation and conversion. Elsewhere Hooker defined "the middle age" more specifically as the years from twenty to forty.⁵⁵

Still, we should be careful about concluding that Puritans thought children should wait for adulthood before conversion. Church-membership age can serve as an approximate gauge of conversion timing, but can be misleading if relied upon exclusively: candidates did not just experience grace immediately before offering themselves as members. Assurance took time to develop.⁵⁶ Demographic evidence and church-admissions data may indicate that most men and women who joined the church were not ready to do so until they reached adulthood, had married, and perhaps become parents. But ministers contended that church children should have been ready before that. Preachers' pronouncements about "middle age" chiefly were intended to warn adults not to put off preparation--Hooker was anxious to point out that "there are few examples of old men

century conclusions of G. Stanley Hall and Edwin Starbuck. Selement, "The Means to Grace: A Study of Conversion in Early New England," (Ph.D. diss, University of New Hampshire, 1974), 83-91. Cohen, in contrast, insists that conversion should not be equated with the onset of adulthood. Cohen, *God's Caress*, 14-16.

⁵⁵ Thomas Hooker, *The Application of Redemption* (London, 1659), 268; *The unbelievers Preparing for Christ* (London, 1638), 199.

⁵⁶ Cohen also notes that "linking conversion so closely to church membership compresses the experience, which cannot be readily associated with a single discrete occurrence. The new birth was a prolonged process that began years before one joined a congregation and whose impact resonated throughout a believer's life." Cohen, *God's Caress*, 14-15.

converted"--rather than to discourage children from seeking grace too early. John Cotton scolded adults who had been baptized infancy but had not grown in grace. He called it shameful "to have lived a baptized Christian, twenty, forty, or sixty years, and not more washed from sin than a Turk or a Jew." God sometimes chose to save children, in part, to shock adults into repentance: "for Babes and Children," Cotton asserted, "if they be brought to grace, God hereby casts shame on elder men." Ministers did not advise baptized children to wait until middle age to get ready for salvation.⁵⁷

The Cambridge Platform marked "years of discretion" as the point at which children should seek full communion. Its use of this term reflected traditional assumptions about childrens' place in the church. Since the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Catholics had required annual confession and communion for all who had reached the "age of discretion."⁵⁸ Protestants subsequently tended to connect

⁵⁷ Hooker's doctrine was "That God can and doth call in all ages, some in their yonger age, some in their riper yeares, and some in their old age; God calls some in all ages, but most and most usually before their old age." He observed that God could overcome both the infirmities of children and "the sturdy heart" of young men to save them. Hooker, *The unbeleeevers Preparing*, 192-196, and *The Application of Redemption*, 265-268, 276; Cotton, *The Way of Life* (London, 1641), 35-36, and *A Practical Commentary...upon the first Epistle generall of John* (London, 1656), 90-91.

⁵⁸ The medieval church employed the terms "age of reason" and "age of discretion," related concepts governing eligibility for the sacraments. At age seven children were thought to attain use of reason and with it, ability to commit mortal sin. Therefore, the Fourth Lateran Council's twenty-first canon ordered all to take the sacraments of confession and communion annually once they reached this

young adulthood with full membership, using confirmation to test the capacities that years and catechizing had developed. In New England, youth would be counted of age, for church purposes, "according as God gives experience and maturity of naturall understanding, and Spirituall," Richard Mather explained.⁵⁹

Legal precedents indicated that the age of discretion fell in the teenage years, around fourteen or sixteen. In Massachusetts, fourteen marked the "age of discretion" in cases of slander or sodomy, and as the point at which children could choose their guardians. Plymouth used sixteen as the significant age in cases of slander and lying.⁶⁰ But New England churches resisted fixing the age

age. The "age of discretion" implied responsibility and adulthood; at this age, often set at fourteen or sixteen, persons were eligible for the sacraments of marriage or ordination. New England Puritans had little use for the "age of reason" as the onset of culpability--they were comfortable attributing sin to infants--but they agreed that communicants needed maturity. Understanding the Lord's Supper as a sacrament for adult members, they carried over the medieval index of adulthood. They adopted the concept of the "age of discretion," putting it to use as a qualification for adult--that is, communicant--church status. Treatments of Protestant usage of these terms sometimes interchange "discretion" and "reason." For example, J.D.C. Fisher translates canon twenty-one as applying to those at "years of discretion," and cites other medieval councils that set communion eligibility in the early teen years. See Fisher, *Christian Initiation: The Reformation Period* (London, 1970), 238-39. See also entries on "Age" and "Discretion" in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 12 vols. (New York, 1908), 1:83, 3:444, and the entry on "Age (Canon Law)," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967): 1:197-98. Comments helpful in defining these terms also appear in de Molen 59-63, and Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 125-27.

⁵⁹ Richard Mather, *Church-Government and Church-Covenant Discussed* (London, 1643), 22; Beales, "Historical Child," 387-89.

⁶⁰ Laws provided guidance in determining the age of

of discretion at any firm number, remaining more concerned with mental and spiritual attainments than with actual years.⁶¹ As with many other matters, Massachusetts ministers judged congregations most fit to decide their own questionable cases. Richard Mather asserted that one rule could not be made for all because God gives the blessings of maturity "sooner to some then to others."⁶² Though they did not rule on a specific age for conversion, churches did assume youth would be ready for full communion on the brink of adulthood. This study is not so much concerned with the actual ages of New England converts as with the implications of the assumption, expressed in the Cambridge Platform, that church children *should* experience conversion by maturity. The Cambridge Platform maintained the traditional link between catechizing and church maturity, even though it dropped a ceremony marking the attainment of age and knowledge. Since they already had grace in the covenant, church children had only to improve the pious education they

maturity, though the significant age varied in different situations. See Beales, "Historical Child," 384-85. The *Oxford English Dictionary* entry on the "age of discretion" notes that English law set the age at fourteen.

⁶¹ Joseph Kett indicates that Americans through the early nineteenth century described age not so much in specific numbers of years, but in terms of overlapping stages of dependency. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York, 1977), 11-14.

⁶² The Northampton church led by Eleazar Mather decided, for instance, that Scripture gave no "perticular yere or tyme" to mark the end of the age of minority. In practice, teenage children could be counted as yet dependent. See Beales, "Historical Child," 388-91; Richard Mather, *Church-Government and Church Covenant*, 22, and *A Disputation Concerning Church-Members and Their Children* (London, 1659), 13; Axtell 31-32.

received, along with other means of grace, and wait for the Spirit to work in them.⁶³

Through catechizing, church children would be nurtured in the faith their parents' covenant promised them. Religious education had a role in cultivating members of the Puritan "tribe" but it did not exclude those whose families were outside the church.⁶⁴ Bay Colony leaders deemed it essential for all to believe and worship God. On a temporal level, catechisms provided a threshold of knowledge for all who would live in New England towns and worship in New England churches. As Francis Bremer notes in his brief treatment of these manuals, catechisms "utilized metaphors that introduced youth to the language of religious discourse and helped to fix a communal understanding of the nature of Puritan faith and the forms in which it was experienced."⁶⁵

For while the ultimate goal of catechizing was salvation, its proximate aim was the edification of the godly colonies. John Sommerville argues that English Puritans were especially attuned to children because their

⁶³ Beales, "Historical Child," 390-91. Beales suggests that Puritans equated the "age of discretion" with adolescence, hypothesizing that since the Chelmsford church had youth attend catechizing until age sixteen, sixteen served as its working definition for age of discretion.

⁶⁴ Edmund Morgan argues that Puritans were interested in bringing about conversion in the children of saints, to the neglect of those outside of the church, and claims this "Puritan tribalism" undermined their quest for purity. Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 174-86. Godly parents may have been more earnest in teaching their children, but colonial laws demanded that all families catechize, and churches ordered the attendance of all children at religious instruction sessions.

⁶⁵ Bremer, *Shaping New Englands*, 57.

future orientation made them anxious to win the support of the next generation. "The necessity of preserving the movement beyond the lives of the founders meant reaching out to the young, trying to impress or appeal to them," Sommerville asserts.⁶⁶ New England Puritans were no less interested in preserving their colonies beyond the lives of the founders. To maintain what they had begun, they had to teach their offspring to value the institutions they built and the principles they honored. Ministers showed concern for the future during debates over the halfway covenant: Jonathan Mitchel, for instance, observed that "[t]he Lord hath not set up Churches onely that a *few old Christians* may keep one another warm while they live, and then carry away the Church into the cold grave with them when they dye." Instead, Mitchel argued, churches were to "*nurse up still successively another Generation of Subjects of Christ that may stand up in his Kingdome when they are gone, so that he might have a People and Kingdome successively continued to him from one Generation to another.*"⁶⁷

By teaching children the catechism as consistently as the alphabet--and the vastly influential *New England Primer* did present the two together--Puritans strove to raise up pious, orthodox generations. Catechisms helped cultivate a laity schooled in the religious principles of the colonies' founders.⁶⁸ New England's ministers sometimes failed to

⁶⁶ Sommerville, *Discovery of Childhood*, 12.

⁶⁷ Mitchel quoted in Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 138.

⁶⁸ To claim that Puritans had some success in transmitting doctrine across generations is not to claim that everyone in

appreciate that accomplishment because they looked for conversion, not "mere" religious knowledge, as a sign of religious fidelity. But through instruction in homes and schools as well as churches, catechisms taught the young to observe Puritan doctrine and institutions, and even to hope for grace.

As central documents in the education of New England Puritans, these catechisms warrant analysis, in content and in context of the colonies' social and ecclesiastical institutions. Because these writings depended upon conventions developed by European Protestants, this study first places colonial manuals in the context of Reformation catechesis. Focus then shifts to the catechetical manuals and practices Puritan colonists developed. The study closes in the early eighteenth, though not to signal the end of New England catechizing: indeed, catechizing continued throughout the colonial period, using texts devised in the first generation of settlement. By the 1720s, however, patterns for religious instruction in several institutions were established, and the texts for this instruction

New England absorbed and accepted these principles, or that these tenets eclipsed all other ideas about religion and morality. Catechisms helped make certain religious ideas and expressions common cultural currency, even if some residents of the colonies did not embrace their lessons. As Charles L. Cohen indicates in his review of recent literature on colonial religion, "it is now easier to conceive of Puritanism as a predominating cultural force without having to demonstrate its absolute stranglehold on New England minds and mores." See Cohen, "The Post-Puritan Paradigm of Early American Religious History," *WMQ* 3d. ser. 54 (1997): 702.

remained stable. Although colonial authorities never mandated a single form, John Cotton's *Milk for Babes* and the Westminster Shorter Catechism emerged as the common catechisms of New England, and the remainder of the colonial period saw few new catechisms printed there.

Chapter one examines the background of New England catechisms by tracing the development of the genre. Because sixteenth-century Protestants and New England Puritans after them claimed to be reviving the practice of the primitive church, attention is given early-church catechesis, and then to the early-modern catechizing putatively patterned after it. Chapter two explores the ways English reformers adopted European catechisms and developed their own forms. Like some on the continent, many English Protestants linked catechizing with confirmation. However, while this religious instruction had a role in the church, it was also conducted in other institutions. With attention to the continuities and adaptations Puritan colonists employed in catechizing, chapter three examines the use of these manuals in colonial households, schools, churches, and evangelistic projects, and in the long-lived schoolbook, the *New England Primer*.

Chapter four analyzes the doctrinal content of Puritan religious education, highlighting common themes among the several dozen catechisms written by New England ministers through the early eighteenth century. Having established what catechisms taught, the study turns attention in chapter

five to the experience of learning them, looking first at clerical advice on the process, and then at lay reports of these documents' roles in conversion. Chapter six traces ministers' efforts to use catechizing to bring children closer to full-communicant status. In debates over the "halfway covenant," in the mass covenant renewals of the 1670s, and in contentions over Solomon Stoddard's communion policies, clergy revisited the institution of Protestant confirmation, and constructed rites by which catechized youth could make mature commitment to the church. The conclusion notes catechisms' persistence in New England culture in the eighteenth century. These documents continued to provide doctrinal fundamentals, and as a feature of the *New England Primer*, they taught common religious and moral assumptions as they helped generations of children learn to read.

Chapter One. Instruction, Examination, and Confirmation: Catechizing from the Early Church to the Reformation

Introduction

Christian catechesis is as old as the church itself, but the printed, question-answer presentation of doctrine that we recognize as a catechism is substantially a product of the Reformation.¹ The verb "to catechize" derives from the Greek, meaning to inform by word of mouth, or sound out; ancient catechizing was instruction by oral repetition.² The early modern catechism was given shape and wide use by Martin Luther, who placed confidence in it as a means to correct popular ignorance, inculcate doctrine, and encourage Christian obedience. Following Luther's large and small catechisms, many reformers adopted the genre as a means to edify and purify the church. New England Puritans who composed and employed catechisms were drawing upon this early modern Protestant experience.

Sixteenth-century reformers invoked the practice of the early church in support of their catechizing, though a brief examination of primitive catechesis shows that early modern instruction differed in some important ways. For early Christians, instruction was connected to the rites of

¹ Gerard S. Sloyan, "Religious Education: From Early Christianity to Medieval Times," in *Shaping the Christian Message: Essays in Religious Education*, ed. Gerard S. Sloyan (New York, 1958), 3-4.

² Sloyan 5; St. Augustine, *First Catechetical Instruction*, ed. and trans. Joseph P. Christopher. Ancient Christian Writers Series (New York, 1978), 93-94n.

initiation for adults. Men and women who sought to enter the church had to learn elements of the faith before they were admitted to baptism and the Eucharist. Catechesis changed when adult initiation gave way to infant baptism. While the church in the Middle Ages did not bring baptismal candidates through a program of education, medieval primers and confessional manuals foreshadowed aspects of Reformation catechesis. From Christianity's first century through the Reformation, preparing the laity to partake of communion was a crucial purpose of catechizing.

Several sixteenth-century reformers made particularly significant contributions to establishing the early modern genre. Luther developed its basic form, fashioning a large catechism for teachers and a smaller one for laity to memorize and recite. Like Luther, other Protestants perceived catechizing as an appropriate way to school children in the faith; further, they attached catechizing to a new confirmation ceremony, which they viewed as a suitable way to mark youth as qualified for communion. Martin Bucer invoked early-church precedent to justify the confirmation rite he used to complete programs of catechizing. John Calvin also had children profess doctrine before they were accepted at communion, and used his catechism to foster the discipline of church and community. Also warmly embraced in Reformed circles was the Heidelberg Catechism, which subordinated traditional staples, like commandments, creed, and Lord's Prayer, to its discussion of redemption.

As they guided people away from the rituals and penitential system of the Catholic church, Protestant leaders realized that they needed positive means to cultivate Christian knowledge and behavior. They applied catechisms to this dilemma, valuing them as instruments to teach and to test the faith of the people. The sixteenth-century catechists who devised these manuals not only educated their own flocks, but pioneered a means of religious instruction that would prove popular in the old world and the new.

Catechesis in the Early Church

In the primitive church, catechesis imparted teaching on faith and morals through homilies or private instruction. Its content varied according to its audience: to *accedentes*, those interested in the faith but not yet Christians, the gospel was presented in the context of God's gracious work from Creation through the coming of Christ. This *narratio* of the work of salvation situated new Christians among the faithful from ages past and yet to come. Mystagogical catechesis was addressed to those qualified for baptism, entrusting the Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, and sacraments only to those who been prepared for full initiation into the church.³ In the first centuries of the church, catechetical instruction was predominantly oral.

³ *First Catechetical Instruction* 3-5, 93-95; Sloyan 17-21.

Many church fathers, including Origen, Irenaeus, Chrysostom, and Ambrose, preached catechetical homilies.⁴

One of the clearest depictions of the context and function of early-church catechesis comes from the fifth-century writings of St. Augustine. Augustine's *De Catechizandis Rudibus* (*On Catechizing the Uninstructed*) treats the teaching of *rudes*, those presumed to have no knowledge of Christianity. It was intended to assist a catechist in conveying instruction orally to learners; it was not a manual for newcomers to Christianity to study on their own. Written about 405, the manual illustrates characteristic features of Christian education in this period. *De Catechizandis Rudibus* remained silent on the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and baptism and communion, but presented the *narratio* and gospel with moral exhortations. This material was to be learned and believed but not memorized. By briefly outlining the story of God's merciful acts in history, Augustine urged new Christians to consider themselves in the context of that story.⁵

Instruction like that presented in *De Catechizandis Rudibus* would be transmitted to new believers at the start

⁴ The earliest printed catechetical work is the first-century *Didache*; the author of this work is unknown but thought to have lived in Egypt, Syria, or Palestine. Sloyan 4-11; Leonel L. Mitchell, "The Ancient Church: The Development of Catechesis in the Third and Fourth Centuries: From Hippolytus to Augustine," in *A Faithful Church: Issues in the History of Catechesis*, eds. John H. Westerhoff III and O.C. Edwards, Jr. (Wilton, CT, 1982), 49-52, 66-74; Marvin J. Taylor, "A Historical Introduction to Religious Education," in *Religious Education: A Comprehensive Survey*, ed. Marvin J. Taylor (New York, 1960), 13.

⁵ *First Catechetical Instruction* 21.

of their preparation for baptism. After they accepted this teaching, *accedentes* were sealed with salt and the sign of the cross,⁶ and had entered the catechumenate. Called by the name of Christian but not yet fully incorporated into the church, catechumens could not partake of baptism or the Eucharist. When they notified the bishop of their desire and readiness for baptism, they became *competentes*. During Lent, *competentes* undertook an intense period of instruction and asceticism with fasting and exorcisms. In the week before baptism, the bishop would "hand over" to them the creed and the Lord's Prayer, in the *traditio symboli*. A week later, in their *redditio symboli*, catechumens recited back the formulae that now defined them as Christians. In a ceremony at the Easter vigil, candidates renounced the devil, professed faith, and were baptized. Now called *illumini* or *neophyti*, they could come to communion, and they began to learn the meaning of the sacraments they had just received.⁷

In Augustine's day, converts were initiated in a unified rite after a period of catechesis: baptism, the laying on of hands, sealing with chrism, and then the

⁶ *First Catechetical Instruction* 82, 131, 146. The application of the cross on the forehead sealed the recipient as a Christian. The administration of salt symbolized the preserving, purifying, and cleansing of the catechumen.

⁷ This description of the process of Easter initiation draws upon Thomas M. Finn, "It Happened One Saturday Night: Ritual and Conversion in Augustine's North Africa," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 58 (1990): 589-616, and F. van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop*, trans. Brian Battershaw and G.W. Lamb (London, 1961), 347-387.

Eucharist were administered together, and the new Christian was brought into full communion with the church. The process presumed an adult catechumenate. When, through the birth of children to Christian parents and the coerced conversion of foreign peoples, infant baptism prevailed, qualification for the sacraments and the meaning of catechesis changed significantly. An infant could be baptized by a priest, but because only a bishop could perform the laying on of hands and chrismation, Christians might not receive these until much later. Chrismation and laying on of hands were incorporated into the sacrament of confirmation, which emphasized these blessings rather than examination of Christian knowledge.⁸

Instead of having the new Christian profess faith at initiation, parents and godparents in the Middle Ages testified on children's behalf at baptism, and pledged to teach them the Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, and Ave Maria. The elements of catechesis were drawn from this material pledged at baptism.⁹ Absent the requirement of

⁸ Faustus of Riez, a late-fifth-century French bishop, noted that the "episcopal impositions of the hand" in confirmation strengthened the baptized person, and that the sacrament was necessary for all the faithful, "that they may be full Christians." See Milton McC. Gatch, "The Medieval Church: Basic Christian Education from the Decline of Catechesis to the Rise of the Catechisms," in Westerhoff and Edwards, *A Faithful Church*, 83-86. See also J.D.C. Fisher, *Confirmation Then and Now*, Alcuin Club Collections 60 (London, 1978), 133-36, and *Christian Initiation in the Reformation Period*, Alcuin Club Collections 51 (London, 1970), 160-61.

⁹ Gatch points out that the staples of catechesis were drawn from the liturgy of initiation in baptism. See Gatch 86-89. Johann Michael Reu notes that parents were bidden to instruct their children, but, "[n]ot seldom the failure to

instruction before initiation, church-directed catechesis was largely abandoned in the Middle Ages, though there is evidence of continued instruction in other capacities. Some clerical and lay leaders made efforts to educate the laity, providing teaching on doctrinal basics in written works or homilies. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, delivered catechetical sermons in the last lenten season of his life; in these sermons, the Angelic Doctor himself taught on the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Law.¹⁰ Despite evidence of such instruction, however, even historians with generally favorable appraisals of the medieval church regret the decay of Christian education in the period.¹¹

Instruction and Confession in the Medieval Church

The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 placed new emphasis on religious education. The Council's twenty-first canon, *Omnis utriusque sexus*, required all of the faithful seven years and older to confess mortal sins to a priest and

fulfill this duty is mentioned in the confessional." Reu, *Catechetics* (Chicago, 1918), 70-74.

¹⁰ Several printed instructional works survive from this period. Alcuin of York composed a text which some have credited as the first catechism, but this work does not take the form later recognized as standard for the genre. Catechetical homilies were another source of instruction. Sloyan 23-28, 31-34; Gatch 91-95; Josef Andreas Jungmann, *Handing on the Faith: A Manual of Catechetics*, trans. A. N. Fuerst (Freiburg, 1959), 14-16.

¹¹ Josef Jungmann, a historian generally appreciative of religious culture in the middle ages, concedes that "[t]his era contented itself too easily with religious usage and paid too little attention to the religious formation of the mind, knowledge and the understanding." See Jungmann, *Handing on the Faith*, 18-19, and "Religious Education in Late Medieval Times," in *Shaping the Christian Message*, 58.

receive communion at least once each year, at Easter. Qualifications for communion included the age to enable the exercise of reason and the knowledge to examine oneself and repent. To fulfill their new obligations, laypeople and clergy alike were to learn a minimal amount of doctrine and be able to identify sin. The requirement of annual confession and communion spurred the creation of new varieties of literature for both clergy and laity. Bishops and archbishops ordered that vernacular preaching on the commandments, Creed, and Lord's Prayer be performed regularly each year. Recognizing that many parish priests were incapable of giving such instruction, some bishops offered manuals to equip clergy to perform these duties.¹² In England, church leaders responded to *Omnis utriusque sexus* by issuing synodal constitutions obliging parish priests to educate their flocks, and supplying manuals on doctrine and hearing confessions.¹³ John Peckham's Lambeth Constitutions set the standard for future works. In 1357 John de Thoresby, Archbishop of York, composed a doctrinal manual based on the Lambeth constitutions. Thoresby's manual, called the *Lay Folks' Catechism*, was first printed

¹² W. A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1955), 191-92; Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, 1977), 21-22.

¹³ Two dissertations on English catechisms provide especially helpful background on this medieval instructional material. See Lynne Diane Durbin, "Education by Catechism: Development of the Sixteenth Century English Catechism," (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1987), 27-28; Margarita Patricia Hutchison, "Social and Religious Change: The Case of the English Catechism, 1560-1640," (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1984), 17-18.

in Latin and then in the vernacular. The book was versified in English to help users memorize it and offered indulgences to any who would learn it by heart. Even John Wycliffe found the *Lay Folks' Catechism* useful, though his version came with "large interpolations of Lollard doctrine."¹⁴

These works can be counted distant relatives of the early modern catechism as they strove, by doctrinal education and examination, to prepare clergy and laity for confession and communion. *Omnis utriusque sexus* prompted the development of *summae* for confessors, which taught priests how to weigh sins, evaluate contrition, and mediate forgiveness. Because priests had the power of the keys, they had to be able to lead penitents to full confession.¹⁵ In the later Middle Ages, manuals for confessors were supplemented by material for the laity. Some works sought to instruct the people in doctrinal fundamentals. John Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris, wrote several forms of instruction, including *On Drawing the Little Ones to Christ*, and *L'ABC des simples gens*, a doctrinal summary for the unlearned.¹⁶ Latin primers led readers through the

¹⁴ Thomas Frederick Simmons and Henry Edward Nolloth, eds., *The Lay Folks' Catechism, or the English and Latin Versions of Archbishop Thoresby's Instruction for the People*. Early English Text Society, 118 (1901; Reprint, Millwood, NY, 1987), xvii-xxvii; Quotation from Pantin, 212-13.

¹⁵ Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 28-53, and, "The Summa for Confessors as an Instrument of Social Control," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, eds. Charles Trinkaus and Heiko Oberman (Leiden, 1974), 103-107.

¹⁶ Pantin 221-236; Durbin 28-30, 37-39; Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 45-46.

prayers of the church; these works contained the liturgy of the hours, plus variable additions, including a creed, the Ten Commandments, and psalms.¹⁷

Paralleling the *summae* for confessors were manuals that taught laypeople how to avoid and confess sins.¹⁸ Many of these texts posed as "mirrors" for the faithful: with titles like "Mirror of a Christian" (*Christenspiegel*), "Mirror of Sinners" (*Spiegel des Suenders*), or "Confessional Mirror" (*Beichtspiegel*), they held up the Apostles' Creed and Lord's Prayer as definitions of what a Christian was supposed to believe and pray. But their doctrinal statements were overshadowed by their definitions of sins, punishments, and need for contrition. They were tools for introspection, giving users a standard against which to judge themselves in order to prepare for confession.¹⁹

¹⁷ The content of primers could vary substantially. Most English primers followed the use of Sarum. See Charles C. Butterworth, *The English Primers (1529-1545): Their Publication and Connection with the English Bible and Reformation in England* (Philadelphia, 1953), 1-5. The relation of primers to English catechisms will be examined in chapter two, below.

¹⁸ Denis Janz, ed., *Three Reformation Catechisms: Catholic, Anabaptist, Lutheran* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), 17-18; Johannes Geffcken treats illustrated doctrinal manuals that he calls "picture catechisms." See Geffcken, *Bilderkatechismus des fünfzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1855), 20-24, 29; Eginio Weidenhiller, *Untersuchungen zur deutschsprachigen katechetischen Literatur des späten Mittelalters* (Munich, 1965); Steven E. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven, 1975), 16-32.

¹⁹ Other popular works of this type were Stephan Lantzkranna's *Heavenly Road (Himmelstrasse)* and the anonymous 1474 *The Soul's Consolation (Seele Trost)*. See Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 46.

Deitrich Coelde's *Fruitful Mirror, or a Small Handbook for Christians*, is a noteworthy example of the genre. Coelde's manual was first printed in 1470, and subsequent editions were repeatedly reprinted, translated, and read in Europe on the eve of the Reformation.²⁰ Coelde's *Fruitful Mirror* opens with the creed and Ten Commandments, and then gives enumerated groups of commands and sins which the faithful must observe: the "five commandments of the holy church," requiring attendance at mass, reception of the sacrament, and obedience to church fasts and excommunications; the "seven deadly sins," followed by "the nine alien sins for which many people are damned," which concern the abetting of another's misdeeds; the "mute sins against nature," including murder, ill treatment of widows and orphans, and the sexual sins for which "God hesitated so long, i.e., up to five thousand years, before becoming man." Following are the six sins against the Holy Spirit, the sins of the tongue, and the six conditions God requires before forgiving sins. The "seven points by which one can tell whether he is in the grace of God or not" precede instructions on coming to confession and receiving the sacrament's blessings. Steven Ozment, judging Coelde's catechism to be typical of the late-medieval genre, observes its tendency to foster "the most rigorous introspection and

²⁰ Coelde's first edition appeared in 1470. The second edition, "The Mirror of a Christian Man," went through twenty-nine editions between 1480-1520. See Janz 7-8; Ozment, 29-32.

discipline, a kind of laicized monastic routine and 'wordly asceticism'."²¹

Early church catechesis and medieval confessional manuals can both be considered relatives of the Reformation catechism, though Protestants preferred to acknowledge their ties to the former. Primitive catechesis framed a body of religious instruction necessary for those who would join the church and partake of its sacraments. Like sixteenth-century "larger" catechisms, some medieval manuals taught parish clergy how to present the Apostles' Creed, Ten Commandments, and Lord's Prayer to the laity. Primers acquainted lay readers with the prayers of the church, and confessional manuals helped them to examine themselves according to the church's doctrine and observance. Early Protestants were, in some respects, doing a new thing in creating their printed, question-answer catechisms, but also drew upon older types of lay instruction in the church.

Catechisms in the Reformation

Both humanists and Protestant leaders lamented popular ignorance and the excesses of late medieval piety. Humanists esteemed instruction as a way to cultivate purer worship: Erasmus lent his efforts to the teaching of youth, and in England, John Colet's *Catechyzon* imparted to the boys

²¹ Janz notes that Coelde followed the order typical of these manuals by placing the Creed before the Ten Commandments. Janz 17-18, 46-69; Ozment, *Reformation in the Cities*, 29-32.

at St. Paul's School doses of traditional doctrine along with encouragements to virtue.²² Protestants even more aggressively promoted religious instruction as a means to change popular beliefs and practices. While others had experimented with instructional dialogues in the 1520s, Luther's two catechisms, printed in 1529, made the form popular.²³ Luther set out to teach old and young alike, but came to invest high hopes in children who, when catechized, would grow up to believe and defend correct doctrine. Lutherans sought to harness powers of the state, school, and family to inculcate faith in children, and deployed catechisms as instruments of reform.

Martin Luther: Catechisms for Reformation

The best way to bring purity to the church, to Luther's mind, was not to strip cathedrals or smash images, but to educate people about the truth of Christianity and enable them to turn from popish errors. Luther envisioned a voluntary system of instruction in which adults would

²² Durbin estimates the date of the *Catechyzon's* printing to be 1510. The *Catechyzon* contained standard doctrinal material but without the question-answer form of later catechisms. See Durbin 86-88; Berard L. Malthaler, *The Catechism Yesterday and Today: the Evolution of a Genre* (Collegeville, MN, 1995), 16-18; Ernst-Wilhelm Kohls, *Evangelische Katechismen der Reformationszeit vor und neben Luthers Kleinem Katechismus. Texte zur Kirchen- und Theologie Geschichte* 16 (Gutersloh, 1971), 21-26.

²³ Reformers including Sam, Althamer, Capito, Brenz, and Agricola wrote simple forms of instruction in 1525-1528, in advance of Luther's small catechism. Kohls 8-10. See also Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521-1532*, trans. James C. Schaaf (Minneapolis, 1990) 2: 273.

willingly come to hear pastors expound the faith, and fathers would teach religion to their families. In the early 1520s, Luther wrote several explanatory works on the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Apostles' Creed. To help people prepare for the sacrament, he preached instructional sermons during Lent and instituted pre-communion examinations. Though the Catholic sacrament of confession had plagued Luther with doubt and guilt, he considered retaining a version of it to afford people a chance to admit sins and claim God's forgiveness. But his efforts to teach and encourage the laity seemed to have little effect. During visitations in Saxony in 1528 and 1529, Luther was disheartened to find that many remained ignorant of Christian doctrine and the sacraments. Having expected the laity to embrace instruction gladly, Luther faced a problem that would plague Protestant reformers: once Catholic rules had been lifted, the people used their liberty from obligatory fasts, confessions, and contributions to indulge the flesh.²⁴

Frustrated at clerical negligence and popular apathy, Luther composed two catechisms in the spring of 1529 to serve as more effective instruments of pedagogy and piety. His *Deutsch Catechism*, usually called the "larger catechism," presented substantial expositions of doctrinal

²⁴ Brecht 2: 271-273; Gerald Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning*, 158-59; Reu, *Catechetics*, 128-32. See the introduction to Luther's small catechism in Mark A. Noll, ed., *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1991), 59-61.

points to aid the clergy in teaching the people. Luther hoped ministers also would use it in their own devotions, as he did himself: "I must still read and study the catechism daily, yet I cannot master it as I wish, but must remain a child and pupil of the catechism, and I do it gladly."²⁵

Luther's smaller catechism (*Der kleine Catechismus*)

presented doctrine in a simple question-answer format.

Luther esteemed these catechisms highly among his works and anticipated their success, exclaiming, "I declare, I have made a reformation that will make the popes' ears ring and hearts burst."²⁶

The structure of the small catechism reflects themes characteristic of Luther's theology. Reversing the order of medieval manuals like Coelde's, Luther placed the Ten Commandments before the Apostles' Creed: the demands of the law were to make students feel their need for grace. Faith meets Christians only after they have been driven to it by knowledge of sin. Following the commandments, the catechism described the creed. Rather than naming each article, the respondent discussed why "I believe that God created me and all that exists," how "Jesus Christ, true God...is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature," and how in the church "he daily and abundantly forgives all my sins." With confidence the student then explained the

²⁵ Brecht 2:277-78; Strauss, *Luther's House*, 159.

²⁶ Luther perceived his catechisms as key instruments in reform. As Strauss observes, "[f]ew of his works received more of his care than these unpretentious compendiums of basic religious knowledge, and none was closer to his heart." Strauss, *Luther's House*, 155-59.

Lord's Prayer and discoursed about the sacraments of baptism, confession, and communion. Appended to this doctrinal material were morning, evening, and mealtime prayers, and a *Haustafel*, definitions of domestic relations and mutual duties. Acknowledging that Luther did aim to instill morality in youth, Steven Ozment finds the smaller catechism "a study in freedom and simplicity" compared to late-medieval manuals.²⁷

In the preface to the small catechism, Luther explained to pastors how the work should be taught. At first he did not insist that all clergy use his catechism, but advised that teachers must repeat whichever form they chose in exactly the same way every time they presented the material. They should read a catechism word for word so that people could memorize it. Luther considered repetition the most effective way to impress (*einbilden*) knowledge in their hearts.²⁸ After learners had mastered the short form, the pastor should expound a large catechism to deepen understanding of the obligations and blessings of the faith. Learning this material could be empowering for ordinary people, Luther thought, boasting that youth could know more

²⁷ Text of Luther's catechism cited from the English translation in Noll, *Confessions and Catechisms*, 76-77. Commandments, Creed, Lord's Prayer, and sacraments are considered the full content of a catechism. Catechetical works before Luther's usually did not treat all of these parts. Luther included confession, in addition to baptism and communion, among the sacraments. Kohls 9; Ozment, *Reformation in the Cities*, 155.

²⁸ Luther believed questions and answers would drive doctrine "home to the hearts" of believers. Strauss, *Luther's House*, 152-55; Brecht 2:274.

about the Word than a university scholar, because in the catechism they learned the "Lord's Prayer, the Creed, the Ten Commandments, what confession, baptism, prayer, the cross, living, dying, and the sacrament of the altar are, and about what marriage, civil government, father and mother, wife and child, man and son, servant and maid are."²⁹

Other clergymen received Luther's catechisms enthusiastically. Many followed his lead and wrote their own; hundreds were written in sixteenth-century Germany.³⁰ But these catechisms were received with less enthusiasm among the people. To Luther's dismay, visitations continued to reveal ignorance and superstition. For a time, he could fault the Catholic priests who had failed to teach them, but since the catechism had been offered, those who refused to accept instruction should be rejected from the church. Luther would tell the disobedient that "they deny Christ and are no Christians," and would forbid them to come to the Lord's Supper or stand as sponsors in baptism.³¹

²⁹ Quoted in Brecht 2:275.

³⁰ Several German collections attest to the proliferation of catechism-writing in the sixteenth century. Johann Michael Reu's five-volume collection includes a variety of catechisms from German-speaking areas, but as Strauss notes, "Huge as it is, his collection of tests and synopses is far from complete, nor would it be possible for a single scholar to catch every title." Strauss, *Luther's House*, 164-65; Reu, *Quellen zur Geschichte des kirchlichen Unterrichts in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands zwischen 1530 und 1600*. 5 vols. (Guterloh, 1911); Ferdinand Cohrs, *Die Evangelischen Katechismusversuche vor Luthers Enchiridion*. 5 vols. (Berlin, 1900-1907; reprint Hildesheim, 1978.)

³¹ Noll, *Confessions and Catechisms*, 62-65; Brecht 2:275.

Frustrated with parents' failure to teach their children, Luther came to expect more from the state. Once hoping for voluntary participation, he made catechesis obligatory. Lutheran cities and principalities passed orders requiring that all boys and girls attend school where they would learn the catechism. As theological disagreement divided Protestants, Lutheran authorities sought to preserve orthodoxy, no longer encouraging pastors to use whichever catechetical form they wished, but mandating use of Luther's.³² Earlier, Luther had expected the people would learn to read the Bible, but experience made him consider the catechism a more secure means to introduce them to the gospel. Gerald Strauss and Richard Gawthrop suggest that Lutherans used catechisms so avidly because these manuals were safer to entrust to the laity than was scripture.³³

Though Luther and his peers invested much hope and labor in catechizing, the project of educating the laity in Lutheran Germany was not as successful as they wished. Strauss proclaims the "unprecedented venture" of Lutheran catechizing a failure. Visitation records reveal complaints of children who can say no prayers, teenagers who refuse to go to catechism classes, and adults who believe in magic. Strauss suggests that the catechisms' heavy emphasis on morality, especially obedience to parents, masters, and

³² Strauss, *Luther's House*, 165-67, 174-75.

³³ Richard Gawthrop and Gerald Strauss, "Protestantism and Literacy in Early Modern Germany," *Past and Present* 104 (1984): 34-37.

rulers, made them more suited to solidifying the social order than to firing up piety.³⁴

Resistance to learning the catechism certainly frustrated Lutheran leaders. Still, instruction did bear some fruit. Though Luther intended learners to do more than memorize the catechism, he began his efforts at a time when the "mere" ability to memorize and recite the Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, and Apostles' Creed was an achievement. Beyond the success or failure of catechesis in sixteenth-century Germany, the texts themselves helped shape strategies of religious pedagogy among Protestants and Catholics alike.³⁵ In pioneering the catechism, Luther and his colleagues opened a new medium for reform. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would witness a flood of these documents, devised to train the laity, especially children, in the faith of Protestants.

³⁴ Showing no mild distaste for the material Lutherans asked children to memorize, Strauss seems relieved that pedagogical methods were so poor, since students mercifully must have forgotten their lessons: "Common sense will tell us that such cadences went in and out of children's ears without leaving as heavy a burden of shame as they were meant to induce." Strauss, *Luther's House*, 174-75, 209-11, 241, 303-305. See similar commentary in Strauss, "Reformation and Pedagogy: Educational Thought and Practice in the Lutheran Reformation," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval Religion*, 272-93, and Strauss, "The State of Pedagogical Theory," 69-89.

³⁵ Bellarmine, Canisius, and other prominent Catholic leaders produced catechisms after the Council of Trent. Strauss, *Luther's House*, 171-72.

Martin Bucer: Catechizing for Confirmation

Martin Bucer also eagerly embraced the catechism as an instrument of reform. In addition to writing several of his own, Bucer linked catechisms to a non-sacramental version of confirmation, designed to test children's faith and qualify them for the Lord's Supper. A former Dominican, Bucer came under the influence of Luther and left the order. He arrived in Strasbourg in 1523, and by 1531 had become unofficial head of the city's churches. Along with Wolfgang Capito, Matthaus Zell, and Caspar Hedio, he led church reform in Strasbourg. The temper of the city was comparatively cautious and tolerant, which provided both opportunities and frustrations for the reformers. The city's populace generally accepted Protestantism, but its tolerance also attracted religious radicals unwelcome elsewhere, and to Bucer's dismay, numerous spiritualists and anabaptists flocked there in the mid-1520s.³⁶ Like Luther, he was also frustrated to find that the people, having thrown off the "popish yoke," were unwilling to assume the "yoke of Christ." Bucer perceived that catechizing could help on both fronts: instruction could encourage the populace to take up Christian beliefs and duties, and could

³⁶ Amy Nelson Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ: Martin Bucer and Church Discipline* (Kirkville, MO, 1994), 67, and "Church Discipline and Moral Reformation in the Thought of Martin Bucer," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 22 (1991): 445. See the treatment of anabaptist activity in Strasbourg in Miriam U. Chrisman, *Strasbourg and the Reform: A Study in the Process of Change* (New Haven, 1967), 177-200.

help the church purify communion without abandoning infant baptism.³⁷

Bucer proposed mandatory catechetical classes for the city's youth. Parents would bring children and servants to be instructed, and these would be examined on their knowledge and conviction before being admitted to the Lord's Supper. Bucer recognized that Catholic confession had tormented the faithful with introspection and doubt, but it also had offered an opportunity to instruct and to inspect beliefs and morals. Catechesis of the young, followed by public examination and profession of faith, could help fill the gap left by the abolition of confession. Rejecting confirmation as a sacrament, Bucer devised an "evangelical confirmation" to complete the church status of the already baptized.³⁸

Other critics had lambasted sacramental confirmation before Bucer proposed his purified ceremony. Even before the Reformation, John Wycliffe declared anointing with oil to be "a frivolous rite which cannot be derived from scripture." Some humanists also maligned it, rejecting the authenticity of the ancient sources on which confirmation was grounded. Protestants attacked confirmation, claiming it had no scriptural foundation and condemning it as a way

³⁷ The term "yoke of Christ" comes from Burnett's discussion, used to describe the teaching, oversight, and punitive institutions that Bucer desired to employ in a system of church discipline. Burnett, *Yoke of Christ*, 1-8, 35-36, 67-68.

³⁸ Burnett uses the phrase "evangelical confirmation" to distinguish Bucer's practice from the Catholic practice. Burnett, "Church Discipline," 445.

bishops lorded authority over the people and denigrated the sacrament of baptism. Luther derided confirmation as "monkey play" (*Affenspiel*), and though he was willing to accept some examination in its place, he did not write a German order of confirmation.³⁹ The followers of John Hus developed an alternative to confirmation in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. As Amos Comenius recorded, children among the Bohemian Brethren were taught at home and in school, and then publicly examined in the faith and asked to renew the covenant entered with God at their baptism. After children recited the creed together, the minister laid hands on them and prayed for them.⁴⁰

Bucer championed a ceremony along these lines. He deplored Catholic confirmation as a "children's game contemptuous of God." Rome had ruined a ceremony which, in his understanding, used to operate effectively to test the faith of children who had come of age. This abuse of confirmation had impeded religious instruction: it was the fault of the "popish church" that "the catechism is neglected....when children grow up and come to the age of reason they are not urged to make a public confession of

³⁹ Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, 169-73. Though Luther himself did not devise a confirmation ceremony, numerous church orders in Lutheran territories included some such rite. Some, particularly among Scandinavian Lutherans, had catechetical examinations for children without a public ceremony; others employed a ceremony closer to the traditional confirmation rite or expressly devised to substitute for it. See Arthur C. Repp, *Confirmation in the Lutheran Church* (St. Louis, 1964), 15-59.

⁴⁰ Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, 160-61, 165-68; Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. Reprint ed. (New York, 1877; Grand Rapids, MI, 1967), 1: 565-80.

their faith...and to submit themselves gladly to the discipline and admonitions of the church." Bucer advocated a public ceremony consisting of a profession of faith and pledge of obedience. He justified his new rite by likening it to early church initiation.⁴¹ In his evangelical confirmation, children would declare the articles of the catechism and then agree to "faithfully act and live in accordance" with that profession. This ceremony became an important element of Bucer's system of church discipline.⁴²

Since 1526, Bucer and his fellow reformers had used catechisms to teach the young in Strasburg. His colleague Wolfgang Capito had written one in 1527, and in the 1530s and 1540s Bucer composed several of his own. In his first catechism, Bucer addressed the anabaptist charge that impure persons were admitted to the Lord's Supper. Agreeing that it was not acceptable to admit all the baptized to communion without first instructing and testing them, he recommended catechizing to build and examine Christian knowledge. In Bucer's 1534 work, the child began by identifying himself as a Christian by virtue of baptism, and then discussed the

⁴¹ Burnett, "Church Discipline," 445. Fisher argues that although reformers believed they were imitating early church practice, early confirmation was not a ceremony emphasizing profession of faith: "it is quite clear what confirmation originally was not---it had nothing to do with personal confession of the faith by those who had been too young to do this at their baptism: it was not an act of self-commitment." Fischer, *Confirmation Then and Now*, 137-138.

⁴² W. Diehl calls Bucer the "father of evangelical confirmation." See Diehl, *Zur Geschichte der Konfirmation: Beiträge aus der hessische Kirchengeschichte* (Giessen, 1897); Burnett, "Church Discipline," 444; Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, 174-177.

Creed, sacraments, and Lord's Prayer. Bucer's 1537 catechism was shorter catechism, with similar content. His 1543 form, in contrast, discussed the structure of the church and the duties of a Christian. A 1549 catechism contained text similar to the earlier forms, but was prefaced with an ABC and featured both Latin and German text.⁴³

Bucer and his colleagues repeatedly beseeched the city council to make catechizing mandatory, institute examinations, and strengthen church discipline. While Strasbourg balked at some of these changes, Bucer lent his assistance to reform projects elsewhere. In drafting church orders (*Kirchenordnungen*) for Ulm, Ziegenhain, and Cassel, he linked catechizing to church discipline; he offered confirmation as the means to bring baptized, catechized children into the worshiping community.⁴⁴ Under Bucer's plans, children in these cities were to attend catechizing sessions, and be examined at Christmas, Easter, or Pentecost. The pastor would lay hands on the children, "thus confirming them in the name of the Lord," and then would "admit them to the table of the Lord" in accordance with their promise to abide by Christian discipline. Catechesis thus became a means to prepare the baptized to partake of the Lord's Supper. Bucer used confirmation to

⁴³ Burnett, *Yoke of Christ*, 60; Reu, *Quellen zur Geschichte des kirchlichen Unterrichts*, 1:23-65, 67-105.

⁴⁴ Repp 31. Repp names the confirmation ceremony Bucer devised for the Zeigenhain *Kirchenordnungen* the "first confirmation, in the modern sense, in Lutheran history."

demonstrate children's commitment to the church and readiness for the sacrament.⁴⁵ His formulation of this new ceremony influenced church leaders, like Philip Melanchthon, to institute similar confirmation practices.⁴⁶

In 1542 Bucer supported the attempt of the Archbishop of Cologne, Hermann von Wied, to reform the church in that city. Bucer collaborated with other reformers on the document detailing the proposed church order, known in English as Hermann's *Consultations* (*Einfaltige Bedencken*). Like the other church orders Bucer authored, Hermann's *Consultations* included a confirmation ceremony. To Bucer's regret, the document did not bring reform to fruition: the city rejected Hermann's plans and the archbishop was removed. But the *Consultations*, along with Bucer's other *Kirchenordnungen*, influenced Protestants in other parts of Europe in their attempts to purify and rebuild the church.⁴⁷

Bucer's own tenure in Strasbourg was threatened when the city submitted to the Augsburg Interim, the pro-Catholic decree imposed by Charles V. In 1549 he fled to England. He accepted a professorship at Cambridge and, in the remainder of his life, gave counsel to England's church leaders. In 1550, Bucer completed his treatise on

⁴⁵ Burnett, *Yoke of Christ*, 60, 68-69, 84-85; Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, 179-80.

⁴⁶ For Wittenberg, Melanchthon deemed it "most necessary that catechetical instruction be held on specific days in all the churches....To such instruction confirmation might be added, namedly, that when a child has reached the age of discretion, he be required to make a public confession of faith and asked whether he will remain in this one divine doctrine and church." See Repp 47.

⁴⁷ Burnett, *Yoke of Christ*, 116-17, 145-66.

Christian society, *De Regno Christi*, which he dedicated to Edward VI.⁴⁸ In this work, as in his other writings, Bucer pointed to the importance of catechisms and confirmation. In the Christian community the book envisioned, baptized children would be

diligently catechized and instructed in the doctrine of Christ, so that they may make for themselves publicly in church the profession of their faith which they were unable to do when they were baptized, confessing their sins, and embracing with a most grateful heart the grace of Baptism conferred on them in infancy, renouncing the world and Satan, and pledging themselves to the obedience of Christ.⁴⁹

Bucer paralleled the "personal profession of faith and Christian obedience" that he thought adults should give before baptism, with a profession baptized children would make after they were catechized. Those who refused instruction or would not make a profession Bucer would expel: "if any do not permit themselves to be catechized...they ought to be rejected from the company of saints and the communion of the sacraments." England did not achieve the Christian society Bucer envisioned, but its reformers did take to heart his counsel on catechesis. Many English Protestants would come to understand reformed confirmation as an appropriate cap to a course of catechizing, a way to prepare children to receive

⁴⁸ Burnett, "Church Discipline," 455; Burnett, *Yoke of Christ*, 207-209; Wilhelm Pauck, ed., *Melanchthon and Bucer*, The Library of Christian Classics, Ichthus Edition (Philadelphia, 1969), 158-159.

⁴⁹ Pauck 227-29.

communion.⁵⁰

John Calvin: Catechism in Christian Society

When John Calvin first arrived in Geneva in 1536, he found that its residents had destroyed images and attacked Catholic practices, but had not adopted a reformed theology or worship. With his colleague Guillaume Farel, he drafted a confession of faith to which all Genevans should subscribe. When the city's Small Council rejected their plans and expelled the two reformers in 1538, Calvin took refuge in Strasbourg, where he observed the reform strategies of Martin Bucer. Geneva called Calvin back in 1541, and he returned on the condition that the city accept his Ecclesiastical Ordinances and instruction for children. Calvin later recalled, "Upon my return from Strasbourg, I wrote the catechism hastily, for I would never have accepted this ministry if they had not pledged me these two things; namely, to keep the catechism and the discipline." The catechism was integral to Calvin's efforts to bring the city to right belief and worship.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Quotations from Bucer's *De Regno Christi* in Pauck 227-229. See also Burnett, *Yoke of Christ*, 213-216; Basil Hall, "Martin Bucer in England," in *Martin Bucer: Reforming Church and Community*, ed. D. F. Wright (Cambridge, 1994), 158-159. Bucer also commented on the catechism and confirmation in the new Book of Common Prayer. For more extensive discussion of his comments on this topic, see chapter two, below.

⁵¹ For discussion of Calvin's church organization and discipline in Geneva, see E. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York, 1967), 95-97; Harro Höpfl, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin*, (Cambridge, 1982); Robert M. Kingdon, "The Control of Morals in Calvin's Geneva," in *The Social History of the Reformation*, eds. Lawrence P. Buck and Jonathan W.

Though he expected adults to purify their lives and beliefs, like other reformers, Calvin focused special attention on children.⁵² In order to fit children for communion, he suggested that they enter a program of catechesis. He required that students be taught in fifty-five Sunday lessons and tested on their knowledge before being admitted to the Lord's Supper for the first time.⁵³ Having learned doctrine from the catechism, the young would "give an account of their faith before the church." At age ten, a child should "present himself to the church," recite the catechism and be examined on "every article" of it, and be corrected if he misunderstood anything. This profession of faith would unite young members to the whole body so they could "with one mind worship the one God." Catechetical instruction, in Calvin's judgment, was an effective means to build up the community around a common faith.⁵⁴

Calvin shared with other Protestants contempt for Catholic confirmation, condemning it as "one of the most deadly wiles of Satan."⁵⁵ Like Bucer, he would supplant the former sacramental confirmation with a profession of faith

Zophy, (Columbus, OH, 1972), 3-16.

⁵² Höpfl notes that, "[s]ince the public institutions of the Christian polity were constructed for *aedificatio* and not merely for repression, it is only consequent that Calvin should have given much attention to the education of young and old alike. Höpfl 203.

⁵³ Monter, *Calvin's Geneva*, 103-106.

⁵⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill, ed., Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia, 1960), IV. 19.4-5.

⁵⁵ Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, 354-55.

to bring children into full communion. In the 1549 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin argued that Protestants should revive the custom of early Christians, in which "catechumens" were given the opportunity to assume full membership through a doctrinal examination:

In the early times it was the custom for the children of Christians after they had grown up to be brought before the bishop to fulfill that duty which was required of those who as adults offered themselves for baptism. For the latter sat among the catechumens until, duly instructed in the mysteries of the faith, they were able to make confession of their faith before the bishop and people. Therefore, those who had been baptized as infants, because they had not then made confession of faith before the church, were at the end of their childhood or at the beginning of adolescence again presented by their parents, and were examined by the bishop according to the form of the catechism, which was then in definite form and in common use.⁵⁶

Like Bucer, he would instate a practice he thought similar early-church confirmation to provide a way for grown, baptized children to show fidelity to the church. Calvin rejected confirmation as a sacrament but he realized the value of having children profess their faith in this kind of ceremony.

The catechism Calvin composed for Geneva's youth emphasized believers' duty to know and worship God rightly. In it, children did not claim Christian status by baptism, nor was the law held out to propel them to pleading for grace. Instead, the first question set proclaimed that the

⁵⁶ *Institutes*, IV. 19.4-5.

chief end of human life was to know God. The catechism further explained that believers must not merely to know about God, but they must learn in order that "we may honour him....That we be certain that He loves us, and desires to be our Father, and Savior." Learning the catechism would help children own the faith of the church. Calvin explicated knowledge of God through the Apostles' Creed. The Ten Commandments followed the creed, for Calvin emphasized that good works follow grace. Christians were not to try to earn God's favor through deeds, but should use godly obedience to express gratitude. The Lord's Prayer, finally, appeared as an element of right worship.⁵⁷

Calvin hoped the catechism would promote the unity and purity of the church inside Geneva and among Protestants throughout Europe. In the church, catechetical examinations could act as a filter between the membership created by baptism and those qualified for communion. Catholics had defended images as the books of the poor (*libri pauperum*),⁵⁸ but the uneducated would have no need for images once they learned this manual of doctrine. In Geneva, the catechism would defend against sectarianism and replace idolatry with right worship. Just as it brought together the pious within the city, Calvin hoped the catechism could advance reform

⁵⁷ Quotations come from the text of Calvin's *Catechism of the Church of Geneva*, in *Tracts and Treatises on the Doctrine and Worship of the Church*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance, Vol. 2. (Grand Rapids, MI, 1958), 25, 41-42, 62-64.

⁵⁸ For discussion of the Catholic defense of images as *libri pauperum*, see Carlos N.M. Eire, *War Against the Idols* (Cambridge, 1986), 19.

across Europe by unifying various Protestants. Radical English Protestants, including John Knox and other Marian exiles, embraced Calvin's catechism. The Geneva reformer eschewed controversy in the document, confessing his goal that the manual could be "common to all the churches." He hoped that those who accepted this doctrinal summary would make it "their formal symbol of Christian communion."⁵⁹

The Heidelberg Catechism: Professing Assurance

Protestants were far from unified in the Palatinate, where Lutherans contended with followers of Zwingli and Calvin in the 1550s. In 1559 Frederick III became Elector of the territory and purged the church of staunch Lutherans. He called Zacharias Ursinus to a theology chair and Caspar Olevianus to the pastorate in Heidelberg. Ursinus and Olevianus both blended Reformed faith with a desire for harmony as they collaborated on the Heidelberg Catechism. First printed in 1563 in German and also Latin, the catechism was translated into English shortly after. The catechism was designed to be irenic: its authors did not even attack Catholic dogma, though in the second printing, the Elector himself inserted a question condemning the mass.

Heidelberg's church leaders are credited with broad influence on English Protestants and New England Puritans, explicating the federal theology that underlay New England

⁵⁹ E. William Monter, "The Consistory of Geneva, 1559-1569," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance* 38 (1976): 467-84. Torrance, *Tracts and Treatises*, 34-36.

conceptions of divine covenants. Heidelberg's manual demonstrated how the classic staples of a catechism genre could be fitted within a doctrinal scheme. Further, this catechism prioritized the believer's need for assurance--a perennial concern for seventeenth-century Puritans. The catechisms' responses not only brought the student to recite religious information but to personalize it, to understand how doctrine could effect the comfort of the Christian.⁶⁰

The catechism was divided in three sections: part one reported the misery of man, part two proclaimed redemption, and part three taught thankfulness and obedience. The structure of the work emerged from its doctrinal logic, not from the catechetical staples themselves. Rather than beginning with either law or creed, the Heidelberg manual proclaimed the gospel--the fall, the need for redemption, and the work of Christ--*before* it introduced the standard formulation of this faith in the Apostles' Creed, which first appeared in article twenty-three.⁶¹ The catechism's first question asked students to describe their "only hope," and respondents were given a breathtaking profession of faith to speak in return, claiming, "[t]hat I...am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from the power of the devil." Respondents even were allowed to proclaim that the Holy Spirit "assures me of

⁶⁰ Schaff 1: 531-37.

⁶¹ Thomas F. Torrance, ed., *The School of Faith: Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London, 1959), 72.

everlasting life."⁶² Like other answers throughout the catechism, these prompted students to connect points of doctrine with the assurance they provided. Question twenty-seven, for instance, gave a definition of Providence, followed by question twenty-eight's practical query, "What benefit do we derive from the knowledge of God's creation and providence?" Question thirty-six asked, "What benefit do you receive from the holy conception and birth of Christ?" Question fifty-seven prompted, "What comfort do you derive from the resurrection of the body?"⁶³ The Heidelberg Catechism brought students to identify themselves with grace and to view Christian duties as an opportunities to demonstrate thankfulness to God.

In Heidelberg's church order, the catechism occupied a position between baptism and communion. Elector Frederick offered the catechism as a summary of doctrine to be used in churches and schools for the "rising generation." Like Hermann's *Consultations*, the Heidelberg catechism perhaps had more immediate influence beyond its home territory than within it. After Frederick's death in 1576, the Palatinate passed to Lutheran control and Luther's small catechism supplanted the Heidelberg form.⁶⁴ The Heidelberg catechism was, meanwhile, warmly adopted by other Protestants, including Dutch Reformed communities. It was later approved

⁶² Quotations of the text of the catechism are drawn from Torrance, *The School of Faith*, 69. See also Schaff, 1: 529-554.

⁶³ Torrance, *The School of Faith*, 73-79.

⁶⁴ Torrance, *The School of Faith*, 67; Schaff I:533-35.

by the Synod of Dort as "a most accurate compend of the orthodox Christian faith." Philip Schaff credits it as "the first Protestant catechism planted on American soil," as it crossed the Atlantic in 1609 with Dutch immigrants. The catechism was also repeatedly printed in England and found an appreciative audience among some Protestants there.⁶⁵

Conclusion

In the sixteenth century, Protestants produced catechisms by the hundreds, offering these manuals faith for the religious education of the laity. While these works were closely related to other devotional and educational literature of the period, they came to take particular forms and lend themselves to specific uses. Catechisms could be taught from the pulpit, in the household, or in school. Some were suited for the literate to read and learn, but the question-answer format could also be used in predominantly oral instruction. In either case, learners were not only to master the material but be able to speak it.

From the early church, catechesis had had a role in preparing of Christians for communion. The medieval church no longer cultivated a catechumenate, as infants were baptized and not subsequently required to profess their faith. But since 1215, Christians had to be examined in the confessional before they could take communion. Medieval confessional manuals were used to impart doctrine and assist

⁶⁵ Schaff 1:547-49.

users in repentance. To assume some of the functions of the discarded sacraments of confession and confirmation, many Protestants adopted pre-communion examinations for children who were baptized in the church. Catechetical instruction and profession became standard means to prepare children for the sacrament, and many Protestants formalized this usage in a confirmation ceremony.⁶⁶

By defining (or redefining) the familiar staples of the faith for their users, catechisms built confessional identities. Though they did not experience unmixed success in their instructional schemes, continental clergy counted catechesis a chief means to correct error and build up the church. English Protestants also perceived the potential of the genre, adapting its teaching methods and usage to suit their own projects. Placing faith in the flexibility and efficacy of the catechism as an instrument of reform, sixteenth-century Protestants developed the form that New England Puritans later adopted to edify the young.

⁶⁶ Some Protestants accepted the label "confirmation" for their ceremonies of this type, while others embraced the practice without the name. As demonstrated above, many sixteenth-century Lutherans employed a variety of confirmation, particularly after the pattern of Martin Bucer. The practice took deeper root in Lutheran communities in the seventeenth century, under the leading of Pietists, most notably Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705). Spener viewed confirmation as a "renewal of the covenant," a solemn public occasion for baptized, grown children to ratify baptismal promises, "to give witness of [their] personal faith or 'conversion,' and to accept the obligation to lead a Christian life," Arthur C. Repp explains. Repp 70.

Chapter Two. English Protestant Catechisms, 1548-1648

Introduction

English reformers adopted catechisms and continental precedents for their use. First written in the 1540s, English catechisms drew from both indigenous and continental strains of religious literature. The content of English catechisms varied: some remained close to traditional material, while others privileged new doctrinal emphases. In usage, these catechisms served several ends, educating the laity in the new faith, and forming a central part of the new rite of confirmation in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, several patterns had developed in English catechizing. First, experience demonstrated the utility of allowing numerous catechisms: the prayerbook's official form coexisted with a multitude of alternative catechisms. Catechists seemed to consider it quite acceptable--even necessary--to have many manuals to deploy in schooling people in the faith. Second, catechisms proved useful in institutions outside of the church, particularly schools and households. Third, while catechisms written early in this period explicated the Apostles' Creed, commandments, Lord's Prayer, and sometimes the sacraments, later manuals often de-emphasized these staples in favor of the theological principles of the writer.

English Protestants found catechisms versatile instruments. As a presentation of doctrine, a they could be used to expound articles of faith and examine knowledge. They also helped teach and practice reading. They could guide parents in instructing their children, ministers edifying their flocks, schoolmasters training their students. They were suitable to public or private settings. Further, though many catechisms were geared toward children, they could also teach adults who lacked knowledge or, in the judgment of the catechist, who understood the faith incorrectly--the people whom some catechists called "children in understanding."¹

Though catechisms could be put to many purposes, one was paramount. From the time the form was introduced, the Church of England employed catechisms to fit the young for communion. The first official catechism appeared within the confirmation rite in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The 1549 prayerbook transformed English confirmation from the bishop's administration of spiritual gifts to the confirmands' occasion to profess their baptismal faith. In making this momentous shift, the prayerbook's drafters adapted the usage of continental church orders. Confirmation in England became the customary means to make children eligible for the second sacrament.

¹ Ian Green, "'For Children in Yeeres and Children in Understanding,': The Emergence of the English Catechism under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 37 (1986): 396-425.

For Puritans, confirmation posed problems. From the beginning, the more radical among England's leading reformers were leery of the new rite. It bore too many associations with the old Catholic sacrament to be trustworthy: chrismation, the sign of the cross, and the special role of the bishop in the ceremony all made it suspect. The godly had plenty of reasons to dislike confirmation, even the non-sacramental variety of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Yet, though they left behind confirmation when they were able to do so, they embraced the purpose and character of the Protestant version of the ceremony. Marian exiles, for instance, dropped confirmation from their services but continued to use a catechism to prepare children of the church for communion. Parliament in 1645 threw out confirmation along with the rest of the prayerbook, but prompted the writing of new catechisms to guide the examination of communicants.

The development of catechisms in England cultivated assumptions about their content and use that writers in seventeenth-century New England would rely upon when composing new versions. English experience would have taught Puritan emigrants that it was acceptable for many catechisms to circulate rather than allowing only a single official. While custom also would have suggested that confirmation was one chief end of catechizing, colonial Puritans were disinclined to embrace that ceremony.

English Primers and Cranmer's *Catechismus*

Before the 1549 prayerbook introduced an official catechism, several types of lay religious literature anticipated the function and content of the genre. Primers, used in the middle ages as lay devotional guides, were transformed into manuals of religious and literacy instruction in sixteenth-century England. Medieval primers had directed the pious to follow the prayers of the church. Their content varied, featuring the Liturgy of the Hours and often the calendar of saints' days, psalms, and special prayers as well. Primers were intended for adults rather than children, though their pious contents made them suitable material for boys to use in practicing reading.² England's primers were published in Latin until the 1520s.

In the 1530s printers began issuing some primers entirely in the vernacular. Writers with Protestant sympathies were responsible for a number of these works.³

Some vernacular primers contained instructional dialogues that foreshadowed catechisms. George Joye's

² This discussion of English primers relies upon Charles C. Butterworth, *The English Primer (1529-1545): Their Publication and Connection with the English Bible and Reformation in England* (Philadelphia, 1953), and Helen C. White, *The Tudor Books of Private Devotion* (Madison, WI, 1951).

The title "primer" is of uncertain origin, but might have originated Bishop Hilsey suggested in his prologue to the *Manual of Prayers*: "the *Horae* came to be called the Prymer, because it was the *Primus Liber* of the medieval schoolboy." See Hilsey's *Manual*, in *Three Primers, Put Forth in the Reign of Henry VIII*. 2d. ed. (Oxford, 1848), 320. See also Edwyn Birchenough, "The Prymer in English," *The Library*, 4th ser. 18 (1937): 177.

³ White 60, 82; Birchenough 181.

Hortulus Animae ("Garden of the soul") introduced "A fruteful and very christene instruccion for childrene," a discursive presentation of the parts of faith, and a "Dialogue between a father and a son," which posed questions and answers on the Creed and the Ten Commandments. With these two sections, Joye gave the primer a role in teaching readers about these Christian formulae.⁴ Subsequent primers borrowed heavily from the *Hortulus*, often featuring derivatives of the "fruteful instruction." Though these instructional sections were not full-fledged catechisms, they did suggest a form for a lay manual of doctrine. And while primers were not yet designed primarily for youthful readership, some did present material for children, including an ABC.⁵

Determined to rectify ignorance among the laity but eager to encourage uniformity, Henry VIII issued injunctions in 1536 and 1538 requiring the clergy to teach the Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, and Creed in English, underscoring the importance of knowledge as a qualification for communion.⁶ While the proliferation of primers fostered religious knowledge, the king was dismayed at their variety, and authorized a single version to replace the others. *The*

⁴ Butterworth, *English Primer*, 29, 32-33, 44-45; White 87.

⁵ Butterworth, *English Primer*, 52-59, 105-106, 122, 199, 212-213. The authorized ABC was preceded by Thomas Petyt's 1538 *The BAC both in latyn and in Englysshe*. See Charles C. Butterworth, "Early Primers for the Use of Children," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 43 (1949): 374-382.

⁶ T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Petty School* (Urbana, IL, 1943), 32-37, 49.

Primer, set forth by the King's Majesty reflected traditional primers and more recent innovations, but did not contain a catechism.⁷ Edward VI followed suit in issuing official primers, and at first, his looked very much like their predecessor. Once a catechism had been drafted for the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1549, though, it was incorporated into the official primer. Henceforth catechisms became a standard feature of the primer, and their regular presence arguably transformed the medieval manual into a different kind of book, the primer's devotional purpose giving way to an instructional focus.⁸

New primers offered prayers and dialogues in the vernacular, but another new work also presented exposition of Christian staples. Appearing the year before the first *Book of Common Prayer*, Thomas Cranmer's *Catechismus, That is to say a shorte Instruction into Christian Religion for the synguler commoditie and profyte of children and yonge people*⁹ was the first major English work to use the title "catechism." The work was an unacknowledged borrowing of European material: the *Catechismus* was based on children's sermons that Nuremburg pastor Andreas Osiander had preached from Luther's *Small Catechism*. Justas Jonas translated

⁷ See the 1545 *Primer, set forth by the King's Majesty*, in *Three Primers, Put Forth in the Reign of Henry VIII*, 440-526.

⁸ Baldwin 32-37, 49.

⁹ Ian Green argues that because the catechism was still a new genre in the mid-sixteenth century, borrowed from continental writers, early English catechisms often assumed it necessary to give lengthy titles and introductions to explain what a catechism was. Cranmer's long title reflects this assumption. See Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 61.

Osiander's sermons from German to Latin, and Cranmer brought them into English. Not presented in question-answer format, Cranmer's 1548 book covered catechetical staples--the Creed, Ten Commandments, and Lord's Prayer--in several chapters.

Cranmer's recent biographer Diarmaid MacCulloch observes that the *Catechismus* reads as though it was hurried to print. Its first edition was riddled with errors, and its Lutheran eucharistic theology contradicted the position Cranmer subsequently defended. Though corrections were made in the third printing of the work, MacCulloch judges the whole experience of the *Catechismus* a "fiasco" for Cranmer.¹⁰ It may have been that for the Archbishop, but the haste with which he brought it to press does, at least, reflect his perception of the urgent need for an English catechism. Cranmer explained in his dedicatory epistle that Henry VIII would not have needed to seek reform so strenuously,

[i]f so greate negligence of the education of the youth had not bene so much suffered....Or if the aunciente and laudable ceremonie of Confirmation hadde continued in the olde state, and bene duely used of the ministers in tyme conuenient, where an exacte and strayghte examination was had of allsuche as were of ful age, bothe of theyr profession that they had made in baptisme touching theyr beliefe and kepyng of goddes commaundementes, and with a generall solemne

¹⁰ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Cranmer* (Oxford, 1995), 387-391. MacCulloch suggests that Cranmer had the help of others--likely John Ponet, Thomas Becon, Rowland Taylor, or the printer Walter Lynne--in translating the *Catechismus*. See also D.G. Selwyn's introduction and the text of the *Catechismus* in *A Catechism, set forth by Thomas Cranmer*, ed. D.G. Selwyn, The Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics 6 (Oxford, 1978).

rehersall of the sayde commaundementes and of all the articles of theyr fayth.¹¹

Cranmer perceived catechizing as connected to confirmation. He invoked the precedent of the primitive church--as interpreted by such Protestant leaders as Calvin and Bucer--to describe confirmation as an examination of youth in knowledge and faith. He noted that the purpose of teaching children creed and commandments was to prepare them to own the belief and the promise of obedience made in baptism. Though his 1548 catechism was itself short-lived, Cranmer's conception of the genre's significance and purpose carried over into the *Book of Common Prayer*.¹²

Catechism and Confirmation in the Prayerbook

In September 1548, Cranmer, a group of bishops, and "other learned men" met at Chertsey Abbey to compose a new church order. *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, after the Use of the Church of England* was passed in Parliament on 21 January, to be in use by Whitsunday, 9 June 1549.¹³ The catechism, like the prayerbook generally, reflected the spectrum of conservative and reforming

¹¹ Selwyn ii.

¹² MacCulloch 391.

¹³ For background on the composition and sources for the *Book of Common Prayer*, see F.E. Brightman, *The English Rite*, 2 vols. (London, 1901), 1:780-86. See also G.J. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy* (London, 1969), 66-68; Francis Procter and Walter Howard Frere, *A New History of the Book of Common Prayer* 3d. ed. (London, 1955), 45-64. MacCulloch accords credit to Cranmer for the overall "editorship and structuring" of the *Book of Common Prayer*. MacCulloch 414-18.

opinions involved in crafting it, and combined traditional English sources with admired continental writings and *Kirchenordnungen*. Following the lead of continental reformers like Hermann and Martin Bucer, the prayerbook introduced England's new official catechism in the context of confirmation.¹⁴

The prayerbook's catechism itself was a new composition, not a copy of continental form or a reworking of Cranmer's 1548 *Catechismus*. The content of the catechism and confirmation orders drew upon traditional English rites and primers, but the connection of the two elements derived from continental Protestants.¹⁵ One purpose of the official catechism, Ian Green notes, was that by learning it, "the young should be enabled to proceed to confirmation, and then at the appropriate age to participate in the Lord's Supper." Catechesis should make youth ready for confirmation, the prayerbook declared: "it is thought good that none hereafter shall be confirmed, but suche as can say in their mother tong, th[e] articles of the faith, the lordes prayer, & the

¹⁴ Prayerbook scholars debate whether Cranmer worked with German, Latin, or English version of Hermann's *Consultations*, but agree that this work bore significantly on Cranmer's thinking about restructuring the church. Geoffrey Cuming notes that, "[t]he layout of Confirmation is obviously modeled on Hermann, with an explanatory introduction and a catechism before the service." See Cuming, *The Godly Order: Texts and Studies Relating to the Book of Common Prayer* (London, 1983), 68-85; Brightman 1: xlvi-xlix; C.H. Smyth, *Cranmer and the Reformation under Edward VI* (Cambridge, 1926; reprint Westport, CT, 1970), 37.

¹⁵ J.D.C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation, The Early Reformation Period* (London, 1970), 236, 240.

ten commaudementes: And can also aunswere to such questions of this shorte Catechisme."¹⁶

The official catechism was very brief. It first asked children to state the name given them in baptism. Giving it, children remarked that their godparents pledged them to forsake the devil, believe the Christian faith, and walk in God's commandments. Next asked to "rehearse the articles of thy belief," children recited and summarized the Creed. Next they named and explained the Ten Commandments, which godparents had promised they would observe. Finally, they recited the Lord's Prayer. Unlike most earlier Protestant catechisms and Cranmer's 1548 work, this contained no teaching on the sacraments.¹⁷

The confirmation rubric stipulated that parents were to send children and servants to church to learn this catechism at least once every six weeks, on Sundays or holy days, a half-hour before evensong. Curates would supply bishops with a list of those who learned the catechism, and then bishops would confirm these. Knowing the catechism would ready children to assent to the faith of their baptism and to the discipline of the church. Though the 1549 version of the service retained some traditional elements, like the sign of the cross the bishop made on confirmands' foreheads, this "reformed" confirmation emphasized the examination of knowledge rather than the transmission of spiritual

¹⁶ Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 115-28; Brightman 1:776, 790.

¹⁷ Cuming, *Anglican Liturgy*, 86-87.

blessings. English reformers in the 1530s and 1540s had emphasized the need for the laity to learn the staples of the faith. Now, youth were not proceed to communion until they could demonstrate that knowledge in confirmation.¹⁸

Foreign Criticisms and Foreign Catechisms

The prayerbook's system of catechizing and confirmation was informed not only by the writing of European reformers but by their presence in England. Cranmer had invited distinguished reformers from the continent there to find refuge, and many took up the offer, including Martin Bucer. Bucer arrived in the spring of 1549 and accepted a post as Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. Asked to evaluate the new prayerbook, he presented his comments in a work known as the *Censura*, which critiqued the catechism and confirmation ceremony along with other aspects of the new English church order.¹⁹

Bucer applauded many aspects of the prayerbook but expressed reservations about others. In the confirmation service, he recommended removing residual Catholic features, like the physical sign of the cross. Primarily he argued that instruction and examination should be more rigorous. Children needed to be catechized more often than the prayerbook's six-week intervals. Bucer noted that some German churches performed instruction every Sunday and even

¹⁸ Brightman I: 796-799; Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, 236-38.

¹⁹ Smyth 230-37.

on weekdays; the prayerbook similarly should require catechizing weekly on the sabbath. He approved of confirmation as a means to have children accept the faith of their baptism, but he was not content to allow knowledge alone to qualify them for communion, for

no sound argument is adduced for believing that to be a confession of the faith which is in the confessor, and a confession of a true understanding of the gospel, and not some vain copying of words, which the children have repeated at length because they merely recite them from memory, although in their hearts they perceive nothing of their memory.²⁰

Bucer was willing to credit the catechetical recitation as a true statement of faith only if it were accompanied by the testimony of moral behavior, "for although churches cannot see into the hearts of men, yet they must judge trees by their fruits." Evaluation of behavior as well as knowledge would help churches bring to communion only "those who according to the rule of God's word can from the fruits of their lives be recognized as members of Christ." To authenticate the catechetical profession, Bucer expected confirmands to bring not only holy words but holy lives to the ceremony.²¹

Bucer confronted a problem that reformed advocates of catechizing had to overcome. They honored the catechism as a means of teaching and examining people. They would even accept its answers as evidence of real knowledge and belief.

²⁰ Bucer's *Censura* is translated and excerpted in Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, 246.

²¹ Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, 246-50.

But they knew that its memorized text could be recited emptily. They were wary of crediting a "parroted" recitation supplied by a speaker who might not understand or believe it. To guard against this, they insisted teachers should take pains to discern whether those who recited doctrine understood it; beyond that, Bucer requested not words but actions to ratify the catechetical recitation. In his judgment, the way to solve the problem of rote responses was to be sure that godly obedience accompanied pious professions.

The second edition of the *Book of Common Prayer* reflected some of Bucer's counsel. The 1552 prayerbook required weekly catechizing, and its catechism gave fuller text of Exodus 20 in responses on the ten commandments.²² The 1552 book stressed the importance of religious knowledge: while the first edition of the prayerbook warned that none should be admitted to communion until they had been confirmed, the second barred a child from communion "vntil such tyme as he can say the Catechisme and be confirmed."²³

In addition to the advice reformers offered to English church leaders, they also presented examples of catechetical practice in their own churches. In the summer of 1550, Protestant refugees in London were granted places to meet

²² Cuming, *History of the Anglican Liturgy*, 113. Cuming remarks that the catechism was given the extensive scripture quotations "to gratify Hooper's enthusiasm for the ten commandments."

²³ Brightman 1:776-79, 794-99.

and worship, and allowed to conduct services in their own languages and by their own rites.²⁴ Jan Laski, named superintendent of the worshipping foreigners, gathered into them "stranger churches." The Dutch-speaking church under Laski required adults who wished to participate in communion to sign the church's "Confession of Faith" and go through a public examination of forty questions and answers. For the young, ministers catechized on Sunday afternoon, teaching and examining older children in the congregation each week. Children aged five or over were enrolled in religious instruction, and by age fourteen, they were to be ready for confirmation. Those whose knowledge and obedience rendered them fit for confirmation were placed on the church's membership rolls. Laski's stranger church demonstrated how catechisms could be used to edify children in the community's belief, shield them from doctrines deemed heretical, and reveal their readiness for communion.²⁵

Confirmation in the Church of England

Although the *Book of Common Prayer* wove together catechism and confirmation, it was some time before the new, non-sacramental confirmation ceremony was consistently observed in England. Further, the godly always regarded the ceremony with ambivalence. They saw in confirmation too

²⁴ For broad treatment of the "stranger churches" in England under Edward VI, see Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London* (Oxford, 1986).

²⁵ Pettegree 9, 36-37, 57-63. Martin Micron's catechism, used in the Dutch church, was also translated into English.

much residue of Roman Catholic practice to warrant wholehearted acceptance of the rite. Thus, while they supported religious instruction and examination to prepare children for communion, they sometimes shied away from the label of confirmation.

In its Protestant incarnation in the prayerbook, confirmation was an innovation. Under Henry VIII, the *Bishop's Book* and the *King's Book* both affirmed that confirmation was a sacrament, as it had been considered in the medieval church.²⁶ When reformers strove to weed errors and superstitions from the church order, they frequently mocked traditional confirmation. Tyndale recalled that people falsely believed "that if the bishop butter the child in the forehead, that it is safe." Thomas Becon similarly condemned the former sacrament: "The bishop mumbleth a few Latin words over the child, charmeth him, crosseth him, smeareth him with stinking popish oil, and tieth a linen band about the child's neck, and sendenth him home. O Lord God," Becon lamented, "what a Confirmation of a child's faith is this! Yea, rather, what a delusion and mocking is this of the godly, ancient custom in confirming children."

²⁶ In the Convocation of 1537, and then again in 1540, bishops debated the sacramental character of confirmation. Ollard presents Cranmer as the most radical critic of confirmation among the bishops. See S.L. Ollard, "Confirmation in the Anglican Communion," in *Confirmation or the Laying on of Hands*. 2 vols. (London, 1929), 1:71-77. Excerpts of bishops' opinions from 1537 and 1540, plus relevant selections from *Bishops' Book* and *King's Book*, appear in Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, 206-33. See also William Jackson, *The History of Confirmation* (Oxford and London, 1877).

The new service would not impute extraordinary powers to the bishop, though the prayerbook still maintained that only bishops should perform the laying on of hands. Supporters of the new ceremony traced it to the early church. Rather than embracing the medieval meaning of confirmation as an episcopal grant of grace--though some in the Church of England still favored confirmation in the old sense--the new rite emphasized the confirmands' act of accepting the faith of their baptism.²⁷

Both clergy and people were slow to embrace this new ritual. Rates of confirmation in Edwardian England are difficult to establish, but a student of confirmation in England, S.L. Ollard, argues that few children were confirmed in Edward's reign.²⁸ Under Mary's reign, confirmation was returned to its sacramental form. Marian exiles, meanwhile, abandoned the ceremony in name and honored it in principle.

Catechizing among the Marian Exiles

Upon the Marian restoration of Catholicism in England, many Protestants fled to the continent and established sizable communities in Frankfort, Emden, Duisburg, Strasburg, and Zurich. Their experience was significant for the future of English Protestantism and of English

²⁷ Ollard 79-83 Confirmation understood as an episcopal transmission of grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit Ollard terms "objective"; he calls a "subjective" view of confirmation the service used for a profession of faith.

²⁸ Ollard 84-85.

catechesis. Freed from the necessity of following the *Book of Common Prayer*, they created new forms for instructing their children, but maintained the connection between catechesis and qualification for mature church membership. Many Marian refugees were unsatisfied with the church they had left behind and hoped to continue sifting traditions and purifying rites. In June 1554, a cluster of refugees gathered in Frankfurt. Planning a new church order, William Whittingham and a group of radicals summoned John Knox, then in Geneva, to be their pastor. With Calvin's encouragement Knox took the call to Frankfurt.²⁹

Knox was sympathetic with the doctrines of the Frankfurt radicals, but thought it imprudent to adopt the starkly reformed service while a vocal minority there still supported the *Book of Common Prayer*. In December 1554, Knox, Whittingham, and others wrote to John Calvin, detailing the errors of the 1552 prayerbook. In one complaint, they bewailed the brevity of its catechism, "which consisteth off the Articles off the faith the Lordes, praier, and ten commandements, and all this is dispatched in lesse than two leaves."³⁰

²⁹ This discussion of the "Troubles at Frankfort" employs the Knox/Whittingham account of the incident, *A Brieff Discours off the Troubles begonne at Frankford in Germany Anno Dominini 1554*, The English Experience Series, no. 492 (New York, 1972). Scholarly accounts of the troubles appear in Jasper Ridley, *John Knox* (Oxford, 1968), 189-214, and H.J. Wotherspoon's introduction to *The Second Payerbook of King Edward the Sixth and the Liturgy of Compromise*, eds. H.J. Wotherspoon and George W. Sprott (London, 1905), 9-56.

³⁰ Procter and Frere 129.

Amidst ongoing tension about church practices, Knox and his colleagues designed a "Liturgy of Compromise" for the Frankfurt community. The order omitted confirmation, but kept a catechism resembling the prayerbook's, adding material on the sacraments. In several respects the new order upheld the function of catechesis as a preparation for church maturity. The rubric for baptism reminded godparents of their "bounde duty to see [the baptized child] brought up in the Catechism to the end it may learn shortly as may be such things as a christian ought to know & believe." In describing how members would qualify for communion, the order sketched out separate but related courses for adults and children. All adults received at the sacrament were to "make a declaration or confession of their faith before the pastor and elders, shewing themselves fully to consent and agree with the doctrine of the Church, and submitting themselves to the discipline of the same." Parallel requirements for children were itemized in an article describing "How the young shall be Catechised." Children would come to the church each Saturday or Sunday afternoon to be catechized, and would "not to be admitted to the Communion till they be able to make profession of their faith before the whole congregation. And also to have an honest testimony of towardness in godly conversation." The Frankfurt community perceived an examination of knowledge as an appropriate prerequisite for communion for adults and

children alike, but devised distinct ceremonies for adults and children to evidence their qualifications.³¹

With the arrival in Frankfurt of other English Protestants, this compromise order was put aside. Led by Richard Cox, the group contended against the new liturgy. When the English church split, the victorious faction returned to a service based on the *Book of Common Prayer*, while Frankfurt authorities, fearing reprisal for harboring Knox, removed him.³² Joined by other exiles, Knox returned to Geneva and there revived the Frankfurt church order he had helped draft. Known henceforth as the "Order of Geneva," it was printed in 1556 for use by the English-speaking community in Geneva; later, it was incorporated into the *Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland*. Knox chose Calvin's catechism for this servicebook. The community's use of the catechism also reflected Geneva's practice. Children were catechized weekly, and once they reached the age of discretion, they were examined by the minister and elders, and then could partake of the Lord's

³¹ In the Frankfurt church's brief term of peace, the "Liturgy of Compromise" was introduced, to be used from February to April, and if necessary then reevaluated by Calvin, Musculus, Martyr, Bullinger, and Viret. See Wotherspoon and Spratt 166, 237, 240-49.

³² After Knox's expulsion, Cox wrote to Calvin on April 5, 1555, describing the order of service adopted in the Frankfurt congregation. The new order deleted some of the "burdensome ceremonies" of the prayerbook, including confirmation. Instead, "[c]atechumens were admitted to the Communion before the Congregation, when they made profession of their faith." Even those Marian exiles who were sympathetic to the prayerbook chose to keep confirmation's purpose but drop its title. Wotherspoon and Spratt 211-15, 221.

Supper. The English exiles who settled in Calvin's Geneva rejected confirmation as the *Book of Common Prayer* had presented it, yet they upheld the purpose of the reformed ceremony, catechizing and examining their children before they allowed them to participate in communion.³³

Confirmation from Elizabeth to the Restoration

After Elizabeth restored Protestantism and, with it, prayerbook confirmation, the ceremony was still unevenly administered in England. Some bishops apparently opposed the practice; others failed to perform it regularly. When bishops did make rounds to confirm children, thousands of people sometimes pressed in at once to acquire the blessing. In such a setting, bishops might not examine the confirmands at all. Perhaps puzzled by the ceremony, which had gone back and forth from sacrament to non-sacrament, people seem to have judged confirmation as the chance for a bishop's blessing rather than their profession of faith: confirmation was popularly called "bishoping." Richard Baxter remembered with disgust that the bishop who had "bishoped" him did not ask a single question to test his faith.³⁴

In addition to popular confusion about confirmation, critics leveled principled objections against it. The godly objected to its resemblance to the old Catholic sacrament.

³³ Ridley 219, 243-244; Wotherspoon and Sprott 52-56. For the English exiles' "Order of Geneva," see William D. Maxwell, *The Liturgical Portions of the Genevan Service Book* (Westminster, 1965), 65, 109, 114-20.

³⁴ Ollard 118, 124, 198.

Further, enemies of the episcopacy were hardly enthusiastic about services designed specially for bishops. After the Elizabethan settlement, some, with Marian exiles among them, pleaded in the 1570s and 1580s for the use of an alternative service book, often suggesting one based on the order of Geneva. Consistently, these alternative church orders omitted confirmation. Perceiving confirmation as unnecessary and tainted by Catholic corruptions, Puritans preferred to remove it altogether.³⁵ Under James I, Millenary petitioners asked the king to supply a more thorough official catechism and discontinue confirmation. At Hampton Court, Puritans continued to press for changes to, or omission of, the ceremony. James I agreed to title the service, "[t]he Confirmation or further examination of children's faith," emphasizing that the statement of faith was the significant part of the rite, not the episcopal blessing. He also agreed that the catechism was too short and approved an added section on the sacraments.³⁶

Given royal and episcopal support for confirmation, the rite was administered more regularly under James I and Charles I than before. It was abrogated entirely in 1645:

³⁵ For discussion of these alternative service books, see Procter and Frere 131-34, 139-43.

³⁶ As Ollard disgustedly notes, even some of confirmation's proponents had come to understand the ceremony as an examination of faith based on early-church practice, an origin myth he blamed Calvin for fabricating. Richard Hooker defended a more traditional interpretation of it. *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* was frank in tracing the practice to the Apostles and in claiming its power to grant gifts of the Holy Ghost. Ollard 94-97, 104-13.

in January 1644/5, Parliament passed "An Ordinance for taking away the Book of Common Prayer," which abolished use of the prayerbook. In its place, the Ordinance issued "The Directory for the Publique Worship of God," which discontinued "burdensome Ceremonies," including confirmation.³⁷ However, Parliament did provide a means to keep the unqualified away from communion, offering an ordinance allowing the suspension of the ignorant and scandalous from the Lord's Supper. The rule empowered elders within a congregation to confront the notorious, examine the ignorant, and bar both from communion. To help in gauging and correcting ignorance, Parliament produced articles of faith, decreeing that before people came to communion, they had to know about the Trinity, faith, and repentance.³⁸

Even when they eliminated the rite, Puritans upheld the purpose of Protestant confirmation, creating a statement of faith to use as a doctrinal threshold for admission to communion. Just as Thomas Cranmer and his allies had done, supporters of the new policy agreed that the church should

³⁷ The Directory gave advice about the doctrine and structure of sacraments but did not provide set services or prayers for the. John Morrill characterizes the Directory as "a guide to the construction of as do-it-yourself services." See "The Church in England, 1642-1649," in *Reactions to the English Civil War, 1642-1649*, ed. John Morrill (London, 1982), 89-114. See also Florence Higham, *Catholic and Reformed: A Study of the Anglican Church, 1559-1662* (London: SPCK, 1962), 213-220. The text of the Ordinance appears in C.H. Firth and R. S. Rait, eds., *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, 2 vols. (London, 1911), 1:582-98.

³⁸ Firth and Rait 1:582-98, 789-92.

require some test of the baptized before these could come to communion. The 1645 Parliament agreed that a statement of faith, plus freedom from scandalous sin, could qualify participants for the Lord's Supper. Characterizing the 1645 policy as an "alternative yardstick" to the former system of catechizing and confirmation, Ian Green notes that Parliament's ordinance "laid down not a personal profession of faith, but merely a minimum amount of knowledge, much of it the same as that contained in the Prayerbook Catechism of 1549, and a competent level of understanding of what those heads contained." It was hardly surprising, then, that writers obedient to the 1645 ordinance employed catechisms to correct ignorance and cultivate faith. John Ball drafted a very short form "composed according to the rules and directions" of Parliament. Jeremy Cateline structured a catechism to correspond with the ordinance, laying out articles from the Parliamentary statement of faith, his own explanatory questions and answers, and scriptural citations in three parallel columns.³⁹

In the absence of the prayerbook's system of catechizing and confirmation, churches had new opportunities to use the catechism of their choice. Catechists developed their own arrangements for instruction and examination. Richard Baxter's practice was noteworthy: Baxter set out on a program to instruct the eight-hundred-odd families in his parish.⁴⁰ He summoned each family to his house on Mondays

³⁹ Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 37-38, 79-82.

⁴⁰ Not only did Baxter write several catechisms himself,

and Tuesdays to be examined and instructed by him or his assistant. Those who knew the essentials of the faith and lived without scandal, Baxter determined, could come to the Supper. Those still ignorant but desiring membership were directed to "learn awhile as catechumens and come again." Reviving a kind of catechumenate seemed to Baxter the right way to guide people to the sacrament. He exhorted pastors elsewhere to follow his example, proclaiming that "[w]e never hit the way of pulling down the kingdom of the devil till now." Baxter criticized ministers who overvalued preaching but failed to give people catechetical foundations: how guilty was the minister who thought "when he hath preached, he hath done all his work."⁴¹

Some ministers during the Interregnum--and not just disgruntled backers of the episcopacy--called for the return of confirmation. In 1657 Jonathan Hanmer, a vicar who became a nonconformist in 1662, urged its revival in *An Exercitation upon Confirmation*. Baxter appreciated the book enough to write a preface for it, and in the following year he published his own case for confirmation. Baxter's

but he organized the Worcestershire Association to improve church discipline. To combat ignorance among children and adults, the Association devised a confession of faith and a short catechism. See W.A. Shaw, *A History of the English Church, 1640-1660*. 2 vols. (1900; reprint New York, 1974), 2:144-156. The confession, the covenant statement, and an exposition of the Worcestershire Association's beliefs appear in Baxter, *Christian Concord: or the agreement of the associated pastors and churches of Worcestershire* (London, 1653).

⁴¹ Baxter, *Gildas Salvianus: The Reformed Pastor*, ed. William Brown, Banner of Truth Trust Reprint (1656; Carlisle, PA, 1974), 175-82, 190; Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 222-26.

Confirmation and Restauration insisted that the reformed ceremony should be reinstated out of respect for the universal church. Nearly all Christians practiced some form of confirmation, he argued. Calvin himself defended the purified service, and thus, "they must be very singular persons who disown it," Baxter concluded. Though some reformers were wary of the ceremony, Baxter recognized that the church needed an orderly method to prepare and examine communicants before the sacrament. He also understood that the ceremony was consistent with the practice of many contemporary Protestants.⁴² However, the restoration of confirmation came not because Baxter bade it, but with the Restoration itself, the return of the monarch and the revival of the *Book of Common Prayer*.⁴³

Catechizing in Church and School

Like confirmation, catechizing in Elizabeth's reign was restored to its usage according to the prayerbook. Ian Green determines that while everything might not have been executed to the prayerbook's specifications, churches did offer a good deal of instruction. The prayerbook insisted that catechizing be held on "every Sunday and holy day." In practice, catechizing was more likely performed in parts of the year rather than consistently throughout it. These

⁴² Ollard 141-43; Hanmer, *An Exercitation upon Confirmation* (London, 1658); Baxter, *Confirmation and Restauration* (1658), in *Richard Baxter's Practical Works*, vol. 14. William Orme, ed. (1832), 401-594.

⁴³ Ollard 144-48; Brightman 1:778-79, 793-95.

sessions generally occurred in church, though some ministers invited children into their homes.⁴⁴ The prayerbook declared that catechizing be held in conjunction with Sunday evening services. For the period between 1558-1640, children and servants normally were sent the church for a half hour of catechesis before the service. In some cases, catechizing was held within the evening service, with examinations or expositions in the place of the homily. Elizabeth's visitation articles in the 1570s urged that children begin attending church catechizing when aged seven or eight, and end when they were nineteen; ministers routinely complained that it was difficult to bring teenagers and servants to attend catechizing.⁴⁵

This catechizing blended oral and written forms of instruction. At the most elementary level, lessons were spoken, but catechists assumed intermediate students were literate and seem to have expected children to work from a printed text. Green surveys the writings of three catechists in order to sketch a clearer picture of teaching methods: ministers Robert Cawdrey and Richard Bernard, and schoolmaster John Brinsley, all left reports of their catechetical practice. Cawdrey and Brinsley recommend that children learn one half-page of a catechism each Saturday until they could say the whole piece. Bernard advised against bothering beginners with lengthy discourses; children needed to learn words before meanings. In

⁴⁴ Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 99-105.

⁴⁵ Green, *A Christian's ABC*, 100-105, 111-13, 115-28.

examinations, he advocated testing each student for as long as he could answer, then passing to the next. Cawdrey was willing to ask different students the same questions in turn, so that the "ignorant and unlearnedner sort may the easily conceive it by heart." Brinsley bade older students to test younger ones before the master himself examined them.⁴⁶

Religious instruction fell within the purview of other institutions in addition to the church, as Brinsley's report illustrates. Catechizing was considered the responsibility of parents and schoolmasters as well as ministers. In order that its content might be imparted more broadly and deeply, the official catechism was carried outside the pages of the prayerbook and planted in other printed volumes. Issued in a variety of publications, most notably the official ABC and primer, the prayerbook catechism was "the most frequently reproduced [catechism] of the early modern period," Green estimates.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Green establishes patterns of catechizing by examining descriptions of instruction in Richard Bernard, *The Faithfull Shepheard* (1607) and *Two Twinnes* (1613), Robert Cawdrey, *A Short and fruitfull treatise on the necessitie of catechising* (1604), and John Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius or the Grammar Schoole* (1612). See Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 230-43

⁴⁷ Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 65-66, 581-82, 702-703. The *ABC with Catechism* first appeared in 1551 and was still reprinted in enormous quantites in the eighteenth century. Green estimates that between 20,000-100,000 copies of it were published each decade from the 1560s through the 1630s. Baldwin supports this conclusion, positing that the catechism pervaded the language and culture of early modern England. Examining the official catechism, primers, and petty school curricula, Baldwin investigates the ways that words and ideas from the prayerbook form filtered into the language of the street--and of the Shakesperean stage. See

The prayerbook catechism by itself was too short to be adequate for all types of school-based religious instruction.⁴⁸ English Protestants already had noted the need for an additional catechism in the 1550s. In 1553 Edward VI approved John Ponet's *A short catechism...set forth by the King's Majesty's authority, for all Schoolmasters to teach*, a Latin catechism for grammar schools. It was not long in use, discontinued under Mary.⁴⁹ Under Elizabeth, those who sought a catechism for grammar school and university use chose to write a new form rather than reviving Ponet's. Alexander Nowell, who had been a Marian exile in Frankfurt, produced an advanced catechism in the early 1560s. Nowell submitted his long, Latin *Catechismus Puerorum* to the Convocation in 1563, and Elizabeth's canons of 1571 ordered all schoolmasters to use it.⁵⁰ The Latin original was translated into Greek and

Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Petty School*.

⁴⁸ At Lambeth in 1561, Archbishop Matthew Parker and other bishops agreed that a Latin catechism should be designed for schools. See Edward Cardwell, *Documentary Annals of the Reformed Church of England*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1844; reprint, E. Ridgewood, NJ, 1966), 1:298-301.

⁴⁹ Cuming, *A History of the Anglican Liturgy*, 115-117; Procter and Frere, 601. Procter and Frere remark that foreign catechisms continued to be popular even after the introduction of Ponet's work.

⁵⁰ Nowell's catechism was not accepted at once: the Lower House subscribed, but the Upper House only "allowed" it. The catechism languished for several years after Nowell sent it to Cecil, and Nowell finally published it in 1570. The origins of Nowell's catechism are investigated in William P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation: The Struggle for a Stable Settlement of Religion* (Cambridge, 1968), 277-82, and Haugaard, "John Calvin and the Catechism of Alexander P. Nowell," *Archiv fur Reformationsgeschichte* 61 (1970): 50-65. Though others have suggested that Nowell's catechism was based upon Ponet's form, Haugaard argues that the "internal structure" and language of

English (the latter translation done by Thomas Norton, who also translated Calvin's *Institutes*).⁵¹ Even in English, Nowell's manual was too difficult for many students. In the early 1570s, Nowell produced a condensed Latin version, known as the "middle catechism," which was also brought into English and Greek.⁵²

Instruction in schools was meant to complement that done in churches, either preparing children to begin the prayerbook catechism or extending the knowledge they first acquired through that form. Such instruction was conducted at three levels: elementary teaching in at home or in petty schools; grammar school use of middle forms, like Nowell's catechisms; and the most advanced catechizing, done at the university level, using substantial reformed texts from continental and English theologians. While it may be unreasonable to conclude that all English children learned their doctrinal lessons thoroughly, it is plausible, as Green suggests, that the several contexts in which people encountered catechisms ensured that many grew up with at least some knowledge of the prayerbook form or its variants.⁵³

Nowell's catechism much more closely resemble John Calvin's.
⁵¹ Haugaard, "John Calvin and the Catechism," 54-59; Haugaard, *English Reformation*, 278; Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 189-93.

⁵² Nowell's name is attached to three other short catechisms. his 1573 work known as Nowell's "shorter" form is an enlargement of the prayerbook form. Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 189-93.

⁵³ Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 170-73. See also Philippa Tudor, "Religious Instruction for Children and Adolescents in the Early English Reformation," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35 (1984): 391-413.

At the introductory stage, children learned the *ABC*, with the *Catechism* and then met the same prayerbook dialogue in the *Primer with the Catechism*. The *ABC* contained an alphabet--with the first line of letters nicknamed the "criss-cross row" because it was preceded by a cross--and then syllables, numbers, the prayerbook catechism, and prayers to be said before and after meals. Green estimates that the *ABC* went through two or more printings a year, with more than 25,000 copies each decade, from the 1560s through the 1630s. Used for the twin purposes of teaching literacy and Christianity, the *ABC with Catechism* was, as Green notes, a "huge bestseller."⁵⁴ Petty schools bore responsibility for teaching the English *ABC* and primer, and schools sometimes counted knowledge of the prayerbook catechism as proof of having learned to read.⁵⁵

Grammar schools generally used Nowell's catechisms. Before the *Catechismus Puerorum* had been condensed and translated, teachers often preferred to use foreign forms. In the late 1550s and 1560s, Geneva's catechism was popular. By the mid-1570s, many schoolmasters shifted to one of Nowell's catechisms. At the university level, students encountered advanced works by European divines.⁵⁶ Those who had studied Nowell's Latin form might proceed to the Greek

⁵⁴ Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 175-77, 581-82, 702-703.

⁵⁵ Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 176-77; Baldwin 65-66.

⁵⁶ Procter and Frere 601-602; Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 66-67, 184-88. Calvin's catechism still saw extensive use despite the appearance of many English forms. The English translation of Calvin's catechism was reprinted more than twelve times between 1560 and 1598.

translation, then to Calvin's catechism in Greek or Hebrew, and then to a form of the Heidelberg Catechism. Oxford students in 1579 were to be taught from Bullinger's *Catechesis pro adultoribus*, Calvin's *Institutes*, Jewel's *Apologia*, or a Latin form of the Thirty-nine Articles. Other students confronted Ursinus's lectures on the Heidelberg catechism or Beza's long question-and-answer form. Catechizing of this sort was understood as a rigorous doctrinal education, a walk through the paces of continental Reformed theology.⁵⁷

Alternative Catechisms

Though the prayerbook form and Nowell's works bore official status and wide use, the brevity of the former and the complexity of the latter left a sizable gap into which writers supplied catechisms for varied educational needs. In the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, many writers, predominantly clergymen, wrote new manuals. As Green argues, this explosion of new catechisms aimed not so much to compete with or replace official versions, but to apply catechetical methods to a wide range of levels and learning abilities. Writers experimented with different strategies, modifying the official catechisms or creating altogether new ones.⁵⁸ The most obvious way to supplement

⁵⁷ Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 188-89, 197-200.

⁵⁸ Green credits the sudden growth of new forms to increased schooling, desire to buttress England against Catholic threats, and, above all, interest in bringing Christian knowledge to all levels of education. John Morgan argues that the variety of catechisms among Puritans applied

the Book of Common Prayer catechism was to do so literally. A number of catechists presented versions of the prayerbook form with additional material, with the basic text divided differently, or with more explication supplied for the original questions.⁵⁹

Puritans were responsible for producing a number of alternative catechisms, and they generally used these forms with enthusiasm. On rare occasions, the godly expressed reservations about catechisms, worrying that they were not named in the Bible or that it was unsound to mix God's word together with man-made responses. For instance, when the Dedham classis in 1583 approved having Edmund Chapman's catechism "to be published for the use of the people of Dedham especially," a few members of the classis objected that in catechisms "the word of god and man are confounded." Yet such complaints were unusual. The godly, by and large,

the same message in several forms: "The plethora of puritan manuals ensured that England's households were flooded with the same message over and over, so that response became a matter not of thoughtful choice, but rather of conditioning." In contrast, C. John Sommerville contends that the variety of catechisms did not reinforce a single doctrinal standard but encouraged more independent judgments about doctrine: "The proliferation of catechisms could not help having an unsettling effect upon religious indoctrination," and fostered "the idea that education is a process of discovery," even if this were not the intent. However, while exposure to different catechisms might have "unsettled" learners, the several documents could still convey a common body of doctrine. See Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 68-79; Morgan, *Godly Learning*, 153; Sommerville, "The Distinction between Indoctrination and Education in England, 1549-1719," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44(1983): 387-406.

⁵⁹ Green describes in detail these adaptations of the prayerbook catechism. Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 112, 149-60, 194-95, 245-62.

embraced catechizing as a lawful and helpful instrument of religious development. One way to avoid confounding divine and human words, as some catechists discovered, was to compose answers wholly of scripture quotations; more commonly, catechists supported their dialogues with copious scripture citations. For the most part, Puritans, like the Dedham classis, concluded that catechisms were consistent with the "practice of all reformed Churches" and lauded them "as a preparatyve to the publike and ordenary exercises of the worde and prayer."⁶⁰ Those who objected to the content of a particular catechism, or to the imposition of one form onto another church, could use a different one or write their own.⁶¹

A few writers regretted the bewildering variety of new catechisms. Richard Bernard had already written several original compositions when he offered *The Common catechism*, an adaptation of the prayerbook form, for "uniformity's sake." In general, though, instructors seemed to consider this variety a salutary development. William Gouge remarked, "Howsoever I think it very requisite that there were one compleat approved catechism to be used in all

⁶⁰ The short catechism under discussion was Chapman's *A catechisme with a prayer annexed* (1583). For the classis' discussion of catechizing, see Roland G. Usher, ed., *The Presbyterian Movement in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth as Illustrated by the Minute Book of the Dedham Classis, 1582-1589* (London, 1905), 28-32, 89-91.

⁶¹ The Independent Philip Nye argued that pastors should be able to determine their own catechizing arrangements. He thought it wrong to require one pastor to use another's catechism or an official form. Philip Nye, *Beames of Former Light* (London, 1659), 10.

churches, yet I find that in all ages of the Church God hath stirred up many of his servants to publish severall forms, all agreeing in the substance." Many writers promoted their compositions as particularly effective tools for reaching some segment of the still-ignorant population. The Dering/More manual lamented that many catechisms were too complex "then can be carryed in the mind of the ignorant man," so theirs was a simplified presentation. For those whose reading skills were too limited to grasp the message of his *Golden Chaine*, William Perkins devised an "ocular Catechism," a chart showing the paths of the saved and the damned. With diverse styles and emphases, the multitude of catechisms could accomplish more than could the prayerbook form alone.⁶²

The godly critics of the prayerbook catechism generally faulted that dialogue not so much for what it contained as for what it left out. It had no teaching on the sacraments until 1604 and did not present a detailed treatment of salvation. Some alternative catechisms corrected this lack by stressing the *ordo salutis*. These catechisms often opened with questions about the nature of God or the origin of the scriptures, and then moved rapidly into discussion of election. Rather than allowing the order of creed, commandments, prayer, and sacraments subtly to convey

⁶² Bernard, *The Common catechisme* (London, 1630), sigs. A2r-A4r; William Gouge, *A Short Catechisme*, in *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*, ed. Alexander F. Mitchell (London, 1886), 43-44. Perkins's "Ocular Catechism" and *The Golden Chaine* are both reprinted in *The Works of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward, (Abingdon, 1970).

theological principles, these catechisms often pressed the four staples into the writers' own doctrinal scheme, or left them out entirely. They frequently omitted the Apostles' Creed. William Perkins's popular form, *The Foundation of the Christian Religion*, did not explain the Lord's Prayer, Ten Commandments, or Creed at all, but instead offered six points of Christian teaching which, once learned, would enable its students to understand rather than blankly recite those formulae.⁶³

Although these catechisms did not, like the prayerbook form, invite students to call themselves Christian by virtue of baptism, they did coach children in the nature of faith and encourage them to count themselves in the company of believers. Discussing election, catechisms forced respondents to acknowledge that many people would be damned, yet gave them hopeful words to describe their own status. As many writers did, Stephen Egerton used the first-person plural when the student described God's saving works on behalf of "us," and then used the third person, or an indefinite "man," to name the elect. Yet Egerton later allowed the first-person singular, urging the weak in faith

⁶³ Arthur Dent, *The Christian Mans Care...Together with a Short Catechisme for the Simpler Sort*. [Bound with *Certaine Sermons*] (London, 1637), 52; Edward Dering/John More, *A Briefe and necessarie Catechisme or Instruction, very needeful to be known of all Housholders* (1597), in M. [E.] Dering's workes, *The English Experience Series*, no. 448 (Amsterdam, 1972), sig. A5v. Green, *A Christian's ABC*, 632-35.

to say "I am truly persuaded of mine owne Salvation by .
Jesus Christ alone."⁶⁴

As they taught students how to describe their belief, some catechisms offered their text as a profession of faith. Learning the catechism would enable the speaker to "give an answer of our hope to anyone," Richard Bernard suggested, referring to the scriptural charge in I Peter 3:15 (oft-cited by proponents of New England's conversion relation) that believers be ready to explain their hope of salvation. Arthur Dent similarly offered his *Plaine Exposition* to help those of his flock "to give a reason of their faith." Of course, catechists knew faith rested on more than knowledge, but these writers defined the "reason" for faith as an expression of the doctrine that saved, not a narrative of one's coming to believe that doctrine.⁶⁵

Catechisms in Household Instruction

Some alternative forms were especially devised for use at home by families. Puritans were avid catechists at home, particularly careful to direct religious instruction of children and servants.⁶⁶ Godly parents perceived the task

⁶⁴ Bourne, *A Light from Christ*, 241-245; Egerton, *A briefe method of catechizing*, 7-9, 29-30, 32. Some catechists, however, were especially careful not to lump "us" among the saints.

⁶⁵ Bernard, *The Common catechisme*, sig. A4v; Arthur Dent, *A plaine exposition of the Articles of our faith* (London, 1594).

⁶⁶ John Morgan asserts that Puritans were particularly adept at catechizing: "The primary form of household instruction was catechizing, a simple process emphasized by all protestants, but perhaps especially by puritans among Englishmen." Though Ian Green insists that catechizing was

of educating their children to include not only the development of children's reason but also the training of the will. This conception of childrearing, John Morgan argues, made catechisms the primary instrument of religious instruction for the godly household. Like schoolmasters, parents appreciated the discipline fostered by memorization, exposition, and recitation of doctrine. William Gouge reminded parents that children were prone by nature to many evils, but timely religious nurture would be "an excellent preservative against their owne naturall corruption." Robert Cleaver warned parents that they could not rely on the clergy alone to educate their children: they had to explain fundamental principles at home so that children "may the better profit by the publike teaching." By instructing children and servants, parents enabled them to comprehend what they heard in sermons--or correct inadequacies in the preaching of an unsound minister.⁶⁷

One of the most widely used manuals, William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties*, warned parents children were "not borne but made Christians." By catechizing, parents guided their own children toward grace and advanced the progress of the Reformation, for "if all parents were carefull of their dutie in this kind," Gouge predicted, "there would be a

important to English Protestants generally, he does concede that the godly were more likely to use catechisms at home. Morgan, *Godly Learning*, 152-53; Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 203-10, 218-20.

⁶⁷ Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), 544; Robert Cleaver, *A godly forme of householde government* (London, 1598), 38-39.

succession of those that feare God, and thereby a preservation of true religion."⁶⁸ He deemed mothers especially effective in religious nurture because they had most contact with young children. Of course, a father should oversee this education since he was "both a King and a bishop over his house and family."⁶⁹

To help parents teach their children, writers experimented with various formats and teaching aids. Some authors composed several manuals for different age groups, while others included multiple dialogues within a single catechism. Herbert Palmer adopted another strategy to improve comprehension. He presented basic questions and answers in two ways, first giving a full answer to the catechism questions, then subdividing each initial query into shorter segments, so that each question could be answered merely with "yes" or "no." By requiring children to think about parts of a question and judge them true or false, Palmer hoped to avoid "parroted" responses. Palmer's method proved popular, at least among other catechists, who

⁶⁸ Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 537-39. Josiah Nichols agreed: a well-instructed family "may be the preserving of the countrie and Church...the seedplot against the time of of reformation, and a meanes by which God doth multiplie his people and peace in a countrie." Nichols, *An Order of Household Instruction* (London, 1595).

⁶⁹ Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Form of household Government*, sig. A4v; Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties*, 540, 667. Women are also given important roles in the religious education of their families in William Bradshaw's *A Preparation to the Receiving of the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Bloud* (1617), dedicated to Lady Grace Darcy, and in John Stockwood's epistle dedicatory to Lady Golding, in Robert Cawdrey, *A Shorte and Fruitefull treatise, of the profite and necessitie of Catechising* (1580).

later applied it to the prayerbook catechism and then to the Westminster Shorter Catechism.⁷⁰

Linking Church and Godly Household

Promoted as means to improve sermon comprehension, Bible reading, and sacramental observance, household catechizing reinforced instruction given by the church. Though catechizing was "chief in importance" among the clergy's "extra-pulpit duties," as John Morgan argues, ministers' efforts could be futile without the cooperation of parents in the labor.⁷¹ Arguing that reformation faltered because people were not adequately prepared to hear sermons, Robert Cawdrey used a colorful metaphor. Expecting preaching to succeed without catechizing was like a father who put his son out to the care of a nurse, "and shee shoulde feede it with Bacon, and such strong meates, so that it should pine and consume away," and when the man would question her about his child's weakness, she would profess that she gave him "nothing but good and wholesome meate." The father would cry, "Oh, thou foolishe Nource, it is no marvel that my childe doth no better prosper under thy keeping, seeing thou feedest him with such kinde of meates."

⁷⁰ Egerton, *A briefe method of catechizing* (London, 1594); Immanuel Bourne, *A light from Christ* (London, 1646); Herbert Palmer, *An Endeavour of Making the Principles of the Christian Religion...plaine and easie* (London, 1640). Palmer intended his method to prevent children from merely memorizing responses without acquiring their meaning--an error some students demonstrated by supplying the right answer for a wrong question.

⁷¹ Morgan, *Godly Learning*, 86-87, 154-55.

Cawdrey acknowledged that "many Parishes have been fedde with good and wholesome doctrine many years," but because pastors did not prepare congregations to receive it, "the labor for the most part [was] utterly lost."⁷² Puritans' esteem for the word preached is well known, but they realized that sermons would be ineffective if hearers were ignorant.

Ministers noted that catechisms also could help prepare the faithful for communion. Protestant writers sometimes drew explicit parallels between the use of their catechisms and the Catholic sacraments of confirmation and confession. In his English version of the Heidelberg catechism, "E.B." noted that ministers still expected people to communicate "at the appointed times, especially at Easter," and argued that clergy should teach and examine them for that occasion. Robert Cawdrey criticized men and women who were reluctant to learn the catechism and "render an account of their faith to the minister," for under "Poperie," they were unashamed to "confesse their sinnes, to their ghostly father" in order to "receive their Maker at Easter (as they termed it)." Richard Baxter also drew a parallel to confession, conceding that, "the Popish auricular confession is a sinful novelty," but asserting, "perhaps, some will think it strange that I should say, that our common neglect of personal instruction is much worse, if we consider their confessions in themselves, and not as they respect their linked doctrines

⁷² Cawdrey, *A Shorte and Fruitefull treatise*, sig. B1r.

of satisfaction and purgatory." Having discarded these Catholic sacraments, English Protestants valued in their place the exercise of public catechizing and examination before the sacrament.⁷³

Not only public examination but also private preparation for the Lord's Supper could be done through a catechism. These dialogues helped users obey the scriptural charge, in I Corinthians 11:28-29, to examine themselves and discern the Lord's body. In their catechism, Dod and Cleaver used questions and answers on the Ten Commandments to lead the reader to repentance. Self-examination, as this catechism defined it, entailed the penitent's private confession of individual sin. In other catechisms, questions helped communicants to "discern the Lord's body," by which catechists understood, at minimum, discernment of the bread and wine as distinct from common use. In this usage, "self-examination" required communicants to check that they believed rightly about the sacrament. Through Stephen Egerton's manual, readers would inspect their knowledge, faith, and obedience to see "Whether they know the grounds of religion, beleve in Christ, hate their sinne, and love their brethren." In the Dod/Cleaver *Dialogue of Preparation to the Lord's Supper*, worthy receivers had to investigate "whether we be of the number of the faithful," a condition that would be evidenced by a

⁷³ Richard Bernard, *A large catechisme following the order of the common authorized catechisme* (London, 1602); E.B., *A catechisme, or briefe instruction* (London, 1617), sig. B2r; Cawdrey, sig. B3v; Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 180-82.

"competent measure of Repentance, Knowledge, Faith, and Love." The goal of the catechism-for-communion was to lead individuals through this kind of scrutiny, offering questions and answers that readers could use to examine the self.⁷⁴

The Westminster Catechisms

Through the 1640s, alternative catechisms attempted to supplement or improve upon the prayerbook version. When the Book of Common Prayer was set aside, the Westminster Assembly decided to draft a new official form. In July 1643, the Assembly convened to compose a Confession of Faith. That December, the Assembly appointed Herbert Palmer, reputedly the best catechist in England, to begin work on a catechism. In May 1645, Palmer and his committee produced a report, which is thought to have recommended a two-level catechism like Palmer's *Endeavour*. Though it accepted the wisdom of presenting doctrine in different degrees of complexity, the Assembly instead decided to have two separate catechisms prepared.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Bernard, *A large catechism*, 39-41. Bernard required communicants to examine themselves regarding sin, redemption, and the sacrament, belief in Christ as expressed in the creed, repentance achieved with reference to the ten commandments. Though leaving out the Lord's Prayer, then, Bernard defined the classic parts of the catechism as essential tools for right participation in the Lord's Supper. See also Egerton, *A briefe catechisme*, 16; John Dod and Richard Cleaver, *Ten Sermons, Tending chiefly to the fitting of men for the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper....[and] a short Dialogue of Preparation* (London, 1609), 2-3, 15, 18.

⁷⁵ Ultimately Palmer was not the architect of Westminster's renowned Shorter Catechism. He died in August

Deeming it unsatisfying, as the Assembly's Scottish Commisioners expressed, to "dress up milk and meat both in one dish," the Westminster divines upheld the distinction Luther first established, crafting a larger catechism for pastors and teachers (with 196 questions), and a smaller one for the young, "rude and ignorant" (containing 107 questions).⁷⁶ Both were patterned after the Assembly's Confession of Faith. The Assembly first presented the larger catechism to Parliament in October 1647, and followed with the shorter in November, adding scripture citations afterwards. Parliament approved their publication in September 1648, but did not mandate their use in England. The Scottish Parliament adopted them in July 1648.⁷⁷

Both of the Westminster catechisms were printed repeatedly in the 1650s, sometimes together, sometimes along with the Assembly's Confession of Faith or with an ABC. Just as other writers had done with the prayerbook catechism, authors showed esteem for these dialogues by amending them. Though it was written for the young or "ignorant," Westminster Shorter Catechism was still beyond the capacity of the very young. Almost immediately after it

1647, and work on that document is attributed to Anthony Tuckney. S.W. Carruthers, *Three Centuries of the Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Fredericton, New Brunswick, 1957), 4; Mitchell, *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*, xxx.

⁷⁶ This account of the Westminster Assembly's actions on catechisms is drawn from Carruthers 3-9; Mitchell, *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*, ix-xxxviii, and *The Westminster Assembly* (Philadelphia, 1884), 407-41.

⁷⁷ Green specifies that Commons accepted the larger catechism but Lords did not. Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 81; Morrill 94-96; Carruthers 5.

was printed, John Wallis applied Herbert Palmer's method to the new catechism, giving simplified questions with "yes/no" answers to make it suitable for elementary users. Wallis's format proved popular, going through eight editions between 1648 and 1662. Another writer turned the shorter catechism into verse, and still another parceled the catechism's long answers into shorter ones. The Westminster Shorter Catechism also was received warmly in New England. In the early eighteenth century, Cotton Mather reworked its questions and answers and had it printed with his own catechetical manuals.⁷⁸

The Westminster catechisms embodied patterns that alternative catechisms had been working out for a half century. They followed a doctrinal scheme more closely than had the chief catechisms of the sixteenth century. Though he numbered the Westminster shorter among the three timeless Protestant catechisms (along with Luther's and the Heidelberg catechism), Philip Schaff lamented that the Assembly substituted "a logical scheme for the historical order of the Apostles' creed."⁷⁹ The drafters of the Westminster catechisms debated including the Creed at all, finally inserting it without giving explication.⁸⁰ The

⁷⁸ Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*. 2 vols. (1877; reprint, New York, 1967) 1:784-5; Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 80-82; Carruthers 7.

⁷⁹ Schaff 1:788. Thomas F. Torrance provides interesting comparison of the Westminster catechisms and those of Calvin and Heidelberg catechism, along with the text of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. See Torrance, *The School of Faith*, 261-78.

⁸⁰ A few members of the Assembly, including Philip Nye, argued that the Apostles' Creed should not be placed in the

Assembly's manuals fit Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer, and sacraments into their own logical structures. The Shorter Catechism first asked about man's chief end (to know God and enjoy Him forever), then queried, "What is God?," and subsequently coursed through the decrees of creation and providence, sin, and redemption, to bring the believer to the moral law. Only then did it address the Ten Commandments, the sacraments, and Lord's Prayer.

The Westminster forms corrected the defects that the godly perceived in the prayerbook catechism. They presented at length the doctrinal particulars Puritans thought children should master, including election. They gave ample treatment of the process of redemption. New England Puritans would find in the Westminster forms, especially the shorter catechism, statements of faith that resonated with their own theological views. The Westminster catechisms were not perfect, colonists judged: they gave scant attention to church polity, and were not the most suitable forms for youngest learners. But godly New Englanders would keep faith with the Westminster standards into the eighteenth century, employing them along with their own catechisms to define and transmit doctrinal essentials.

catechism. Resolving the dispute, a committee agreed to include a marginal postscript clarifying the clause on Christ's descent to hell. Carruthers 5.

Conclusion

If seventeenth-century English writers no longer felt the need to define the genre to readers, as mid-sixteenth-century writers had, they did remind readers of catechisms' importance in the Christian life. Some writers named the catechism a full-fledged means of grace, particularly as a partner or preparative to preaching. John Ball explained that faith was wrought "[i]nwardly by the spirit, as the author, and outwardly by the preaching of the word and catechising, as the instruments thereof." "E.B." presented catechizing not merely as key to sermons but to the Bible itself, and as an aid to conversion, declaring that God himself "hath invented [catechizing] as an ordinance of his, to helpe his elect to the faith of Christ."⁸¹

The English experience with catechisms fostered assumptions about the genre and its use that New England Puritans carried to the colonies. First, the century of English usage demonstrated that variety was acceptable, and that numerous catechisms could teach different audiences more effectively than could a single, official form. Second, that experience guided the content and structure of New England catechisms. The historic staples of the faith--creed, Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer, and sacraments--still formed the basis of instruction, but

⁸¹ John Ball, *A Short catechisme* (London, 1642), 15, 149; E.B., *A catechisme*, sigs. A4v, B2r

seventeenth-century English writers freely adapted their presentation.

English usage established the place of catechizing in homes and schools as well as in churches. The Church of England linked its official catechism together with the rite of confirmation, and the godly upheld the function of that ceremony though they disliked its title and trappings. Confirmation was the regular end of a course of catechizing, and the normal means to examine children's faith and advance them to communion. Though the builders of New England's congregational way embraced catechisms for teaching children, they opted to leave confirmation behind.

Chapter Three. The Practice of Religious Instruction in New England

Introduction

Puritans who migrated to New England carried with them some English cultural forms and adapted or abandoned others. In their desire to institute purified religion, they pruned the calendar of holidays and saints' days and pruned their meetinghouses of adornments. They strove to shape churches gathered out of the world and ruled by saintly congregations. In the new colonies, they hoped to gain for God not only better worship but more worshipers: one of the Bay Colony's explicit goals was to bring Native Americans to Christianity. Of course, they also looked for new saints within their own households. They were glad to secure for their children pure ordinances and the means of grace. For all these ends--building churches, teaching their children, and evangelizing Native Americans--they adopted catechisms as worthy instruments to transplant in the new world.

Historians have suggested that New England Puritans viewed catechizing principally as a family activity. Some scholars argue that settlers intended to have households perform religious instruction, and that only when families proved unequal to the task did schoolmasters and ministers assume it. "Puritan preference and New England necessity conspired to minimize clerical catechizing and maximize that of the family," James Axtell posits. When families fared poorly as instructors, Axtell continues, ministers had to

help teach children, and "even grammar-school masters were pressed into service in the unfamiliar role of catechists." Gerald Moran and Maris Vinovskis echo Axtell's conclusion, suggesting that when fathers failed as catechists, ministers performed advanced catechizing and assigned early instruction to mothers. David D. Hall argues that when ministers began writing and teaching these doctrinal manuals, they engrossed a task not originally in their sphere: "[p]roviding catechisms was the preachers' first step toward full responsibility for what was meant to be a function of the family."¹ Whether these scholars blame the inability of families or the overreach of ministers, they concur that Puritans initially viewed catechizing as a household occupation. Yet sixteenth- and seventeenth-century practice in both Europe and New England contradicts these conclusions. Colonists did indeed expect families to catechize, but were accustomed to having other institutions assume this responsibility as well. They had learned from English example that catechizing was a regular activity in schools and parishes.

In many respects, Puritans used catechisms in New England as Protestants had used them in Europe--as a means to cultivate doctrinal and literacy instruction in homes, schools, and churches. In the context of the church, though, colonists made a significant change, setting aside

¹ Axtell 21, 26, 32-35; Moran and Vinovskis 129-32; David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1972), 168-69.

the customary place of catechesis in advancing youth to full communion. The admissions policies established in the Cambridge Platform supplanted confirmation, and with it, the standard church purpose of catechizing.² This separation of catechizing from rites of admission or initiation has contributed to confusion about ministers' role in this work. Because New England Puritans at first did not link formal programs of instruction to confirmation, some contemporary observers and twentieth-century historians have supposed that ministers did not originally catechize or consider it their duty to do so. In his criticism of the Bay Colony, Thomas Lechford complained that "there is not catechizing of children or others in any church."³ However, the testimony of clergy and laity alike confirms that ministers did teach catechisms, in children's sessions, household visitations, and from the pulpit.

Responsibility for religious education rested in the overlapping agencies of family, school, and church. Colonial clergymen catechized for many of the same reasons ministers in Europe had done so: to introduce children to doctrine, enhance their comprehension of sermons, inoculate them against heresies, and teach them to obey the Ten Commandments. While many ministers performed such instruction, Cotton Mather in particular lavished an

² The relationship between confirmation and Massachusetts' requirement of conversion narratives for church admission is explored in chapter six, below.

³ Thomas Lechford, *Plain Dealing, or News from New-England*, ed. J. Hammond Trumbull (Boston, 1867), 53-54.

extraordinary measure of attention to this labor. Families used catechisms to teach children beliefs, manners, and duties. Schools found them helpful in practicing reading and reinforcing religious lessons. These tasks were also undertaken by the *New England Primer*, which offered catechisms along with its alphabets and syllables. Used as instruments for literacy, manuals of doctrine, and guides to lawful living, catechisms helped socialize children in the godly environment of the Puritan colonies.

Catechizing in the Family

Primary religious education in New England took place in the family. While some scholars have discerned in New England a sharp division of labor between household and clergy in catechizing duties, reformers since Martin Luther encouraged the family to cooperate with the church's educational efforts. The experience of English Puritans suggests that parents were already accustomed to the task.⁴ Of course, some parents were not diligent in catechizing; the Massachusetts General Court's passage of laws requiring religious instruction suggests that not all householders were faithfully discharging this duty. But cultural expectation made clear that parents should introduce the young to the principles of religion.

⁴ For discussion of English Puritans' interest in catechizing, see Sommerville, *The Discovery of Childhood*, 135-41.

Parents interested in the salvation of their children. were expected to introduce them to religious knowledge and observance. Of course the godly were expected to edify their children, but all families, including the unregenerate, were ordered by law to instruct their own. Parents unwilling to catechize were crueller than "Sea-monsters," ministers charged. Cotton Mather reminded mothers and fathers that instruction was their responsibility because children's birth sin was the parents' fault: "thy Children are dying of an horrid poison, in their Bowels; and it was thou that poison'd 'em." Clergymen also used more positive exhortations. Richard Mather urged parents to "teach your children the word of God, firstly the principles of Catechism, and afterward higher points." Instruction was the way adults could encourage the salvation of the young, Israel Loring maintained: "Catechize your Children, and in that way (a very proper and useful way) instill into them the great and fundamental principles of our holy and excellent Religion." Thomas Cobbett directed, "let good Parents take speciall care & use the utmost diligence you can, about the matter of the good and godly education of your Children," for so doing, mothers and fathers would use "one of Gods ordinary waies and means, to effect saving good in Children." When Benjamin Wadsworth enumerated the mutual duties of *The Well-Ordered Family*, he insisted that parents not only should train children in good manners and a lawful calling, but should also "Teach your

children the Catechism," and youth should "mind to remember it as long as they live."⁵

Catechizing was held to yield both temporal and eternal benefits. Cotton Mather promised that well-instructed children were also better behaved ones, blessings to their households and neighborhoods. As English clergymen had warned, children would not be able to understand sermons--and therefore could not make use of this chief means of grace--unless they first had been taught fundamentals by their parents. Home instruction prepared children to profit from preaching and more advanced catechizing in church. For instance, Salem's congregation in 1660 ordered "that Mr. Cotton's Catechism should be used in families for teaching children, so that they might be prepared for public catechizing in the Congregation." By providing early instruction, householders fostered the colony's goals of creating a doctrinally literate population and equipping children to contemplate redemption.⁶

New England fathers bore responsibility for household government, including family devotions and education.

Deodat Lawson urged householders to catechize in order to

⁵ Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered* (Boston, 1694), 11; Richard Mather, *A Farewel Exhortation*, 6; Israel Loring, *Duty and Interest of Young Persons* (Boston, 1718), 22; Thomas Cobbett, *A fruitfull and usefull discourse* (London, 1656), 213-15; Benjamin Wadsworth, *The Well-Ordered Family* (Boston, 1712), 62.

⁶ Cotton Mather, *The Man of God Furnished* (Boston, 1708), 5-10; Axtell 26. On the educational duties of parents, see also Gusti Wiesenfeld Frankel, "Between Parent and Child in Colonial New England: an analysis of the Religious Child-Oriented Literature and Selected Children's Works," (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1977), 56-58.

impart "*Truths to be believed, and Duties to be performed,*" to teach children "the great things of their Salvation."⁷ It fell to the master of a house to insure that children and servants under his roof knew how to read and were familiar with New England religion. Laws reinforced clerical prescription. In 1642 the Massachusetts General Court mandated that masters must equip children and servants with the ability to "read & understand the principles of religion & the capitall lawes of this country." The Court strengthened this order in 1648, requiring all masters "once a week (at the least) [to] catechize their Children in the grounds and principles of Religion, and if any be unable to doe so much: that then at the least they procure such children or apprentices to learn some short orthodox catechism without book." Connecticut, New Haven, and Plymouth issued similar laws in the 1650s. In 1655, Massachusetts promulgated another rule for catechizing.⁸

Massachusetts towns enforced the General Court's requirement with strictures of their own. In 1661 Billerica named "Lieut. Will French and Ralph Hill, senior" to examine the town's families and discover "whether their children and servants are taught in the precepts of religion, in reading and learning their catechism." In 1670 Watertown ruled that

⁷ Deodat Lawson, *The Duty and Property of a Religious Householder* (Boston, 1693), 27.

⁸ Bay Colony laws concerning catechizing are discussed and quoted in Axtell 21-23. See also Nathanaell B. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*. 5 vols. (Boston, 1854) 2:6-7; Eames 16-18; Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 87-88.

"selectmen should go through the town in their several quarters," to test whether children and servants "be educated in some orthodox catechise." Dorchester's selectmen purposed to "have a vigilant eye to see that men's children and such within their charge" were being taught with "some orthodox catechism in families." The selectmen reminded householders of their duty, and called them to "render account here oft when they shall be hereunto required, either in the church or privately."⁹

Masters in New England, as in old England, complained about servants who resisted catechizing. Nevertheless, regardless of the disposition of their pupils, masters were to strive to make them literate and pious. The master's duty to catechize could, in fact, be part of the servant's contract: in one contract, Joseph Underwood of Watertown agreed to "teach the boy to read and write and some orthodox catechise" when he took on a servant in 1677.¹⁰

Laws bound masters to household instruction, but prescriptive literature insisted that mothers and fathers both should take up the task. Teaching children was not an altogether new role for women--William Gouge's *Of Domesticall Duties*, for instance, called on mothers to help

⁹ Walter Herbert Small, *Early New England Schools* (Boston and London, 1914), 296-97.

¹⁰ Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, 8; Small 347. Ezekiel Rogers lamented that it was "hard to get a servant that is glad of catechising or family-duties: I had a rare blessing of servants in Yorkshire, and those that I brought over were a blessing: but the young brood doth much afflict me." Rogers quoted in Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, ed. Thomas Robbins, 2 vols. (Hartford, 1853; reprint, New York, 1967), 1:413. [Hereafter cited as *Magnalia*]

educate children--but New England manuals made the charge explicit.¹¹ David Hall and Anne Brown suggest that mothers were "especially responsible for the spiritual welfare of their children," a duty that childbirth highlighted by bringing women to ponder the spiritual inheritance they would leave their offspring. Richard Mather insisted that "the Mother & mistress of the house is not exempted from this duty [of catechizing]," for mothers were "more with your children whilest they are little ones, then their Fathers are, therefore be still teaching them as soon as ever they are capable of learning." Cotton Mather also called women to this duty: a good mother's zeal "for the *Sprits* of her Children" should transform her into "a *Martha*, that is, a Teacher," and should lead her to make them "Expert in some *Orthodox Catechisms*."¹²

Manuals suggested that mothers direct early education while fathers oversee the more advanced stages.¹³ A regular

¹¹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich acknowledges women's roles as children's primary care-givers, but her emphasis on the variety of women's household tasks draws her to conclude that mothers hardly had leisure to conduct religious instruction: "With heavy responsibilities, little time, and few resources [mothers] could at least admonish and pray"--but not necessarily do more in teaching religion to their children. Yet prescriptive literature suggests, and funeral sermons confirm, that mothers were crucial in children's education. Ulrich's insistence that women were too busy to educate children does indicate why mothers were willing to pay for children to attend a dame school, which, she says, functioned as a kind of "communal day care." Ulrich, *Goodwives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York, 1982), 157-58.

¹² Brown and Hall, "Family Strategies and Religious Practice," 53-54; Richard Mather, *Farewel Exhortation*, 12-13; Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* (Cambridge, 1692), 94-95, and *A Family Well-Ordered*, 36-37.

¹³ Studies of New England literacy suggest that men were

pattern might have been that which Increase Mather recorded of his own childhood: "I learned to read of my mother. I learned to write of Father." Jane Colman Turell's "[f]ather daily instructed her" from age six to ten, while her mother "often pray'd for her, and over her, and gave her the wisest Counsels, and most faithful Warnings."¹⁴ Though ministers always urged fathers to uphold devotion and instruction in their households, women's educational duties may have been enhanced as churches in colonial New England increasingly gathered majorities of female members.¹⁵

There is substantial evidence, in sermons eulogizing pious women and in diaries describing early learning, that women did fulfill the role ministers assigned them, teaching children to be literate and religious. In a funeral sermon, Cotton Mather praised one matron for the "Large Number of *Well-Educated Children*, that she has presented to the Public," the product of her "abounding in excellent Instructions to her Children." When memorializing his own father, Mather emphasized the influence his grandmother had

more likely to be able to read and write. Nevertheless, women were almost universally able to read, and thus could teach their children to do so. See Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 32-34; Moran and Vinovskis 125-29.

¹⁴ Michael G. Hall, ed., "The Autobiography of Increase Mather," *AAS Proceedings* 71 (1961): 278; Benjamin Colman, *Reliquae Turellae, et Lachrymae Paternae* (Boston, 1735), 62.

¹⁵ Building on arguments that family laxity in catechizing prompted churches to perform it, Moran and Vinovskis suggest that as male church membership declined, ministers transferred teaching responsibilities to women. While this argument is grounded in the problematic assumption that families were at first expected to catechize on their own, it does suggest that women were doing a praiseworthy job of catechizing. Moran and Vinovskis 130-32.

on Increase: "As the Lad grew up she Taught him, (as her . Lemuel) all that was good." So instrumental was she to Increase's faith that Cotton called her "Twice a Mother to him." Benjamin Colman noted that the children of the late Elizabeth Sewall Hirst displayed through their piety "the *Pains she took in their Education*, the *Example* she gave them, the *Instructions* and *Charges* they had from her, her Prayers and Vows for them." Richard Brown recorded that he was "educated under the wing of my parentage, especially my mother, who was a pious and prudent woman, and endeavored to instill into [me] the principals of Religion and Holiness." With these efforts, women exerted authority in New England society, serving, notes Amanda Porterfield, as "guardians, interpreters, and inculcators of Puritan culture."¹⁶

Desiring that children "suck in religion with mother's milk," ministers consistently recommended that catechizing begin early. John Cotton urged parents to introduce the very young to it, for "Babes are flexible and easily bowed,"

¹⁶ See Cotton Mather, *Ecclesiae Monilia* (Boston, 1726), 24, 38-39; *Parentator* (Boston, 1726) in *Two Mather Biographies*, ed. William J. Scheick (Bethlehem, PA, 1989), 86; Benjamin Colman, *The Honour and Happiness of the Vertuous Woman* (Boston, 1716). 13. Richard Brown quoted in Axtell 174. For an excellent treatment of ministers' expectations of mothers, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668-1735," *American Quarterly* 28 (1976): 20-40. Amanda Porterfield suggests that mothers "had primary responsibility for shaping religious experience and for implementing the domestic discipline and affection that lay at the heart of Puritan strategies for world renewal. Mothers explained God to their children and servants, if not as leaders of family worship sessions, then in the context of their surveillance of household activities." Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England: The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (Oxford, 1992), 94.

and "if a Childe be well set, and straight in his Childe-hood, he will grow more strong and compact when he is elder."¹⁷ Far from assuming that children should be taught the same complex material administered to adults, clergymen told parents to consider children's abilities and not attempt to impart too much at once. Using the common metaphor of children as "narrow mouth'd vessels," Peter Bulkely insisted that "pious education" be given to the young in measured doses.¹⁸ These admonitions suggest that Puritans strove to adjust instruction to youthful capacities. Still, seventeenth-century expectations for early learning might strike us as rather demanding. Nathaniel Eaton recalled that his "education was in a religious manner from a cradle I was trained up to read Scripture." Cotton Mather boasted that his son began to read before the boy turned two. John Barnard remembered starting school by age three, and around the same age Samuel Sewall's son was sent to a dame school. Benjamin Colman's daughter Jane "could say the greater Part of the Assembly's Catechism" by the time she was four.¹⁹

Even before children could read, educators considered it desirable that they memorize a catechism's responses. Once these phrases became familiar to the young, they would

¹⁷ Cotton, *A Practical Commentary...upon the first Epistle generall of John* (London, 1656), 93, 101.

¹⁸ Cotton, *A Practical Commentary*, 92; Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel-Covenant, or, The Covenant of grace opened* (London, 1651), 162. See also Morgan, *Puritan Family*, 87-100.

¹⁹ Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 35-36; Colman, *Reliquae Turellae*, 61-62.

take steps toward reading, piecing together syllables and words from what they already knew. Lawrence Cremin judges catechizing to have been a "dull and routinized" process, but marvels that through this process, "many a youngster must have found himself, willy-nilly, learning to read."²⁰ Like catechists in Europe, New England teachers were confident that children would later comprehend what they had memorized. At home, children might first learn their letters from a hornbook (a sheet listing alphabet and syllables on a paddle covered with horn), and then work through a catechism.

Puritans believed that children should be catechized children at a young age so they would grow up within these doctrinal and behavioral patterns. Catechisms could be offered on numerous occasions, and in the course of their education learners might meet several different forms purveying common doctrine. While ministers and magistrates insisted that children should be catechized, they did not insist that parents (or schoolmasters or churches) must use any particular catechism. Authorities commonly pressed the use of "some orthodox catechism," but did not specify a particular one. In 1641, the Massachusetts General Court called for the drafting of a common catechism, but in spite of the law, no single, standard catechism was written for the colony's use.²¹ Instead, ministers were spurred to

²⁰ Cremin 156; Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 37-38.

²¹ Eames cites John Winthrop's record that in 1641 the General Court "desired that the eld[ers] would make a catachisme for the instruction of youth in the grounds of

write versions for their own congregations. Though William Perkins's *The Foundation of the Christian Religion* and the Westminster Shorter Catechism were popular, colonial clergy did not rest satisfied with these, but produced their own manuals.

Puritans took to heart a lesson from the English experience: teaching methods should be matched to abilities. New England ministers' willingness to compose new forms reflected judgment that catechisms should vary with a child's capacity and knowledge. The form of the document shaped the way it would be taught. With elementary catechisms, parents were to read questions for children to answer and memorize. When children had learned a catechism "very perfectly," parents were to explain those principles further and ascertain whether "the sense of the Truth is Entred into their Souls." Mothers might employ an elementary form to teach their younger children, while fathers proceeded with more complex material, possibly from another catechism. If a family owned only one catechism, the householder could use its questions and answers to expound more advanced points of doctrine.²²

religion....that the elders should be desired to agree upon a form of catechism which might be put forth in print." Though Eames found a citation for "A Catechism agreed upon by the Elders at the Desire of the General Court" (1641) in a nineteenth-century bibliography of colonial publications, he is persuaded that no such catechism ever existed. Eames 17-18.

²² Cotton Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, 19-20; Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 87-92; Wadsworth, *The Well-Ordered Family*, 62.

In arguing that Plymouth colonists treated their children like "little adults," John Demos notes that "the whole family went to the same Church service, and the young no less than the old were expected to digest the learned words that flowed from the pulpit."²³ But Puritans labored with children, before and after church services, to help them "digest" those important words. That was a good part of the goal of catechizing. Young children working through a catechism met many "learned words" and were given comparatively straightforward definitions of them, so they would be able to grasp sermons and other religious discourse. Writers designed these manuals to present important ideas and vocabulary in a way that children could comprehend.

A parent's job in teaching the catechism entailed more than merely explaining doctrine and testing memory. Parents were to use these questions and answers to instill conviction in their children. In catechizing, a parent must "inform his Children how to fly from *Sin*, and turn to *God*, and close with *Christ*," Cotton Mather insisted. Catechesis involved practice as well as memorization. By teaching children the covenant of grace, parents might "bring them sincerely to renew their Covenant with God in their own Persons." In instructing her daughter Jane, Benjamin Colman's wife added "wisest Counsels and most faithful Warnings," likely urging the child to consider her estate in

²³ Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*, 140.

light of orthodox doctrine.²⁴ Catechisms embodied the Puritan tension between "historical faith" and "saving faith": knowledge was both essential and limited in the drama of salvation. Learning alone could not bring salvation, but a catechism could become an instrument to nudge children toward conversion. Children who mastered their catechisms learned how they might hope to find favor with God, how they might fit into their town's church, how they ought to understand specific sins (in order to avoid them), and how to receive the language ministers used in sermons each sabbath.

While the public context of catechizing changed in some respects through the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, the expectation that families should provide this instruction remained constant throughout the period. Contrary to some historians' evaluations, families were not excused from (or squeezed out of) their catechetical duties in the late seventeenth century. The family's role in instructing children was still considered so essential that in Cotton Mather's generation that Mather could agree with a "famous Writer in the church," who judged that "If *Parents* did their *Duties* as they ought, the *Word* publickly Preached, would not be the ordinary means of *Regeneration* in the Church, but only *without* the Church, among Infidels."²⁵ By catechizing their children, parents equipped the young to

²⁴ Cotton Mather, *Nepenthes Evangelicum* (Boston, 1713), 26-27, and *Companion for Communicants* (Boston, 1690), 113; Colman, *Reliquae Turellae*, 62.

²⁵ Mather, *A Family Well-Ordered*, 6.

understand the doctrine their communities valued, and to live righteously. Further, this instruction could plant seeds of later conversion. As Axtell, Moran, and Vinovskis observe, the family fulfilled an important role in the religious education of the young. But from the beginning, it was not the only institution engaged in this task. Catechizing begun in the family could continue in school and church.

Catechizing in Schools

Puritan colonists demonstrated their conviction that education was an important ally of true religion by founding schools soon after settlement. Their dedication to literacy bore fruit in traditional schools and more informal academic arrangements. A 1647 Massachusetts law required towns of fifty families to provide a school to teach children to read and write, and required towns of one hundred families to establish a grammar school, to combat the "one chief project of that old deluder, Satan," who strove to keep people from knowledge of scriptures. Connecticut and Plymouth followed the Bay Colony's lead, issuing similar school laws in the 1650s through 1670s. Even before Massachusetts' "Old Deluder Satan" law, however, several of its towns had endeavored to establish schools. Dorchester, Charlestown, Boston, Dedham, Ipswich, Roxbury, and Cambridge had grammar schools, while Salem kept a reading school.²⁶ While school

²⁶ The terms "reading school," "English school," and "petty school" all appear in secondary literature to

laws reveal high-minded intention, in practice, some towns were not so quick to set up the institutions that the laws demanded. In the years following the General Court's ruling, towns required to keep grammar schools established them, but only a third of those required to keep reading schools followed through. Later in the century, some towns opted to keep general schools that taught English and the classical languages, rather than maintaining separate institutions. Where grammar schools took root, towns experimented with different means of supporting them, funding by subscription, rents, and taxation.²⁷

Towns' uneven success in maintaining schools did not leave children without instruction in reading and writing. Parents already performed basic instruction, and they might also send their children to a dame school. Combining the environments of household and school, dame schools were gathered informally, with parents paying a local woman a few pence each week to teach reading and sometimes other subjects to their children. Later in the seventeenth century, towns accorded such schools financial support and

describe the elementary institution dedicated to teaching vernacular, not classical, language skills. Confusion in names is somewhat appropriate, for as Geraldine Murphy argues, the colonists themselves were much more clear about the properties of a grammar school than of the elementary institution. See Small, *Early New England Schools*; Geraldine Joanne Murphy, "Massachusetts Bay Colony: The Role of Government in Education," (Ph.D. diss, Radcliffe College, 1960), 56, 144.

²⁷ Cremin 180-187. Murphy's "Massachusetts Bay Colony" gives a broad examination of Massachusetts experimentation in school founding, focusing on different funding methods and the patchy success of the colony's school laws.

recognition. Towns sometimes agreed to have women teach during months when masters were not keeping school, and even allowed these women to use local school buildings.²⁸

In dame schools and reading schools, boys and girls would practice spelling, reading, and learning catechisms or psalms. Occasionally they might learn writing or arithmetic as well. Children could also exercise more homely skills. One eighteenth-century man recalled his dame-school days, in which he practiced reading with a psalter, and then after "he had read and spelled a little, he was usually put to *shelling beans* or some other useful and improving occupation." Given the environment of the dame school, it is likely that many children sometimes were put to such improving occupations. Conclusions about the curricula of these schools must be largely speculative; lamenting that children's schoolbooks are "notoriously ephemeral," Lawrence Cremin surmises that dame and reading schools used catechisms, primers, psalters, spellers, writing manuals, and even perhaps Edmund Coote's *The English Schoole-Maister*.²⁹

Parental and dame-school instruction prepared children for more advanced education. When boys were ready for grammar school, schoolmasters assumed that they already had ability to read and write English. While the skill of literacy was itself understood to serve the interest of

²⁸ Small 165-72.

²⁹ Small 275-79; Axtell 169-70, 175-83; Cremin, 180-82, 184-87. See also Clifton Johnson, *Old-Time Schools and School-books* (New York, 1904).

Christianity, schoolmasters also offered more specific religious education.³⁰ Good schools deserved to be called "the very *Salt* of the town," Cotton Mather declared, for in them youth should be "over & above *Well Catechised* in the principles of *Religion*," with this instruction given at least weekly. As in England, boys might use catechisms to practice Greek and Latin: as Mather insisted, "The lesson of *Jesus* are nobler things than the lessons of *Cato*." Some towns explicitly directed their schoolmasters to catechize. Richard Norcross, hired at Watertown in 1650, was instructed to teach a catechism weekly. John Prudden at the Roxbury Latin School was told to give his students "scholasticall, moral and theological discipline." Daniel Epps in Salem had to supplement his instruction in ancient languages with moral and theological principles. In New Haven, the schoolmaster was directed to catechize every Saturday afternoon. The master in Dorchester was to do the same, "either in some catechism which the wardens shall provide and present, or in defect thereof, in some other," and in Hampton, New Hampshire, the town called the master to teach children in "some orthodox catechise provided for them by their parents or masters."³¹

³⁰ Axtell attributes school catechizing to the family's failure to perform it properly, declaring that "even grammar school masters were pressed into service in the unfamiliar role of catechists." However, English practice demonstrates that schoolmasters were quite familiar with their roles as catechists. Axtell 32-35; Small 90-91.

³¹ Mather, "An Address, Ad Fratres in Eremo" [Bound with Mather, *The Family Well-Ordered*], 1-2; Cotton Mather, *Bonifacius: An Essay upon the good*, ed. David Levin (Cambridge, MA, 1966), 84; Small 7, 26, 119, 299; Cremin

Boys who continued their studies at Harvard also continued their course of catechesis. As in England, catechesis at this level was not rote recitation but instruction in the major works of Reformed divinity. Harvard's academic schedule in the 1640s featured "catechetical divinity" on Saturday mornings at eight o'clock.³² The writings of William Ames, Wollebius, and William Buchan were the choice texts for these sessions. An early eighteenth-century Harvard schedule shows that these works were still deemed appropriate: the 1723 program of study prescribed that students start with "the greek Catechism" as freshmen, continue to "Wollebius's Divinity" in their second and third years, and finally reach Ames's *Medulla* in the fourth.³³ More advanced than grammar-school catechizing, these divinity lessons gave students further exercise in theology and classical languages. They equipped future ministers with material they might use later in catechizing their congregations. Harvard chose to use the divinity manuals of prominent continental and English

186, 191; Axtell 32-34.

³² Cremin 214; Samuel Eliot Morison, *Harvard in the Seventeenth Century*. 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1936), 1:141. Relevant sections of *New England's First Fruits* appear in Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge, 1935), 432-37. Michael Wigglesworth recorded in his diary that he had "divinity catechetical" on Saturdays while a Harvard student, and helped teach this subject later as a Fellow at the college. See Richard Crowder, *No Featherbed to Heaven: A Biography of Michael Wigglesworth, 1631-1705* (Michigan State, 1962), 37, 45-46.

³³ Morison supplies the titles of these texts based on his survey of surviving works of divinity from seventeenth-century Harvard users. The 1723 Harvard program supports his findings. Morison, *Harvard in the Seventeenth Century*, 1:147.

theologians. New England clergy did not produce these manuals themselves, preferring to write catechisms to provide "milk for babes," and remaining content with the doctrinal "meat for men" in the manuals of other Reformed theologians.

As in England, academic institutions at all levels incorporated catechisms into their instruction. Protecting religion was the underlying goal of New England education, and catechizing fit comfortably into the programs of New England's schools. The instruction provided in these institutions complemented the introductory teaching parents offered. Like Nowell's "middle" and "larger" forms in England, colonial catechisms helped grammar students increase doctrinal understanding as they exercised classical tongues.

Catechizing Native Americans

Ministers applied catechizing not only to those born and raised in godly institutions, but to those yet outside the embrace of the gospel; they used catechisms to work in missionary outreach to Native Americans. Puritans had made this evangelism one goal of settlement. The Massachusetts seal testified to the Company's missionary aims: "Come Over and Help Us," Puritans imagined that Indians had called out to them. New England's godly scorned the easy "conversions" of Jesuit missionaries who, they charged, merely gave Indians new clothes, forcibly baptized them, and called them

Christian.³⁴ Instead, in their missions, the English would offer Native Americans the same hard, narrow road to salvation that they themselves walked.

Despite their early ideals, these colonists made little effort to bring Christianity to Amerindians in the first decade of settlement. Occupied with the many tasks of town-building in the wilderness, they lacked time and resources to pursue missions. *New Englands First Fruits* counted among the impediments to the work the Native Americans' language and their "distance from Christianity," as the natives had "never been prepared thereunto by any Civility at all." Nevertheless, settlers reported some favorable signs among those who were impressed by the "English man's God," and ministers hoped for "greater Harvest" in the future.³⁵

In the 1640s, John Eliot and the younger Thomas Mayhew both began to evangelize among Indians. Mayhew preached to those on Martha's Vineyard and early won a committed convert named Hiacoomes, who later became a preacher to his own people. By 1650, with the help of some remarkable providences and support from local sachems, Mayhew counted hundreds of Christians and even twenty-two communicants among the island's Indians. John Eliot, the minister at Roxbury, visited groups of Indians in 1646, preaching,

³⁴ [John Wilson], *The Day-Breaking, if not the Sun-Rising of the Gospell with the Indians in New-England* (London, 1647), 15.

³⁵ Quoted in Morison, *Founding of Harvard College*, 421-431.

teaching, and praying with them. Eliot and his colleagues reasoned that Indians not only needed faith, but also needed the accoutrements of English civilization to help them receive that faith. Thus, as Eliot began gathering converts, Puritans organized them into English-style towns. The first of these "praying towns" was settled at Natick in 1651.³⁶

To draw assistance in funding these missionary efforts, Edward Winslow tried to gather support in England. In 1649 Parliament chartered "The Society for the Propagation of the Gospell in New England," familiarly called the New England Company. The New England Company provided essential aid to Eliot, Mayhew, and other missionaries. Among other projects, the society published a series of promotional reports known as the "Eliot Indian tracts," which provide an

³⁶ This discussion of Puritans' missions to the Indians in seventeenth-century New England relies on Alden T. Vaughan, *New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675*, Rev. ed. ([orig. Boston, 1965], New York, 1979), and William Kellaway, *The New England Company 1649-1776* (New York, 1961). Whereas these two sources consider favorably the Puritans' project to Christianize the Indians, other scholarship views it in a more negative light. See, for instance, Neal Salisbury, "Red Puritans: The 'Praying Indians' of Massachusetts Bay and John Eliot," *WMQ* 3d. ser. 31 (1974): 27-54. Salisbury criticizes English missionary efforts, alleging that Eliot's attempt to make civilized saints of the Indians only gave New Englanders practice in waging "cultural warfare." James Ronda attempts to shift attention from the English actions, benevolent or harmful as they may have been, and focus instead on the Indians' agency in evaluating, accepting, or rejecting missionaries' messages. See Ronda, "'We Are Well as We are:' An Indian Critique of Seventeenth-Century Christian Missions," *WMQ* 3d. ser. 34 (1977): 66-82. My treatment of Eliot's missions assumes that Puritans bore sincere intentions in evangelizing Native Americans, even though those intentions were accompanied by a sense of cultural superiority.

overview of the ministers' progress and frustrations in evangelizing their neighbors.³⁷

Puritans considered literacy as important for "Praying Indians" as for English Christians, but few among the clergy had facility in Native American tongues, and few potential converts could speak English. To remedy the problem, the New England Company funded the printing of an "Indian Library," which included Eliot's translation of the Bible, an Indian catechism, a dialogue, a primer, a grammar handbook, and versions of important devotional writings, such as Richard Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted* and Lewis Bayly's *Practice of Piety*.³⁸

Eliot's missionary program was substantially a program of education. Unlike the English settlers, who might be "ignorant" but still familiar with Christian principles, Native Americans needed to be trained in doctrine from the very basics. Puritans assumed that before these people could be converted, they had to exchange their understanding of creation, providence, and redemption for a Christian worldview. Once they had acquired and accepted this knowledge, Puritans believed, Indians might find themselves close to grace. Thus, teaching Native Americans was a large

³⁷ Vaughan 254-55; Kellaway 9-14, 22-24. Eliot was not the author of the tracts but his leading role in missionary work linked his name to the promotional works. The Indian tracts are reprinted in *MHS Collections*, 3d. ser., IV (1834).

³⁸ Vaughan 276-79; Kellaway, 122-65. Eliot and other New England ministers wrote and translated these works. See also Henry W. Bowden and James P. Ronda, eds., *John Eliot's Indian Dialogues: A Study in Cultural Interaction* (Westport, CT, 1980).

part of evangelizing them. Not all of the English instruction was strictly religious in content. Since Puritans thought that living a godly life meant living a "civilized" one, they also taught Indians to work, dress, and be governed like the English. To help them enjoy the benefits of literacy, Puritans brought their children into schools for instruction in reading and writing. The English settlers even aimed to offer Indians a Harvard education. In the mid-1650s, under the presidency of Henry Dunster, Harvard added an Indian College to its grounds. Though few Native American youth ultimately completed Harvard's course of study, Puritans at least made efforts to provide the learned ministry the converts would need when Eliot and company would lie in the dust.³⁹ Puritans' evangelical-educational program spanned a range of levels, but the most basic instruction arguably was most crucial. Eliot and his colleagues judged that unless Indians accepted English perceptions of religion and righteous living, their children would never approach grammar school, and their souls would never near heaven. Catechisms therefore were a mainstay in missionary activities.

On his first missionary visit, Eliot gave his hearers a sermon sketching God's work in the world--like the *narratio* in early catechesis, a description of Creation, Fall, and redemption--and then he held a teaching session. First he asked questions of his hearers, and subsequently allowed the

³⁹ Morison, *Harvard in the Seventeenth Century*, 1:340-45; Vaughan 282; Kellaway 109-11.

Indians to question him. After three hours of teaching, Eliot and accompanying ministers rewarded their students, giving tobacco to adults and apples to youngsters. Two weeks later, Eliot returned to the group and this time gathered together the children for catechizing.⁴⁰

With these children, Eliot followed the same techniques English catechists recommended for their own youth. So that teachers would not "clog their mindes or memories with too much at first," the visiting ministers initially asked the children only three questions: who made the world, who could save them, and how many commandments God gave them to keep. After this successful session, Eliot once again "gave something to every childe" as a reward. When Eliot made return visits, he would check to see how well children and adults had memorized (and internalized) the catechism. Indian children who attended school also were catechized there. In school, "the Master daily prayeth among his Schollers, and instructeth them in Catechisme," using a form Eliot wrote for the purpose. Through questions and answers, ministers could gauge how well Indians understood important doctrines. Once, when a boy got drunk and disobeyed his parents, Eliot sensed a problem even before he heard of the young man's misdeeds, because he "did observe when I catechized him, when he should say the fift Commandement, he did not freely say, *Honour thy father*, but wholly left out *mother*." Questions and answers could reveal progress as

⁴⁰ Vaughan 247-49; [Wilson], *The Day-Breaking*, 6-7.

well as problems. Eliot reflected with satisfaction that "sundry young men...whome I did catechise and so train up ever since, these now are sundry of them good parts able to teach."⁴¹

Catechizing by simple questions and answers was Eliot's method for children, but he intended this knowledge to reach their elders as well. Having spent time with the smallest during his visits, Eliot bade older youths and adults to help children practice the catechism in his absence, and "by the often repeating of it to the children," men and women also learned to answer the questions. One convert recounted, for instance, that he brought his son when he first attended the minister's lecture, and the boy was asked who made him. The boy "was taught to answer, God," and the father afterwards had to ponder the lesson: "that night Monotunkquanit could not sleep, wondering whether he should then pray to God."⁴²

⁴¹ [Wilson], *The Day-Breaking*, 8; Thomas Shepard, *The Clear Sun-shine of the Gospel Breaking Forth upon the Indians in New-England* (London, 1648), 21; Henry Whitfield, "Strength out of Weaknesse; Or a Glorious Manifestation of the further Progresse of the Gospel Among the Indians in New England," in *MHS Collections*, 3d. ser., IV (1834), 169-70; Joseph Felt, ed., "Letters of John Eliot," *MHS Proceedings* 17 (1879-1880): 248.

⁴² Shepard, *The Clear Sunshine*, 18-19; [Wilson], *The Day-Breaking*, 8; Eliot, *A further Account of the progress of the Gospel Amongst the Indians of New England: Being a Relation of the Confessions made by several Indians* (London, 1660), 24-25.

Eliot also had speakers in his *Indian Dialogues* testify that the catechism was useful for adults as well as children. One character, seeking to learn more about Christianity, declared, "I see myself very ignorant, and therefore I am very desirous to learn catechism, because I have heard and do perceive that is the foundation of all knowledge in religion being wisely gathered out of the

Since his very first meeting with Indians, Eliot valued the questions they posed to him in addition to those he asked. In the Indian tracts, he regularly listed examples of the faith-related queries Native Americans posed to him and his colleagues, for the questions provided crucial evidence of Indians' reception of the gospel. "By these questions you may see they somewhat savour the things of God and Christ," he pointed out to readers, "and that their soules be in a searching condition after the great points of Religion and Salvation."⁴³

English children were credited with no special quickening of faith when they displayed the Christian presuppositions familiar to them, but when Native Americans began to think of the world in Christian terms, their queries showed that they had begun to grasp and believe what the English ministers preached. They asked Eliot about God's work in nature, about biblical personalities, and about how to live more faithfully as Christians. "You say our body is made of clay, what is the Sunne or Moone made of?" asked one; "Why did Abraham buy a place to bury in?" wondered another; another, showing concern that undoubtedly pleased his teachers, asked, "When every day my heart thinks I must dye, and goe to hell for my sins, what shall I doe in this case?" As Eliot noted, this "enquiring" was "a good sign." Further, Indians' questions remedied the weakness of scripture." Bowden and Ronda 109.

⁴³ For examples of such lists, see [Wilson], *The Day-Breaking*, 3-7; Shepard, *The Clear Sun-shine*, 13-15; Winslow, *The Glorious Progresse of the Gospel*, 12-14.

the standard catechisms used to instruct them. A standardized lesson, especially one designed for and by English Christians, could not anticipate all the questions that might arise among this audience, nor could it bridge the gap between the students' preconceptions and Christian doctrine. By answering as well as asking questions, Eliot could present orthodoxy with relevance and see how Indians had incorporated his instruction into their worldview.⁴⁴

Indians could adopt, select, or reject the teachings of the English. They were less likely merely to approve them as true without responding to them--less likely, that is, to have what the English called mere "historical faith." Knowledge was not all that they needed for salvation, but embracing it was a substantial part of their experience of faith. Eliot encouraged his colleagues to accept the knowledge and behavior of the Praying Indians as important signs. The English should consider the obstacles that faithful Indians overcame in showing their belief--abandoning pow-wows, leaving friends, displeasing sachems--and count that evidence of grace, for the natives would hardly be able to do all this without grace:

[I]t cannot but appear there is some work of God upon their hearts, which doth carry them through all these snares, and adde to this, that if upon some competent time of experience, we shall find them to grow in knowledge of the principles of

⁴⁴ Winslow, *The Glorious Progresse of the Gospel*, 12-14; Shepard, *The Clear Sun-shine*, 14. James Ronda interprets the Native Americans' questions differently, arguing that these "searching questions" revealed Indians' ability to select, resist, and doubt the doctrine Puritans presented. Ronda, "We are Well as We Are," 78.

Religion, and to love the wayes of the Lord better, according as they come to understand them, and to yeeld obedience to them and submit to this great change, to bridle lusts by lawes of chastity, and to mortifie idlenesse by labour, and desire to traine up their children accordingly; I say if we shall see these things in some measure in them, what should hinder charity from hoping that there is grace in their hearts....⁴⁵

Their spiritual growth and evident understanding, plus the testimony of their actions, would reveal the work of God. The English should give Indians time to understand and obey the teaching, Eliot advised, and then charitably should look for grace in these converts.

However, with the Indians at Natick, the English proceeded cautiously in counting church candidates as truly converted. In the early 1650s Eliot observed enough wholesome belief and behavior among the Natick group to judge that some had received grace. He attempted to gather them into a church. In 1652 the Natick converts tried for the first time to covenant as a church, professing faith and repentance through an interpreter before an English audience. On that occasion, the ministers present judged the Indian converts insufficiently prepared. In 1654, they tried again. This time, elders were particularly interested to discern whether the converts had adequate Christian knowledge.⁴⁶ They found they had. When the candidates

⁴⁵ Whitfield, *The Light Appearing*, 41.

⁴⁶ The English posed many questions, as Eliot put it, not in "Catechisticall method strictly, in a way Children might Answer"--that is, the converts were queried on the same doctrinal points a catechism would cover, but they were to answer more at length, in their own words. The irony of Eliot's statement is that the Amerindians' words were quite

replied to the ministers' questions, the examiners were so impressed that they cut short the display of doctrinal knowledge Eliot had planned. "[I]t was said," Eliot recorded, "that they did perceived that they were instructed in points of Catechisme, by what they had heard from them." Once more to Eliot's frustration, however, the men who had offered themselves as pillars of the church were judged unready. In 1659, the converts' testimonies finally were approved, but ministers worried that Indians might yet lack abilities to administer their own church. The English agreed to let them communicate in the Roxbury church for a time. Finally, in 1660, the converts covenanted together in their own church.⁴⁷

While the repeated attempts at church formation were frustrating to the converts, the records that this process yielded are useful for historians seeking to understand the Praying Indians' paths to conversion. Having examined these records, Charles L. Cohen argues that Natick church candidates were, in fact, not converted and not ready for church fellowship when they first testified. They were penitent but not sufficiently sorry for specific sins in 1652, Cohen judges, and even when they gave improved

"catechisticall," in that the converts had learned from catechisms the figures of speech to use in describing their faith. Eliot, *A Late and Further Manifestation*, 10.

⁴⁷ Eliot, *A Late and Further Manifestation*, 21. Accounts of the Natick group's attempt to start a church are found in Vaughan, 266-270. Vaughan suggests that the converts showed adequate knowledge and proof of salvation, but the English felt the Praying Indians needed a longer "apprenticeship" before they were able fully to manage the affairs of a church. See also Kellaway 89-90.

narratives in 1659, citing scripture and detailing repentance, they did not manifest the affective range of English converts.⁴⁸ That is, they "truncated and muted the affective cycle Puritans underwent, lopping off the joys of sanctification and mitigating the horrors of humiliations."⁴⁹

In his evaluation of the Indians' 1652 narratives, Richard Mather insisted that the "Spirit of the Lord hath been working thereby in the hearts of many of them such Illumination, such Conviction, &c. as may justly be looked at (if not as full and thorough Conversion, yet) as an hopeful beginning and preparation thereto." Mather's statement could be interpreted as Cohen interprets it: as a judgment that the Indians had passed through some stages on the way to grace but were not saved. Yet even if Mather meant to indicate that these Praying Indians had only come part of the way, he did emphasize that grace was present in them. Mather urged that none who considered their confessions should doubt "whether any sound and saving work be yet wrought in them or no." At the very least, the Praying Indians had the beginnings of grace and signs of repentance. They could name their sins, and they called on Christ for salvation. This, to Mather, was evidence of

⁴⁸ Charles L. Cohen, "Conversion Among Puritans and Amerindians: A Theological and Cultural Perspective," in *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith*, ed. Francis J. Bremer (Boston, 1993), 233-56.

⁴⁹ Cohen, "Conversion Among Puritans and Amerindians," 254.

grace, "considering how the Work of the Spirit of God is said by Christ Himself to consist in great part in convincing of sin, and of righteousness."⁵⁰

The Native American converts may have expressed less depth of emotion than English saints, as Cohen argues. However, like the godly English, who frequently noted that hearing sermons triggered conviction or brought comfort, the Praying Indians sometimes indicated how learning a new doctrine brought them to a turning point. In their narratives, Praying Indians explained how hearing a scripture or doctrine prompted thought or action, fear or relief. One convert, Ponampam, recalled, "the first word that I heard was, *That all from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, shall pray unto God*; and I thought, Oh! let it be so." Receiving news that there was pardon in Christ, Ponampam was further moved: "I heard, That God would pardon all that beleeve in Christ! and quickly after I saw my sins to be very many." Another convert, Magus, confessed that he formerly did not believe that God made the world, but later desired to pray, and "after this I heard of Gods anger against me, and I beleeved it." Totherswamp noted, "after I came to learn what sin was, by the commandements of God, and then I saw all my sins, lust, gaming, &c." Growing in his belief, "when I heard that word of Christ, Christ said *Repent and Beleeve*, and Christ seeth who Repenteth,

⁵⁰ John Eliot and Thomas Mayhew, Jr., "Tears of Repentance: Or, A Further Narrative of the Progress of the Gospel amongst the Indians in New-England," *MHS Collections*, 3d ser., IV (1834), 219-20.

then I said, dark and weak is my Soul, and I am one in darkness, I am a very sinful man, and now I pray to Christ for life." Of course, knowledge alone was not the same as understanding, and these converts did not necessarily embrace the word when they first encountered it. As Ponampam lamented of his early behavior, "I only heard the word, I did not understand it, nor meditate upon it." He admitted resisting the gospel, testifying that, "when I heard the Catechism, *That God made all men*, I did not believe it, because I knew I sprang from my Father and Mother." John Speene first ignored preaching, for "whatever I heard I lost because my heart was run away," but later, "I hearing the Catechism, I desired to learn it, and then I believed that when Believers die, their souls go to God, and are ever happy." By the time they could understand the gospel, Amerindians had already been beneficiaries of the Spirit's work on their minds and hearts.⁵¹

Eliot's evangelical education bore fruit with those to whom he ministered. Some of his colleagues also conducted such education elsewhere. Abraham Pierson devised a native-language catechism for those residing in Branford, Connecticut (part of the New Haven colony) in 1658.⁵² In Norwich, James Fitch strove against Mohegan opposition to

⁵¹ Eliot and Mayhew, *Tears of Repentance*, 229-30, 240-42, 247, 252.

⁵² Pierson's catechism seeks to demonstrate divine truths by the laws of nature. Though this must have seemed to him a reasonable way to bring the gospel to people unfamiliar with Christian doctrine, the catechism was more abstract than Eliot's and, in Vaughan's judgment, less helpful. Vaughan 277, 301.

gain converts, and enjoyed modest success before King Philip's War. On Martha's Vineyard, Thomas Mayhew "preached and catechised children who answered readily and modestly in the Principles of Religion." Mayhew maintained a busy schedule of ministering to two Native American congregations until 1656, when he set sail for England along with one of his converts and was lost at sea. Upon his son's death, the elder Thomas Mayhew continued work among the Christian Indians. By 1674, most on the island had come over to Christianity, and at least fifty attained status of communicants. In Plymouth, William Leveridge and Richard Bourne preached to Nausets, and a group of converts formed a church at Maktopog in 1670. John Cotton, Jr., preached to Native Americans at Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard in 1664, and later to a group in Plymouth when he moved to the church there. Rhode Island could count few Christian Indians despite the fact that Roger Williams preached to the Narragansetts there. Williams's Bay Colony brethren attributed his missionary failures to his moral lapses: Thomas Shepard reported that one sachem would not hear Williams preach because he discovered the clergyman working on the Sabbath.⁵³

In all these efforts, the Puritans' project was to transform the self-perceptions of the Native Americans drawn to Christianity. Whether or not God would extend grace to

⁵³ Kellaway 96-99; Vaughan 239-240, 259-95, 302-3; Frederick L. Weis, "The New England Company of 1649 and its Missionary Enterprises," *PCSM Transactions* 38 (1941): 146-47.

them, their conversion would begin with knowledge and change of mind. Catechisms made comprehensible the religious terminology of the English, and gave converts a new language to use in describing themselves as Christians. However one judges the efforts of Eliot and his colleagues to civilize and Christianize the Praying Indians, catechisms were essential in these projects of evangelism and instruction.

Catechizing in Church

Cotton Mather boasted that New England's ministers catechized more avidly than "had few pastors of mankind."⁵⁴ Yet catechizing was not, at first, a legal obligation for churches. Neither the Massachusetts General Court nor the Cambridge Platform made it an ecclesiastical duty in the colony's first few decades. Colonial churches removed catechizing from its regular, mandatory position as a sabbath-afternoon exercise to prepare church youth for communion. Nevertheless, while colonial catechizing may have occurred with differing frequency and in different arrangements than that ordered by the *Book of Common Prayer*, seventeenth-century colonial clergy did catechize their flocks, and laity did report receiving this instruction.

It is clear, though, that some colonists were unsatisfied with ministers' religious instruction. In Plymouth in 1623, some complained that "Children [were] not Cattachised nor taught to read." The church protested that

⁵⁴ *Magnalia* 2:179.

catechizing was being performed, even though it was not all conducted in church, as "divers take pains with their owne . . . as they Can."⁵⁵ In 1641, Thomas Lechford described Massachusetts churches' admissions procedures (of which he disapproved), and charged that most churches failed to provide religious education:

[t]here is no catechizing of children or others in any church, (except in Concord Church, & other places, of those admitted, in their receiving:) the reason given by some is, because when people come to be admitted, the Church hath tryall of their knowledge, faith, and repentance, and they want a direct Scripture for Ministers catechizing; As if, *Goe teach all Nations, and Train up a childe in the way he should goe*, did not reach to Ministers catechizings.⁵⁶

Lechford's report must be considered carefully. Some of the colonies' leading ministers had been catechists before the migration. It is unlikely that they would forsake this exercise once they arrived in New England. Further, it is important to remember that instruction and examination both fell under the title of catechizing. Here, Lechford seemed to complain primarily of the lack of catechetical examinations, or at least of their irregular observance in Sunday afternoon sessions for children. With disgust, he noted that ministers excused themselves from performing catechetical examinations on the grounds that they examined faith during church candidates' admissions. Lechford thought very little of this excuse. But his report corroborates the Puritans' own claim that their professions

⁵⁵ Axtell 26; Shurtleff, *Massachusetts Records*, 2:6-7; *Plymouth Church Records*, PCSM 22 (1920), 52.

⁵⁶ Lechford, *Plaine Dealing*, 53-54; Eames 16-18.

of faith and repentance resembled the catechetical examinations familiar in England, and that New England had adopted its admissions test, in part, to fill a role elsewhere assumed by Protestant confirmation.⁵⁷

Ministers might have catechized sporadically in the early days of settlement. They did not institute a system of catechesis for confirmation. The absence of such formal programs of instruction perhaps fostered the conclusion, among contemporaries and later historians, that churches abandoned catechetical duties. Further, the full program of preaching Puritans offered on the sabbath helped displace catechizing from its Sunday afternoon time slot in some churches. Since young and old alike attended sermons in the morning and afternoon, some ministers probably allowed that teaching to suffice, rather than holding separate sessions for children.

But New England clergy did not lack concern for the young or their religious development. Even before he arrived in the Bay Colony, Richard Mather vowed to "be more careful in Catechising Children...And therefore to bestow some Pains this way, every week once." John Davenport, while in Amsterdam, "set up a catechetical exercise in his family" on sabbath afternoons, which drew other eager hearers from the community. Accustomed to catechizing, these ministers did not drop the exercise when they

⁵⁷ Richard Mather and John Cotton both compared New England's conversion narratives, given at church admissions, to catechetical professions of faith required in English and continental Reformed churches. See chapter six, below.

emigrated. In passage to the colonies, in fact, the practice was maintained. In his journal, John Winthrop recorded sessions of shipboard catechesis, noting that migrants "appointed Tuesdays and Wednesdays to catechize our people, and this day Mr. [George] Phillips began it." The Massachusetts Bay Company directed John Endicott that the sabbath be observed with the end of labor "every Satterday throughout the yeare at three of the clock in the afternoone, and that they spend the rest of the day in chatechizing and preparaceon for the Sabeth as the ministers shall direct." When engaged as ministers for Salem, Francis Higginson and Samuel Skelton were bound to "endeavour in their places of the ministry as well in preaching, catechizing, as also in teaching, or causing to be taught, the Companyes servants & their children, as also the salvages and their children." Describing colonial life, *New England's Plantation* thanked God that "we have here plentie of Preaching and diligent Catechizing, with strikt and careful exercise."⁵⁸

From the beginning, then, some ministers did catechize. Though others may have been less earnest in the exercise, in principle the ministry counted this worthy work. The problems that led to the synod of 1662, and the solutions proposed by that synod, spurred ministers to strengthen

⁵⁸ *Magnalia* 1:324, 451-52; James K. Hosmer, ed. *Winthrop's Journal: "History of New England, 1630-1649,"* 2 vols. (New York, 1908), 1:36-37; Fleming 19; Edmund S. Morgan, ed., *The Founding of Massachusetts* (Indianapolis, 1964), 345. Quotations also appear in Axtell 24.

programs of religious instruction. In March 1669, the Massachusetts General Court ordered ministers and elders to catechize. Many were already doing so. Some catechized on Sunday afternoons, while others arranged weekday sessions at the church or visited families at home. Even Thomas Lechford moderated his criticism by praising the work of Concord's Peter Bulkely, who, according to Cotton Mather, engaged in "constant catechizing" on the Lord's day, examining all "unmarried people" and allowing the whole congregation to be "edified by his expositions and applications." In Plymouth, John Reyner demonstrated his ability and willingness to "train up children in a Cattikettical way." Ezekiel Rogers, too, won a reputation for caring for youth. Cotton Mather memorialized him as "a *Tree of Knowledge*, but so laden with *fruit*, that he stooped for the very *children* to pick off the apples ready to drop in to their mouths." Rogers summoned children to his home individually and examined their knowledge and practice of faith. John Eliot not only found time to instruct Indians, but also lavished attention on the rising generation in Roxbury. Eliot strove to "keep up the blessed *echo's* of truth between himself and the young people of his congregation." He was particularly careful to fit his teaching to learners' capacities. Cotton Mather guessed that though there were already about five hundred catechisms, "Mr. Eliot gave himself the travail of adding to their number"--as did many New England clergymen--offering

his work "as an antidote for his own people against the contagion of such errors as might threaten any peculiar danger to them." Thomas Shepard preached a series of sermons on his catechism between 1643 and 1645. His congregation apparently found this teaching effective; in their conversion narratives, church candidates noted how reading the catechism and hearing it explicated contributed to their religious experience.⁵⁹

Catechizing is mentioned frequently in records and eulogies of ministers, indicating that clergy did, indeed, perform this work. Reviewing the achievements of New England's first- and second-generation ministers, Cotton Mather often cited catechizing as he praised their labors in the *Magnalia*. Francis Higginson, Mather reported, "did catechise and examine persons about their fitness for the communion." Charles Chauncey thought so highly of this kind of instruction that he advised another minister to "catechise every Lord's day in the afternoon, so as to go through the catechise once in a year." James Noyes was "very much loved and honoured" in Newbury, and after his death, his catechism was "still publickly and privately used in that church and town hitherto." Thomas Thacher at Weymouth served "in catechising the *lambs* of his flock, for which he likewise made a Catechism." He praised his grandfather, Richard Mather, for writing catechisms "so well

⁵⁹ Axtell 24-26, 30; *Magnalia* 1:401-402, 411, 550-51; *Plymouth Church Records*, 107-108; McCarl, 441n.

formed, that a Luther himself would not have been ashamed to be a learner from them."⁶⁰

John Fiske, pastor in Wenham and then Chelmsford, kept a notebook detailing church business, including children's instruction. In 1656, Fiske began examining baptized children to discern their knowledge, religious experience, and readiness for full membership. The following year, the church agreed that youth should be catechized "the day after our lecture constantly at 3 of the clock in the afternoon at the pastor's house." The church paid to bind copies of Fiske's catechism, *The Watering of the Olive Plant*, for the use with its children in 1658. Later, when they exhausted their supply of their pastor's catechism, they voted to procure copies of the Westminster Assembly's shorter version. In 1660, the church decided that girls should come on Mondays for catechesis, and boys should come the following day, "at 2 o'clock in the afternoon in winter and at 3 of the clock in summer." As Cotton Mather described it, "our Fiske therefore did, by most laborious catechising, endeavour to know the state of his flock, and make it good."

⁶¹

New England churches followed English practice in setting ages for catechizing. Church-based religious instruction was viewed as an appropriate activity for older

⁶⁰ *Magnalia* 1: 357, 454, 472, 484, 490-91; Cotton Mather, *The Man of God Furnished*, 15-17.

⁶¹ Robert G. Pope, ed., *The Notebook of the Reverend John Fiske, 1644-1675*, *PCSM Collections* 47 (Boston, 1974), 111-15, 125, 128-29, 158-59, 198; *Magnalia* 1:479.

children and teenagers. Church records indicating ages of catechumens reflect this assumption. In the 1670s, the church in Norwich required that children "from 8 or 9, to 13 years of age" come for catechizing on the Lord's Day. Youth over thirteen no longer had to attend these group sessions, but as long as they remained under their family government, they had to attend private instruction.⁶² In Dorchester, those "from 8 to 16 years of age" were to come to the church to be catechized. After they had reached sixteen, those up to the age of twenty-four were to meet in sex-segregated groups "to be discoursed with," and presumably helped in applying the lessons of that instruction. Peter Bulkeley bade all "unmarried persons" to his catechizing.⁶³

Even without legal or ecclesiastical mandates for instruction, some New England clergy committed themselves to catechizing, from the early days of settlement. The Cambridge Platform institutionalized conversion narratives for adults, rather than catechetical professions for youth; in the absence of a confirmation ceremony, the place of religious instruction in the church was not entirely clear. Though the ecclesiastical context of catechizing would vary in the colonial period, ministers always considered this instruction important. They judged catechizing a clerical responsibility, if a responsibility to be shared with parents and schoolmasters. By the 1650s and 1660s, when the

⁶² Frances Manwaring Caulkins, *A History of Norwich* (Chester, CT, 1946), 123; Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 241.

⁶³ Walker 420; Charles Pope, *Records of the First Church at Dorchester; 1636-1734* (Boston, 1891), 93.

young displayed difficulty in advancing to full church communion, clergy increased instructional efforts with the children in their charge.

Cotton Mather as Catechist

While numerous clergymen dedicated themselves to instructing children in the principles of religion, the labors of Cotton Mather in this sphere were extraordinary. Perhaps the most ardent champion of catechizing in New England, Mather wrote several catechisms, used them to teach his own flock, deployed them in his evangelical labors, and led instruction tirelessly within his family. He praised catechizing with reference to church history, noting that ancient and Protestant practice alike sanctioned it. Augustine's *De Catechizandis Rudibus* set the pattern for religious instruction, and Jean Gerson devoted his last years to teaching children, Mather noted. He pointed out that other Protestants--including some he labeled as unsavory "sects"--used catechisms. Curiously, Mather mocked "sects" for eschewing human devices in worship but employing them in catechesis: "[E]ven those who decry all *forms*, yet cannot keep out of *This*; tis by Incessant Catechizing, that they propose to attain their ends," he commented, as if he were not descended from a proud lineage of clergymen who decried all forms. He explained, further, that Roman Catholics had paid compliment to Protestant instruction by developing a catechetical system to counter it. To signal

Reformed approval for this practice of instruction, Mather recalled that the "Renowned Synod of Dort" had endorsed "a . . . Three-fold Catechizing" in church, home, and school.⁶⁴

What Mather recommended to other clergymen he also practiced himself. Even before he became a minister he prayed that God would allow him to write something for service "*among young Persons.*" Once installed in Boston's Second Church, he instructed the children there, experimenting with various methods. In 1685-86 he began visiting families from house to house to examine their "everlasting interests." To the young members of each family he posed questions of the catechism and used the answers to make "as lively Applications unto them as I could." With approval he read Richard Baxter's *Gildas Salvianus*, a guide for clergy that emphasized the duty of catechizing. He urged other ministers to make visitations to see "how far young people are Instructed in their Catechisms," and to make "suitable and serious Applications" of them.⁶⁵

In later years, Mather drew youth together in his home for monthly instruction. When these catechism classes became too large for his house, he moved the sessions to a

⁶⁴ Mather, *Man of God Furnished*, 2-4.

⁶⁵ In a diary entry for 1717-18, Mather records reading *Gildas Salvianus* "again." Presumably he had read it before, though it is not clear whether his household visitations were inspired by Baxter's book. Cotton Mather, *The Diary of Cotton Mather*, American Classics Edition, 2 vols. (New York, 1957), 1:7, 114; 2:498 [Hereafter cited as *Diary of Cotton Mather*]; Cotton Mather, *Maschil, or, The Faithful Instructor* (Boston, 1702), 109-10.

school, where he hoped in addition to "edify others that may be Spectators." He taught girls separately from boys, and came to regard the "little Damosels of the Flock" as his own children. Of course, his own children received their father's instruction as well. In family exercises he explicated a catechism "with abundance of brief Questions, which make them to take in the meaning of it." He even applied catechetical methods to help his children understand sermons, putting "every Truth, into a Quaestion, to be answered still, with, Yes, or, No."⁶⁶

He also took catechisms beyond their customary roles in New England institutions, to appeal to groups outside of them. Like John Eliot, Mather was not satisfied to use these manuals solely for the edification of those within the church. He produced a series of evangelical catechisms to school outsiders in the faith. Mather drafted *The Faith of the Fathers* (1699) to present Christian doctrine to Jews, whose conversion he anticipated as a harbinger of the millennium. Bypassing traditional staples to show how the prophets had predicted and explained Christ, he answered each point of this catechism with an Old Testament scripture.⁶⁷ Blacks in Boston also came under Mather's

⁶⁶ *Diary of Cotton Mather*, 1:534-37; 2:68, 239, 271-72, 275, 756, 763.

⁶⁷ Mather recorded in his diary that a Jewish settler in the Carolinas had become a Christian, and "my little Book, *The Faith of the Fathers*, [was] therein a special Instrument of good unto him." *Diary of Cotton Mather* 1:298-99, 315. For discussion of Mather's views on the role of Jewish conversions in the millennium, see Richard Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: The Origins of American Evangelicalism* (Washington, D.C., 1979), 65-66.

concern. In *The Negro Christianized* (1706), he urged masters to introduce those in servitude to the gospel and provided forms for that purpose: a simple, three-question catechism for "the Negroes of a Smaller Capacity" and a longer one for those of "bigger Capacity." He advised householders to engage a child, another servant, or even to hire a teacher to provide religious instruction to slaves. Mather catechized his own servant Onesimus. He also advised "a company of poor Negroes" who embraced Christianity; the rules of the society directed that the group recite together "either the *New-English Catechism*, or the *Assemblies Catechism*, or the *Catechism in the Negro Christianized*."⁶⁸ For residents of the new world unfortunate enough to live within Catholic colonies, Mather wrote *La Fe del Christianos* (1696), a twenty-four item summary of Protestant doctrine addressed to those in "the midst of the Spanish Indies."⁶⁹

Mather also used catechisms to protect those within the fold from error. He composed several manuals to guard Protestants from popery, directing them to colonists most susceptible to the inroads of Catholicism. He had "some hundreds of this Catechism," *The Fall of Babylon* (1702), printed for distribution in Maryland, where "the Popish clergy seduced many People on frequent Occasions." He prepared *Frontiers Well Defended* (1707) for colonists in

⁶⁸ Mather, *The Negro Christianized* (Boston, 1706), 3, 27-36; *Diary of Cotton Mather* 1: 177; 2:271-72. The catechism designed for "Negroes of Smaller Capacity" was the same three-question form Mather presented to English children in *The A,B,C of Religion* (Boston, 1713).

⁶⁹ *Diary of Cotton Mather* 1:296.

dangerous proximity to the French Catholics in northern New England. Mather's anti-Catholic catechism rehearsed the errors of papal authority, images, transubstantiation, purgatory, holidays, and other Catholic practices, and prompted Protestants to thank God "for the Blessings of the Reformation." In his *Supplies from the Tower of David* (1708), Mather supplemented this material with doctrinal armaments against such other erroneous systems as Quakerism, Socinianism, Pelagianism, Antinomianism, Anabaptism, and Antisabbatarianism.⁷⁰

Mather was delighted to find that catechisms also had a place in the voluntary associations of pious young people that formed in Boston in the early eighteenth century. He encouraged the formation of such associations, which assembled for prayer, mutual support, and the suppression of vice. In 1718 he allowed a "lovely Society of Pious Children," to meet in his library, and undertook their "Instruction and Protection." A 1721 entry in Mather's diary notes his intention to "Contrive an Association of young People, to advance Religion among their Brethren, and bring them forwards to the Table [of] the Lord; and bring them into my Company." He made appearances at these voluntary associations to exhort and instruct their members, and observed with satisfaction that recitation of catechisms

⁷⁰ *Supplies from the Tower of David*, in Mather, *The Man of God Furnished* (Boston, 1708); *Diary of Cotton Mather* 1:572, 594-95.

was a regular exercise in "*Religious Societies of Some Young People among us.*"⁷¹

The New England Primer

Mather's energetic efforts illustrate the flexibility of catechizing in early eighteenth-century New England. Through the remainder of the century, catechisms would be borne to the children of New England by a vehicle even more influential than Cotton Mather: the *New England Primer*. This little book, combining alphabets with lessons, prayers, and, importantly, catechisms, introduced generations of children to the doctrines and mores of the colonies' pious founders. For Puritans, education always had been placed in the service of religion, so there was nothing novel about the contents of the primer. Its significance, however, lay in its popularity and longevity: finding a place in this reader, catechisms secured a role in the education of New England youth for over a century. One of the most widely used schoolbooks in early America, the *New England Primer* initiated generations of American children into the vocabulary, theology, and prejudices of Puritans, conveying this material not only to members of congregational churches, but to any child who learned to read through this book.

The original primer was the handiwork of Benjamin Harris. A printer in London, Harris fled to Boston in 1686

⁷¹ *Diary of Cotton Mather* 1:418-19; 2:615, and Mather, *Youth in its Brightest Glory* (Boston, 1709), 26.

after drawing punishment for publishing sharply Protestant literature. In England, he had printed *The Protestant Tutor*, which contained an alphabet, syllables, and numerals, plus the Lord's Prayer, Creed, and Ten Commandments. Soon after his arrival in the colonies, Harris presented the first edition of *The New England Primer*.⁷² He simply might have set out to adapt the previous publication for his new colonial market. Yet the new work differed in several important ways from *The Protestant Tutor*. From its early pages, for instance, the book reflected New Englanders' sharp intolerance of "popish" religious symbols: the cross that traditionally began the first row of the alphabet was removed in this primer.⁷³ Still more important, unlike *The Protestant Tutor*, the *Primer* included a catechism. Every known edition of the *New England Primer* contained one, either the Westminster Shorter Catechism or John Cotton's *Milk for Babes*, and sometimes both of these popular New England catechisms.⁷⁴

For over a century and a half, many children in America learned to read through the *New England Primer*. The book is, perhaps, most widely recognized for the first couplet of its famous alphabet--"In Adam's Fall, We Sinned all"--but beyond the illustrated ABC, the primer fused moral and

⁷² The precise date of the first publication is unknown; Ford estimates it as between 1687 and 1690. Worthington C. Ford, *The New-England Primer*, reprint ed. ([orig. 1897]; New York, 1962), 16-17.

⁷³ The cross customarily was placed before the alphabet, and gave this line of text the nickname, "criss-cross row." Ford, *The New-England Primer*, 24.

⁷⁴ Ford, *The New-England Primer*, 37-38.

religious content to reading lessons throughout. Catechisms were an important component of the book: the dialogues through which Puritan children were accustomed to learning the basics of faith fit well with the purpose of the primer.

The work's content drew from traditional primers and ABC books. It began with an alphabet, sometimes embellished with edifying sentences and a list of syllables. In addition to the plain ABC, an illustrated one gave rhymes for each letter, pressing lessons of piety and mortality. For instance, besides the famous couplet for the letter A, a rhyme for the letter T, reminded children, "Time cuts down all/Both great & small."⁷⁵ After the illustrated alphabet, the book introduced the Lord's Prayer and Apostles' Creed. Like *The Protestant Tutor*, the *Primer* presented a poem memorializing the burning of John Rogers. Illustrated with an image of Rogers's wife and children watching the martyr expire at the stake, the poem urged New England colonists to remember the trials of England's early Protestants and to root themselves in that identity. After the Rogers poem, the book presented more religious material: its catechism, "A Dialogue between Christ, Youth and the Devil," and various helps to piety. Some editions also included the Ten

⁷⁵ The illustrated alphabet changed in later editions of the *Primer*. In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the heavily biblical emphasis was toned down and the alphabet's couplets were made more lighthearted. For the letter "U," for instance, a later edition gave so un-Puritan a sentiment as, "Urns hold, we see/Coffee and Tea." Ford, *The New-England Primer*, 26, 31.

Commandments, a list of the books of the Bible, edifying verses, and hymns.⁷⁶

This book was part of the transformation, begun in England in the mid-sixteenth century, of the character and function of a primer. Having served as a guide to liturgy of the hours, medieval primers were refashioned by sixteenth-century reformers, who stripped Catholic content, translated text from Latin to English, added instructional material, and finally inserted a catechism. The primer thus had grown from a devotional manual into an elementary schoolbook. No longer a guide for use in church or with set prayers, it was intended chiefly for the young to use, at home or in school, as they learned to read.

The primer wove together pious lessons and reading exercises, reinforcing honored doctrines and behavioral standards. By the end of the seventeenth century, Massachusetts' clergy no longer held sway in colonial government, but Puritans did not need religious establishments to sustain the principles of their faith within New England culture: The *New England Primer* carried this material to those without connection to a congregational church as well as to those born and raised within one. Assigned as a first reader, the book was "part of nearly every American child's culture until the

⁷⁶ Ford debunks the *Primer's* myth about Rogers, noting that "a study of the facts shows that the use of this poem and story, was nothing but a piece of sectarian garbling and falsehood." In later eighteenth-century editions of the work, the *Primer* also included Isaac Watts's hymns. Ford, *The New-England Primer*, 24-25, 32-33, 45-47.

nineteenth century," Gillian Avery asserts in her study of American children's literature. By imparting doctrine and morals during the process of teaching literacy, the primer "bit deep into the consciousness of many generations."⁷⁷

While ministers might still use their own forms in church, in homes and schools the *New England Primer* became the manual of choice, supplanting individual catechisms. The primer acquainted successive generations of children with the religious principles of Puritan New England. While it taught them letters and numbers and syllables, The *New England Primer*, with its catechisms, introduced children to doctrines of providence, election, redemption, and sabbatarianism.

Conclusion

In many respects, patterns of catechizing from Protestant Europe carried over to the colonies. As in old England, catechizing was performed by parents and schoolmasters, as well as by clergymen. Resourceful ministers like Cotton Mather and John Eliot also put catechisms to use in the new circumstances of colonial life. In churches, ministers adapted English practice to suit particular congregations. Some clergymen visited families to examine children, while other ministers called the young to their homes. Some decided that they could best serve the needs of their flocks by designing their own catechisms.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Avery, *Behold the Child*, 29.

⁷⁸ Cotton Mather reviews New England ministers' methods of

Contrary to the assessment of historians who argue that families alone were responsible for catechizing, schoolmasters and ministers, from the beginning, understood religious education as their duty. Though the church context of catechizing changed through the colonial period, the value of catechisms for presenting doctrinal and moral guidance remained constant. Clergymen, mothers and fathers, and school "dames" and schoolmasters all used catechisms to explain important doctrines and vocabulary, inculcate godly behavior, and even lead learners toward conversion. Outlasting even the most diligent teachers, the *New England Primer* conveyed this material to generations of children as they learned to read. Though James Axtell's survey of Puritan catechizing does not leave him altogether enthusiastic about this means of instruction, he reflects that catechisms were "the key that unlocked the cultural heart of religious maturity."⁷⁹ They marked the steps along the road to salvation and rendered comprehensible the peculiar signposts and monuments of the New England Way.

catechizing in the early eighteenth century in his *Ratio Disciplinae Fratrum NOV-ANGLORUM: A Faithful Account of the DISCIPLINE Professed and Practised in the Churches of New England* (Boston, 1726), 104-105.

⁷⁹ Axtell 44.

Chapter Four. The First Principles of the Oracles of God: The Content of New England Catechisms

Introduction

A catechism, Richard Mather explained, was a form to handle the fundamentals of the faith "[b]riefly, many things being contracted into narrow summes, for the helping of memory, and yet plainly, as may be for the understanding of the simple."¹ Within the catechisms they wrote for their churches, New England ministers contracted many points of theology, soteriology, and ecclesiology into sums for the simple. In some respects, these writers followed the pattern of English and European catechisms, addressing the "first principles" of faith, worship, and obedience. In other regards, colonial catechisms displaced traditional catechetical staples in favor of their own doctrinal standards.

Initially, colonial clergy used catechisms from England. Colonists favored William Perkins's *The Foundation of the Christian Religion*, and may have brought others on their transatlantic passage as well.² Some ministers carried over from England the manuals they used in churches there; some of these likely circulated among congregations in manuscript well before being printed.³ After some years

¹ Mather, *A Catechisme, Or The Grounds and Principles of Christian Religion* (London, 1650), 1-3.

² Wilberforce Eames, *Early New England Catechisms* (1898; reprint Detroit, 1969), 5-16.

³ In most cases, it is not possible to discern precisely when these catechisms were first written or how long they

in the colonies, though, clergy wrote and had printed catechisms of their own. New England ministers did not intend these to be narrowly provincial documents, any more than they perceived their sermons or theological treatises to be limited to a colonial audience. But in doing what many English ministers had done, creating manuals to serve the needs of their own flocks, they developed catechisms with distinctive features. While there are differences among the New England catechisms examined here, the doctrine they presented shares substantial common ground. The two distinct strains of doctrine that Janice Knight discerns among New England theologians--dividing "preparationists" like Shepard and Hooker from the more mystical Cotton and Davenport--are not clearly evident in these documents. Some divergence is visible in treatment of certain issues, but the catechisms provide similar answers on many points; in most cases, differences owe more to the length and complexity of individual forms than to theological disagreement. As they presented instruction reflecting the ecclesiastical and social ideals of the godly colonies, ministers produced catechisms with common characteristics.⁴

were used in manuscript form before they were printed. Alexander F. Mitchell notes that Ezekiel Rogers's catechism was written while he was still in England. Hugh Peter's *Milk for Babes, Meat for Men*, was printed in Amsterdam and London for Peter's congregations there. It is included in this sample of New England catechisms because Peter likely used in Salem as well. See Mitchell, *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*, xl.

⁴ See Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism* (Cambridge, MA, 1994). David D. Hall provides a helpful summary of the different "shades of emphasis" within New England theology in Hall, "On Common

These manuals tended to give central place to the doctrine and application of redemption. They also defined the church in such a way that youth growing up in the colonies would see how their congregations matched the pattern given in scripture.

Not all of colonial New England's catechisms have survived. Cotton Mather's *Magnalia* cites works that since have been lost, and early bibliographies name some that are missing from modern records. The pool of catechisms in use in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century New England was larger than the surviving works examined below,⁵ but the sample does represent the majority of known catechisms, and includes the writings of a number of prominent clerical authors. The group includes primarily introductory catechisms, plus several longer forms for mature readers. These catechisms reveal the outlines and accents of religious instruction in New England.⁶

Ground: The Coherence of American Puritan Studies," *WMQ* 3d. ser. 44 (1987): 212.

⁵ Cotton Mather mentions a catechisms by "Mr. Norris" and "Mr. Danforth" that modern scholars cannot locate, as well as a "lesser and a larger" by Richard Mather, of which only the latter survives. John Davenport apparently wrote a catechism for his new congregation in Boston, but this has not been located either. *Magnalia* 2:179; Eames 18-20, 27, 34, 38.

⁶ The New England catechisms discussed in this chapter include the following: Richard Mather, *A Catechisme, or, The Grounds and Principles of Christian Religion* (London, 1650); John Fiske, *The Watering of the Olive Plant* (Cambridge, 1657); John Norton, *A Brief Catechisme* (Cambridge, 1660); Thomas Hooker, *An Exposition of the Principles of Religion* (London, 1645); John Cotton, *Milk for Babes* (London, 1646); Samuel Stone, *A Short Catechism Drawn out of the Word of God* (Boston, 1684); Ezekiel Rogers, *The Chief Grounds of Christian Religion* (London, 1642) [reprinted in Mitchell, *Catechisms of the Second Reformation*]; James Noyes, *A Short*

Purpose, Audience, and Structure

Colonial writers followed the convention, initiated by Martin Luther, of differentiating between short catechisms for the young and larger forms for training adults or clergy. In addition, these writers embraced the lessons of English experience by welcoming a variety of catechisms rather than trying to apply one to all situations. New England catechisms occupy a range of instructional levels from elementary to substantially complex, though none offers university-level doctrinal exposition. Occasionally writers declared, through titles or prefaces, whom they intended as users of their catechisms. In the absence of such clues, length, style, and the complexity of the works must supply information about likely audiences.

Catechisms that are relatively short (about twenty pages or fewer), with comparatively brief answers and straightforward language, were intended for children to learn, memorize, and recite. Several in this sample were clearly meant for children: John Cotton's *Milk for Babes*

Catechism (Cambridge, 1661); Hugh Peter, *Milk for Babes and Meat for Men* (n.p., 1630); Thomas Shepard, *The First Principles of the Oracles of God* (London, 1655), and *A Short Catechism Familiarly Teaching the Knowledge of God* (Cambridge 1654); John Davenport and William Hooke, *A Catechisme Containing the Chief Heads of the Christian Religion* (London, 1659); James Fitch, *The First Principles of the Doctrine of Christ* (Boston, 1679). For bibliographical data and printing histories on the above works, see Eames, *Early New England Catechisms*.

Many of Cotton Mather's catechisms repackage older forms, and the content of these reflects the sample itemized above. Mather's specialized catechisms, like those written for Jews, Spanish-speaking Catholics, or African-American slaves in Boston, are considered independently in chapter three, above.

(thirteen pages), James Noyes's *A Short Catechism* (sixteen pages), John Norton's *A Brief Catechisme* (twenty-two pages), John Fiske's *The Watering of the Olive Plant* (sixteen pages before appendix), and Ezekiel Rogers's *The Chiefe Grounds of Christian Religion* (fourteen pages). Those catechisms with answers given in several parts or in paragraph form served to present more detailed material to intermediate learners. However, length itself did not necessarily determine a catechism's audience. Thomas Shepard wrote two relatively short forms: *The First Principles of the Oracles of God* and *A Short Catechism*. The former covers standard catechetical material in seventeen pages. Its answers are a bit weighty for beginners but were probably considered manageable for older children. The latter is not very much longer, at twenty-six pages, but its pages are full of complicated material on conversion, presented in lengthy, subdivided answers. Though the length of this latter catechism is not excessive, the difficulty of the work suggests that it was intended for more mature readers or for explication from the pulpit.⁷

Richard Mather, according to his grandson's report, wrote a "larger and a lesser" catechism. His larger has survived, and it presents a good example of the longer forms designed for advanced learners. It treats doctrine at

⁷ Shepard preached a series of sermons on the *Short Catechism* between 1643 and 1645. The work itself was printed posthumously in 1654. See Mary Rhinelanders McCarl, "Thomas Shepard's Relations of Religious Experience, 1648-1649," *WMQ* 3d. ser. 48 (1991): 441n.

length in thirty-three chapters. It was suited for older readers to use as a guide, not for memorization. The long catechisms written by New Haven ministers John Davenport and William Hooke, and Norwich pastor James Fitch, also were suited for adult readership or for teachers' use. Though Fitch's catechism contains fewer pages than Mather's, its expositions are denser, giving answers in paragraphs with numerous subdivisions. The responses of the Davenport/Hooke catechism are somewhat ponderous, with many answers appearing in complete paragraphs. Thomas Hooker's *An Exposition of the Principles of Religion* was not aimed at young children, but the whole was divided into six sections manageable to be mastered by intermediate learners.

Some of these works include prefaces or introductions, either from the writer or another's pen, describing the catechism's intended readership or special features, and sometimes explaining why the author chose to add to the multitude of extant catechisms. Hugh Peter advised readers that his work would protect his congregation from Catholicism, building up the laity's knowledge so that "if ever your poore Infants bee driven to wildernesses, or to hollow caves, to Fagot and Fire, or to sorrowes of any Kinde, they will thanke God & you, they were well catechized." Increase Mather noted that there were already five hundred catechisms in existence, but commended James Fitch's long version for offering both "Milk" and "strong Meat in respect of rational explications." John Cotton and

John Wilson declared Richard Mather's catechism a worthy work providing fundamentals with "pithy solidity and orderly dexterity digested together" for those of "riper age." John Fiske prefaced his catechism by apologizing for it, stating that he would have preferred to "have made use of some others labours" in catechizing. Yet because Chelmsford desired his own composition, he paused to explain how he had structured the work. The catechism was brief, he pointed out, leaving commandments, sacraments, and the Lord's Prayer to be treated in appendices, "because the same will more suit with such capacities as are already entered, than such as are but in their enterance."⁸

Richard Mather began his larger catechism with an explanation of catechizing itself. He described the "warrantableness" of the practice: the Bible blessed it "because Catechising is nothing else but the drawing of the doctrine of Religion into briefe summes." He noted that the question-answer method had "plentifull warrant in the Scriptures." Catechizing provided the means of attaining "well-grounded knowledge and of profiting by Sermons" and could also "prevent apostasie and the infection of errour." It was necessary for both actual children and "children in understanding." Older persons should not be ashamed to be catechized, Mather insisted, since it was "much more a sinne and shame" to refuse to remedy one's ignorance.⁹

⁸ Peter, sig. A3v; Increase Mather, "To the Reader," in Fitch, *The First Principles*, sig. A4v; Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, sig. Alr; Fiske 4.

⁹ Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, 1-4.

New England catechisms were written primarily for the benefit of a minister's own congregation, as title pages and prefaces sometimes reflected. John Fiske's catechism was designed for his Chelmsford church, Seaborn Cotton's for his flock in Hampton, New Hampshire, James Noyes's for his Newbury congregation, and the Davenport-Hooke catechism for New Haven. Even so, writers did not wish to limit readership to their localities. Within New England, churches or families could use another town's catechism to promote instruction. The Salem church, for instance, ordered in 1660 that children be taught Cotton's catechism at home in order to prepare for more advanced instruction in church.¹⁰

Catechisms could also be part of the transatlantic communication that gave New England sermons and treatises an audience beyond the colonies. Some New England catechisms were printed in London; the manuals were written for colonial congregations, but were also suitable for the godly in old England.¹¹ Sometimes writers showed explicit interest in drawing wider readership. John Cotton's *Milk for Babes* was directed to "Boston Babes in either England," expressing Cotton's concern for youth in his former and

¹⁰ Axtell 26.

¹¹ One biographer of Thomas Hooker has even suggested that Hooker wrote his catechism to try to influence the Westminster Assembly. Hooker was invited to the Assembly but declined to attend; knowing the body intended to draft a catechism, he had his catechism published in London in hopes of influencing that work. See Sargeant Bush, Jr., "Thomas Hooker and the Westminster Assembly," *WMQ* 3d. ser. 29 (1972): 291-300.

present congregations. Its title page also proclaimed the catechism's willingness to be "of like use for any Children" , anywhere. In introducing James Fitch's catechism, Increase Mather hardly would have praised the author as one whom "the Lord hath seen meet to fix his present station not only in a wilderness, but in one of the obscurest places therein," if he expected the work would be read solely in Connecticut.¹²

Writers organized material to move the intended audience through a logical sequence of questions about belief and obedience to God. Catechisms employed structural and typographical features to present information accessibly. As had many English forms, they placed questions and answers in different type. Most often questions were given in italics and answers supplied in roman type.¹³ Where answers were comprised of several parts, writers commonly divided them into digestible forms several lines long, and numbered each item. In only a few advanced catechisms did answers appear in long paragraphs. Puritan catechists demonstrated characteristic respect for the Word and conviction that catechumens should be literate in it: though questions and answers were not usually expressed in the Bible's own verses, writers almost invariably gave copious citations to show how their teaching

¹² Peter, *Milk for Babes*; sig. A2v; Fiske 4; John Cotton, *Milk for Babes*; Increase Mather, "To the Reader," in Fitch, *The First Principles*, sig. A4v.

¹³ Quotations from catechisms, as they appear in this chapter, will only employ italics for emphasis, rather than reproducing the italic type used in whole questions or answers.

accorded with scripture. Scripture citations frequently appeared in margins alongside the text or were given at the end of each answer.¹⁴

In ordering the content of these works, New England authors followed trends visible in England's alternative catechisms. Many English catechisms written in the late-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to supplement the prayerbook form, had moved away from full treatment of the Apostles' Creed, Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer, and sacraments. Instead, they prioritized issues of salvation and grace. Sometimes they incorporated the four catechetical staples into their presentations, but they often omitted one or more of them. Almost all of the New England catechisms considered here treated the sacraments and Ten Commandments, but fewer explicated the Lord's Prayer item by item, and until Cotton Mather's early eighteenth-century catechisms, none included the Apostles' Creed.

Colonial catechisms sometimes paralleled the organization of William Perkins's *The foundation of the Christian Religion*, which presented doctrinal points as a preparative to the traditional staples. Thomas Hooker, for instance, followed Perkins's six headings very closely in the six sections of his intermediate catechism. Other colonial catechisms bore more resemblance to the Westminster

¹⁴ However, Cotton Mather's first catechism, *A Scripture Catechism* (Boston, 1691), composed answers out of scripture texts.

formulae, in content and structure, though none copied the Assembly's catechisms exactly. The pedagogical methods that England's catechists had pioneered also found their way into New England's compositions. Herbert Palmer's system won warm approval, particularly from Cotton Mather.¹⁵

Cotton Mather was the most innovative of New England's catechists, adopting Palmer's scheme and experimenting with his own varied methods. Mather applied Palmer's technique to several catechisms, rewriting John Cotton's *Milk for Babes* and the Westminster Shorter Catechism to solicit simple yes/no responses. In addition to the Palmer method, Mather tried other helps to understanding and devotion. He devised pointed questions and answers to prompt students to evaluate their own spiritual state. He even put doctrine to rhyme in "A Body of Divinity Versified," to help learners memorize such principles as, "Them who to be in Christ, Thro' Grace, consent, God brings into His Gracious Covenant."¹⁶

Though Mather explored different means of rendering doctrine accessible, the content of the catechisms he designed for New England youth shared common themes and emphases with the other colonial forms. In their manuals, clergy presented the doctrines and moral guidance they considered essential. The character of God, the way of

¹⁵ Sargeant Bush also notes the close resemblance between the structure of Hooker's catechism and Perkins's *The Foundation of the Christian Religion*. Bush, "Thomas Hooker and the Westminster Assembly," 292.

¹⁶ Cotton Mather, *Much in a Little*, 7.

salvation, and the substance of godly living constituted the "first principles" of the faith. The work of redemption lay at the heart of New England catechisms. English reformers had complained that the prayerbook catechism lacked teaching on conversion, and took care to address this in their compositions. New Englanders did so as well. In some catechisms, God's essence and works, particularly the work of redemption, occupied the major part of the manual. In most cases, catechisms opened with credal material about God, then discussed salvation, and finally treated matters of religious observance. Frequently writers divided content into two parts, first defining knowledge of God and then treating obedience to God. The latter section provided instruction on commandments, worship, prayer, and sacraments.¹⁷

Q: "What are you to know concerning God?"¹⁸

God was the primary focus of New England catechisms. Descriptions of divine attributes and actions occupied at least the first several pages of most works. Some placed this theological exposition in the context of human need,

¹⁷ Numerous New England writers used this conventional division. James Fitch instructed readers that religion "consist[s] of two parts, Faith and Observance." Davenport and Hooke defined "true Religion" as faith and obedience towards God. Shepard also organized his *First Principles* around faith and observance. Reflecting Calvin's theology, Shepard's *Short Catechism* defined the Christian's requisite knowledge as "The Knowledge of God" and "The Knowledge of Ourselves." Fitch 1; Shepard, *First Principles*, 2, and *Short Catechism*, 1; Davenport and Hooke 3; Norton 3.

¹⁸ Shepard, *Short Catechism*, 1.

opening with a question about the purpose of man or the nature of religion, and then introducing the God in whom all were to believe. Shepard asked first, "What is the best and last end of man?" Cotton asked the child, "What hath GOD done for you?" Both authors encouraged students to use what they learned about God to aid worship and devotion, rather than treating it as abstract doctrine. Others posed a question or two about the scriptures and discussed how the Word revealed God. These initial queries could help set the tone of the catechism. After only a few introductory comments, though, students often confronted imposing questions about the deity. Some catechisms bluntly asked, "Who is God?" The answers described the Almighty in rather technical terms; catechisms communicated the conviction that true religion flowed from a right understanding of God. The sinner's need for redemption would be acknowledged soon enough, but students first had to pause and contemplate God alone.¹⁹

Having stressed the importance of knowing God, catechists admitted that humans could only know the divine "back parts," as some put it. Explaining that the godhead consisted of three persons, the first theological section usually focused on God the Father. Christ as Son of God was given fuller treatment later, amidst treatment of

¹⁹ Shepard, *First Principles*, 1; Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 1. "Who is God?" was the second question in John Cotton's *Milk for Babes*, and was answered, "God is a Spirit of himself and for himself." Shepard asked, "What is God," as did Hooker, on the second page of his intermediate catechism.

redemption. The Holy Spirit might also receive further discussion in the application of redemption. Catechisms led students to contemplate God's properties and attributes, "sufficiency" and "efficiency"--that is, God's essence and works. Here writers varied in the degree of complexity they were willing to present: some listed essence, attributes, faculties, and properties of God, while others noted what God was and had done in simpler terms. Some of the same qualities could appear under different headings. God's attributes were "His Independency, Unity, Immutability, Eternity, Infiniteness, Omnipresence, Omnipotency, Wisdome, Omniscieny, Holiness, Blessedness, Sovereignty, Goodness, Mercy Meekness, Clemency, Justice, and Verity," James Noyes enumerated. Samuel Stone listed infiniteness as part of God's essence, and, like most writers, reminded learners that God was spirit. Ezekiel Rogers named infinteness, eternity, unchangeableness, understanding, will, and power as God's chief properties, while for Shepard, understanding and will were better described as faculties.²⁰

God's works included decrees, Creation, and Providence. Some writers focused here on God's project in making and sustaining the creatures of heaven and earth. Others introduced the matter of election at this early stage.

²⁰ Davenport and Hooke 3; Shepard, *First Principles*, 2-4; Stone 4; Rogers 55-56; Noyes 4. Not all lists were as long as Noyes's, but his enumeration does illustrate that even in a simple catechism, God's nature could be described with complex terminology and doctrinal precision. Compare Green's survey of English catechisms' treatment of such material in *The Christian's ABC*, 302-13.

Shepard defined God's decree as "his Eternall and determinate power, concerning the effecting of all things," but said nothing in that place about election. Ezekiel Rogers, on the other hand, listed the decree as God's primary work; to Rogers, the decree meant "[t]hat which the Scripture calleth Predestination.... Election and reprobation." Noyes, too, named election and reprobation as the "particular decrees" of God. Providence meant God's general ordaining of events, but could also be given more pointed implications for salvation. Shepard said Providence was the way God "provideth for his creatures," in either ordinary or miraculous channels. For Stone, the term meant God's "exact watch over all his Creatures." Part of Providence was "government," and over the reasonable creatures, God exercised "special government," leading them to "an eternal estate of happiness or misery by his being pleased or displeased."²¹

Q: "What is Redemption?"²²

Having awed the catechumen by defining an all-powerful, all-knowing God, the manuals went on to treat the hopeful soul's concern: salvation. While teaching on salvation could bring comfort, catechisms were candid in discussing predestination, even in its most discouraging implications. Election might be addressed even before treatments of

²¹ Noyes 5; Shepard, *First Principles*, 4-8; Norton 4-5; Stone 6; Rogers 56.

²² Davenport and Hooke 18.

redemption.²³ Whether or not the catechist had broached election as an aspect of God's decrees or Providence, chief attention would be paid to it in considering the Fall. God had created men and women in his image, catechisms narrated, but the first man tragically had sinned. Adam's misdeed was grave: he had explicit command not to eat of the tree, he "had the image of God, so he was able to have obeyed if he would," and in his action, one writer explained, "the whole man did strike against the whole law." The remote history of Adam and Eve was relevant to the seventeenth-century child because in Adam's fall, we sinned all: "all we being in his loyns were partakers of his sin and punishment."²⁴ All humanity was tainted with original sin. In discussing the Fall, many catechisms paused to distinguish original and actual sin. Learning how they had compounded inborn corruption with misdeeds of their own, students were to feel--or at least acknowledge--need of a savior.²⁵

Catechisms tried to preach the message of redemption to all but hold out promises only to the qualified. They alternately addressed humanity-at-large and the individual believer, sometimes defining universal conditions, and elsewhere describing only the saved. The student learned

²³ Shepard did not define election in discussing decrees, but did speak of "Mans Apostasy and fall" in describing Providence. Rogers 56; Mather, *A Catechisme*, 16-18; Shepard, *First Principles*, 4-8; Davenport and Hooke 20-23.

²⁴ Fitch 25-30; Rogers 57; Shepard, *First Principles*, 7.

²⁵ Thomas Shepard's formulation, for instance, listed original sin as "the contrariety of the whole nature of man to the Law of God," while actual sin was "the continual jarring of the actions of man from the Law of God." Shepard, *First Principles*, 8.

that all were guilty, and then discovered that some were elected to salvation, while others were reprobated to eternal punishment. All humanity was created by God, and all people were present in Adam, but some would receive redemption as promised in the gospel, while others would suffer punishment for their sins. The importance of covenant theology in Puritan thought was borne out in catechisms' treatment of God's two provisions for humanity. While a few works did not make reference to these concepts, a number did present redemption in the context of the covenants of law and grace. In the first covenant, catechisms explained, God had agreed to grant life "upon condition of perfect obedience to the law in a mans own person, with a threatning of everlasting death & cursednesse for the least transgression." After Adam's fall, when all humanity in him was rendered incapable of performing these terms, God made another covenant, one of "gracious reconciliation." The covenant of works, Richard Mather declared, "belongs to Adam, and all his posterity," while the covenant of grace "belongs onely to the elect." This latter covenant extended "a promise of life upon Faith in Christ." By giving Christ, God provided the means for some to fulfill the condition of faith.²⁶

²⁶ Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, 52-53; Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 10-11; Noyes 6-8. Cotton did not describe covenants of grace and works, but described the church covenant as "the fellowship of the Church in the blessings of the Covenant of grace, and the seales thereof." Noyes used slightly different terminology, calling one covenant the "Covenant of the Law" and the other the "Covenant of the Gospel." Other short catechisms gave brief treatments of

While writers had no qualms about announcing damnation for the many, catechisms did not dwell on the horrors of hell; they treated the Last Judgment rather evenhandedly. They were more interested in redemption, which they handled first in theory and then in application. Christ had been introduced in the section on the Trinity, but received more thorough attention here, in an explanation of his nature and offices. Jesus was defined as both God and man, having a dual nature essential to qualify him as mediator. Catechisms employed traditional terms to characterize Christ's prophetic, priestly, and kingly roles. Within answers on Christ's humiliation and exaltation, they treated aspects of the historical life of the Son of God. Articles three through seven of the Apostles' Creed narrated Christ's birth, suffering, death, and resurrection: While only a few New England catechisms discussed the virgin birth, most treated some aspects of Christ's life and crucifixion under the category of "humiliation," and discussed the resurrection and ascension as aspects of "exaltation."²⁷

Once they clarified how God had wrought redemption, catechisms showed how grace would be applied to believers, for every New England child needed to know the steps to union with Christ. While writers almost universally distinguished between the steps toward union with Christ and

the two covenants. See Shepard, *A Short Catechism*, 15-16, and *First Principles* 13-14; Rogers 57-58; Hooker, *An Exposition*, 8.

²⁷ Stone 7-8; Norton 7-10; Hooker, *An Exposition*, 14-15; Fitch 35.

the benefits of communion with Him, the number of markers in the *ordo salutis* varied from author to author, reflecting the works' level of difficulty and the writers' own interests. Simplest catechisms condensed the number of steps and minimized the use of technical terms. These might list vocation as the first step, in which the soul was quickened by the "external call of the Gospel" and the Holy Spirit's gift of "a principle of life," as John Norton put it. Norton, who opened his treatment of salvation with vocation, did note that something had to happen to the soul before this stage. The soul experienced faith and repentance, an "averseness from sin, sorrow for sin, and a steadfast purpose for a new life," before union with Christ, he explained. Though some instructors did not break the process down to more formal steps, they acknowledged some preparatory activity.²⁸

Others detailed preparation more explicitly. By describing preparation, catechisms could teach future saints how to repent and how to know when repentance went deep enough. Seaborn Cotton defined preparation as the process "whereby a sinner is cutt off from Sin and Self, that is, made contrite and humble." Thomas Shepard divided the believer's first preparatory step into two parts: contrition and humiliation. In contrition, "the Spirit immediately cuts off the Soul from its security in sin, by making it to mourn for it, and separating the soul from it, as the

²⁸ Norton 11; Noyes 9.

greatest evil." In humiliation the soul was "cut off from. self-confidence in any good it hath or doth." This was the crucial stage before salvation. A true saint would be willing to "be disposed of as God pleaseth." As he described humiliation, Samuel Stone coached individuals on proper emotional responses, asking, "Which is the first part of this self-despair?" The respondent then catalogued the feelings of the saddened soul, "that whereby the sinner refuseth to rest in the shadow of his best duties, as utterly unable to answer the Law."²⁹

Perhaps the most thorough treatment of preparation in these catechisms came in Thomas Hooker's *An Exposition of the Principles of Religion*. Hooker chronicled how one acquired "a sight of sin" in contrition. In contrition, a sinner grew persuaded that the evil that preachers and scriptures condemned was "his own sinne." Sinners could cultivate this "sight of sin" by meditation and by "convincing the heart of its loathsome condition." Hooker assigned the rational sinner a wide range of activity in preparing for salvation, but still attributed the effective work to "Gods humbling hand." Scanting treatment of preparation, the Davenport/Hooke catechism agreed that the

²⁹ Seaborn Cotton 25; Shepard, *First Principles*, 11-12; Stone 10. Norman Pettit notes that in his theology of preparation, Thomas Shepard further divided contrition into two steps, conviction and compunction. See Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (New Haven, 1966), 96-114.

soul must be prepared before union with Christ, but gave this responsibility to the Holy Spirit.³⁰

Through one's effectual call, the soul experienced the benefits of Christ gradually. Conversion was a process that followed a discernible pattern, these ministers thought. John Fiske simplified the course of salvation to contain two steps, justification and sanctification. Most catechists, though, defined four: justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification. Whether they listed more or fewer individual steps, all distinguished between the instantaneous change of justification and the long-term growth in grace of sanctification. In justification, God imputed righteousness to the sinner, removing condemnation. Next, in adoption, God "doth accept and pronounce that all those that are called, to be his children, and heirs unto eternal life." These two stages the believer experienced in time, but they did not occur through any action of one's own: God instantaneously moved the sinner into a status of righteousness and acceptance. Sanctification, in contrast, was a continuous process "whereby the Sons of God are renewed in the whole man." Sanctification had two parts. Mortification helped believers to die to sin, and

³⁰ Hooker, *An Exposition*, 16-19. On Hooker's understanding of preparation, see Frank Shuffleton, *Thomas Hooker, 1586-1647* (Princeton, 1977), 82-95.

Richard Mather insisted the heart must be prepared, but did not specify who accomplished this. He did indicate that before vocation, the soul was dead in sin. John Norton agreed, defining the soul as "meerly passive" in the first call. John Davenport agreed that preparation must occur, but said the Holy Spirit must do it. Mather, *A Catechisme*, 77-79; Norton 11; Davenport and Hooke 22.

vivification each day renewed them in the godly life. The life-long course of sanctification brought "a continuall war* and combat between the renewed part...and the unrenewed part" of the believer. This long combat would not be completed on earth, but a saint's perseverance in it helped evidence grace. In glorification, the elect would become thoroughly holy and blessed in heaven.³¹

As they explained the steps of redemption, catechisms avoided leading respondents to assume themselves among the saved. They were willing to let children use the first person to describe sin. Because all bore sin and guilt, the first-person plural, a universal "we," was a safe way to speak of fallen humanity. In most cases, though, when it came time to discuss salvation, the respondent spoke of the elect in third-person pronouns, or used expressions marking the group of God's chosen but not necessarily including the speaker within it. Shepard used "the faithfull," and Stone noted that "a believer" would experience conversion and its benefits. Redemption is "effectually applied only to the elect," the manual of Davenport and Hooke explained, so "certain persons" would receive grace, and certain other persons would receive punishment. Occasionally writers

³¹ Fiske 9; Shepard, *First Principles*, 12-13; Noyes 9-10; Norton 12-13. Shepard inserted "Reconciliation" between justification and adoption. Directing his instruction to "babes," John Cotton chose to use the simplest terms, not even employing the technical language of justification. Instead, he explained that the spirit gave believers faith to receive Christ, prayer to call upon him, repentance to mourn sin, and new obedience to serve God. Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 9.

included a first-person plural pronoun within a third-person treatment of redemption. Hooker, for instance, spoke of redemption's work on a "beleeving sinner," but later asked, "What do we receive from Christ?" Shepard also lapsed out of third person, asking the student to name benefits "we doe enjoy from Christ."³²

John Cotton's catechism provided a rare exception to reliance on the third person. From its first answer, learners were encouraged to look to God for salvation, affirming God's good will toward them, if not a guarantee of grace: "God hath made me, He keepeth me, and He can save me," the respondent declared. In speaking of sin, the respondent used the first-person singular ("I was conceived in sinne"), and continued to do so when asked "How doth the spirit of Christ apply Christ, and his promise of grace unto you, and keepe you in him?" The child then was to answer, "By begetting in me faith to receive him." We cannot conclude, from this treatment, that Cotton opened a wider way of salvation than his colleagues, but at least for the very young, he was not overly cautious about distinguishing elect and reprobate among the learners of his catechism.³³

In any case, by demarcating elect and reprobate, catechisms did not intend to discourage children from desiring grace. Since all were sinners, no particular individual's guilt made him or her uniquely unqualified for

³² Davenport and Hooke 21; Hooker, *An Exposition*, 20-23; Shepard, *First Principles*, 12-13.

³³ Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 1-2, 8-9.

election. Catechisms aimed to pique desire for grace but not promise it too early. Unlike some continental and English catechisms, the child was never identified as a Christian by virtue of baptism. All New England children were to be taught catechisms whether or not they were baptized, whether or not their own parents were saints.

Catechisms did offer some encouragement to their students. Having placed such stress on right knowledge of God and of the process of salvation, these manuals suggested that those who knew and pursued wholesome doctrine would be more likely recipients of grace. Thomas Shepard's *A Short Catechism* began, "What knowledge is necessary toward the attainment of eternal life?" The knowledge of God and of salvation, Shepard implied, was an essential prerequisite for grace. Hugh Peter's title page described the catechism as containing "*Principles necessary, to bee known and learned, of such as would know Christ here, or be known of him hereafter.*"³⁴ Knowledge did not, by itself, save learners, but people who lacked knowledge were utterly lost. Catechists reminded children that those who learned these fundamentals could have a measure of hope.

New England catechisms included more extensive doctrinal and practical material on conversion than did some earlier European catechisms. Their first goal was to magnify God in the work of redemption. Secondly, they wanted to show clearly what conversion was and was not: it

³⁴ Shepard, *Short Catechism*, 1; Peter, *Milk for Babes*.

was not a violent swoon, dream, or vision. Catechisms marked out stages of salvation that the believer would experience *in time*, even though God had decreed election from eternity. In addition to giving children a clear sense of conversion's process, catechisms prepared them for the experience. Acquainting children with the terms of the conversion morphology would make them ready to understand preaching on repentance. When children would someday take to heart the call to conversion, if they knew the order of vocation, justification, adoption, and sanctification, they could recognize how far they had come on the way to grace.

Of course, catechisms were not exactly how-to manuals. They pointed out the way of salvation and, in some cases, advised preparation, but did not guarantee that learners would attain grace. Indeed, they insisted that God worked salvation, not men and women, even those who knew all the right steps. Just learning and saying the catechism did not bring on grace, but the process did train its students on how to desire and perceive it.

Training Up Godly New Englanders

If catechisms gave most care to preparing their students for the experience of grace, they did not neglect preparation for social life and church participation. Moral instruction usually fell towards the end of a catechism, after treatment of redemption. That order could indicate that obedience should follow conversion. Some catechisms

did not spell out the relationship between salvation and righteous living, but abruptly broke off discussion of redemption and began discussing duties--implying that moral material was relevant for all audiences, whether or not the learner would be among the redeemed. Some works followed the outline of the decalogue, dividing duties into "ceremonial" and moral" observance. Ceremonial observance pertained to the worship of God. Moral observance described the duties that people bore to one another. In some cases, New England catechisms did not broach the decalogue at all, devising their own headings for sections on worshipping God and loving neighbors.

John Cotton's *Milk for Babes* placed the Ten Commandments before salvation, using them, as Luther did, to drive the desperate sinner to Christ. After an exposition of the commands, Cotton asked whether the student had kept them, and the respondent had to confess, "No, I and all men are sinners." Other catechisms acknowledged that the law made sinners feel need of a savior, but detailed the commandments elsewhere. Most often, the Ten Commandments appeared after the full treatment of redemption. Like the Geneva and Heidelberg catechisms, these catechisms implied that observing the moral law was a believer's way of showing gratitude to God and living out sanctification. Even the regenerate could proffer only imperfect obedience, but because the saints would always lament their imperfection,

"the Lord may threaten and correct them, but his loving kindness...is never taken from them."³⁵

Naturally, God did not only give commandments to the regenerate. Noyes treated the decalogue after redemption and the sacraments, but left a sharp break between those topics and the decalogue. The last part of the catechism addressed learners whether or not they could claim redemption. The unregenerate were warned that contempt for God's law was sure proof of a hardened heart, for God's "fierce and fearful secret wrath" would increase as their sins multiplied. The law was part of any Christian's religious observance, for those under the covenant of law or the covenant of grace.³⁶ Catechisms used treatment of the Ten Commandments to uphold behavioral norms, to exhort care for one's neighbor, faithful labor, sexual purity, dutiful obedience, and material contentment. Catechists who discussed the commandments individually discovered in each specific item a host of wider applications. As English catechists also tended to do, they highlighted both the prohibitions and the corresponding duties implicit in each commandment.³⁷

³⁵ Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 6; Shepard, *First Principles*, 14.

³⁶ Rogers 60. John Fiske gave an exposition of the decalogue in an appendix after the body of his catechism.

³⁷ Green points out three principles of interpretation that governed catechisms' presentation of the Ten Commandments: division of the ten items into two tables, a broad interpretation of commandments, and recommendation of both positive duties and negative prohibitions with each commandment. See Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 427-30.

Q: "What is a visible church?"³⁸

The Christian's first duty was to believe in God correctly. New England catechisms can appear theologically top-heavy, scanting morality, until one realizes how earnestly they urged right belief as a Christian duty. The manuals cast questions in terms of obligation, asking children what they were to know or what they had to believe about God. Religious convictions were a matter of both ecclesiastical and civil interest in New England, as General Courts indicated when they passed laws requiring catechizing. The quality of students' eternal life, as well as their daily life in the godly colonies, depended in part on their willingness to acquire this knowledge.³⁹

Writers took up the subject of the church at various places in their catechisms. Some placed it immediately after redemption, while others treated it along with sacraments. Occasionally it appeared suddenly, with little connection to material coming before or after. Catechisms that treated the Ten Commandments could further explain the worship of the church in the context of the first table of the decalogue. Noteworthy differences between old England's and New England catechisms appear in discussions of the church. Most in Ian Green's sample of popular English catechisms mentioned the church, but these generally avoided contentious points of ecclesiology. Some English forms, including the Westminster Shorter Catechism, omitted the

³⁸ Norton 13.

³⁹ Shepard, *First Principles*, 1, 5; Peter 5; Norton 3.

subject almost entirely.⁴⁰ In contrast, even the most basic of the colonial forms gave at least a brief definition of the church, and many gave rather complex presentations of ecclesiology. New England clergy had learned to be defensive about their church polity through years of polemics with Presbyterians, and they wanted youth to be able to articulate the correctness of congregationalism. Therefore, catechisms pointed out key features of the rightly ordered church: its embrace of the elect and exclusion of unregenerates, its covenant, its officers, and its relationship to other churches.

Writers sketched out the congregational way by question and answer, taking care to show how New England worship followed God's own patterns. Catechists might marshal both Old and New Testament endorsements for their ecclesiology. In larger catechisms, writers sometimes explicitly owned New Testament forms as their guide: Davenport and Hooke, for instance, noted that "the prophesies concerning the churches under the new Testament" gave sanction to New England's church covenants. Shorter catechisms did not so specifically demonstrate how the primitive church inspired their congregations, but did list in margins the New Testament scriptures that informed their ecclesiology.⁴¹

As they defined the church, writers defended the exclusiveness of its membership. Some named the church as the subject of redemption. In so doing, catechists applied

⁴⁰ Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 326-34.

⁴¹ Davenport and Hooke 29. See also Fitch 56-57.

redemption to a community rather than making isolated individuals objects of grace, and drew the boundaries of the church to enclose only the elect, not "mere professors." Visible sainthood was an integral part of the church's very definition. In defining the church, the respondent in Cotton's *Milk for Babes* described it as "a Congregation of Saints joyned together in the bond of the Covenant, to worship the Lord, and to edify one another in all his Holy Ordinances." Richard Mather explained, "by the appointment of Christ all churches ought to consist onely of true beleeevers."⁴²

If the church had a duty to keep the unregenerate out, it was the saint's duty, as Davenport and Hooke argued, to join a particular church. In a point their authors had grown expert in defending against English opponents, catechisms explained that a church was founded on a covenant. Mather observed that wood and stones did not make a house until they were "compacted" together, and so a visible church did not exist "without some visible bond and union." Members joined by personally taking hold of that covenant, "giving up themselves and their seed to the Lord first, then to his People," John Fiske determined. Catechisms even advised children about New England's admissions process. In becoming members, saints would take hold of the covenant and submit themselves to the church "by confessions of their sinnes and profession of their faith."

⁴² Norton 13; Noyes 10; Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, 101-104; Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 10.

Thomas Shepard admitted that hypocrites could creep into the church, but asserted, "if they could have been known to be such, they ought to be kept out," and they should be cast out once discovered.⁴³

Explaining the difference between the catholic church and particular churches, manuals noted that it was each congregation's right to admit members and exercise discipline. In addition, the brethren elected leaders to occupy specific New Testament offices. John Norton delineated the relative duties of pastors, teachers, ruling elders, deacons, and widows. Though officers had important tasks, the power of the whole remained with the brethren, Norton stipulated. He upheld the independence of the congregation, explaining that in case of conflict, the church should repair to a "council," gathered to declare truth but "not to exercise authority." While not all catechisms described church officers and synods in the detail Norton employed, other manuals also deemed it crucial for learners to know the properties of a right church. Richard Mather distinguished between pure, corrupt, and false churches, implicitly warning that even the colonial congregations could become polluted.⁴⁴

The Old Testament also supplied guidance for colonial churches, both in the example of the "Nationall church of

⁴³ Davenport and Hooke said believers would "sin greatly" if they had opportunity to join the church but did not. Davenport and Hooke 33-34; Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 10-11; Shepard, *First Principles*, 16.

⁴⁴ Norton 13-15; Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, 105-106.

the Jewes," and in the first table of the Ten Commandments. The first commandment covered "natural" worship, which James Fitch described as believers' acceptance of God and cleaving to Him in "understanding, will, and affections," and Richard Mather perceived as forbidding atheism, ignorance, and unbelief. The second command defined "instituted" worship, Christians' service to God in ministry, sacraments, prayer, and discipline. Believers were to take care to worship according to God's plan, not by "Superstitious abuse or Idolizing any of the Instruments, or meanes appointed of God by his worship; and the doing of any honour to any humane device." Catechists interpreted the second commandment to forbid use of images and religious accessories of human design. Cotton explained that the commandment required worship "such as God hath ordained, not such as man has invented." The third command bound believers to use God's name and works "not vainly, not unreverently, not unprofitably." As for positive duties, the faithful were required to hear the Word, and ministers were to preach it properly. Davenport and Hooke reminded readers that "with the reading of the word must be joyned the opening and applying of it"--that is, preaching was to accompany reading of the scriptures, and the Word was not to be preached from the Apocrypha or expounded from a book of homilies. The congregation was directed to praise God by singing psalms. Those who were able to join a church were supposed to do so,

and those qualified to receive sacraments were to partake properly.⁴⁵

Catechisms that explicated the Ten Commandments gave careful attention to the fourth. Writers stressed the need to keep the sabbath, a duty Richard Mather summarized as "the consecrating and observing that seventh part of time in Gods solempne worship." Some writers lavished special care on defending this command. James Fitch included a long technical argument determining why God moved the sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week. Catechists insisted that all attend "holy duties" on the Lord's day, and were careful to stipulate how time should be spent and which activities were to be avoided on that day. As much as Puritans valued diligent labor in callings on the other days of the week, John Cotton warned that "we should rest from labor" on the sabbath. Perhaps recalling English abuses of the sabbath, he added that Christians should also "much more [rest] from play on the Lords day." Time should be spent "holily," Fiske warned, and Richard Mather cautioned against "profaining of the Lords holy time." Saints should relish the day through its end, "not greedily nor suddenly rush into worldly occasions, as if we were weary of the Sabbath, and glad it were at an end." The sabbath was to structure Christians' whole week, catechists suggested, making believers ready to worship on that day and work on the other

⁴⁵ Fitch 61-63; Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, 110-12; Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 3; Fiske 59; Davenport and Hooke 37-38.

days. John Norton noted that the fourth commandment further forbade "[a]ny humane institutions of holy dayes, or holy times" on other than God's own appointed sabbath, thereby sweeping aside the host of saints' days and holidays observed in England.⁴⁶

Q: "What is Observance towards God?"⁴⁷

After noting rules about God's service in the first table of the decalogue, catechisms then opened duties toward neighbors. Commands in the second table each received roughly equal weight. European catechisms sometimes placed disproportionate stress on the fifth commandment,⁴⁸ but New England versions did not overemphasize the command to honor one's father and mother. Like English and continental forms, colonial catechisms did broaden the prescription to include others in authority, and not merely parents. Richard Mather required yielding due respect to "naturall parents, husbands, fathers, magistrates, ministers, aged persons, or any other superiors," and John Cotton admitted that in "father and mother," the command meant all superiors in "family, school, church, and commonwealth." But catechists also recommended behaving "respectively to

⁴⁶ Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, 116-17; Fitch 64-70; Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 3-4; Norton 20.

⁴⁷ Stone 11.

⁴⁸ Some English catechisms also stressed obedience to parents and authorities, Green notes, but most of the catechisms in his sample did not overemphasize this. Green, *A Christian's ABC*, 452-60. Gerald Strauss does argue that German Lutheran catechists were particularly anxious to emphasize this commandment. See Strauss, *Luther's House of Learning*, 162-64.

equals" and "not contemning thy inferiors." New England's reading of the fifth commandment acknowledged rank and order, but did not beat the lowly into submission.⁴⁹

To John Fiske, the commandment implied more than just subordination of lower to higher. It also highlighted mutual responsibilities between parents and children, husbands and wives, masters and servants, magistrates and subjects, and ministers and people. Far from advising blind submission to arbitrary authority, Fiske asserted that the commandment was to inform men's choice of rulers, since voters were bound "to nominate and elect such, as be Able men, Fearers of God, men of Truth, and hating Covetousness."⁵⁰

The remaining commandments also underscored perennial New England concerns. Catechisms strove to encourage community, assigning their students the duty to care for and watch over neighbors. Expositions not only forbade positive evils but went out of their way to describe the good that Christians were bound to do to others. The sixth commandment declared, "Thou shalt not kill," and to Norton, it also required the "use of all due means that conduce to the good of our Neighbour, concerning his spiritual or temporal life." One was bound, in the seventh commandment, not only to preserve one's own chastity--"Thou shalt not commit adultery"--but as James Noyes insisted, to show

⁴⁹ Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, 117-18; Fitch 71; Norton 20; Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 3-4.

⁵⁰ Fiske 68-73.

concern for "the purity of our Neighbour." Beyond forbidding theft, the eighth commandment urged care for others' goods. It obliged people to "give all men their due," to "communicate our goods freely to our neighbour." It forbade "spend[ing] our own without benefit to ourselves or others" and "[a]ll fraudulence & corruptnesse in our dealing." The ninth commandment was given to inform public as well as private life: bearing false witness could occur when laws failed to promote "the publick peace, and quiet of the subject in all godliness and honesty," or when "[j]udgment is perverted, Records are unfaithfully reported, or preserved, unnecessary suits are managed."⁵¹

Catechisms contained much advice about regulating one's earning and spending. They explained, for instance, that the tenth commandment forbade covetousness and decreed contentment with one's lot, an important admonition amidst the social mobility of New England. In catechetical explanations, the commandment could be found warning the pious against "[d]esiring of, or envying at the good of our Neighbor." Not only with this command but in other contexts, catechisms urged learners to be satisfied with what they had, to "get our goods honestly" and "spend them thriftily." They exhorted hearty labor in one's tasks. The pious were to nourish the grace "which inclineth us to be provident in our Calling," and John Norton noted that the

⁵¹ Norton 21-22; Noyes 14-15; Cotton 5; Fiske 85.

even the fifth commandment obliged that "we walk orderly in our callings."⁵²

The commandments offered occasions for catechists to sketch out the morality they wished the young to live out. James Noyes used the commandments as an opportunity to define virtues: hope, love, fear (under the first commandment), humility, gratitude, obedience (under the fifth), goodness, mercy, meekness, patience (under the sixth), temperance, chastity, modesty, gravity (under the seventh), righteousness, liberality, frugality (under the eighth), verity, fidelity (under the ninth), and contentation (under the tenth).⁵³

Q: "Which are the Sacraments?"⁵⁴

Children who learned the Ten Commandments would practice them in their diligent labor, domestic obedience, and virtuous public behavior. This was their "moral observance" of religion. Their "ceremonial observance" brought them to the sacraments and prayer. They were to know the benefits of the sacraments described in the New Testament, through which God sealed the grace bestowed on the elect. Children whose parents were church members and eligible for baptismal privileges likely had more interest in catechisms' discussion of sacraments. Yet even children

⁵² Norton 20; Noyes 16. In urging an "orderly" walk in one's calling, Noyes bade learners both to work diligently and to avoid acting above their station.

⁵³ Noyes 13-16.

⁵⁴ Shepard, *First Principles*, 15.

who had not been baptized were not to ignore this material. Youth could be baptized if, before they reached maturity, their parents joined the church, or if they themselves came to faith and joined. In any case, ineligibility for sacraments was supposed to spur desire for them, not breed indifference.

New England's instructional manuals upheld the special features of the colonies' sacramental practice, especially its exclusiveness and connection to covenant theology. They specified that sacraments did not generate grace but only ratified the grace that the regenerate already possessed. The two sacraments--and catechists insisted there were only two real sacraments--were "signes and seales" of the covenant God made with saints. Therefore, they only belonged to "the faithfull members of some visible Church, and their seed." Sacraments could not be administered outside of a covenanted particular church and must be given "by a minister of the word, unto the faithful in church-fellowship."⁵⁵

Sacraments fused external symbols with spiritual meaning, so Christians were not to become preoccupied with the physical elements themselves. The sacrament of baptism presented a sign and seal of "ingrafting into Christ." The washing of water signified the "bloud of Christ washing away our sins unto eternal life." Catechisms advised learners not to fix upon the element of water, but to value the

⁵⁵ Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, 91; Davenport and Hooke 39-42, Shepard, *First Principles*, 15.

ceremony sanctified by preaching, performed by a minister. "joyning the word with the seale & sanctifying the ordinance by public prayer." Baptism was to be given to the visibly elect and their children, sealing that grace "to beleivers and their seed." Davenport and Hooke even insisted here that only the covenant status of "next and immediate parents" qualified children for baptism; grandchildren of saints, accordingly, were not counted eligible. Scoring a point against anabaptism, they also insisted that this first sacrament "is to be but once administered."⁵⁶

Catechisms provided a pointed opportunity to remind baptized children of the promises and responsibilities bestowed upon them in infancy. Baptized children, speaking about the sacrament, were to recall God's grace in "the pardon and clensing of my sinnes" or "washing away our sins unto eternal life." To the unbaptized, catechisms had to explain why New England churches properly refused the sacrament to children whose parents were not church members. This issue was, of course, tightly woven into the fabric of Puritan ecclesiology and covenant theology, and catechisms hardly gave the unbaptized opportunity to protest their own neglect. But they did try to explain New England's policies. They demonstrated that sacraments belonged to the "seed" of those in covenant, while making clear that baptism was available to adult converts as well as federally holy infants. For those who earnestly desired the sacraments,

⁵⁶ Noyes 11; Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 12; Davenport and Hooke 33.

catechists intended that they improve the means of grace, rather than merely resenting the Bay Colony's sacramental policies.⁵⁷

Baptism, given once, sealed a Christian's first entrance to the church. The Lord's Supper, to be received repeatedly, was the "Sacrament of our spirituall nourishment, and continuance therein." New England catechisms took care to set apart right use of the Supper from eucharistic interpretations they considered erroneous, distinguishing external from spiritual aspects of the sacrament. Having made those distinctions, though, catechisms were ready to name the bread and wine as corporeal signs of Christ. Davenport and Hooke narrated the minister's distribution of the elements to communicants, saying "take and eat it, as the body of Christ broken for them....take and drink it, as the blood of Christ shed for them, and this also to do in remembrance of him." New England sharply restricted the pool of worthy communicants, but once qualified, believers were encouraged to receive the elements as signs and seals of "the body of Christ broken for me, and of his bloud shed for me." Receivers would be "feeding on [Christ] spiritually" as they ate the bread. In addition to describing worthy partakers and the meaning of the sacrament, some catechisms specified its proper administration in church. Communion was not to be administered privately, but was to be given only to saints

⁵⁷ Noyes 11; Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 11.

in the congregation, who should be seated around the Lord's table.⁵⁸

The Lord's Supper was only given to church members, but even these were not automatically eligible. Infant members could not receive the second sacrament until they had grown up, learned the faith, and confessed their own belief. Even adult members could not simply communicate without preparation. Though New England ministers differed in their teachings on preparation for conversion, they were in agreement that saints needed to prepare themselves each time before receiving the sacrament. Some catechisms described how communicants should prepare for the Lord's Supper. Communicants had to be "[s]uch members of the Church as are endowed with knowledge, spiritual affections, faith, repentance, and thankfulnesse." They were to receive the sacrament only after "having examined and judged themselves." Worthy partakers had to "discern the Lords Body, and examine themselves." To Samuel Stone, this meant checking to see whether they found "no satisfaction but in Christ himself." Thomas Shepard indicated that "[c]hildren and fools, and wicked" could not come to the sacrament because they could not perform the requisite acts of discernment. The ignorant, including children, "cannot examine themselves, and so renew their Faith," presumably

⁵⁸ Noyes 11; Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 12; Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, 93; Shepard, *First Principles*, 15-16; Davenport and Hooke 42-43.

from immaturity of the understanding, while the wicked were disqualified by what self-examination would discover.⁵⁹

Q: "What are the parts of prayer?"⁶⁰

Puritans' wariness about using set forms of worship or devotion was apparent in treatments of the Lord's Prayer. Traditionally one of the four staples of catechisms, many English forms offered explications of it. But William Perkins had expressed the godly's concern with such forms, by offering his catechism to be learned before such traditional formulae. It was not enough, Perkins insisted, to be able to say the Lord's Prayer--or creed or commandments--"unlesse ye can understand the meaning of the words, and be able to make a right use" of them inwardly and outwardly, which he observed the ignorant failed to do. Rather than rattling off rote prayers, believers should pause to comprehend the familiar words.⁶¹ Furthermore, Puritans valued prayer that was heartfelt and inspired by the Spirit; for the saints' many petitions and praises, one single form of prayer was not adequate. Yet the Lord's Prayer was different from the set forms Puritans disliked in the *Book of Common Prayer*, given by Christ himself and lifted straight from scripture. Though New England saints did not reject the Lord's Prayer, they tended to view it as

⁵⁹ Davenport and Hooke 32-33, 42; Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, 93; Stone 15; Shepard, *First Principles*, 16.

⁶⁰ Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, 94.

⁶¹ Perkins, *Six Principles*, sig. A4r; Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 286-87.

a model for their own supplications rather than a strict form for the petitions of God's people.⁶²

Some catechisms defined prayer without mentioning the Lord's Prayer at all. Cotton explained prayer as "calling upon God in the Name of Christ, by the helpe of the Holy Ghost, according to the will of God," and said no more. Others described the process of prayer, sometimes dividing it into three steps: in confession one acknowledged sins, in petition one asked God for blessings according to His will, and in thanksgiving one showed gratitude for what God had given. Prayer had to be offered with the right attitude and for the right ends. The suppliant was to be righteous and humble, and was to pray for something lawful, as guided by scripture. People could pray publicly or privately, "as the Spirit of christ helpeth them," in spoken words or sung psalms.⁶³

Several writers identified the Lord's Prayer as a "pattern of prayer," informing children that it showed the godly "what we should pray for and how." The formula gave believers "the substance of things to be desired or prayed for," which they could then request in petitions of their own. Christians prayed for God to work his will, to fulfill their needs, and to keep them from sin. Seaborn Cotton upheld the Lord's Prayer as a pattern for believers' petitions, but recommended following it so closely that he

⁶² For the most part, the catechisms in Green's sample do treat the Lord's prayer. Green, *The Christian's ABC*, 484-85.

⁶³ Fitch 73; Norton 16.

might as well have taught children to pray in the traditional words. The Lord's Prayer, he explained, guided believers to ask God for such things as "the Hallowing of his name, the coming of his Kingdom, the doing of his will...the obtaining daily bread, remissions of sins, deliverance from temptation."⁶⁴

A few writers chose the traditional course of including and explicating the Lord's Prayer petition by petition. John Fiske gave full interpretation of the familiar lines, teaching New England children to pray therein for the institutions that pious colonists held dear. For Fiske, the second petition, "thy kingdom come," begged God for the "granting and blessing such means as may advantage hereunto: Such as godly family nurture, civil Government, Schools of learning, &c." In praying for their daily bread, New England children were also asking God to prosper their government and their work. That petition requested "the enjoying a civil, and religious right to our enjoyments," and "the blessing of our honest labours travells & endeavours" along with the more basic "creature comforts." In asking God to lead them not into temptation, the faithful hoped to avoid "idelines, improvidence, intemperancy, and luxury, sinfull ambition, selvishnes, and incompassionatenes," and prayed that they would be spared "[u]nsanctified affections...yea & unsanctified prosperity too." Thomas Hooker also gave full explication of the

⁶⁴ Rogers 62-63; Norton 16; Seaborn Cotton 32-34.

Lord's Prayer. Hooker made a large concession to the needs of earthly life in explaining why it was acceptable to ask God for something so mundane as bread: "We desire a comfortable supply of all things concerning this life....[a] man must have a being, before a well-being; nature before grace." He read "lead us not into temptation" as a corporate petition. In asking this, saints were to bear in mind the community as well as themselves, desiring "that God would provide means for others good and make us instruments to deliver them," by watching over their conversation and notifying them "what is amisse." Hooker used this traditional petition to encourage godly oversight, demonstrating how catechists, even when employing the Lord's Prayer in its standard form, could make room for the special intentions of New England.⁶⁵

Continuity and Adaptation

New England catechisms took on distinctive character not by limiting themselves to provincial concerns, but by freely adapting traditional material to suit their theological emphases. In many respects, these catechisms continued to resemble their forerunners: they taught by question and answer, upheld the structural features appropriate to larger and smaller catechisms, and treated many of the same doctrinal points. But New England Puritans departed in significant ways from catechisms that

⁶⁵ Fiske 21, 26-27, 33; Hooker, *An Exposition*, 28-35.

highlighted the Apostles' Creed, Ten Commandments, Lord's Prayer, and sacraments. Advancing a pattern prevalent in some seventeenth-century English catechisms, New England writers organized contents around their own theological structures, rather than letting the building blocks shape their works.⁶⁶ While many New England versions featured at least two staple elements, others did not include any of them.

Of the four staples, catechisms most consistently omitted the Apostle's Creed. In England, other clergymen had shown unease with its origin and content, its rote recitation, and the tendency of churchgoers to perceive it as a prayer. The Westminster Assembly debated whether to include it at all, finally agreeing to append the text to its shorter catechism but not using the creed to explicate doctrine. Through the early Reformation, the creed had represented the faith into which a child had been baptized.

⁶⁷ In place of the creed, New England catechisms substituted teaching on God's nature and works, Christ's redemptive role and offices, and the structure of the church. Puritans intended that children learn God was Spirit, not a creature to be envisioned in images or worshipped like an idol. They wanted children to remember

⁶⁶ Green, *The Chrisitans' ABC*, 283-89.

⁶⁷ In seventeenth-century New England baptisms, parents did not recite the Apostles' Creed on behalf of their children. On baptismal procedures in New England see Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 143.

that God's Providence, not natural accident, moved the world they inhabited.

Cotton Mather upheld many of his grandfathers' doctrinal principles, but in the early eighteenth century, he reversed the New England custom of omitting creeds from catechisms, and began to include them. In one work, he insisted that the Apostles' Creed was a formula "well worth, an Early inscription upon the *Memories* of our children." Nevertheless, Mather showed himself as independent-minded about religious forms as his forbears were, supplementing that the Apostles' Creed with "creeds" of his own composition, like his "Glorious Abstract of the Articles of Christianity," or his defense of the Trinity entitled "Faith of the Fathers."⁶⁸

Whether or not they included the Apostles' Creed, like numerous English forms of the same period, New England catechisms supplemented credal material with discussions of predestination and the *ordo salutis*. Going through the steps of salvation, catechisms introduced youth to the process they would certainly hear dissected in numerous sermons, and which they might even experience. This outline would help youth recognize stages of conversion in themselves and others. When and why God chose to call a saint was mysterious; how the convicted sinner experienced repentance and vocation was not. Because most catechisms

⁶⁸ Mather also designated significant scriptures as "creeds." For instance, he named John 3:16, "Our Savior's Creed," and Deuteronomy 6:45, "Moses's Creed." See Mather, *Much in a Little*, 1-3.

presented the process as one that occurred to the "beleever" or "elect," they attempted to spur hope and preparation.

Though creeds did not appear in New England catechisms until Cotton Mather placed them in his, the Ten Commandments, sacraments, and Lord's Prayer often did find a place in these manuals. It may be surprising that New England's founding ministers, often stereotyped as stern legalists, frequently left the decalogue out of their catechisms or reduced it to a simple summary of the two tables. This surely does not indicate unconcern for God's moral law, but does suggest that clergy prioritized salvation over moral rules in early religious instruction. John Fiske's strategy might reveal a pattern: he did not explicate the commandments in the body of his catechism but gave them full treatment in an appendix. We might guess that other catechists supplied such an "appendix" in personal instruction and preaching, though they did not do so within a catechism's printed pages. Explicating the Ten Commandments, ministers advised children on the practical implications of God's decrees to keep the sabbath, honor parents, and forsake theft, adultery, and covetousness. The colonists' esteem of community and purity were borne out in the mundane prescriptions catechists drew from the decalogue. As Richard Mather reminded his readers, the commandments were binding on all: believers used them in

godly obedience, but unbelievers were not exempt from the law.⁶⁹

The Lord's Prayer sometimes was offered in its entirety. More often, catechisms gave general instruction on the attitude and manner of prayer, looking to the Lord's Prayer for a model. The sacraments were treated almost invariably, perhaps because New Englanders felt the need to school the young in the justifications for their exclusive sacramental policies. Catechisms provided an opportunity to remind children of their baptism and the responsibilities and benefits assigned to them therein. As for the Lord's Supper, catechists since the Reformation showed concern that their students understand their doctrine of the sacrament. Before they approached it, ministers insisted, believers had to know its meaning and be able to examine themselves for penitence and grace. A catechism would help them perform this self-scrutiny.

Conclusion

Ministers used catechisms to present what they considered essential doctrine to the youngest or least learned in the community. That material often overlapped with the content of sermons or other devotional books. It was not intended to be especially original; it had to fit in a relatively few pages, and had to be expressed plainly. It represented what ministers considered the fundamentals of

⁶⁹ Richard Mather, *A Catechisme*, 112.

the faith. Writers might choose to omit the creed, for example, because it did not adequately articulate points teachers considered most important; instead, they might devote space to describing God's faculties, or conversion's stages of repentance, justification, and sanctification. By placing such matters in a catechism, ministers demonstrated their conviction that believers at the youngest ages should begin to think of God and of themselves in particular ways.

Writers chose content carefully. Instead of simply sticking to traditional formats and lessons, or relying solely on imported English catechisms, ministers put together material they considered needful for their flocks. Except for pointed definitions of the church, the content of most catechisms was not polemical.⁷⁰ Rather, they offered the doctrinal groundwork upon which learners could build an understanding of the faith. Ministers detailed the steps of conversion, for instance, not because children would fail to hear about these elsewhere, but to prepare young listeners to get full benefit of sermons bidding them to union with Christ. Often questions in a catechism presented knowledge as the saint's duty, without which he or she certainly could never please God. "What are you to know

⁷⁰ With few exceptions, New England catechisms did not use space to castigate opinions of Catholics or heretics. Hugh Peter's *Milk for Babes*, written for his Amsterdam and London congregations, did stridently oppose Roman doctrines. Several of Cotton Mather's catechisms also take up arms against false opinions; see treatment of these in chapter three, above. On the whole, though, these manuals strove to guard children from heresy not by argument but by education in the Puritans' own faith.

concerning God?" Thomas Shepard demanded, "What are you to make of all these things?" "Concerning God, what are you to know?" John Norton also asked. "What must you know, concerning particular Providence, touching man?" Hugh Peter questioned his students.⁷¹

Catechisms provided an introduction into the terms of religious discourse youth would hear frequently in New England. By explaining what the Lord's Prayer actually meant in petitioning, "Give us this day our daily bread," what one experienced in baptism, or what a minister intended when he discussed God's Providence, catechisms transmitted to New England's next generation the principles of the faith filtered through Puritan convictions. Designed by ministers specifically for congregations in the wilderness, these catechisms introduced children to the faith their parents upheld and their preachers expounded. They gave the pious language to express their understanding of God, aspirations to holiness, and regret over misdeeds. By charting the path of conversion, they tried to inspire longing for salvation. Other forms of religious address also contributed to these aims, but catechisms provided an early road-map to the way of grace, so that saints could learn how far they had to go, and understand when ministers described in more detail the texture of humiliation, justification, and adoption. New England catechisms did not just give theological

⁷¹ Shepard, *Short Catechism*, 1, 5; Peter 5; Norton 3.

information, but pledged learners to the faith of their churches.

Chapter Five. *"I had learn in my Catechism": Catechizing and Lay Religious Experience*

Introduction

Prescriptive literature and colonial laws indicate that catechizing was performed in New England, and catechisms themselves disclose the doctrine ministers aimed to present. Taken alone, however, these sources do not provide a full picture of how the laity experienced this religious instruction. The numerous contexts in which catechisms were taught suggest that many children acquired at least some familiarity with their contents. Yet Puritans themselves recognized that there were children who did not learn these texts very well. Massachusetts laws ordering catechesis in 1648 and 1669 recognized that some families were not teaching their children adequately. Ezekiel Rogers, pastor at Rowley, complained that he could not find a servant who was grateful for catechizing. Such laments permit us to conclude that some children failed to learn their catechisms and that others probably absorbed the words but not the meaning of these lessons. Reverend John Fiske indicated that this was the case among some youth in his Chelmsford church. Examining the knowledge and spiritual growth of young people in his flock, in addition to those with doctrinal competence Fiske found Jonathan Bates to be "very ignorant," while Benjamin Spalding's "memory seem[ed] better than his understanding."¹

¹ Axtell 22-23, 28-30; Pope, *The Notebook of the Reverend*

Nevertheless, despite reports that some students neglected their lessons, colonial New England affords evidence that others esteemed this religious education. Some church members demonstrated, in their conversion narratives, that they did memorize these documents and found them helpful in the duties and disciplines of Christian living. Clerical advice and popular reports together establish a more distinct picture of what learning a catechism entailed and how the laity put their lessons to use.

Just as ministers composed guides for parents or others who taught catechisms, they also offered youth advice on the process of learning them. Such counsel flowed in abundance from the pen of Cotton Mather, who had boundless confidence in catechisms' potential as a means of grace. Mather outlined a course of study, showing students how to move from memorization to comprehension, and pointing out the multiple applications of a catechism well learned. More than simply an introduction to doctrinal formulae, a catechism could provide its users aids to prayer or preparation for communion, and could even be a guide to the process of salvation. While other ministers also offered advice on employing these manuals, Mather explained most carefully how the young could "improve" catechizing to their spiritual benefit. His writings on the subject set out the

process learners young were to follow in studying a catechism.

Beyond ministerial recommendations, the testimonies of men and women who joined New England churches even more clearly illustrate the role of catechisms in lay religious practice. Catechisms for them were not merely dry, dogmatic sentences, but adaptable instruments that helped them along the road to salvation. For godly New Englanders, these manuals furnished a framework and vocabulary for religious experience. Colonists encountered catechisms in oral exposition and through printed texts, and met this instruction at numerous points on the way to conversion. Catechizing could give children their first introduction to doctrines of the church, but its effects were not limited to childhood. To be sure, some adults may have remembered little of their catechetical lessons. Nevertheless, the process of learning, memorizing, and reciting these catechisms could fix their place in the religious development of saints. Men and women recalled and acted upon lessons they had memorized as children, and continued to hear catechetical expositions as adults. Catechisms assisted the saints in several capacities, teaching, convicting, and comforting them. Conversion testimonies corroborate Cotton Mather's claims that catechisms were important tools to nurture religious knowledge, habits, and experience.

Mather's Counsel for Catechumens

Cotton Mather not only wrote catechisms and prepared parents and ministers to teach them, but tried to help students learn them effectively. He sketched out for students the stages of their catechetical education, from memory to understanding and recitation, and described the benefits these lessons could yield. Though Mather believed Christian education could make youth mannerly and diligent, he hoped it would do more than that. It could assist them in religious duties. More critically, it also could lead them to the threshold of conversion. He anticipated that if instruction were carried out "in a way most likely to take for the Winning of Souls," it could "prove an Introduction to Abundance of Good."²

The first step in mastering a catechism was to memorize it, Mather directed. Though he desired more than superficial retention of the questions and answers, he insisted that children should begin by learning them by heart. He devised short forms--one had just three questions--to help the youngest commit the text to memory. In other works, he suggested that they master only part of the answers or the accompanying scripture citations before tackling full responses. In some of his large forms, he offered rhymed text to help retention. Memorizing catechisms would help learners master the terms that they subsequently would hear in sermons or could use in

² *Diary of Cotton Mather*, 2:68.

describing religious experience. Learned well, these lessons could have life-long resonance in students' spiritual development. Like Mather, Joseph Sewall also urged the young to master a catechism in childhood so that they could ponder it in their "riper years." Whatever use they might later make of these manuals, memorization supplied children with a stock of godly knowledge and vocabulary.³ Records of a Connecticut witchcraft case illustrate how well one servant girl learned her catechism. The girl reportedly fell into fits in which she would recite "a great many verses, which are in some primers, & allso the dialogue between Christ the yoong man & the divull, the Lords prayer, all the commandments & catechism, the creede & severall such good things." Though this was not exactly the orderly recitation ministers had in mind, the young woman obviously held the text of a catechism actively in memory, together with other staples of New England religious literature.⁴

This girl's peculiar performance highlights another aspect of learning a catechism: after memorizing it, students would recite it. Though longer manuals were not intended for rote retention and oral rehearsal, elementary forms were. Having gotten their catechisms "without book,"

³ Mather, *Cares about the Nurseries* (Boston, 1702), 18, and *The A,B,C of Religion* (Boston, 1713); Joseph Sewall, "Sober-Mindedness Explain'd as a Necessary Part of Early Piety" in *A Course of Sermons on Early Piety...By...Eight Ministers* (Boston, 1721), 5.

⁴ Quotation in Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 21. The elements that the girl recited were regular components of *The New England Primer*.

children in New England then could be called upon to recite it in several venues. Children likely made their first recitations at home, with their parents as examiners, since colonial laws charged parents to see that children mastered their lessons. Children might then take turns answering the queries of a minister or a schoolmaster. Massachusetts children might also exhibit their ability to profess doctrine before selectmen or, after 1679, tithingmen, who visited homes to investigate whether the young were being taught reading, religion, and the colony's laws. Some youth chose to practice the catechism with their peers. Cotton Mather observed that a society of pious young men recited a catechism together, and through the activity, "have thereby come to have the *Word of God*, more sensibly *Abiding* in them." In Mather's estimation, repeating the words together gave these youth an affective sense of the doctrine and helped them retain the knowledge. Recitation was a significant aspect of learning a catechism. It provided students practice in speaking publicly about their faith, so that if they later stood before a church as candidates for full communion, their admission ceremonies would not be the first time they had answered questions about their faith.⁵

Once the catechism was set in mind, students were to strive to understand it. Testing the children in his church, John Fiske distinguished those who knew doctrine "in the letter" from those who had progressed further and were

⁵ Axtell 23, 45; Mather, *Youth in its Brightest Glory* (Boston, 1709), 26.

competent "as to understanding." Skeptical of material merely memorized, ministers sought strategies to help children comprehend the doctrine. Cotton Mather urged teachers to present material so that children "*Understand, what they Remember, of their Catechism, and not recite it, like meer Parrots, by rote.*" Mather tinkered with the text of existing catechisms to make them more comprehensible. He added extra sets of questions and answers to others' manuals, and employed Herbert Palmer's method of soliciting simple yes/no responses to question series. Palmer's method seemed to him an excellent way to sharpen students' grasp of doctrine, requiring hearers not only to memorize theological principles but to distinguish correct pronouncements from misstatements.⁶

Asking yes/no questions allowed Mather to press respondents to apply doctrine to themselves. For instance, as one dialogue in Mather's *Maschil* explicated original sin, the text did not leave the doctrine as an abstract declaration but demanded of the student, "*Were you Born a Sinner?*" "Yes," he or she would be prompted to admit. Respondents would concede, further, that their corrupt nature was bent continually unto sin, and they would acknowledge how this original debility worked out in practice in their lives: "*Do you find much Sinful Darkness in your mind? Have you many vain and false Thoughts in your mind?*" the inquiry pressed. The child could hardly deny it,

⁶ Pope, *The Notebook of the Reverend John Fiske*, 187; Mather, *Maschil*, 11.

and had to say yes once again when asked, "Does your *Memory* forget *Good Things*, and retain *Bad ones*?" Becoming aware of their depravity and God's just wrath, respondents would discover their "[c]ondition such, that you have need above all things, to look after Salvation from that Condition." They would have to give a resounding no when asked, "Are you Able to Save your self, by any work or worth of your own?" The questioner thereby brought students to see that they needed and desired Christ: "Well then: Do you Desire to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ, *not having your own Righteousness, but the Righteousness which is in God by Faith*?" When taught and tested in this manner, students had to confess that the doctrine they upheld not only described humanity at large, but characterized *them*. In the process of answering such questions, they articulated their commitment to these principles.⁷

Practicing Godly Duties

Once they learned a catechism, young men and women could put it to work for them. While Cotton Mather praised these manuals as aids to various religious duties, his father and grandfather had noted its advantages long before. One of the catechism's strengths, all three generations of Mathers observed, was in keeping its students away from grave sins. Richard Mather urged those in his congregation to learn a catechism to protect themselves from heresy, and

⁷ Mather, *Maschil*, 22-23, 62-63, 82.

Increase Mather noted that those well schooled in religious principles were often "kept from falling into Scandalous . . . Sins." By enumerating the duties men and women owed to God and neighbor, catechisms defined right conduct in very practical terms. Students were not left with the bare commands not to steal or covet, for instance, but were admonished not to "take away another mans goods, without his leave: or to spend our own without benefit to our selves or others," and were warned not to lack "contentment" with their own possessions. As it taught students to observe the sabbath, one catechism led them to itemize their Sunday responsibilities: "How will you spend the *Lords-Day*? In *Holy Duties*?....In *Praying*, and *Reading*, and *Meditating* on the things of God; and *Worshipping* of God, in the Assemblies of His People?"⁸ If they answered "yes" to those questions, as the catechism prompted them to do, they could not remain ignorant of the nature of the commandment, and indeed would have pledged to obey it. Those who tried to uphold these expansive commandments developed, at the least, habits of external obedience to divine and social expectation. If they transgressed, knowledge of these rules could spur the conscience and bring sinners to admit wrongdoing and repent.

⁸ These same commandments bound Christians to positive deeds of obedience as well as avoidance of wrong. The prohibition against stealing, for instance, also obliged people to exercise "due respect to the goods of our Neighbour, in righteousness, liberality, and frugality," and the warning not to covet meant that the obedient should nurture "a due respect to the prosperity of our Neighbour, in rejoycing in his prosperity, and accepting our own portion with contentation." Noyes, *A Short Catechism*, 15-16; Cotton, *Milk for Babes*, 5-6; Mather, *Maschil*, 37.

Cotton Mather observed that catechizing "restrained" youth from sin. John Eliot noticed that the opposite held true as well. Ministers could expect to find misdeeds in children who did not learn their lessons well: Eliot remarked that an Indian youth who once gave a faulty response to a question on the fifth commandment soon after--not surprisingly, in the minister's view--disobeyed his parents.⁹

In addition to its negative function of restraint, catechizing cultivated positive habits of devotion. Cotton Mather suggested parents use a catechism to teach children to pray. Even before the young approached the Lord in supplication, these lessons encouraged them to develop godly desires. Though Puritans were leery of prepared prayers, Mather realized that children might need help in speaking to God. From the catechetical responses that they had memorized, children could find expressions to address the Lord. Parents could help the young turn these responses into petitions and thanksgivings. Once taught that God "hath made me, He keepeth me, and He can save me," for instance, a child could thank the Lord for that protection and provision. Or, learning that people were brought to Christ by "the power of his Word and Spirit," children might pray for attentiveness to scripture and for the Holy Spirit's quickening of what they read.¹⁰

⁹ Richard Mather, *Farewel Exhortation*, 6; Increase Mather, *The Order of the Gospel* (Boston, 1700), 27; Whitfield, "Strength out of Weakness," 169-70.

¹⁰ Cotton Mather, *Family-Religion Excited and Assisted* (Boston, 1707), 15-16. Catechism responses are from John Cotton's *Milk for Babes*, a form Cotton Mather cherished and

Those preparing to come to the Lord's Supper--for the first time or in regular observance--could use catechisms to guide self-examination and repentance. General catechisms could be put to this purpose. In addition, special communion manuals printed in New England late in the seventeenth century offered questions designed to probe the conscience and discover sincere faith.¹¹ Cotton Mather's *A Companion for Communicants*, for instance, had readers reflect on these queries: "Am I at so hearty pains for no Outward and Earthly Thing, as I am for the Mortification of every Lust?" or "Is my Soul extreamly affected with the Blessed Fulness and Glory which is in the Lord Jesus Christ?" These manuals posed questions that communicants had to answer with personal admissions, answers developed through self-scrutiny guided by the manuals' lengthy definitions of obedience and transgression.¹²

In order to come worthily to the Lord's Supper, people had to be made aware of their sin and mourn for it.

Catechisms and communion manuals helped develop both sight and sense of sin. Cotton Mather recommended that potential communicants meditate on their catechisms, allowing these

adapted in his own catechisms. See *Milk for Babes*, 1, 7.

¹¹ Cotton Mather wrote two such manuals, *A Companion for Communicants: Discourses upon the Nature, the Design and the Subject of the Lord's Supper* (Boston, 1690), and *A Monitor for Communicants* (Boston, 1714). Cotton Mather, with his father Increase, also wrote an introduction for a Boston edition of an English communion manual, John Quick's *The Young Man's Claim unto the Sacrament of the Supper of the Lord*, 2d. ed. (Boston, 1700). For a discussion of communion manuals in New England, see Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 200-205.

¹² Mather, *A Companion for Communicants*, 128.

documents to reveal shortcomings and bring them to lament wrongdoing. Cotton Mather advised readers to set "before your selves the *Ten Commandments*, with the Explanation thereof, as you have it in your *Catechism*."¹³ Contemplating one's life according to the commandments and explanations would foster the humility required for approaching the sacrament.

By internalizing and articulating religious principles, the catechized could acquire not only an understanding of doctrine but an understanding of themselves in light of that doctrine. The testimony of a Native American woman suggests catechisms' capacity to cultivate this self-perception. John Eliot recorded the hopeful speech that one woman, whom he believed to be a saint, made as she neared death. She professed that "she beleaved God would pardon all her sins, because she beleaved that Iesus Christ dyed for her; and that God was well pleased in him, and that she was willing to dye, and beleaved to goe to Heaven, and live happy with God and Christ there." Realizing that this sounded perhaps too articulate to be authentic, Eliot anticipated incredulity in his readers. He admitted that his English audience might "mervell at, and scarce credit such expressions" as the speech of an Indian. Eliot himself had no reason to marvel. He explained that her words were "points of Catechisme which I constantly teach the Children...and they be truths now familiarly known by the

¹³ Mather, *Man Eating the Food of Angels* (Boston, 1710) 61-62.

attentive hearers, whereof she was one." Absorbing the instruction Eliot offered to children, the woman claimed its terminology to articulate her own hope of grace.¹⁴

Cotton Mather hoped all students would embrace the lessons of a catechism in this way. His unflagging enthusiasm for this instruction was fueled by the conviction that it conveyed more than flat information about religion. To him, it helped children learn who they were in Christian terms, what was expected of them, and what they might hope from God's covenantal promises. Even if they did not find in a catechism the reassurance that they would "live happy with God and Christ" in heaven, they would acquire religious knowledge that would enable them to grow in faith and contribute to godly communities.

The Catechism as a Means of Grace

In teaching students to memorize, comprehend, and recite catechisms, Cotton Mather hoped these texts might bring the learners to Christ. Like sermons, catechisms could provide a channel for God to work salvation in the elect. Conscious of that potential, Mather advised teachers to use pointed questions and pursue the implications of each item of doctrine until students confronted their fallen estate. For instance, when children recited the first response in John Cotton's *Milk for Babes*, "God has made me, He keeps me, and can Save me," instructors were to follow up

¹⁴ Winslow, *Glorious Progresse of the Gospel*, 7-8.

with these challenging inquiries: "Did you make your self? Who then made you? Can you keep your self?.... Can you Save your self, out of the Miserable condition, into which you are fallen? Unto whom are you to look for Salvation?"¹⁵ These drills could "awaken the *Attention*" and "*Enlighten the Understanding*" of young men and women. With piqued interest in the subject of salvation, learners might then begin to think deeply about religious matters and evaluate their own condition against catechetical responses they professed. Realizing the implications of that doctrine, they could respond to Christ.¹⁶

With these questions and answers lodged in the mind, earnest catechumens could employ them to stir the heart. Mather advised learners that when they were confronted with a doctrinal point, they should consider how it affected them. Young and old alike could use catechisms to ask questions "which every body should Answer unto themselves," like, "If God should now call me away by Death, What would become of me after Death?" or "Have I ever had Experience of a Saving Work, from the Holy Spirit of God upon my Heart?" Religious information should not rest in the mind alone but should be conveyed to the heart, Mather insisted. He advised instructors to "contrive that [children's] *Hearts and Lives* may be shaped by the Truths thus got into their *Understandings*." Students should feel what they understood to be true. Parents could promote this affective sense if

¹⁵ Mather, *Man of God Furnished*, 12.

¹⁶ Mather, *Man of God Furnished*, 1.

they took pains "to make [children] feel the Truths which are before them." The questions and answers of a catechism were not abstract bits of theology but practical declarations about the eternal state of saints and sinners. Students were supposed to sense the relevance of the statements they recited. When a catechism described the effects of sin, for example, learners should consider "*Whether it be not a very Sad Condition: And, Whether they would not gladly be Delivered from it.*"¹⁷

In pondering what they had memorized and professed, young men and women could be moved to act upon the catechism. Considering that God's wrath might be directed at them and believing that repentance was paramount in the order of salvation, they might be struck with their need to repent and get Christ. "Who can tell," Mather mused to instructors, "but while the Blessed *Echo's* of Truth are in this *Catechising* thus passing between You and Them, their Young *Hearts* may Burn within them." If catechumens got their hearts to "burn" with the truths they echoed, they would have come to saving faith. Like any other means of grace, catechizing required God's power to be effective for salvation, but with the intervention of heaven, it could bring hearts to be "*Surpriz'd* into such a Consent unto the Gospel, as may prove a Real, and a Lasting work of *Regeneration* upon them." In this way, learners might find

¹⁷ Mather, *Maschil*, 110-111, and *A Good Evening for the Best of Days* (Boston, 1708), 22; Brown, "Catechists and Catechisms," 2:30.

themselves in the midst of a conversion experience as they studied their catechisms.¹⁸

Religious understanding and conversion were closely linked, Puritans thought, though the former did not automatically prompt the latter. John Fiske implied that understanding and experience were points on a continuum rather than wholly separate activities. Some youth in his Chelmsford church he found to be "beyond expectation as to understanding, though short of what is required" for full communion, as though understanding blended into the first stages of regeneration. In distinguishing religious knowledge from experience, ministers sometimes separated the "assent" of the mind, an agreement that doctrine was true, from "consent" of the heart, an inner acceptance of God's truth and sovereignty. Anyone well educated in the principles of religion should proffer assent, but no human being could compel the heart to consent. God had to do that. Yet if God would do it, He could do it through a catechism, and a catechism provided the saint an opportunity to accept the offer of grace. Properly taught, catechisms could "draw [learners] unto a Consent as well as an Assent, unto the Truths of the Gospel," Cotton Mather maintained. This way, instruction could thereby have what Mather called a "verticordious Efficacy," effectively bringing the heart to conversion as it brought the mind to knowledge.¹⁹

¹⁸ Mather, *Man of God Furnished*, 13-15.

¹⁹ Mather, *Man of God Furnished*, 13-15, and *A Good Evening for the Best of Days*, 22; Brown, "Catechists and Catechisms," 2:30.

Catechisms in the Stories of Salvation

Conversion narratives attest that some men and women in New England did find catechisms as fruitful as Cotton Mather promised them to be. Massachusetts church members were willing to credit catechisms with an important role in the process of salvation. In their accounts of religious growth, they described how these documents brought them to understand religious matters, evaluate themselves, and build assurance in God's provision for them.

The conversion narratives that Massachusetts churches required of their members have provided rich sources for scholars of New England religion.²⁰ They also prove valuable in opening a window onto lay use of catechisms in the process of religious development. In the relations recorded by Thomas Shepard, John Fiske, Michael Wigglesworth, and Edward Taylor in the 1640s-1670s, a number of speakers cite catechisms in their accounts of coming to grace. Some mention catechisms explicitly; numerous others describe their youthful religious education generally, hinting at the pervasiveness of catechizing and its importance in spiritual formation. These church members reported that, along with the influence of ministers, godly brethren, and scripture itself, catechisms worked significantly in their lives. Their narratives reveal some

²⁰ Numerous studies employ the New England conversion narratives, especially those recorded by Thomas Shepard in Cambridge, in examining Puritan religion and expression. Some of the most noteworthy examples of such scholarship include Cohen, *God's Caress*; Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative*; McGiffert, *God's Plot*.

of the ways the laity encountered catechisms, what they learned, who directed the instruction, and how it affected their religious experience.

At the simplest level, catechisms performed their classic function of introducing the young to doctrinal principles. They laid the foundation for later theological understanding and future religious activity. Some speakers marked the significance of such education by mentioning it early--even first--in their narratives. Like some other Cambridge church members, Edward Collins was blessed with godly parents. He recalled that his father "by his catechizing dropped somewhat unto me about fundamentals." Collins's wife Martha opened her narrative by noting that her father was "careful in catechizing me." John Ingerson remembered that his parents made efforts to help his spiritual state by restraining him from sin and "in bringing me to attend the word preached, read, & in Catechising." In the Westfield church, Lieutenant John Mawdsley praised God for "many Sweet Instructions from my Parents," and later mentioned a specific question in the catechism that awakened him. Some speakers commented more generally upon the household education that initiated their journey toward grace. Ensign Samuel Loomis was blessed with "the Instruction of Religious Parents, who discovered unto me the bad Condition of every one by nature." John Root had "the happiness of the injoyning Counsels and Adm[o]nition of godly parents, who instructed me & told the danger all sons

were in by Adams fall, & that I was guilty of Sin thereby." Thomas Hinckman's wife related that "She was first convinced of her estate by nature by means of her godly parents oft instructing her and telling her what her condition by nature was and how to get out of the same." Through such early instruction, Christian parents helped children look upon themselves as sinners who needed God's grace. Catechized children learned what they were "by nature," sharing the sin and guilt common to humanity, but also learned that God could draw them out of that condition.²¹

At its most effective, early catechizing could direct children to salvation. Just like other means of grace, however, it had to be "improved" by its recipients. Even saints admitted what some unregenerates undoubtedly found true: though they were taught, they sometimes paid little heed to their lessons. John Ingerson conceded that his parents "tooke great pains & Care to bring me out of a State of Nature and into a State of Grace," through instruction and restraint, but "I'd little regard itt, but onely for fear of them." Alternatively, saints could err by receiving education earnestly but making inappropriate use of the blessing. Like other religious achievements, education could make one rest in self-righteousness. This trouble befell Martha Collins, who, "looking on myself and comparing

²¹ McGiffert, *God's Plot*, 178, 192; Thomas M. Davis and Virginia L. Davis, eds., *Edward Taylor's "Church Records" and Related Sermons* (Boston, 1981), 104, 107, 112, 115; Pope, *The Notebook of the Reverend John Fiske*, 148.

myself with others thought my condition very good, being civil." Though knowing doctrine would do her good in the long run, pride in the accomplishment temporarily impeded humility.²²

Other converts did make right use of their education. Where catechizing did not bring them to repentance at once, it opened the way for other means, like sermons and godly counsel, to bear on the lives of the elect. Its lessons could reverberate in their subsequent experience, reminding them of salient points of doctrine at opportune moments. In her narrative, Michael Wigglesworth's wife Mary noted, "*I had learn in my Catechism how doth Christ enlighten my soul first he convinceth my soul...it is in a wretched sinful miserable estate and that if he continue in that estate he is utterly accursed.*" She did not indicate that this knowledge moved her immediately after she encountered it; what she had learned sparked her conscience later. Apparently she learned her catechism very well. Though Michael Wigglesworth did not punctuate it as such in his diary, his wife expressed her remark in terms of a question ("how doth Christ enlighten my soul[?]") and answer ("first he convinceth my soul...") just as a catechism would present them. Because she committed these phrases to memory, they remained available in her mind and active in her experience long after she passed beyond elementary catechizing. John Mawdsley also supplied a full question-answer pair in his

²² Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor's Church Records*, 115; McGiffert, *God's Plot*, 192.

relation, indicating that he carried in his mind the doctrinal statement that first convinced him of the "need I had of an interest in Christ."²³

Ministers and godly men and women could provide counsel to the struggling saint. Catechisms, too, could speak into the lives of their learners, providing solace or direction. Illustrating the flexibility of the genre as an oral and printed form, converts reported encountering the words of the catechism in different contexts. Edward and Martha Collins were both taught by their fathers, probably with oral instruction and an elementary printed form. Elizabeth Oakes recorded hearing doctrinal points "out of the catechise"--presumably in sermons in which Thomas Shepard expounded his manual--and also noted reading a catechism by herself. "*Mister Shepard spoke in his catechize*" about the separation between God and natural man, John Green remembered. John Jones, who was a student at Harvard when he made his confession before the Cambridge church, remembered going to a field in despair over his graceless condition and meeting there "a youth [who] used to keep cattle...him often [k]eeping of catechism." The cattle-tending lad spoke words of encouragement by explaining to Jones, from the catechism, that God wearied the self in order to bring it out of itself and unto Jesus.²⁴

²³ Edmund S. Morgan, ed., *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth, 1653-1657* (1951; reprint, New York, 1965), 124; Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor's Church Records*, 105.

²⁴ McCarl 441; George Selement and Bruce C. Woolley, eds.,

The words of a catechism could come through another person or could be read from a page. In either case, converts could perceive the questions and answers as God's own address to them. John Green heard Thomas Shepard catechizing on judgment and "[t]he Lord help[ed] me to consider that I was one of those there spoke of." Recalling his father's instruction, Edward Collins noted, "[a]nd somewhat God did by his catechizing dropped somewhat unto me about fundamentals." From context, we understand that Collins's father was teaching him, but in his recollection it appears as God's doing, with the parent serving as a vehicle for the divine work of laying "fundamentals." Elizabeth Oakes was reading the catechism when "the Lord set me upon question, what [were the] beginnings of second death." For Oakes, the Lord came to her in the catechism not, as for Collins, a voice of reassurance in providing Christian fundamentals, but as an inquisitor who pressed her to reckon with the terrors of the unsaved. His questions made her confess her own needy condition.²⁵

Thomas Shepard's Confessions, Colonial Society of Massachusetts Collections XVIII (Boston, 1981), 201; George Selement, "The Means to Grace: A Study of Conversion in Early New England," (Ph.D. diss., University of New Hampshire, 1974), 297; Morgan, *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth*, 114.

Selement renders Jones's statement in "The Means to Grace" as "finding him often keeping of catechism." In *Thomas Shepard's Confessions*, the youth is described as "often weeping of catechism." The former version seems to me the more likely figure of speech, although the other is also plausible--if the youth actually were "weeping" over the catechism, its words presumably affected him as profoundly as they did Jones.

²⁵ Morgan, *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth*, 114; McGiffert, *God's Plot*, 178; McCarl 441.

In this respect New England catechisms recalled the function of the medieval *Christenspiegel*. They provided a mirror for readers to see how a Christian ought believe, feel, and act, giving the pious a pattern for the self and convicting them of their departures from that pattern. When Oakes heard a point expounded from the catechism, she saw the extent of the Lord's demands and "thought I fell short." Like medieval lists of transgressions, catechisms defined sin and nudged users to recognize failings in themselves. John Mawdsley learned of his woe when a catechism showed him that "If Damnation be the reward of Sin, then is a man of all creatures most miserable." Unlike a beast that simply would die, Mawdsley realized, a sinful man had to anticipate misery in eternity. "Herein was life & death set before me," he recalled, marking this as the beginning of his conviction. When John Shepard heard "out of catechize about original sin," he understood that he "never knew the filth of that sin as then the Lord let me see." The catechism made him consider himself in light of the doctrine of original sin: "Answer to question is contrariety of whole nature of man to law of God, and actual sins of the actions." He pondered how the "contrariety of the whole nature of man" might be worked out in the mundane activities of life, and suddenly saw that "whatever a man did unregenerate was sinful, and plowing was sin, and all what they did perform, and eating and drink and sleep, all was sinful." The picture set before Shepard was not of the

saint's perfection but of the sinner's plight and just condemnation. Realizing that this was his own image as he heard the words of the catechism, he was "convinced of original sin." Knowing that he could not satisfy God, he wondered at the coming wrath and "What a long time eternity was." This was the manner God "awakened" his heart, he reported to the Cambridge church.²⁶

These saints highlighted the difference between plain knowledge of doctrine and saving experience of it: when God "awakened" one to familiar truths about salvation, sinners were forced to understand that doctrinal pronouncements applied to them personally. Simply knowing a catechism did not automatically bring awakening, but its lessons could (and did) bring more than "mere knowledge." For John Shepard, awakening came through realization of the effects of original sin. For Michael Wigglesworth's wife, teaching on redemption warned her that if one continued in a natural estate, "*he is utterly accursed.*" The Lord awakened John Green "by Mister Shepard's catechize" on Christ's coming judgment. The saints interpreted such hard teachings as the dawn of hope. Even the most discouraging doctrine could become the words of life to those who were awakened by them.²⁷

Catechisms helped cultivate what Thomas Hooker termed a "true sight of sin."²⁸ A clear vision of their own

²⁶ McCarl 441, 444; Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor's Church Records*, 105.

²⁷ Morgan, *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth*, 114, 124.

²⁸ See selections from Thomas Hooker, *The Application of*

unworthiness allowed penitents to confess their need and wait, humbled, for redemption. For John Shepard, the sin that the catechism made him see was not a specific act but the birth-guilt he inherited from Adam. Elizabeth Oakes came to understand that her problem was an inability to "see" and "be sensible" as the Lord desired. John Mawdsley saw in a catechism that damnation was the reward of sin, but confessed that his heart was yet hard and he "was not willing to part with my Sin."²⁹ Though conviction may not seem a particularly happy function of a catechism, for converts and for those preparing for the Lord's Supper, seeing sin was an essential step in repentance. Once they knew what constituted guilt and recognized how they were themselves implicated, converts had escaped the damnable condition of complacency.

Instruction could bring words of comfort as well as conviction. The cattle-tending youth whom Sizar Jones met in a field showed him the doctrine of the Lord's work in breaking off the "soul from sin by contrition and self by humiliation." Upon hearing this, Jones "had some hope the Lord might bring me off self and unto the Lord Jesus. And, thus, the Lord helped me to wait on him and to come to him."

In John Fiske's congregation, Thomas Hincksman testified that some scripture "set sadly on him" until Peter Bulkeley

Redemption, in *The Puritans: A Sourcebook of their Writings*, eds., Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, 2 vols., Rev. ed. (New York, 1963), 1:292-301.

²⁹ McCarl 441, Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor's Church Records*, 105.

"in his catechising handled that question, how may one know whether he hath faith or no?" The answer to that puzzle drew Hincksman to "take Christ and the riches of God's grace in Him alone." Abram Smith found "[s]everal things in catechize" that soothed him and reminded him of scriptures in which Christ promised comfort. Mistress Joseph Cooke received "out of catechize" the reassurance "that it was not measure [of repentance] but so much as brought the soul to Christ." For John Mawdsley, the catechism taught his heart to fear and then relieved his fears. Having learned that "when a man dies then is the beginning of his WOE," Mawdsley found joy in the catechism's answer that this would be the case, "if there were no mean[s] of Deliverance. But God hath shown his mercie in giving a Savior to mankinde."³⁰

Having brought people through the course of conversion, first spurring them with conviction and then salving them with promises, catechisms could also help them express that experience. Mary Rhinelander McCarl has demonstrated how candidates in the Cambridge congregation incorporated the language and definitions of Thomas Shepard's *A Short Catechism* into their own speech. McCarl traces their figures of speech to this document: when Elizabeth Oakes hoped the Lord gave her "a heart to seek to enjoy him in all his ordinances," when John Shepard sought God to "quiet conscience," when Abram Arrington realized that his sense of

³⁰ Selement, "The Means to Grace," 297; Selement and Woolley 201; McCarl 458, 461; Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor's Church Records*, 105; Pope, *The Notebook of the Reverend John Fiske*, 147.

sin must be "an intolerable burden to make [him] restless to seek after Christ," they had allowed a catechism to interpret the meaning of their own actions and emotions, and then spoke as they recognized they should feel. Mary Wigglesworth personalized the terminology of one catechetical response, explaining the "wretched sinful miserable estate" not of the abstract "he" that would appear in a set answer, but of her own soul.³¹

As church members confessed, catechisms could play many roles in the spiritual growth of the convert. For some who were "advantaged" by godly parents, these manuals served as a starting point, presenting theological fundamentals and describing the path to grace. But the effects of catechizing were not limited to childhood. Conversion narratives call attention to two features of this instruction that helped to make it significant in the saints' development. First, the memorized text could persist with the learner, arising later in life to convict or comfort, and supplying phrases that saints might adopt as their own language. Second, their adaptability to varied pedagogical and devotional situations meant that children

³¹ McCarl tags these figures of speech as derived from the language in Shepard's catechism. Charles Cohen demonstrates that the laity also used figures of speech from sermons in their conversion narratives. While it is impossible to trace some of these expressions to a catechism alone--since various forms of religious discourse could have employed similar expressions--it is important to note that these speakers do echo terminology from the catechism that they read and heard Shepard explicate. McCarl 442, 444, 450-1; Morgan, *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth*, 124. For Cohen's analysis of the sermon-derived language in conversion narratives, see *God's Caress*, 162-200.

and adults would meet catechisms again and again, in exposition from the pulpit, in the counsel of godly brethren, or through their own private study. However they were encountered, catechisms, like sermons, could awaken hearers to a doctrine or scripture they had taken for granted, could draw them to confess a particular sin or persuade them that Adam's guilt was theirs, and could lead them to Christ. These dialogues allowed students to claim doctrinal statements as descriptive of their own spiritual condition. Catechisms could comfort the hopeful in part because they made familiar the order of salvation. Even statements describing the soul's mourning or humiliation could be encouraging because they appeared in the context of the work of redemption.

Conclusion

While these testimonies may not reflect the experience of all New England's residents--the unconverted presumably had less to say about the importance of catechizing in their lives--these relations do suggest that godly men, women, and children in New England found catechisms as a useful introduction to doctrine and encouragement to holy living. As ministers prescribed, students first memorized catechisms, and then, with the help of parents or other instructors, deepened comprehension of the text. Getting the text "without book" enabled them to retain it and to speak its answers as their own. They could expect to

demonstrate mastery of the material on several occasions, being asked to recite it for a parent, teacher, or other examiner.

New England colonists used catechisms to become acquainted with the faith, but kept returning to them in the ongoing process of religious growth. Their testimonies suggest that the knowledge they acquired helped them avoid sin, eschew errors, and approach repentance. The testimonies also indicate that the laity knew how to employ the ministers' doctrine, as presented in these manuals, thoughtfully and selectively, as it suited their spiritual situations. Cotton Mather promised students that a catechism could support spiritual growth, and pious settlers found that catechisms did prove useful at many points in the way of grace. The questions and answers in these manuals could bring immediate conviction or lasting reassurance. Giving catechisms significant mention in their testimonies, church members indicated that these works played an integral role, along with sermons and scripture, in developing religious experience.

Puritans used catechisms in public and private contexts. They offered the faith of church and community to the young, and enabled them to demonstrate, by speaking its answers, their acceptance of those beliefs. The catechism could also accompany its learners in solitary prayer or reflection, and assist them with self-examination before the Lord's Supper. Memorizing, repeating, and articulating this

material helped make it enduring and effectual beyond its primary purpose as children's instruction. As conversion testimonies demonstrate, catechisms were crucial among the devotional and doctrinal literature that guided the saints.

Chapter Six. Confirmation and the Problem of Religious Education

Introduction

Puritans placed confidence in catechizing as a help to religious devotion and even regeneration. However, they did not establish a clear connection between catechizing and church membership. The Bay Colony's peculiar church-admissions policy displaced catechizing from the role it had filled, in England and in continental Reformed communities, as a preparative to communion. The Cambridge Platform required adults who sought membership to deliver not only a doctrinal profession and covenant pledge, but also a conversion narrative. Drafters of the Cambridge Platform required grown, baptized children to go through this same procedure, rather than devising a distinct means for them to attain full communion. This requirement presented problems for church children.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, ministers attempted to develop what they initially had left out: a process to grant grown, baptized children the privileges appropriate to adult status and to draw from them formal commitment to the church. Ministers meeting in the synod of 1662, called to address questions of baptism and membership, likened the situation of their church children to the early Christian catechumenate. These clergymen recognized confirmation as a precedent for their ceremony of

"owning" the covenant. The policies recommended by the 1662 synod are better understood not as peculiar innovations but as a return to Protestant custom, as a belated effort to accommodate children by adapting a method common to other Reformed churches in Europe. The halfway covenant, and later, covenant renewals, brought clergy and congregations to assume obligations for teaching children and preparing them for further commitment to the church.

Familiar with Protestant confirmation and with the traditional use of catechizing as a preparative to adult membership, New England ministers selectively adopted elements of that practice. Defenders of the 1662 synod admitted that a doctrinal profession could demonstrate knowledge and growth in grace. But, careful to guard the Lord's Supper, they did not allow unconverted members to proceed to communion. In the next decade, Solomon Stoddard did. Defending his decision to allow mature, catechized persons to partake of the Supper, Stoddard admonished his opponents to follow the logic of the 1662 synod and accept a full-fledged confirmation ceremony. Without this means of advancing to communion, children had trouble discerning regeneration and hesitated to seek full communion. Recognizing the problem that the Cambridge Platform test presented for baptized children, Cotton Mather endorsed confirmation as an appropriate way to bring youth to the full privileges of the church.

Visible Sainthood in Massachusetts

In the Bay Colony, churches instituted a demanding test for membership.¹ All residents had to observe the sabbath, worship in the meetinghouse, and hear sermons, but only members could enjoy the sacraments. To win this privilege, men and women had to certify in the charitable judgment of their peers that they were among the elect. Clergy conceded that even careful churches might contain hypocrites, but they installed an admissions policy designed to keep them out. In order to become full communicants, candidates first had to meet with church elders to profess their faith. If the elders approved, the candidate's name was then given to the church. In the waiting period that followed, anyone who knew a candidate's offenses or unrepented sin was to voice these reservations. If no one spoke against them, or if revealed sins had been repented, candidates next appeared before the whole church. There, after several members testified on their behalf, candidates would give a "profession of faith and repentance," relating an experience of conversion and a statement of doctrinal convictions. The congregation could question the candidate about beliefs or experience. If they approved the candidate as a "visible

¹ New Haven instituted a similar test, requiring a conversion narrative from aspiring communicants. Connecticut's churches did not require communicants to give a public account of conversion. Instead, Thomas Hooker hoped to discern saintliness in private interviews of the candidates by the elders or in question-answer sessions, rather than public narratives. See Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 99-100.

saint"--in the congregation's best judgment, one of the elect--he or she became a member.²

The precise origins of this admissions procedure remain obscure, though several historians have shed light on its development. Reviewing the admissions practices of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English Separatists, Edmund S. Morgan notes that their churches demanded knowledge, obedience, and assent to a covenant, but did not seek to identify grace in members. As English Puritans developed what Morgan calls a "morphology of conversion," mapping the stages of salvation, they became more confident of their ability to chart the experience and ascertain election, in themselves and others. Equipped with this understanding of regeneration, New Englanders instituted their tests for grace.³

Building on Morgan's work, Patricia Caldwell posits that the New England narratives emerged from doctrinal professions and from Puritans' emphasis on repentance as the central feature of conversion. In the covenanting of Henry Jacob's London congregation in 1616, she discovers, ten men

² This account of the admissions process is drawn from Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (Ithaca, 1963), 88-89. For primary reports of the admissions policy, see John Cotton, *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New-England* (London, 1645, reprinted in *John Cotton: The New England Way* (New York, 1983), 6-10, 54-58; Richard Mather, *Church-Government and Church-Covenant Discussed* (London, 1643), 23-24; Thomas Welde, *A Brief Narration*, 9; Thomas Lechford, *Plain-Dealing*, 12-29; John Norton, *The Answer to the Whole set of Questions of the Celebrated Mr. William Apollonius*, ed. and trans. Douglas Horton (Cambridge, MA, 1958), 35-36.

³ Morgan, *Visible Saints*, chaps. 2 and 3.

made "some confession or Profession of their Faith and Repentance, some ware longer some ware briefer, Then they Covenanted together to walk in all Gods Ways." These professions varied in length, Caldwell suggests, because members were giving a personalized statement of beliefs rather than rendering only formulaic ones. Significantly, Jacob used two words, faith and repentance, to describe these professions: the profession of faith was a declaration of doctrine, but the profession of repentance, Caldwell asserts, became a narrative of one's experience.⁴ The narrative was at first voluntary in Bay Colony churches, offered only by some members to edify the congregation. By the late 1630s, the narrative had become a requirement--indeed, the chief, and for some, notorious requirement--for church admission. Candidates still supplied a doctrinal statement, but the crucial portion of their profession was the description of God's work on the soul.⁵

⁴ Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (New York, 1983), 55-56.

⁵ Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 102-104; Caldwell 45n, 51, 64-66. Caldwell seconds Morgan's judgment that the requirement took root through John Cotton's urging, in response to the threat of Separatism, by 1636. L. Baird Tipson suggests that the chief aim of the practice was not to widen or narrow the doors of the church, but to nurture assurance in members. Michael Ditmore argues that Thomas Shepard who pushed for the admissions requirement to defuse the threat of antinomianism. See discussions of the origin of the test in Tipson, "Invisible Saints: The 'Judgment of Charity' in the Early New England Churches," *Church History* 44 (December 1975): 460-71; Michael Ditmore, "Preparation and Confessions: Reconsidering Edmund S. Morgan's *Visible Saints*," *NEQ* 67 (1994): 298-319.

Though various social and political concerns motivated the Bay Colony's admissions policies,⁶ the saints' chief interest for limiting membership was to protect the integrity of the sacraments. In particular, they intended that only the regenerate could partake of the Lord's Supper.⁷ However, while Bay Colony Puritans pioneered the conversion narrative as a test for membership, they were not the first to seek to filter the unworthy from participation at communion. Though examinations varied widely in stringency and expectations, Catholics and Protestants both had employed forms of examination before communion to determine whether participants could examine sins and understand the sacrament. In the medieval church, all communicants were required first to go through confession. During the Reformation, Protestants looked to catechetical instruction and examination to substitute for the rejected

⁶ Because many privileges were attached to church membership in Massachusetts, including voting in church and colony, the saints sought to limit it to those who desired its spiritual benefits, not its temporal ones. Michael McGiffert notes how that the conversion narratives drew saints together in companionship, sociability, and power. Patricia Caldwell and Charles Cohen point out that narratives fostered the fellowship of the saints. See Michael McGiffert, ed., *God's Plot: Puritan Spirituality in Thomas Shepard's Cambridge*. Rev. ed. (Amherst, 1994), 144-48; Cohen, *God's Caress*; Caldwell, *Puritan Conversion Narrative*.

⁷ To emphasize communion as the reason for the test is not to minimize congregationalists' principled ecclesiology and arguments for visible sainthood as a qualification for membership. While the other privileges of the brethren were important, they were not open to all church members: women, for instance, could not vote, but were esteemed as full members and entitled to communion. For treatment of Puritan sacramental theology, see E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720* (New Haven, 1974), 161-4.

sacrament of confession, and many linked catechisms to a confirmation ceremony, to formally mark children's readiness for the sacrament. A doctrinal profession was not a perfect gauge of faith, but it still could be a significant expression of belief.

Other Protestants had reckoned with the limitations of the set doctrinal statement long before New England churches instituted their admissions test. Averse to the "parroted" speech of Catholic practice, some had recommended other qualifications to make the profession more credible. Martin Bucer demanded that moral behavior accompany religious understanding, so that true faith would be evidenced in godly conversation. The Bay Colony sought to remedy the defects of the doctrinal test by adding the conversion narrative. They, too, insisted that a godly life accompany the statement of faith, but they wanted both of these elements to be ratified by an account one's experience.

Massachusetts church leaders believed their "relation" was connected to doctrinal examinations familiar in England and elsewhere in Europe. When English Presbyterians criticized New England's innovation, colonists deflected the charge by comparing it to catechetical tests in English churches. Richard Mather informed Richard Bernard that examinations of knowledge and faith were routine not only in New England "but in Sundry parish churches in England: where the Godly ministers will not admit any to the Lords Table till they bee able to give an intelligent answer to the

Questions of the Catechisme." Mather struck an incredulous note with Bernard: "Who would thinke that you should find matter of exception, against such a practise in use [in New England], which soe the substance, findeth soe full and publike approbation, amongst yourselves, at home?" Patricia Caldwell notes that Mather "did not try to claim that 'an intelligent answer' to the minister's questions was a testimony of religious experience." Maintaining that Mather knew the difference between these varieties of religious speech and remained designedly vague in his analogy, she misses the significance of his reference to a *catechism*. By the time of Mather's writing, a catechism was not just another credal statement but a recognizable form in its own right, used to test the young in their knowledge, conviction, and fitness for communion. Catechetical examinations were widely understood as an appropriate way to prepare and screen communicants.⁸

John Cotton also likened New England's admission test to English catechetical examinations. He advised his transatlantic brethren that the English practice of catechizing for confirmation had great potential for good: Cotton suggested that if catechizing were "seriously done, and not perfunctorily," it would be a profitable means to reform English congregations, a method "somewhat of like nature with our receiving members into the Church, and joyning them by Covenant." Cotton not only approved

⁸ Mather quoted in Caldwell 49.

Protestant catechizing but also invoked the primitive practice in which children, "grown up to yeers, professed their faith, ratified their baptismal covenant, and so were confirmed (as they call it) in their Church-estate."

Richard Mather drew parallels between New England's testimonies and the professions of faith that European Reformed communities required of church children. Mather noted New England would "fully approve the practise of the Reformed Churches," in which, before admitting baptized children to the Lord's table, congregations asked those prepared "by reason of age and proficiency in the Doctrine of Catechisme" to make a public statement of faith, and covenant to "continue in that faith which they have confessed." Therefore, Mather judged, New England's policy brought them closer to other Protestants, rather than setting their churches apart.⁹

The Problem of Church Children

Knowing his opponents would recognize the function of a catechetical examination, Mather borrowed that precedent to claim legitimacy for New England's conversion-narrative test. Massachusetts churches required narratives for the same reason that "godly ministers" in England required candidates to give an "intelligent answer" to the

⁹ Caldwell 49; Richard Mather, *Church-Government and Church-Covenant Discussed* (London, 1643), 21-22, and *An Apologie of the Churches in New England for Church-Covenant* (London, 1643) [bound together with Mather, *Church-Government*], 33-38; John Cotton, *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New-England*, 5, 112.

catechism's questions: to demonstrate fitness for the Lord's Supper. The Cambridge Platform appropriated for adult candidates the ceremony that traditionally served as a test and turning point for youth. Having transformed the catechetical profession into an exercise for adults, Mather and his colleagues crafted no separate ceremony through which youth could be brought to full privileges. They determined that New England church children should simply present the same qualifications that their parents had when they became members: a conversion narrative, a profession of faith, and an owning of the church covenant. But timing of this process was left unclear. Rather than stipulating that children demonstrate their fitness whenever they attained regeneration--in whatever arbitrary, inscrutable timing God would work it--New England ministers declared that children should go through this admissions process when they attained maturity. Massachusetts retained traditional assumptions that the "age of discretion" should bring maturity and fitness for communion, but designed no regular occasion to mark that change.

First-generation New England ministers do not seem to have anticipated difficulty in bringing church children to full communion. The fact that some ministers, early on, discussed policies for baptizing grandchildren of saints suggests that they knew church "seed" might sometimes experience delays in experiencing assurance. In 1634 John Cotton argued that a saint could claim baptism for his

grandchild although the child's parents were not communicants. Richard Mather hoped the issue would be addressed in the Cambridge Platform, drafting a clause declaring that "such as are borne in the ch[urch] as members, though they be not found fitt for the Lords Supper...when they are married & have children, those their children may be rec[eive]d to Baptisme." However, at the urging of several dissenters, including "one eminent person," Charles Chauncy, this item was omitted from the final document.¹⁰

As for the matter of bringing church children to full privileges, however, first-generation colonial clergy evidently did not foresee the problems that would arise, and did not provide a systematic solution. In the church-polity debates they entered with English Presbyterians, colonial clergy addressed the issue rather haphazardly. On one occasion, Richard Mather responded to an English query about children in the church by deflecting it: "by Reason of the Infancy of these Churches, we have had no occasion yet to determine what to judge or practice one way or other." Mather may have hoped to draw attention away from the novelty of the Bay Colony's test. Alternatively, he might have thought the matter needed little deliberation: in England, children were expected to make a catechetical profession of faith before they entered full communion, and New England was simply adding another element to that

¹⁰ Increase Mather, *The First Principles of New England* (Cambridge, 1676), 2-3; Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 18.

customary examination. Mather supplied a tentative answer ("for the present we would say") why children should have to make a profession before communion. He pointed out that his opponents agreed church children should not communicate unless they were fit, and from that fact "we may inferre the necessity of their personall profession of their faith, when they come to years, and taking hold of Church-Covenant." Lest his adversaries think this an onerous requirement, he specified that this profession was "onely a Renewing of Covenant, or a new professing of their Interest in Gods Covenant, and walking according to it, when they shall be *Adulti*."¹¹ All that New England children had to do was own the covenant to which they already belonged.

Though age did not effect conversion, Puritan theologians inferred that "years" should bring a change in church status. As John Cotton noted, children were already admitted to God's family in baptism, so "there is nothing wanting but the childs consent, when he comes to yeares of discretion."¹² Crucially, the Cambridge Platform did not tell children to seek full privileges when they had experienced conversion, but when they were of age. The platform indicated that children would be eligible for communion "when being grown up unto years of discretion, they shall desire to be made partakers of the Lords Supper." At that time, they should "come to their tryall & examination, & manifest their faith and repentance by an

¹¹ Mather, *Church-Government*, 20.

¹² Cotton, *The Way of Life*, 388.

open profession thereof."¹³ Years of discretion rendered children able to discern and describe the religious experience which, presumably, had occurred by that time. When Puritans combined the customary conception of age as a qualification for communion, with an insistence that communicants have grace before they partake of the sacrament, children were snared between age-based expectations and doubts about election.

Clergy described the condition of baptized, unconverted children as a state of "church education," implying that learning would bring them closer to regeneration and full membership. Though the Cambridge Platform codified the assumption that age and education should bring change in church status, it provided no occasion for children to present their accumulated years and knowledge as qualifications for further privileges. Parents, teachers, and ministers catechized children, but they conducted this instruction in the absence of a clear connection between catechizing and the attainment of church maturity. When, several decades after settlement, it became clear that children were not advancing to full communion as hoped, ministers installed a version of Protestant confirmation. At the 1662 synod, ministers recognized the appropriateness of a ceremony to bring grown children into acceptance of the church's beliefs, privileges, and duties. Just as significantly, though, New England clergy would not allow

¹³ Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York, 1893), 224.

these mature, orthodox members to proceed to communion. So doing, they complicated the course of their catechumens, who learned, on one hand, that religious knowledge was essential to conversion and, on the other, that doctrinal commitment did not entitle them to partake of the Lord's Supper.

To the Halfway Covenant

For many church children, absent a structured occasion for advancing to adult privileges, arrival at "years of discretion" came and went without bringing them closer to communion. Many in New England's second generation, and those that followed, proved unable to experience grace as definitively as their parents had. Within a church polity based on regenerate membership, this spiritual inability bred complications. The number of communicants dwindled and the grandchildren of saints waited, unbaptized, for the conversion of their parents. Throughout the latter half of the seventeenth century, ministers struggled with the problem of the children of the church. What was to be done with youth who enjoyed all manner of covenant benefits and means of grace, but failed to have satisfactory religious experience when it was expected of them?

Some scholars have counted the halfway covenant as a signal of religious decline, suggesting that Massachusetts had to compromise its commitment to church purity in order to accommodate its spiritually undistinguished progeny. Perry Miller judges the synod's solution a "pathetic, where

it is not a ridiculous, device." Edmund Morgan more charitably maintains that it was "an honest attempt to rescue the concept of a church of visible saints from the tangle of problems created in time by human reproduction." But he still names the halfway covenant "a narrow tribal way of recruiting saints."¹⁴ However, the problems that spurred the synod of 1662 did not stem solely from children's spiritual inadequacy. A defect in church structure, not only in church youth, did much to cause the problem. Some ministers perceived in 1648 that they ought to define more clearly the privileges of these members, though circumstances did not yet force them to do so. As Jonathan Mitchel later explained, "there was not the like urgency" to determine this question in 1648 as there was by 1662.¹⁵ At the 1662 synod, ministers chose to address this problem in

¹⁴ In contrast, Robert Pope dismisses assumptions that the halfway covenant opened the way to religious laxity. David M. Scobey points out that whether or not historians judge New England religion to have declined, seventeenth century clergy thought that was the case. See Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA, 1956), 158; Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 187-138; Robert Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton, 1969) 9-12, 272-273; David M. Scobey, "Revising the Errand: New England's Ways and the Puritan Sense of the Past, *WMQ* 3d. ser. 41 (1984): 4n.

¹⁵ Richard Mather, *Church-Government and Church-Covenant*, 20; Mitchel's preface to the 1662 synod results are included in Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (New York, 1893), 309. Mitchel quotes a 1652 letter of Nathaniel Rogers, who, recognizing the problems the Platform created for children, lamented, "I confess I account it our great default, that we have made no more real distinction between these [children of the church] and others, and they have been no more attended, as the lambs of the Flock of Christ: and whether it be not the cause of the corruption and woeful defection of our youth."

the Cambridge Platform rather than simply berating children or "discovenanting" them.

Though some ministers discussed matters regarding children during the first decades of Massachusetts' settlement, the issue grew to trouble the churches acutely in the 1650s. Some congregations, then confronting the problem, devised their own plans to broaden baptism. Dorchester considered making changes to baptismal policy in 1655, but demurred when neighboring churches expressed reservations. In Ipswich, Chelmsford, and the First Church in Boston, congregations approved plans to baptize the offspring of those who were not yet ready for the Lord's Supper. Some churches kept baptism sharply restricted, and others, especially in Connecticut, leaned towards a "presbyterial" policy that embraced all professing Christians in the community.¹⁶

Colonial governments sought a more consistent solution to the matter. In 1656 the General Court of Connecticut queried the Bay Colony about several items of policy, including rules for baptism. Massachusetts responded by calling together an assembly of ministers in June 1657. Thirteen from Massachusetts plus four from Connecticut gathered to address these questions, which they dispatched quickly in *A Disputation Concerning Church Members and Their*

¹⁶ Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 76. Pope calls the churches with the broadest membership policies "presbyterial" rather than Presbyterian. With few exceptions, these churches were found in Connecticut rather than Massachusetts.

Children in Answer to XXI Questions, authored by Richard Mather. Among other points, the document declared that those baptized in infancy but not yet regenerate should "own the Covenant" when they grew up, and when they had done so, they could bring their children to be baptized.¹⁷ However, the assembly's conclusions did not close the case. In December 1661, the Massachusetts General Court once again called together representatives to decide the question, "Who are the subjects of baptism?" Over eighty clerical and lay participants met in Boston in March 1662, and again in June and September. The synod finally put forth seven propositions, which the General Court commended to the Bay Colony's churches.¹⁸

The seven items evaluated baptismal eligibility and church privileges from various angles. The first proposition noted that members of the visible church were subjects of baptism. The second specified that "Confederate visible Believers" and their offspring were church members. The third ruled that these children remained under the discipline of the church when they grew up. The fourth circumscribed the privileges of these church children, specifying that those yet unregenerate could not come to the Lord's Supper.¹⁹ The fifth proposition--the most

¹⁷ Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 26-29; Mather, *A Disputation Concerning Church Members and Their Children in Answer to XXI Questions* (London, 1659), 21-24.

¹⁸ This discussion of the background to the 1662 Synod relies on Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 43-54, and on the introduction to the synod results in Walker 244-80.

¹⁹ Covenant-owning children were also held back from church voting. However, ministers did not seem terribly

controversial of all--extended their privileges, encouraging them to "own" the covenant and thereby gain access to baptism for their offspring. The sixth proposition allowed baptism to children whose parents were qualified but unable to own the covenant, and the seventh granted it to those who moved from one church to another. At the end of its baptismal deliberations, the synod approved consociation of churches.²⁰

The General Court accepted the synod's propositions but permitted its opponents and defenders both to print their opinions. For several years New England witnessed open debate about the nature of church membership and the problems of church children. Both sides insisted that the safety and purity of the churches rested on their case. Those who endorsed the synod worried that New England would grow wild if children were not kept under church watch, predicting that "[i]rreligion and Apostacy would inevitably break into Churches" if they cut off those in need of their care. Those in the opposite camp, including Charles Chauncy, John Davenport, and Increase Mather, worried that baptism would be applied to persons undeserving of it, and worse, that the Lord's Supper itself would be profaned.²¹

worried that unregenerate children would try to break in on this privilege. Only rarely in these debates did writers feel pressed to affirm the synod's decision that those who could not judge themselves were unfit to "discern and judge in the weighty affairs of the house of God." Walker 328.

²⁰ Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 54-74; Walker 313-339.

²¹ Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 54-57; Walker 326, 331; Mitchel quoted in Increase Mather, *First Principles*, 5 (new pagination); Mitchel, *An Answer to the Apologetical Preface*, in Richard Mather, *A Defence of the Answer and Arguments of*

The Status of Church Children

Lacking the religious experience that would admit them to full communion, the baptized had cast into doubt their own church status. One of the synod's chief concerns, then, was to determine the nature of the membership they retained. The synod's first proposition defined church membership to include church children. Dissenters countered that grown children were "mediate members," who belonged because of their parents' status, not their own faith; such "mediate members" severed themselves from the church by reaching adulthood without getting true faith. By failing to live up to the terms of the covenant, children had "discovenanted" themselves. The synod's defenders scorned these notions. Church discipline could expel members for "notorious sin or incorrigible impenitency," they observed, but not for neglecting to give a profession of faith.²²

Discussions about the duration of children's covenant membership brought ministers to confront the relationship between maturity and church status. The synod had to resolve contradictions in an admissions policy that required conversion but implied that age should bring additional privileges.²³ Both defenders and dissenters agreed that

the Synod (Cambridge, 1664), 15-16; John Davenport, Another Essay for the Investigation of the Truth (Cambridge, 1663), 34-35.

²² Walker 333; Davenport, *Another Essay*, 5, 14-15, 25, 38; Charles Chauncy, *Anti-Synodalia Scripta Americana* (London, 1662), 25, 33; Nicholas Street in Davenport, *Another Essay*, 69; Mitchel, *An Answer to the Apologetical Preface*, 22; John Allin, *Animadversions on the Antisynodalia* (Cambridge, 1664), 39.

²³ Scobey thoughtfully considers contradictions inherent

children in minority entered the church through their parents' covenant. The former group argued that the baptized remained "personal, immediate, and yet-continuing members of the Church." Because membership "ceaseth not with their infancy," church discipline and care extended to them indefinitely. The latter group, in contrast, saw adulthood as a cut-off point. If children could not describe conversion experiences by that time, they were to be counted degenerate. For advancing this principle, Jonathan Mitchel judged the antisynodists more severe than God, who did not disown children "as soon as the day of ripe understanding dawns upon them [and they] *do not bring forth the fruits of Faith and Repentance.*" Though the synod's defenders thought that age and "ripe understanding" should bring religious experience, they preferred to emulate God's patience, letting the baptized pass into adulthood in the church.²⁴ As Increase Mather later explained, a baptized child "is become the Lords, not for fourteen or twenty

in New England ecclesiology. The halfway covenant, he demonstrates, revealed the contradiction in Puritans' commitment to "the church as a community of the elect and infant baptism," in their claims on both "Old and New Testament pacts," and in their conception of the covenant as both "the national covenant bequeathed by the Hebrews and the congregational covenant of primitive Christianity." Edmund Morgan also discusses the synod's attempt to reconcile "conflicting commitments to infant baptism and to a church composed exclusively of saints." See Scobey, "Revising the Errand," 6, 16; Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 133. The contradiction that most interests me is the tension between age and conversion experience as requisites for full communion.

²⁴ Walker 330-31, 333; Mitchel, *An Answer*, 21-22; Richard Mather, *A Defense of the Answer*, 4-7 and Mather, *An Answer to XXI Questions*, 12-13; Allin, *Animadversions*, 37-38.

years, but as long as he shall live." God did not "covenant to be the Childes God only twenty years or till he become Adult." Still agreeing that conversion should come by young adulthood, the synod conceded that in some of the elect, grace might not be manifested until later in life.²⁵

Because the baptized were the seed of those in covenant, the synod argued, church members could hold reasonable hope for the salvation of their children.²⁶ Though not all of the baptized were elect, God would reveal the chosen ones in time and allow sin to unmask the others as reprobates. Employing William Ames's distinction between the "beginning of Faith" and "the increase or growth of Faith," the synod explained that church children already *had* some grace.²⁷ In order to acquire full privileges, they simply needed to grow in faith. Experience could come early in some, since covenant children "have frequently the beginnings of grace wrought in them in their younger years," but others might wait longer. Even without full conversion, they would evidence "some fruits of Faith and Repentance" by their orderly continuance in church ways.²⁸ Richard Mather

²⁵ Increase Mather opposed the synod's results in the 1660s, but later changed his mind about the halfway covenant and defended the synod's decisions in several works. See Mather, *A Discourse Concerning the Subject of Baptisme* (Cambridge, 1675), 59.

²⁶ For general discussion of Puritans' views on baptism and the church, see Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 144-154.

²⁷ Michael Schuldiner traces Ames's definitions of the "being" or "beginning" of faith and its "growth." See Schuldiner, *Gifts and Works: The Post-Conversion Paradigm and Spiritual Controversy in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts*. (Macon, GA, 1991), 94-98.

²⁸ Walker 329-330; Mather, *Defence*, 5,47; Mitchel, *An Answer*, 21-23.

posited that children who were able to fulfill the terms of the synod's fifth proposition gave grounds to hope that they had real faith:

it seems not impossible but that they may be truly godly, and sincere, [since] they are not only not *Scandalous in life*, but do give themselves and their children to the Lord, and subject themselves to the Government of Christ in his Church; and all this not *Ignorantly*, but with understanding; not *slightly*, but *Solemnly* and *Publicly before the Church*: for doth not all this make their sincerity hopeful?²⁹

Listing their qualifications, Mather demanded, "is all this nothing for charity to go upon in accounting them Believers? no, not in the *least degree*?" Good understanding of doctrine and godly behavior, evidenced at the time of majority, gave the church reason to accord children some adult privileges.³⁰

Both sides of the halfway-covenant debate wanted grown children to acknowledge that age placed responsibilities upon them. Synod opponents thought those "that are of competent age and understanding" should pass the same test demanded of adult candidates if they wished to continue in the church: "being grown up, [they] must be admitted to the immediate fellowship, and full communion of the Church, by their personal faith held forth to the satisfaction of the Churches charitable discretion." If these failed to "bring forth fruits of Repentance and faith then (as the Fig-tree which did not bear fruit, was to be cut down) the Church is to disown them, *as having no part in the Lord*, and to

²⁹ Mather, *Defence*, 37.

³⁰ Mather, *Defence*, 45; Mitchel, *An Answer*, 23.

declare, that they by their unbelief have Discovenanted themselves." In contrast, the synod devised a means for grown children to "own" the covenant, even though it was not ready to admit these to communion.³¹

Halfway Covenant and Halfway Confirmation

As defined by the fifth proposition, covenant owning brought mature church children to profess doctrine and submit themselves to the church. In these respects the ceremony paralleled Protestant confirmation, which asked youth to own the baptismal faith pledged for them in infancy and taught to them through a catechism. Like that rite, New England covenant-owning ceremonies treated age, understanding, and verbal commitment as qualifications for additional privileges. Unlike confirmation, covenant owning did not provide access to full communion.

New England clergy were cognizant of similarities between confirmation and their new ceremony, and each side of the halfway-covenant debate cited early-church and Reformation precedents to support its position. Antisynodists pointed out that confirmation normally advanced its recipients to communion. They argued that the new covenant-owning ceremony was therefore inappropriate because it would qualify for the Lord's Supper those who were unready. These ministers recalled that *"that famous*

³¹ Increase Mather, "An Apologeticall Preface," in *Davenport, Another Essay*, sig. A2r; *Davenport, Another Essay*, 5-6, 14-15, 42-43.

Martin Bucer...*maintained that*, None ought to be confirmed Members of the Church, besides those who do hold forth not onely verbal profession of Faith, but apparent Signs of Regeneration." They observed that John Cotton, in *The Holinesse of Church Members*, also described "confirmed" members as those qualified for communion. Therefore, none should be confirmed but those who were ready for the Lord's Supper, and members who owned the covenant were not ready.³²

Synod defenders countered that the covenant-owning ceremony would not bring members to the Lord's table. Admitting that Cotton described the "confirmed" as those fit for full communion, they protested that the synod did not advocate that sort of "confirmed" membership. On other counts, though, they invoked confirmation to defend the covenant-owning ceremony. Mitchel pointed out that Reformed churches in Europe received members "upon such like *qualifications* as are contained in the *Synods fifth Proposition*."³³

Writers in both camps distorted the precedents of confirmation to make them suit their arguments. Antisynodists claimed Martin Bucer as an authority, noting that Bucer wanted further qualifications to corroborate the profession of faith in English confirmation. But Bucer did not ask candidates to supply the "apparent signs of Regeneration" that antisynodists demanded. He thought

³² Increase Mather, "An Apologeticall Preface," sig. A3r.

³³ Mitchel, *An Answer*, 17-19, 41. See also Increase Mather, *A Discourse Concerning the Subject of Baptisme*, 32-38, 42-43.

candidates for communion should have Christian knowledge and holy conversation--just the qualifications that the fifth proposition asked of those who owned the covenant. On behalf of the synod, Jonathan Mitchel also laid claim to Bucer, pointing out that the reformer wished godly conversation to accompany the statement of faith. Mitchel further boasted that New England's practice of admissions was "not behind in anything that Bucer and Parker do require."³⁴

In the covenant-owning ceremony proposed by the synod, youth displayed their mature acceptance of the faith and discipline of the church. The fifth proposition spelled out the structure of the covenant-owning rite:

*Church-members, who were admitted in minority, understanding the Doctrine of Faith and publicly professing their assent thereto; not scandalous in life, and solemnly owning the Covenant before the Church, wherein they give themselves and their Children to the Lord, and subject themselves to the Government of Christ in the Church, their Children are to be Baptized.*³⁵

In owning the covenant, youth would embrace the faith their parents had claimed for them at baptism and demonstrate pious behavior. Maturity equipped covenant children to accept and perform their duties to the church.³⁶

³⁴ Mitchel, *An Answer*, 40.

³⁵ Walker 328.

³⁶ The procedure of "owning the covenant" was not altogether new. Some had used the phrase even before the synod, though there are only few details defining the exact procedure in the mid-seventeenth century. The church in Roxbury described it as "personally, publicly and solemnly to avouch the Lord in an ecclesiasticall way to be their God according to the Covenant of Grace, and to submit themselves to the power and government of Christ in his church." See

The fifth proposition required members to "assent" to the "Doctrine of Faith." Puritan theologians understood "assent" to mean an intellectual agreement with Christian principles, distinguished in Puritan vocabulary from "consent," which the heart performed in experiencing Christ. Ministers arguing over the 1662 synod returned to the distinction between consent and assent in describing the qualifications of communicants. Religious education, they generally maintained, could enable assent, but saints also had to consent to Christ before they could come to the Supper.

In their criticism of the fifth proposition, synod opponents pointed out the limitations of religious assent. Opponents impugned the substance of the fifth proposition's profession of faith and candidates' competence in making it. Unregenerate children should not own the covenant because they really *could* not, dissenters argued. It was "a palpable untruth for an unbeliever, to engage himself to keep the Lords covenant, whereby faith is the condition," because unregenerates did not actually *have* the faith to keep the covenant. Charles Chauncy objected that children who professed the faith would be giving a false profession. Davenport disliked the profession because he doubted that children understood the doctrine of faith, and without understanding, "their publicly professing their assent thereunto, is a meer mockery." Davenport implied that

spoken assent was only meaningful if accompanied by understanding. He contended that the "Parrot-like saying the Doctrine of faith, and an ignorant assent thereunto" revealed hypocrisy, not true belief. Nicholas Street seemed to assume that covenant-owners would be able to understand doctrine, but thought their assent to it should not qualify members for any privileges. "The Devil doth *understand the Doctrine of Faith*, and doth *assent thereunto*," Street scoffed. Synod defenders and opponents clashed over the meaning of the profession of faith. The former maintained that doctrinal statements could be significant, while the latter suggested that children did not really believe the doctrine they described unless they had experienced it.³⁷

Antisynodists inadvertently highlighted the importance of catechizing in preparing children for covenant-owning. John Davenport wondered whether these covenant-owning children would "understand the Doctrine of Faith" they professed. "What course do they take to know it?" he demanded.³⁸ Catechizing was the normal course they would take to know it. Giving a minimal and rather disingenuous construction to the phrase "Doctrine of Faith," the synod's opponents charged that the fifth proposition did not ask enough knowledge of covenant-owners:

....they may be ignorant of the doctrine of the moral law, and therefore have no knowledge of sin, which is attained only by the Law...yea, though they have no knowledge of either the duties of

³⁷ Chauncy, *Anti-Synodalia* 30; Davenport, *Another Essay*, 25; Street in *Another Essay*, 67.

³⁸ Davenport, *Another Essay*, 25.

holiness, or Righteousness toward God or man; know nothing of the sanctification of God's name on the Sabbath, nor what honour they should give parents, Magistrates, or Ministers...yea, though they be unacquainted with the platform of Prayer, or the nature, use, and end of the sacraments....³⁹

Nicholas Street insisted the covenant-owner should "*understand Church-Order and Discipline appointed by Christ*, otherwise he cannot Covenant in judgment, or own the Covenant," implying that the fifth proposition would admit one who did not "know how to behave himself in the House of God, as a Member thereof." The synod's defenders appropriately responded that the "Doctrine of Faith" included all such matters. Catechizing normally instructed children in the law, the duties of obedience (including sabbath observance and honoring parents), the purpose of the sacraments, and the order of the church.⁴⁰

The synod recognized that catechizing was the traditional way to prepare children for mature church status. Declaring children to be in a state of "*Initiation and Education in the church of God*," its defenders upheld the church's responsibility to instruct them. Even the synod's dissenters linked education with church children's fitness for full communion. John Davenport blamed the young members' unreadiness on "too frequent neglect of Parents in their Education, and of Ministers and Churches in their Institution, and Catechizing, and Watching over them." Richard Mather relished the irony in Davenport's charge: the

³⁹ Chauncy, *Anti-Synodalia*, 27.

⁴⁰ Street in Davenport, *Another Essay*, 67.

New Haven minister seemed to assume that children were "not only under the Education of Parents, but also under the Instruction, Catechizing, and watch of the Ministry, and of the Church," but elsewhere Davenport denied that church watch belonged to mature children. In contrast to Davenport's position, Jonathan Mitchel insisted that church children were entitled to instruction: "why also should not baptism and Catechizing (as well as other church benefits) be dispensed only *mediately* and not immediately unto Children?"⁴¹

Ministers on both sides found early-church practice relevant, though they misrepresented it as they drew comparisons between the ancient catechumenate and New England's church children.⁴² Antisynodists pointed out that catechumens were eligible for neither baptism nor communion. Therefore, unregenerate church children should neither come to the Lord's Supper nor have children baptized. They noted, "[t]he Catechumeni were not to be baptized before they were fit for the Lords Supper." Technically the dissenters were correct: after a period of preparation, early-church catechumens did not gain access to baptism until they also were ready for communion. Here, though, antisynodists ignored the practical differences between adult initiation and New England's system, which

⁴¹ Walker 312; Davenport, *Another Essay*, 16-17; Mather, *Defence*, 21; Mitchel, *An Answer*, 20, 35.

⁴² For discussion of Puritans' efforts to emulate practices of the early church, see Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill, 1988).

assumed infant baptism. Jonathan Mitchel's reading of primitive practice told him that qualifications for baptism and communion were different; he noted the "ancient practice of not teaching the Catechumeni anything about the Lords Supper till after they were baptized." Increase Mather was interested in the ancient catechumenate primarily because it revealed that the church accorded its care and instruction to those yet unready for communion. He observed that in training the catechumenate, the ancient church did then "discipline such Children as our Question is about."⁴³

Catechized children who had reached "years of discretion" were eligible to own the covenant, but this ceremony did not bring them to the Lord's Supper. The synod decided these members were short of what was required for communion, for "meer Membership is separable from such ability to examine one's self, and discern the Lord's body." The synod maintained that church children needed spiritual growth, "*a special renewal and exercise of Faith and Repentance,*" before they could be counted communicants. In part, this was a tactic of argument: synod defenders wanted to promise that broadening baptism would not profane the

⁴³ Mather, "An Apologeticall Preface," sig. A3r; Mitchel, *An Answer*, 26. Mitchel cites Hanmer and Baxter in his arguments on confirmation. In contrast, John Allin showed impatience with circulating arguments about the catechumenate, exhibiting little desire to ground the synod's system on ancient precedent. Instead, he instead faulted primitive practice with that potent Puritan charge of unscriptural innovation: "As for that Distinction of Catechumeni, Competentes, and Fideles, the Scripture knoweth no such thing...That distinction came into the Church afterward." Allin, *Animadversions*, 52; Increase Mather, *A Discourse on the Subject of Baptisme*, 29-30.

Lord's table. In principle, though, they did maintain that these members lacked scriptural qualifications for communion.⁴⁴

New England theologians cited I Corinthians 11:28-29 to define those prerequisites. Ordering communicants to examine themselves and discern the Lord's body, the text opened itself to various interpretations. Other Protestants maintained that it required communicants to examine their knowledge of doctrine, of sin and repentance, and Christ's presence in the sacrament.⁴⁵ Massachusetts clergy required communicants to examine themselves for evidence of election. The "matter" of self-examination was faith and repentance, Richard Mather explained, and therefore only the converted could perform it properly: communicants had to check whether they were among the elect for whom Christ had bought redemption. Church members whose examination turned up no

⁴⁴ Walker 327-28; Mather, *Defense*, 26.

⁴⁵ Holifield notes that Calvin had communicants examine themselves to discern "a true repentance" and "a true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," but also urged those without complete assurance to come to the Supper. For early English Puritans, preparation for the Lord's Supper involved introspection, but not all insisted on ability to discern one's gracious estate. Perkins, for instance, would admit to communion those of moral life and doctrinal knowledge, while Arthur Hildersham requested "true justifying faith" and assurance that one was saved. Schuldiner argues that Calvin expected conversion and initial assurance of communicants. Richard Sibbes also would have communicants descend into themselves to discern assurance. Schuldiner notes that Perkins, in contrast, urged the hopeful use "regenerate reason, by a kind of self-catechizing," to rouse the affections and examine behavior. See Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 19, 53-56; Michael Schuldiner, *Gifts and Works: The Post-Conversion Paradigm and Spiritual Controversy in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts* (Macon, GA: 1991), 52-56.

saving faith or true repentance could not come to the sacrament. Ministers could not give the elements to any of whom they could not say "Take and eat, this is the body of the Lord Jesus which was given for you," and those who simply owned the covenant were not included in that number.⁴⁶

The covenant-owning ceremony did not go as far as Protestant confirmation, not granting access to communion. Antisynodists and some historians have criticized the synod for inventing an awkward new practice to salvage the New England Way, and to keep children, though lukewarm in piety, under church discipline. In fact, the synod's solution was not really novel: it was not an awkward invention but a synthesis of traditional Protestant practice and New England church imperatives. Colonial ministers affirmed the importance of age and knowledge, the traditional markers of church maturity, though they subordinated these to their eucharistic theology and their conviction that communicants must be regenerate. The synod's propositions did not contradict the principles of Massachusetts' founding ministers. New England's founders had fused two potentially contrary tenets in their church polity: that church privileges belonged to those visibly converted, and that God extended the covenant to the seed of the elect, who were brought into the church through baptism. These two

⁴⁶ Richard Mather, *A Disputation*, 17-18; Walker 327.

principles were always in tension, but the synod managed to preserve them both.⁴⁷

Assuming that God would save the elect among church children, the synod kept the baptized under church watch. To resolve practical questions about covenant-children's church status, the 1662 synod borrowed from Protestant usage a ceremony to acknowledge the maturity and faith of church "seed." Puritans took on a confirmation ceremony in modified form, separating requisites for baptism and communion to continue admitting only saints to the Supper. The covenant-owning ceremony was a hybrid of New England's particular ecclesiastical tenets and familiar Protestant practices for children.

Even when the General Court and many clergymen endorsed the synod's results, however, some congregations rejected the new baptismal and covenant-owning policies. Others embraced the synod's position. Still others went further in broadening baptism and discipline of the church, developing nearly Presbyterian policies of admission to sacraments. In some churches, ministers granted baptism to any who would profess doctrine, show a godly life, and take hold of the covenant--even if these persons had no previous connection

⁴⁷ See Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 133-38. Morgan agrees that the synod arrived at "probably the most satisfactory way of reconciling the Puritans' conflicting commitments to infant baptism and to a church composed exclusively of saints," though he faults New Englanders for failing to recognize the "church's relationship to the world."

with the church and could not, therefore, own a covenant into which they were entered as infants.⁴⁸

The synod's results did spur ministers to employ various means to encourage the youth in their churches to seek adult status. While catechizing had been conducted in New England homes, schools, and churches before the halfway covenant, the synod gave new impetus to church programs of religious instruction. In the wake of the synod's declarations, the Massachusetts General Court in 1669 ordered ministers and elders to catechize all under their charge, to go into homes to teach and examine families. Responding to the colonial legislation, churches instituted their own systems of instruction. Boston's First Church assigned elders to "go from hows to hows to visit the familys and see how they are instructed in the grounds of religion." Dorchester also contemplated a new plan for catechizing. In the 1670s, Roxbury pledged to "restore our primitive practice for training up [of] youth." Chelmsford had anticipated the 1662 synod both in initiating a form of covenant-owning and in examining church children.⁴⁹ As in the case of John Fiske's congregation, some churches already had programs of catechizing in place before the halfway covenant; ministers did not merely decide to instruct their flocks after synod and government told them to. But the

⁴⁸ Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 246-52.

⁴⁹ "To the Elders and Ministers of every Town within the Jurisdiction of the Massachusetts in New-England," Broadside, 10 March 1668/9; Axtell 26-32; Pope, *The Notebook of the Reverend John Fiske*, 110-115, 158-8, 186-7.

1662 synod urged them to pursue the task with fresh dedication.⁵⁰

Studying the implementation of the halfway covenant, Robert Pope finds that while some churches employed it successfully, all required the pressure of external crises, like King Philip's War, to make them embrace the new measures.⁵¹ He argues that in Dorchester, for instance, the new ceremony never took hold: the church waited until 1677 to adopt the synod's system, and after that only rarely did many children own the covenant.⁵² Contrary to Pope's assessment, Ross Beales interprets Dorchester's experience as a delayed but sincere acceptance of the halfway covenant. The church used three different occasions for extending church discipline to the flock. First, it reviewed its obligations to catechize children. In March 1677 the pastor called youth over sixteen to "Submitt to the Government of Christ in and by his Church." The following month, the whole church renewed its covenant. Finally, in July, thirty-eight grown children owned the covenant for themselves, demonstrating their faith and subjection to church order.⁵³

⁵⁰ Holifield notes that when baptized children hesitated to take up full communion, ministers re-emphasized pastoral duties like catechesis. Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 193.

⁵¹ "The broad implementation of the half-way covenant that occurred between 1676 and 1692 can only be understood in the context of crisis," he posits. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 186-187.

⁵² Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 226-38. Pope gives detailed case studies of the churches of Roxbury, Charlestown, Dorchester, and the Third Church in Boston.

⁵³ Ross W. Beales, Jr., "The Half-Way Covenant and

By calling attention to the lack of church provisions for children and offering means to bring them into adult status, the 1662 synod prompted efforts of individual churches to address the problem. The covenant-owning ceremony allowed youth who had reached the age of discretion to articulate their faith and win some, though not all, of the church's privileges. The synod did not finally settle the matter of unconverted children, but it did take seriously the church's duty to educate and prepare them as it awaited their conversion.

Mass Covenant Renewals

The church in Dorchester waited so long to begin implementing the 1662 synod's propositions that covenant-owning ceremonies intersected with another new procedure: mass covenant renewals. The two ceremonies shared some common features, as they both brought members to articulate their faith in terms of the church's covenant. But covenant-owning requested commitment from individuals; covenant renewal, in contrast, drew all in the congregation together to pledge themselves again to the covenant. Instituted in the late 1670s, covenant renewal ceremonies opened additional venues for churches to draw youth into mature commitment to doctrine and discipline.

Religious Scrupulosity: The First Church of Dorchester, Massachusetts, as a Test Case." *WMQ* 3d. ser. 31 (1974): 468, 471-73, 477-78.

In the climate of crisis of the 1670s--stirred by the ravages of King Philip's War, two fires in Boston, a smallpox epidemic, and impending challenges to colonial government--ministers grew convinced that God was angry at New England. Churches made efforts to divert divine judgment. As one means to this end, ministers arranged covenant renewal ceremonies. The first recorded instance of the practice came in the Norwich, Connecticut church of James Fitch. On a fast day in 1675, Fitch called church members to renew fidelity to the original covenant and embrace seven additional principles for restoring godly order.⁵⁴

Fitch acknowledged that his clerical colleagues might question the ceremony, but he hoped "it will not bee offensive; [we] but doe verily conclude if that be rule for practice, this is a time when the Providence of God does in a knocking and terrible manner call for it." In fact, many other ministers approved Fitch's action and adopted covenant renewals for their own congregations. Urged on by Increase Mather, Dorchester renewed its covenant at the close of 1676. Plymouth's church and Mather's own in Boston did so later in the decade. Increase Mather became an ardent advocate of covenant renewals. Mather and his supporters prevailed upon Massachusetts magistrates to call a synod; in

⁵⁴ Fitch would not take credit for inventing the practice, but claimed that he borrowed the exercise from the late Samuel Stone of Hartford. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 241; Frances Manwaring Caulkins, *History of Norwich, Connecticut*, reprint. ed. ([orig. 1895]; Chester, CT, 1946), 123.

addition to listing the provoking evils of the day, the "Reforming Synod" of 1679 endorsed this new ceremony. On behalf of the synod Mather proclaimed, "Solemn and explicit Renewal of the Covenant is a Scripture Expedient for Reformation."⁵⁵

Though some scholars have perceived mass covenant renewals as another symptom of religious decline, the ceremony was consistent with other Puritan practices. Earlier in the century ministers had called for "renewing" covenants at times of crisis or change.⁵⁶ The same communal ends Puritans pursued through public fasts or thanksgiving days were also reinforced when a whole congregation reaffirmed its dedication to a covenant. As Increase Mather noted, exercises of prayer on public days of humiliation were themselves occasions of "Implicit Renewal of Covenant," and if these were effective in uniting God's people to "divert impending wrath and Judgment," explicit renewals should be even more helpful. Mather rejected charges that the ceremony bred hypocrisy by bringing the insincere to avouch promises they would not keep, for if the godly were

⁵⁵ Richard P. Gildrie, *The Profane, The Civil, and the Godly*, (University Park, PA, 1994), 27; Michael G. Hall, *Last American Puritan: The Life of Increase Mather, 1639-1723* (Middletown, CT, 1988), 148-9; Increase Mather, *Renewal of Covenant the Great Duty incumbent on churches* (Boston, 1677); *Plymouth Church Records, 1620-1859*. 2 vols. PCSM XXII-XXIII (Boston, 1920), 1: 148-52; Walker 435.

⁵⁶ Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 131-32, 248-52. Robert Pope does not contend that piety declined in the late seventeenth century, but does note the difference between the "voluntary" nature of covenant owning and the tendency of covenant renewals to "eliminate voluntarism." Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 246.

to wait for truth and fidelity from all, "then we must not observe dayes of Fasting and Prayer" at all. Rather than worrying about potential hypocrisy, ministers admonished covenanters to make their hearts sincere. As Samuel Willard warned, "if you vow without purposes to pay, it would be better for you if you had not done it."⁵⁷

Though motivated by many troubles afflicting late-century New England, covenant renewals also were tied to the persistently disappointing situation of children of the church. Whether blame was to be assigned to churches, parents, or children themselves, low rates of youthful conversion helped foster the sense of crisis that prompted the Reforming synod. Though covenant renewal was not framed expressly for church children, ministers used it to nudge the young toward church duties.

When congregations came forward to renew their covenants, they often approved provisions for initiating or strengthening programs of catechesis for children. Norwich required that children "from 8 or 9, to 13 years of age" come for catechizing in church on the Lord's Day. When they had completed this study, youth over thirteen but still under family government were to attend private religious instruction.⁵⁸ In Boston, Increase Mather did not neglect

⁵⁷ Walker 435; Increase Mather, *Returning unto God the Great Concernment of a Covenant People* (Boston, 1680), 17; Samuel Willard, *The Duty of a People that have Renewed their Covenant with God* (Boston, 1680), 9-10.

⁵⁸ Of the seven duties to which the Norwich church committed itself, four concerned children. When of age, children were to own the church covenant, and parents and selectmen, meanwhile, were urged to watch over the behavior

the catechizing of his own congregation's children, but asked members to "bring to me the Names & ages of the Children, that I might send for them & enquire into their spiritual estates, etc." When Mather's church renewed its covenant, its members pledged together "that we will do what in us lyeth, to bring up our Children for Christ...and that therefore we will (so far as there shall be a need for it) Catechize them, and exhort and charge them to fear and serve the Lord."⁵⁹ In 1685, several years after its covenant renewal, Dorchester's church summoned children "from 8 to 16 yeers of age to be Catechized & from 16 to 24 ye yong p'sons should come together to be discoursed with all ye maids by themselves & ye men by themselves." Following its renewal ceremony, the Plymouth church in 1679 implemented a program of catechizing. As the provisions of the 1662 synod had done, the adoption of covenant renewals strengthened church commitment to catechizing.⁶⁰

In addition to extending programs of religious instruction, ministers also tried direct appeals to youth. In the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries, clergy made sermons pitched specifically to young people, urging them to come to God. Ministers reminded the young of

of youth. Caulkins, 123; Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 241.

⁵⁹ Increase Mather recorded his intent to catechize in a 1676 diary entry, quoted in Gildrie 26. The covenant of Boston's second church appears at the end of Increase Mather, *Returning unto God the Great Concernment of a Covenant People* (Boston 1680), n.p.

⁶⁰ Walker 420; Charles Pope, *Records of the First Church at Dorchester; 1636-1734* (Boston, 1891) 93; *Plymouth Church Records*, 1: 154.

their covenant blessings and obligations. Those given the means of grace from birth had no reason to delay, clergy argued, but could increase the joy of their salvation by coming to the Lord early in life. Sooner was better, ministers told them: "The *Early* convert is the *Darling Child* in the Kingdom of Grace," John Webb explained. Early converts would enjoy many benefits, avoiding sin, having more time to do service for God, and perhaps even going through less painful conversions. Regeneration would be harder later, Thomas Foxcroft promised, for "the longer you sleep in carnal security, the opening of your Eyes will grow more Difficult."⁶¹ Unlike reprobates who might live long before they came to faith, church children had incentive to pursue it early because they already had claims to grace. Those who were baptized were under obligation to keep their covenant promises; if they later failed to qualify for communion, they could be guilty of "sacramental perjury," reneging on the commitments made for them in infancy. Thus, the baptized should make a "Renewal of [their] Baptismal Covenant" as soon as they were able. The unbaptized were not excused from striving either: even those whose parents were not saints enjoyed the means of grace, and they could use their young years to beseech God for pardon.⁶²

⁶¹ John Webb, "The Peculiar Advantages of Early Piety," *A Course of Sermons on Early Piety*, 24, 27; Thomas Foxcroft, "Exhortations & Directions to Young People," *A Course of Sermons on Early Piety*, 15; Cotton Mather, *Youth in its Brightest Glory* (Boston, 1709), 5.

⁶² Wadsworth, "A Sermon, Setting forth the Nature of Early Piety," in *A Course of Sermons on Early Piety*, 15, 23; Cotton Mather, *Agreeable Admonitions*, 27.

Instead of simply waiting for grace, children were to prepare for it. Ministers issued both negative and positive directives. Sometimes they used fear to plead for conversion: echoing the message of James Janeway's *A Token for Children*, which chronicled the godly lives and early deaths of thirteen youngsters, sermons reminded hearers to ponder their mortality.⁶³ Ministers condemned the besetting sins of youth, including dancing, drunkenness, disrespect, keeping company with bad characters, and "self-pollution." Increase Mather scolded those who might complain that "we cannot convert our selves," reminding them, "Well, but don't do that which will hinder your Conversion." Cotton Mather also chided those who lamented, "I can do nothing of my self," admonishing them that instead of making excuses, they should "Make the Trial." Ministers urged youth to take advantage of religious duties and means of grace, to be diligent in prayer, Bible-reading, and catechizing. Thomas Foxcroft reminded the unconverted that "you can't pretend want of Helps to assist you; For you have all needful Means of Conviction and Awakening."⁶⁴

⁶³ First published in England in the 1670s, Janeway's book was first printed in New England in 1700. It went through many subsequent editions, occasionally with added stories of pious American children. See Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books 1621-1922* (Baltimore, 1994), 31-34; Increase Mather, *A Call from Heaven to the Present and Succeeding Generation* (Boston, 1679), 106-107; Cotton Mather, *Agreeable Admonitions*, 29.

⁶⁴ Increase Mather, "Advice to the Children of Godly Ancestors," in *A Course of Sermons on Early Piety*, 14; Foxcroft, "Exhortations & Directions," 6-7; Cotton Mather, "What the Pious PARENT wishes for," *A Course of Sermons on Early Piety*, 3, 12, 33-34, and Mather, *Best Ornaments of Youth* (Boston, 1707), 8, 11, 23.

Ministers could not compel youth to convert, but they could encourage--indeed, demand from them--some expression of fidelity if they wished to remain in the church. As they renewed their covenants, many churches not only expressed intention to instruct youth, but also required from them a statement of obedience to church discipline. Dorchester devised a covenant "assenting" ceremony for its youth. Plymouth gathered together grown children in special ceremony, calling them to admit their failings, consent to the covenant, and vow to "stirre up themselves" toward grace. Having sketched out its plans to catechize, Norwich demanded that youth, when "grown up and at their own disposal," should "take hold of the Covenant of their Fathers." If any were not ready to own the covenant, they "at least should use means to prepare themselves for it." Those who refused would be admonished first and then excluded from the church. Norwich thus determined that physical and intellectual maturity should bring with it additional church privileges and responsibilities.⁶⁵

By requiring children to express commitment to the church after they had reached their teens, congregations were working out the implications of the Cambridge Platform's clause that "years" should bring change in church standing. Age and the "discretion" it brought enabled children to claim faith and obedience for themselves. As ministers prepared congregations to affirm founding

⁶⁵ Caulkins 123; Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant*, 242; *Plymouth Church Records*, 1:151-52.

doctrines and renew covenants, many used the occasion to ask affirmations of faith from all the congregation's youth. Children of saintly parents might be "in a more hopefull way of attayning regenerating grace,"⁶⁶ but ministers urged all of the young to demonstrate their willingness to use the church's means of grace in seeking after salvation. New England's covenant-owning and covenant-renewing ceremonies brought young members to commit themselves to church. Those who went through these ceremonies no longer belonged to the fold merely by virtue of their parents' standing; they had claimed their church status for themselves.

Solomon Stoddard on Confirmation

In the same Reforming Synod at which Increase Mather advocated covenant renewals, Solomon Stoddard raised controversy over his policy of admitting communicants without requiring a conversion narrative.⁶⁷ The Northampton minister prevailed upon his brethren at the synod to alter the wording of their conclusions on requiring a statement of faith at admissions. The synod had intended to affirm the

⁶⁶ Walker 224.

⁶⁷ For treatment of Stoddard's theology and ecclesiology, as well as his disputes with the Mathers, see Perry Miller, "Solomon Stoddard, 1643-1729," *Harvard Theological Review* 34 (1941): 277-320; Paul R. Lucas, "'An Appeal to the Learned': The Mind of Solomon Stoddard," *WMQ* 3d. ser., 30 (1973): 257-292; James P. Walsh, "Solomon Stoddard's Open Communion: A Reexamination," *NEQ* 43 (1970): 97-114; E. Brooks Holifield, "The Intellectual Sources of Stoddardeanism," *NEQ* 45 (1972): 373-392. Also helpful in defining the debate between Stoddard and Edward Taylor is the introduction to Thomas M. Davis and Virginia L. Davis, eds., *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard: The Nature of the Lord's Supper* (Boston, 1981), 1-57.

old requirement that candidates give a "relation of the work of Gods Spirit upon their hearts." Instead, they substituted approval for the practice of "The Making a Profession of their Faith and Repentance." Once this change was made, as Stoddard later recounted, "I voted with the Rest and am of the same judgment still." Both Stoddard and his opponents could support this tenet and yet proceed with their distinct communion practices, for differing interpretations of familiar words accommodated their theological disagreements.⁶⁸

Stoddard's divergent interpretation of the familiar terms of New England church polity made room for his other innovations, including his policy for bringing youth to communion. He claimed that his practice accorded with New England's venerable rule that "All Such as do make a Solemn Profession of Faith, & Repentance, & are of Godly Conversation, having Knowledge to Examine themselves, & discern the Lords body, are to be admitted to the Lord's Supper." Yet as Stoddard proceeded to define the key elements of this statement, he revealed his departures from old orthodoxies. For him, a profession of faith and repentance meant "an Assent unto, & Acknowledgement of the Doctrine of Faith & Repentance." His profession of faith was a statement of doctrinal knowledge, not a report of religious experience.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Stoddard gives his account of the synod's decision in *An Appeal to the Learned*, in Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 93-94.

⁶⁹ Stoddard, "Arguments for the Proposition," in Davis and

Elevating the role of religious knowledge, Stoddard dispensed with conversion narratives for members of his church. He still held that the elect needed to experience conversion, but they did not need to do so before communion. Eventually, Stoddard would come to argue that the Lord's Supper was a converting ordinance, rather than only a covenant seal for the saved. His communion policies opened questions about the place of knowledge in preparation for that sacrament and the function of confirmation in churches.⁷⁰

In 1687, Stoddard decided that those who were of age, well instructed, and not scandalous in behavior could come to the Lord's Supper. He began admitting to the sacrament all who were over fourteen years old, catechized, and of good conversation. Instruction was, for him, the way to fit members for the privileges of the church. He recalled that in apostolic days, people were accepted at communion when of age and "Sufficiently instructed to examine themselves, & discern the Lord's Body." He made knowledge a chief qualification for communion.⁷¹

Stoddard explained that communicants' needed the "Knowledge to Examine themselves." One could conduct the

Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 67.

⁷⁰ See Taylor's letter to Stoddard in response to the Northampton policy, and Stoddard, "Arguments for the Proposition," in Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 63, 67; Stoddard, *The Inexcusableness of Neglecting the Worship of God Under a Pretence of being in an Unconverted Condition* (Boston, 1708), 17.

⁷¹ Stoddard, "Arguments for the Proposition," Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 73-75.

requisite self-examination with "knowledge of those things that he ought to examine himselfe about, viz, Faith, Repentance, Love, New Obedience." Those who had "Knowledge to Discern the Lords Body" would have "a knowledge of the Nature, Necessity, & Use of the Lords Supper." To Stoddard, persons who could distinguish the sacramental elements from common bread and wine were able to partake. Competent communicants were those who had "knowledge for the Lords Supper." The primary preparation for worthy receiving of the sacrament was not conversion but education. Before admitting any to the sacrament, Stoddard stipulated, the church should accept a profession of knowledge and not demand the "Higher qualifications" of election and assurance. That was what the early church had accepted, Stoddard declared.⁷²

Though Stoddard and his opponents, especially Increase and Cotton Mather and Edward Taylor, honored the same scriptural prerequisites for communion, they differed strikingly in their interpretation of these terms. For Taylor and the Mathers, the object of self-examination was one's own saved state. "What must he examine himself about? Is it not whether he has Grace in his Soul?" Increase Mather demanded of the communicant. Taylor explained that the scripture sense of self-examination "doth not note a mere idle inspection" but implied "the Exercise of Repentance on

⁷² Stoddard, "Arguments for the Proposition," Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 68-69, 70-76; Stoddard, *Inexcusableness*, 22-23; Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 210-13, 219.

the discovery of Sin, & of Reformation in life & Faith in Christ." To Taylor, Stoddard's definitions of self-examination and "discerning the Lord's Body" were both inadequate. Merely to distinguish sacramental bread from common usage was "a Carnall, Leane, Jejune sense" of what the scripture meant by discernment. Discernment was not just doctrinal knowledge, for "a Spirituall Discerning here intended." Taylor explained that discerning was "made the by Eye of true Faith that the Sacramentall Bread & Wine are Signs Signifying Christ's Body Crucified & His blood shed as Standing in my stead....no naturall person can so discern Christ's Body & Blood, as lacking faith to do it." Taylor and the Mathers insisted that communicants had to exercise grace, not just understanding, in performing examination and discernment.⁷³

The role of knowledge and understanding in preparing candidates for the Lord's Supper was a central point of difference in debates with Stoddard. Defenders of Massachusetts' customary admissions policies agreed that knowledge contributed to worthy reception, but argued that the sacrament chiefly ministered to the recipient's heart, not the understanding.⁷⁴ Taylor and the Mathers accused Stoddard of requiring merely an "assent" to doctrine, and

⁷³ Increase Mather, *A Dissertation, Wherein the Strange Doctrine Lately Published in a Sermon...is Examined and Confuted* (Boston, 1708), 8; Taylor, "The Appeale Tried," Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 159.

⁷⁴ Taylor, "The Appeale Tried," 176-177, and "Animadversions," Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 93; Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed*, 214-216; Increase Mather, *A Dissertation*, 28-30.

pointed out that this was insufficient for communion. "A bare assent is onely the inward act of the Rationall Faculty resting upon the thing as true," Taylor explained, so that one who believed and professed in Stoddard's sense would be committed to Christ only so far as his understanding could take him. Even "Divells" believed in this way, the Westfield minister remarked. Saving faith required consent: "Consent is which takes in the whole man, or Soul: the Will Choosing the thing." For this reason Taylor demanded communicants give a confession reflecting their faith and experience of repentance--the story of the will's consenting to Christ. Against Stoddard, Taylor and the Mathers argued that doctrinal knowledge comprised part of a communicant's preparation, but it was not sufficient for the sacrament.⁷⁵

Like his opponents, Stoddard could see the difference between doctrinal understanding and saving faith, but he did not insist that the latter precede communion. Because he thought that the Supper could convert the unregenerate, he did not ask communicants to have grace beforehand. Because knowledge was a crucial prerequisite to communion, Stoddard made catechizing the key preparatory activity. Religious instruction would not necessarily prompt conversion, but it would impart the qualifications Stoddard asked for the sacrament.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Walker 328; Taylor, "The Appeale Tried," Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 181; Mather, *A Companion for Communicants*, 31-32.

⁷⁶ Stoddard, *The Safety of Appearing*, 117, 121.

Stoddard invoked confirmation to defend his policies and to criticize those who embraced the halfway covenant but excluded the unconverted from communion. When he debated Taylor and the Mathers, Stoddard drew them into discussion of the meaning of confirmation. "Those that are fit to be Confirmed Members of the Church are fit for the Lords Supper," Stoddard began his syllogism. Persons who could make a doctrinal profession and show a moral life "are fit to be Confirmed Members of the Church," and these would therefore be competent communicants. In Stoddard's system, baptized children would be catechized, and demonstrate knowledge and obedience when they came of age--fourteen years was the threshold Stoddard set--whereupon they could come to communion. In 1672 he had adopted a ceremony for grown children in the Northampton church, in which "[s]uch as grow up to adult age in the church shall present themselves to the Elders," and if they were able "to understand and assent unto the doctrine of faith," to show a godly life and subject themselves to discipline, they "shall publickly own thee covenant and be acknowledged members of this Church." He treated church children as a catechumenate, to be fitted for communion by religious education. Once they reached mature age and were ready to profess their faith, they should no longer be held among the catechumens--and no longer held back from the Lord's Supper.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Lucas, "The Mind of Solomon Stoddard," 282; Stoddard, "Arguments for the Proposition," Davis and Davis, *Edward*

Stoddard claimed the warrant of the early church in support of his policy. First, he recalled "the practice of the Primitive Churches, whose practice was to Confirm the Members of the Church: & so admit them to the Lords Supper." Next, he sketched a brief history of the Reformed efforts to reclaim the Catholic sacrament for Protestant use. He held up the testimony of John Calvin, the practices of the Waldenses, the arguments of Edward Dering, and the comments Bucer offered upon the first English prayerbook. Stoddard also appropriated Joseph Hanmer's *Exercitations upon Confirmation* in his defense.⁷⁸ Showing that confirmation commonly granted access to full communion, he contended that his policies accorded more closely with Christian custom than did the practice of his opponents. It was the Cambridge Platform's policy of requiring relations that smacked of novelty, not his system; not his arguments but the opinions of his opponents were "New, & unheard of in the Churches till of late years." Stoddard had a strong case. He could claim the authority of the early church and of

Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard, 77.

⁷⁸ Stoddard, "Arguments," Davis and Davis, 81-83, 221n. In their otherwise excellent edition of the unpublished polemics of Stoddard and Taylor, Thomas and Virginia Davis mistake Stoddard's citation for Henry Hammond's *De Confirmatione*, perhaps assuming that a defense of confirmation would come from an Anglican author and not a godly dissenter. Hanmer was, in fact, familiar to New England Puritans. He was a correspondent of John Eliot and a sympathetic contributor to Eliot's missionary work; as the halfway-covenant debates and Stoddard-Taylor exchanges reveal, his writing on confirmation was known in the colonies. See Rendel Harris, "Three Letters of John Eliot and a Bill of Lading of the 'Mayflower,'" *The Bulletin of John Rylands Library* 5 (1918): 102-110.

Reformed theologians to demonstrate that communicants were usually admitted upon evidence of knowledge and godly behavior. Like Martin Bucer, Stoddard demanded that some sign ratify the verbal profession, seeking "Signs in the life, & manners," not a relation of experience.⁷⁹

In addition to European precedent, Stoddard mined the writings of New England first-generation divines to show that they had perceived confirmation as he did. He pointed out that in *Of the holinesse of church-members*, John Cotton argued that baptized children were not "orderly continued, and confirmed members of the Church, unlesse when they grow up to years, they do before the Lord and his people, professe their repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ, and subjection to him in his ordinances; and do not scandalize their profession with an unchristian conversation." Cotton had tried to downplay the novelty of New England's admissions policy by likening it to confirmation. Stoddard turned that argument back upon the champions of the New England Way, pointing out that if members had the qualifications to be "confirmed," they were ready for communion.⁸⁰ Hitting an even more sensitive spot, Stoddard contended that the rationale for his system was enshrined in the decisions of the 1662 synod. For church members who could make a doctrinal profession and had a holy life, "that

⁷⁹ Stoddard, "Arguments for the Proposition," Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 82-83.

⁸⁰ Cotton, *Of the holinesse of church-members* (London, 1650), 19; Stoddard, "Arguments for the Proposition," Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 81-83.

the Persons thus Qualified are fit to be Confirm'd, is according to the judgment of the former Synod, Ano.1662. Who would have them own the covenant & be acknowledged by the Church Profession, & Conversation." New England already endorsed a confirmation ceremony, Stoddard contended, but the synod mistakenly refused to allow "Confirm'd" persons to communicate. In his own church, Stoddard mended that mistake, but it was the 1662 synod, not the leader of Northampton's church, who first installed confirmation in the colonies.⁸¹

Taylor and the Mathers had to grant much that Stoddard asserted about confirmation, but resolutely denied it opened the way to the Lord's Supper. Increase Mather conceded that the phrase "confirmed members," was "usually taken amongst divines for the same thing with being admitted to the Lords. Supper," yet he insisted that those who were continued in the church could not come to the sacrament without an examination of grace. Taylor contested Stoddard's ideas of confirmation with more heat than light. He contradicted Mather's definition of "confirmed members," positing that such a ceremony could not have fitted members for communion in Calvin's Geneva or Edwardean England. Taylor ventured that Calvin surely did not make confirmation "a form of admission to Full Communion," but only instituted the ceremony "to render the Dutie of Catechizing more venerable." Following opponents of the 1662 synod in

⁸¹ Stoddard, "Arguments for the Proposition," Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 81-83.

misinterpreting Bucer's *Censura*, Taylor decided that because Bucer requested "a true Confession of Faith, & Profession of Obedience," the reformer was demanding another profession for communion eligibility. The Westfield minister insisted confirmation was not a divine institution and resisted the substitution of what the English popularly named "Bishoping" for New England's admissions procedure. At end, though, seeming frustrated with the argument about confirmation and unable to get the better of this debate, Taylor simply exclaimed that Stoddard's arguments were designed "for this End & no other, but to Exclude all accounts of any Experience" of conversion and grace. Though Taylor could endorse the ceremony in part, he drew back from its full implications in order to protect the Lord's Supper.⁸²

The Problem of Religious Education

Within contentions over the Lord's Supper, Stoddard and his opponents debated the role catechizing ought to play in fitting the baptized for full communion. Edward Taylor and Increase Mather insisted that doctrinal education was essential, but also required a work of grace for communicants. This requirement left uncertain the place of catechizing in the church: ministers argued that it would nurture children in piety and morality, but also expected these children to have a pivotal experience of grace before counting them saints. In churches following the Cambridge

⁸² Taylor, "Animadversions," Davis and Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 107-111.

Platform, the logic of religious education conflicted with the logic of testified regenerate membership. Requiring a conversion narrative from these grown, baptized children meant asking them to distinguish their regeneration from their religious upbringing--a task some found difficult to do.

Generally, ministers offered hearty praise for religious education. Thomas Prince thanked God that New England youth had "a good and Happy Education." Increase Mather reminded children that godly settlers had first come to the colonies to give them "the great advantage of a Religious Education." Benjamin Wadsworth advised such children to be thankful that "they had a Christian Education" and the "restraints" this afforded.⁸³ Yet preachers who praised education could also disparage it as they strove to stir up heartfelt piety. They warned hearers not to count themselves saved on the grounds of good knowledge and upbringing. Beware of "false conversion," Increase Mather cautioned, for those who thought themselves holy might discover that "[a]ll their godliness [was] the meer effect of a good Education." Mather was disheartened to observe some wicked youth and others "that are only civil, and outwardly conformed to good order, by reason of their Education, but never knew what the new birth means."

⁸³ Prince, "The Great and Solemn OBLIGATIONS to Early Piety," 32; Increase Mather, "Advice to the Children of Godly Ancestors," 3-5, and *An Earnest Exhortation to the Inhabitants of New England* (Boston, 1676) 17; Wadsworth, "A Sermon, Setting forth the Nature of Early Piety," 18.

Benjamin Wadsworth lauded the virtues of catechizing but warned children, "Don't think it enough that you were born of Christian Parents, that you were Baptized, Educated, Instructed [in religion]," for those who had these qualifications could yet perish as hypocrites.⁸⁴

Confronted with these encouragements and warnings, New England youth were understandably puzzled about how to regard their religious education. Some well-catechized children seemed to have a hard time achieving--or at least recognizing--conversion. As religious education gradually nurtured moral habits and orthodox beliefs, it seemed to make a dramatic, momentous change of life less likely. In those reared religiously, conversion could come slowly, even imperceptibly. "The Spirit of God changeth their Hearts gradually and insensibly," Increase Mather explained, so that "[s]ome truly converted ones know neither the time nor the Manner of their Conversion." This experience of gradual spiritual growth is consistent with the devotional style Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe perceives among New England Puritans; Hambrick-Stowe argues that these colonists saw piety as a lifelong preparation for heaven, rather than focusing solely upon the occasion of conversion.⁸⁵ However, for church members seeking evidence of their own salvation, incremental growth could fail to yield assurance. New England Puritans were taught to judge conversion by its

⁸⁴ Increase Mather, *The Duty of Parents to Pray for Their Children*. 2d. ed. (Boston, 1719), 39; Wadsworth, "A Sermon, Setting forth the Nature of Early Piety," 12.

⁸⁵ See Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*.

fruits, but the customary signs of sainthood could be indistinct against a pious background. Moral living would afford no assurance, for if one's conversation were already "restrained" and blameless, good behavior would not be proof of a changed heart. As Michael Schuldiner argues, when baptized church children looked to their works to indicate grace, imperfect sanctification made them fear that they were reprobates after all.⁸⁶

Ministers exhorted hopeful converts to be sure they had repented deeply, submitting themselves under God's hand. Those with shallow repentance could be self-deceived: as Thomas Shepard had preached, "Know it, you cannot perish if you fall short here--you must perish if you do." Those who had developed a sense of sin in young years could have trouble estimating when they had humbled themselves sufficiently to close with Christ.⁸⁷ Further, saints were urged to perceive their lives as cycles of repentance, to see themselves repeatedly "reconverted." Those who experienced these cycles from the relative security of visible sainthood might continually fortify their faith, but for those growing up in the church and looking for signs of

⁸⁶ Increase Mather, *The Order of the Gospel*, 27; Michael Schuldiner overplays the place of works in New England's *ordo salutis*, and exaggerates the 1662 synod's promises to children of the covenant, but does suggest a plausible explanation for spiritual frustration of the second and third generations. Schuldiner, *Gifts and Works*, 91-98.

⁸⁷ Thomas Shepard, *The Sound Believer*, in *The Works of Thomas Shepard*, 3 vols., ed. John A. Albro (New York, 1967), 1:185.

their own election, the process could make them doubt that they ever were truly regenerated.⁸⁸

Amidst the cycles of repentance and devotion, it could be difficult to isolate experience that constituted conversion. Those who grew up godly might be unsure whether and when God had called them, for as Increase Mather remarked, "[i]t is often so with those that have been Advantaged with a Religious Education, and that hath been kept from falling into Scandalous Sins." Mather recounted that Richard Baxter once sat among a group of pious men in which only one could tell the exact time of his conversion; Baxter's anecdote illustrated to him how indistinct the stages of salvation could be for those brought up with religious instruction. The "points of *Experimental Piety*" were less visible in the lives of those raised as visible saints.⁸⁹

Ministers recognized this trouble in the youth of their congregations. When John Fiske interviewed those in his Chelmsford flock, he judged some ready for full communion even though they had not yet declared themselves converted.

⁸⁸ Cohen describes the cycles of reconversion, through which saints, grown frustrated through sin or self-reliance, returned to God and were refreshed in their loving service unto the Lord. The process appears with particular clarity in Cohen's discussion of John Winthrop, who, in renewing his covenant with God, epitomized "reconversion, the process of recapitulating humiliation to reclaim the feeling of grace." Cohen, *God's Caress*, 242-270.

⁸⁹ Increase Mather, *The Order of the Gospel* (Boston, 1700) 27; Everett Emerson and Mason I. Lowance, eds., "Increase Mather's Confutation of Solomon Stoddard's Observations Respecting the Lord's Supper, 1680," *AAS Proceedings* 83 (1973): 43-48.

He found Samuel Fletcher "so competent as upon his desire [Fiske] thought him fit to propound him." Fletcher evidently had grace, but had not been able on his own to ascertain a completed work of regeneration. Cotton Mather preached a funeral sermon for the young deceased Abiel Goodwin, who had been "UNDER the Influences of a Pious Education," and "from her Childhood used unto the Religion of the Closet." Yet her conversion blended imperceptibly into that pious education so that she was not sure when she had first come to the Lord. Mather warned his audience not to count such godly youth unregenerate.⁹⁰

Even those who were models of early piety could get stuck. It could seem unwarranted certitude to deem oneself saved; it was safer for some to continue quietly in the church, hoping for more thorough assurance before seeking communion.⁹¹ Cotton Mather memorialized Rebeckah Burnel who, like Abiel Goodwin, was pious from childhood. On their deathbeds, both girls mourned that they had never owned the baptismal covenant. Seventeen-year-old Burnel had been

⁹⁰ Pope, *Notebook of the Reverend John Fiske*, 187; Mather, *Juga Juncunda* (Boston, 1728), 25-26.

⁹¹ Edmund Morgan suggested that overscrupulosity, not lukewarm piety, might have kept some of these church children from the Lord's Supper: they held back from the sacrament because they judged themselves too harshly. See Morgan, "New England Puritanism: Another Approach," *WMQ* 3d. ser., 18 (1961), 241-42. However, they may have refrained from communicating not simply because they were too strict in assessing their experience, but because they were taught to expect an experience distinct from their pious education, and they had trouble discerning that in themselves. David Hall also discusses those who refused to come to communion because they perceived it as a "zone of danger." See Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, 156-61.

"Glorious within by [her] Early Piety." Suddenly growing ill, she "Lamented it, That she had not Renewed the Consent of her soul to the *Baptismal Covenant*, in that *Instituted Way*, of Coming to the *Table* of the *LORD*: But had permitted too many Difficulties to serve as Apologies for her Delay." Abiel Goodwin took up the yoke of Christ "with such Gradual Dawns of PIETY, that she knew not the Time of her first coming into the Life of GOD." Though she wanted to offer herself to the church, she held back and, like Burnel, "greatly Lamented it, that tho' she were so very Young she had not *Publickly* done what she had purposed." (She proclaimed, however, "I have done it secretly a Thousand Times!") John Fiske found similar hesitation in Jonathan Wright, a Chelmsford youth who had knowledge of doctrine and "a good relation of a work of grace." Wright was "not so clear as to the work of closure with Christ," evidently unsure whether conversion was complete. Fiske agreed to have him "come again upon trial." Without Fiske's interview, Wright may not have mustered courage to declare himself regenerate. Though religiously educated youth like these had experimental piety, some lacked confidence to proclaim themselves saved. But until they did, they remained away from communion in many churches.⁹²

Puritans treasured orderly families, government, and churches as the great blessings of a godly commonwealth; it

⁹² Mather, *Light in Darkness* (Boston, 1724), 19, 26 and *Juga Jucunda*, (Boston, 1728), 24-26; Pope, *The Notebook of the Reverend John Fiske*, 187.

would have been reasonable to anticipate that these institutions would make a difference in the religious experience of those raised under such blessings. Unless the means of grace were meaningless, it was suitable to have godly children grow in grace throughout their young lives, rather than turning abruptly to God only when they reached maturity. New England's rising generations were caught between the advantages of education and the demands of dramatic conversion. Going through an "insensible" religious transformation and pressured by assumptions that salvation would come at the age of discretion, some were left discouraged when they searched their lives for signs of grace. Recognizing the difficulty, Cotton Mather suggested that such members come to understand regeneration as falling within their pious upbringing, rather than as a separate experience. Mather observed that many among the "*Adult Posterity*" of the saints "have the Good Effects of a Pious Education under the means of Grace," yet these worried that they were not "[e]nough improved in all the points of *Experimental Piety*," and stayed away from the Lord's Supper.⁹³ Mather argued, however, that if they really had the good effects of a pious education, they had enough grace to come to the sacrament. Instead of demanding from them a public narrative of the process of conversion, Cotton Mather thought a different means of exhibiting religious experience would be suitable for these members.

⁹³ Mather, *Maschil*, 118-19.

Cotton Mather on Confirmation

Unlike his father and Edward Taylor, Cotton Mather unequivocally endorsed confirmation. He faulted colonial churches for neglecting care of children, demanding, "Why then is not more care taken about a Regular and Orderly CONFIRMATION of such as while infants were *Baptized* in our Churches?" Explaining the kind of service he had in mind, he recommended that elders send for children when they came of age to examine them and prompt them to renew their baptismal covenant. Children who were judged ready would have a "confirmation of their Church-Membership," and could then enjoy full privileges.⁹⁴

Mather sided with his father against Solomon Stoddard and still maintained that communicants should have grace, but he criticized churches that demanded public narratives of all the baptized. He called it "a tyranny, to enjoin upon every man, 'a relation about the precise time and way of their conversion unto God,'" because he saw that "[f]ew that have been restrained by a religious education, can give such an one." Instead, he recommended that the religious experience of those raised in the church be discovered by posing a series of questions to these candidates. Elders should ask them how they had improved their pious lessons, starting with such queries as, "*What sort of Education had you in your younger Years? And what Effects had that Education upon you?*" To report conversion, those with a

⁹⁴ Cotton Mather, *A Companion for Communicants*, 79-80.

good education could recount when God had allowed them to own the truths they had learned. Mather suggested that it was not quite appropriate to apply a test designed for those outside of the church to those raised within its covenant blessings.⁹⁵

Mather's early apology for confirmation was offered in the midst of the Stoddardean controversy, but his commitment to the ceremony extended beyond that episode. References to confirmation run through his writings over the course of more than thirty years. In the 1690 *Companion for Communicants*, he advised a confirmation ceremony in which, when "our Children come to Age, the Elders of the Churches may do well to send for them and Examin them strictly concerning their Conversion to God, and their inclinations to the Remembering and Renewing of their Baptismal Covenant." Those who seemed to lack gracious qualifications should continue catechesis and preparation--that is, continue in the catechumenate--but those "that are found having in them the Savour of Regeneration, may be advised immediately to apply themselves unto our Churches for a confirmation of their Church-Membership," and thereby attain full communion. Ten years later, Mather lent an anti-Stoddardean introduction to the communion manual of, John Quick, expressing in his opening comments New England's need of a means to "Quicken our Young People, unto such a Conscientious Renovation of their Baptismal Covenant, as may

⁹⁵ Cotton Mather, *Maschil*, 115-16; *Magnalia* 2:247.

make it appear that when they are Come to *Years of Discretion*, they are Come to *years of Religion*." To assist the church in bringing the young to renew the baptismal covenant, Mather recommended "bringing our *Baptised*, under an orderly *Confirmation*, and in that *Examination* which may bring the well qualified unto the *Table of the Lord*."⁹⁶

As he struggled to persuade his own church to accept the halfway covenant, Mather drew up a list of "Persuasions and Proposals," which he submitted to its members. The document suggested that "as for the children thus baptized in their minority, the elders of the church may be inquisitive and industrious about their being brought up in the nurture and admonitions of the Lord." When these children grew up, the elders should, "to confirm them in their church-state, put them upon the open renewal of their baptismal covenant, with a subjection of themselves unto the watch of the church." Mather wanted the Boston congregation to put into practice what he suggested in his debates with Stoddard. Those children who were examined and found "to have more sensible and plenary symptoms of conversion unto God" were to be encouraged at once "to make regular approaches unto the table of the Lord," while those who refused to renew the covenant were to be admonished and "debarred from standing among the people of God."⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Mather, *A Companion for Communicants*, 79, and Mather in Quick, *The Young Man's Claim*, 4-5.

⁹⁷ *Magnalia*, 2:313.

Catechesis was the proper means to prepare children for growth in the church, Mather thought, and a course of instruction should be capped with some occasion marking youths' understanding and conviction. Children should do their part by owning the covenant once they were catechized. In *Cares about the Nurseries*, he addressed this "Duty of young Persons, when they come to those Years wherein they are no longer catechised," explaining that age and knowledge made youth capable of "Engaging for your selves." Come of age, they were obliged to "become sensible of your *Baptismal Engagements* to be the Lords," and to seek full communion. In much the same language Mather had used earlier, *Cares about the Nurseries* counseled church elders to conduct "Regular and Orderly Confirmation (so we may call it) for those baptized as infants."⁹⁸

Mather's writings make clear that he was comfortable using the label of confirmation to describe New England's covenant-owning, catechism-professing ceremony. If in 1702 Mather was recommending that confirmation be instituted in New England, by 1726 he was prepared to describe it as a practice observed there. Some pastors, he reported, performed catechizing as a program culminating in "the Great and Good *Preservative of the Churches*, which has of old been known by the Name of CONFIRMATION." In this New England confirmation, "when the *Children Baptised* in the Churches come to be of Age, the Pastors do send for them, and *Examine*

⁹⁸ *Diary of Cotton Mather* 1: 419-421; Mather, *Cares about the Nurseries* (Boston, 1702), 61, 69.

them discreetly and faithfully, concerning their *Improvement in Knowledge and Conversion* to God, and Resolutions for a Life of PIETY, and *Inclinations* to Remembering and Renewing of their *Baptismal Covenant*." As he had indicated decades before, Mather allowed that those who showed evidence of a "Regenerate Mind" were to be brought into full communion after this examination.⁹⁹

In Mather's conception of the process, confirmation included more than a bare recitation of doctrine. Ministers and elders would use the ceremony to check for signs of religious feeling, even of conversion.¹⁰⁰ In being confirmed, children would own the baptismal covenant parents had pledged for them. Instituting confirmation in colonial churches was not bringing in a new ceremony, Mather argued, nor was it meant to replace conversion narratives altogether. He considered this ceremony a suitable examination for mature children of the church, rather than insisting that such members offer a conversion relation in a separate performance.

⁹⁹ Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae Fratrum NOV-ANGLORUM: A Faithful Account of the DISCIPLINE Professed and Practised in the Churches of New England* (Boston, 1726), 104-105.

¹⁰⁰ This manner of "confirming" children might be viewed as another means that New England ministers strove to "shepherd" their flocks amidst the changing social and ecclesiastical situations of the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. For analysis of the ministry's altered professional status and strategies for evangelism in this period, see David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill, 1972), especially chaps. 9 and 11.

Conclusion

In the latter half of the seventeenth century, many Massachusetts ministers still defended the church polity of the Cambridge Platform but acknowledged a deficiency in it. The spiritual difficulties of unconverted youth called for some action to draw them toward adult church membership. Ministers embraced catechesis as one remedy to the problem. They offered it as a means to inculcate doctrine and morality, and also linked it to ceremonies in which youth affirmed church commitment--ceremonies akin to Protestant confirmation. These occasions offered grown, baptized members opportunity to mark their attainment of "years of discretion" and acquire additional privileges of the church.

New England ministers repeatedly revisited the idea of confirmation. They demonstrated knowledge of the meaning and use of this ceremony for church youth, invoking such exponents of the rite as Bucer, Baxter, and Hanmer. The 1662 synod devised a covenant-owning ceremony that bore close relation to Reformed confirmation rites. However, to uphold New England's distinctive communion policies, ministers did not allow this service to open access to the second sacrament. In covenant renewals of the 1670s, ministers again noted that catechizing should ready youth for church privileges and responsibilities. As congregations rededicated themselves to religious instruction, they also called on the catechized to affirm

fidelity to the church. Solomon Stoddard claimed confirmation in defense of his admissions policies. Attributing children's spiritual difficulties, in part, to churches' neglect of confirmation, Cotton Mather went even further than Stoddard in asserting the necessity of that rite.

In Cotton Mather's advocacy of confirmation, New England Puritans had come full circle in their estimation of the ceremony. Richard Mather followed the logic of Protestant confirmation in constructing an admissions test for adults that made no special provision for church children. Cotton Mather argued that confirmation was a better means of bringing church children to communion, rather than putting them through a test designed for those raised outside the church. Cotton Mather went further than some clergy in advocating confirmation, but other ministers agreed that catechizing prepared the baptized for some adult privileges. From the beginning, New England clergy realized the value of catechisms in building knowledge and piety. By the late seventeenth century, some also came to appreciate its customary use as a preparative to full church membership. Because congregational autonomy allowed for variation among New England churches, some ministers brought moral, catechized young adults to communion, while others praised education but demanded grace for the sacrament. Thus, though New England churches did not all reinstate the links European Protestants established between catechizing

and confirmation--and confirmation and communion--ministers
did perceive catechesis as useful means of educating
potential saints.

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