

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE
CHURCHMAN

MARCH, 1903.

ART. I.—DEFINITE RELIGIOUS TEACHING FOR THE
YOUNG: THE CHURCH CATECHISM AND THE
FREE CHURCH CATECHISM COMPARED.

THE moral of the comparison which I am about to make in this article is that the views and language of both parties in the Education controversy, alike of the denominationalist Churchman and of the undenominationalist Dissenter, need revision.

In an advertisement issued by the Christian Knowledge Society, the "special aim" of a magazine which it publishes is said to be "to present, not a colourless Christianity, but the definite teaching of the Church of England." There is a controversial ring in these phrases, such as warms the heart of militant Churchmen. "Colourless" is a term of reproach, evidently aimed at undenominationalism; "definite teaching" is the pride of the denominationalist. My purpose is to note the instruction provided by our Church for children, and to compare it with what may be supposed to be the colourless Christianity which the Christian Knowledge Society is at this time anxious to repudiate.

The fight for Church schools has made us familiar with these epithets. Churchmen insist upon the definiteness of Church teaching as a treasure which they will never surrender, undenominationalism is denounced as a moral monster, "Cowper-Temple religion" has been spoken of with a certain disgust, and it has been declared that the Church conscience is hurt by the payment of a rate for the teaching of it.

The Church's teaching for children, such as is to prepare them for Confirmation, is authoritatively declared to be set forth in the Church Catechism. There we have our definite, coloured, denominational instruction. Can we find anything to represent similarly the moral monster, the colourless

Christianity, the indefinite undenominationalism from which the children of the working classes are at all costs to be protected? Yes, we have now a Free Church Catechism "for use in home and school." It is said to have been prepared to "meet the widespread, growing demand for a modern manual in the much-needed catechetical instruction of our children." This is one of the multitude of things in which the Free Churches have been during the last fifty years imitating the Church of England. So we are able to put side by side and compare together the Church Catechism and the Undenominational Catechism.

The word "undenominationalism" gives an advantage to the controversialists whose object it is to score off the Dissenters. They fasten at once upon the Unitarians. The Unitarians, they eagerly exclaim, are a denomination. Your principle, they say to the undenominationalists, binds you to teach nothing to which a Unitarian can object. But, as a matter of fact, Unitarians are left out of account by the main body of Cowper-Temple religionists. They are very few amongst the working people; and it would seem from the readiness of Unitarian parents of the upper class to send their children to our public schools that Unitarians are not very anxious about protecting their boys and girls from contact with Church worship and teaching. There is no serious obstacle to our leaving Unitarians out of account.

And the Free Church Catechism is able to claim for itself a remarkably representative character. It has been drawn up by a committee which includes the admitted best men for the purpose of the Congregationalists, the Wesleyan Methodists, the Baptists, the Primitive Methodists, the English Presbyterians, the Methodist New Connexion, the Bible Christians, the United Methodist Free Church. And the chairman, Mr. Hugh Price Hughes, who has been recently followed to the grave with so much admiration and respect, is able to say at the end of his preface: "In view of the distressing controversies of our forefathers, it is profoundly significant and gladdening to be able to add that every question and every answer in this Catechism has been finally adopted without a dissentient vote."

Let us look first at the Church Catechism. It has been common with Dissenting critics to charge our Catechism with being deplorably defective. It has nothing definite, they complain, about the Bible, about the Fall, about the Atonement, about the necessity of a change of heart, about the duty of attending public worship, about the prospects of the converted and the unconverted after death. On these heads, it is true, the Church Catechism lays down nothing. Nor

has it any definition of the Church or of the Trinity. What the Church Catechism does is this: It takes the child as a Christian. It says: "You have been baptized. You were baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. That means that you are the heavenly Father's child, a member of Christ or the Son, a subject of the Holy Ghost. You have to be true to what God makes you; to be loyal to the Father, to Christ, and to the Holy Spirit." That is a summary of the Church Catechism as it was in its original form. The portion which treats of the Sacraments is an appendix added afterwards, and having no connection with what has gone before. It is hardly suited to young children, but it contains the instruction which our Church appoints to be given to those who are looking forward to Confirmation. This part contains the one definition which we find in the Catechism. A Sacrament is therein defined, and an admirable definition it is, but quite the most difficult answer in the Catechism for a young learner to understand. The original Catechism is singularly coherent; it takes for granted the Christian calling, and teaches what that means. It says to the child: "You have had the name of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Ghost put upon you. You are to know and to act in accordance with what you have thus been made."

Our Nonconformist fellow-Christians have for some time been drawing away, each sect from its own peculiar standing-ground, and all towards the theology and the worship and the pastoral practice of the Church of England. But their old denominational habits cling to them. The denominations had their origin in attachment to certain doctrines or views. The particular views round which the association gathered were formulated, and religion became to the Dissenting bodies bound up with peculiar propositions or doctrines. Children were a rather troublesome anomaly to the sects in general; the denominational systems were for grown-up persons. To the Baptists especially childhood was an awkward problem, and it has proved too much for the strict Baptist creed. Having been all so largely Anglicized and Catholicized, the Dissenters have turned their attention to the catechetical instruction of Christian children, and they have succeeded in making a catechism which they can all agree to adopt.

Naturally, they have looked to the Church Catechism, and they have found there nothing with which they have any serious difficulty in agreeing. A formal exception, it is true, must be made with regard to infant baptism, which is assumed in the Church Catechism, and which the Baptist creed rejects. It is hardly reasonable that a child of Baptist parents should be taught to speak of having been baptized. But though the

Baptist tradition would no doubt still be followed by those who belong to the Baptist denomination, I feel pretty sure that Baptists in general are not very unwilling that children, including their own, should be treated as God's children, and members of Christ's body, and subjects of the kingdom of heaven. In the Free Church Catechism, to Question 19—"What is the mystery of the blessed Trinity?"—the children's answer is: "That the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, *into whose name we are baptized*, are one God." I do not press this as necessarily implying that the children who say it have already been baptized, but I think it is significant that Baptists like Dr. Clifford, Dr. Tymms, and Principal Gould should be heartily willing that their children, looking forward to a possible baptism, should be thus mixed up with children who are looking back upon their actual baptism, and that they should accept the Divine threefold Name as underlying the condition and the education of children. In the mouths of all other Free Church children "we are baptized" will naturally mean "we have been baptized."

Looking through the Free Church Catechism, we see that its framers have incorporated in it nearly the whole of the Church Catechism; but they have not adopted its simple method. Their denominationalism clings to them, and they are still bound by the spirit of definition; and the happy rudiments of Christian teaching for children which they have found in the Church Catechism are overlaid by them with patches of propositional theology. The Free Church Catechism begins ominously, "What is the Christian religion?" Young children do not need to be troubled with religions and their distinctions. How, I wonder, should we answer that question? The answer is: "It is the religion founded by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." One almost expects this to be followed by, "Who was Jesus Christ?—The Founder of the Christian religion." It is more historical and Scriptural, I think, to regard the Apostles as the founders of the Christian religion, which might, perhaps, be defined as the faith and worship of which Jesus Christ is the proximate object. Then follows a definition of God, of which I will only say that I prefer to it Question 3 and its answer: "By what name has Jesus taught us to call God?—Our Father in heaven." Question 6 defines sin. "What is sin?—Sin is any thought or feeling, word or act, which either is contrary to God's holy law, or falls short of what it requires." Defining is a difficult art. Could we admit that every thought or feeling which falls short of what God's holy law requires is itself a sin? Our godliest feeling, I should fear, would be a sin against God, in being inadequate. The answer to Question 11, "How did the

Son of God save His people from their sins?" is rather a surprise, but a welcome surprise. It is a simple rehearsal of the middle articles of the Nicene Creed. The answer to Question 14, "What did our Lord accomplish for us by His death on the cross?" is obviously a very cautious one—"By offering Himself a sacrifice without blemish unto God, He fulfilled the requirements of Divine Holiness, atoned for all our sins, and broke the power of sin." "Fulfilled the requirements of Divine Holiness" is a sonorous phrase; whether it would mean anything to a child or not, I think no one could object to it. The Ten Commandments are made the occasion of a welcome tribute to the Revised Version by being given in the words of that Version; but the introduction, which is really a part of the First Commandment—"I am Jehovah thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," and without which the command, "Thou shalt have none other Gods before Me," is incomplete—is omitted. The explanations of the Commandments seek to improve upon those given in the Church Catechism, but some things stated in them are open to exception. The Second Commandment is said to teach us "to worship God . . . not by the use of . . . devices of men, but in such ways as He has Himself appointed." Would it be easy to distinguish ways of worship which God has Himself appointed from ways which men have devised? When Free Church people stand up and sing one of Wesley's hymns to an organ accompaniment, are they worshipping God, not by the use of devices of men, but in a way which God has Himself appointed? The Third Commandment is explained as teaching us to regard and use with deep reverence the holy name of God. Apparently, it is the name "God" that is meant. But the name of the Jewish God was Jehovah. The word "God" was not a very sacred one to the Jews, nor was it to the first Christians. St. Paul writes: "Though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth; as there are gods many, and lords many; to us there is one God, the Father, . . . and one Lord, Jesus Christ." In the Apostle's view, the name that had taken the place of Jehovah to those who believed in Jesus Christ was the Father. And this—to which we may add Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost—is the name which Christians are to hallow. The name God has also, it is true, acquired a secondary sacredness, because we use it to designate the heavenly Father. To say that the Fourth Commandment teaches us to keep one day hallowed for rest *and worship* goes beyond the letter of the Commandment, which says nothing about worship, but only enjoins hallowing the seventh day by rest. The Sixth Commandment, it is said, teaches us "to hold human life sacred."

That is a doubtful doctrine. Human life is sacred, in that it ought to be dedicated to the Divine Will as its creature and instrument; but it has no sacredness in itself, so that it should not be taken or given without scruple. Modern civilization has bred a reverence for human life, as animal and mortal existence, that is excessive and unwarranted. Where, as in most cases, the explanations of the Commandments given in this Catechism challenge no other criticism, it may, perhaps, be doubted whether the phraseology of them is such as to bring home the meaning of what they expound with additional force to the minds of children. Take the last of them: the Tenth Commandment teaches us "not even in our heart to grudge our fellow-man his prosperity, or desire to deprive him of that which is his, but always to cultivate a thankful and contented spirit."

The answer to Question 29, "What special means has God provided to assist us in leading a life of obedience?" has, it will be perceived, a good Anglican sound. The answer is, "His Word, Prayer, the Sacraments, and the Fellowship of the Church." But all these have to be defined. God's word, it is cautiously laid down, "is written in the Holy Bible, which is the inspired record of God's revelation." That is in accordance with our sounder modern views about Holy Scripture. But the definition goes on to add that the record is "given to be our rule of faith and duty." There is no indication in the Bible itself that the literature illustrating the two Covenants was given to be a rule. Being such a record as it is, the Church may very reasonably determine that—in the words of our Article—"whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith." The right way of regarding the Bible is that it should be read as a multifarious series of records of God's gradual revealing of Himself; the wrong way, that it should be turned into a rule of faith and duty, for which it was not intended and is not well fitted. The zeal for definiteness and definition goes to a great length when it asks, What is Prayer? Again, the final words of the answer seem questionable. In prayer, it is said, we ask for such things as the Father in heaven has promised. A child who should take this to mean that we ought not to pray for anything which God has not promised would be needlessly embarrassed. The Lord's Prayer is given and explained in the Catechism. There is a marked variation from the Church Catechism in the explanation of "Give us this day our daily bread." We pray, it is said, that God would "provide what is needful for the body." Why it should not be "needful both for our souls and bodies" I do not understand.

When we come to the fellowship of the Church, we have two answers, the terms of which might be accepted even by High Church Anglicans—"The Holy Catholic Church is that holy society of believers in Christ Jesus which He founded, of which He is the only Head, and in which He dwells by His Spirit; so that, though made up of many communions, organized in various modes, and scattered throughout the world, it is yet one in Him." "Our Lord united His people into this visible brotherhood for the worship of God and the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments; for mutual edification, the administration of discipline, and the advancement of His kingdom." The compilers have not emancipated themselves from the obligation of defining how a true branch of the Catholic Church is to be known; but as the essential mark—according to them—is "holy life and fellowship," it would be difficult to pronounce that any society, as having in no part, at no time, and in no degree had holy life and fellowship, is not a true branch of the Catholic Church. But a Free Church has also to be defined. It is "a church which acknowledges none but Jesus Christ as Head, and therefore exercises its right to interpret and administer His laws without restraint or control by the State." This definition has the appearance of presenting the State as a power distinct and separable from Jesus Christ, arguing, as it does, that for those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as their only Head it is impossible or wrong to be subject, so far as His laws are concerned, to the control of the State. But in fact, according to the principles of the Catechism itself, the State is subject to Christ, its laws should be laws of Christ, and its spirit the Spirit of Christ. "To Jesus Christ has been given all authority in heaven and on earth" (Answer 17). "We pray that the Gospel may spread and prevail until Jesus Christ governs every relation of human life" (Answer 32, ii.). "The duty of the Church to the State is to observe all the laws of the State unless contrary to the teaching of Christ . . . and to imbue the nation with the Spirit of Christ" (Answer 37). As well might it be said of a local corporation that it acknowledges the nation only as its head, and *therefore* exercises its right to interpret and administer its laws without restraint or control by the Local Government Board or the Courts of Law. The Church of England acknowledges Jesus Christ as the only Lord to which it owes absolute obedience, and so, indeed, does every individual Christian. But the allegiance of the Methodist to Christ does not make it impossible or wrong for him to be subject to the Legal Hundred; and we of the Church of England do not feel that we are disloyal to Christ, the Head of our English State, in accepting Bishops nominated by the

Crown or in our other submissions to the control of the State. We know of no reason, in the teaching of Scripture or in historical experience, for believing that the Divine authority is exercised more certainly through the Wesleyan Methodist Conference or a Presbyterian assembly or the Pope of Rome than through the British Crown and Parliament.

After defining the Catholic Church and Free Churches, the Catechism has the Christian ministry to define. And again the definition is one that will pass muster amongst Christians in general, including Anglicans—"A Christian minister is one who is called of God and the Church to be a teacher of the Word and a pastor of the flock of Christ." But the next question surely shows how little thought there has been of children in the framing of this Catechism—"How may the validity of such a ministry be proved?" The word "validity" is a prize word of controversy. It lends itself to interminable arguments, and may mean anything or nothing. According to this Catechism, a ministry is decisively proved to be valid by the conversion of sinners and the edification of the body of Christ. Yes; but is there any invalid or non-valid ministry? If an individual minister—say a missionary—after two years, or five years, or ten years of labour cannot appeal to the conversion of sinners and the edification of the body of Christ as having been manifestly wrought by him, is his ministry to be pronounced non-valid? Then, valid will not be a word of much practical meaning.

In its treatment of the Sacraments of the Church the Catechism follows the Church Catechism very closely, omitting the question and answer about infant baptism.

As might be expected, the Catechism concludes with the future state. But the compilers show the influence of that modern theology, which is, in fact, the revived theology of the Church of England, and their falling away from what their fathers would have insisted on as faithfulness, by looking only on the bright side. They describe what those who are saved through Christ may hope for, but they say not a word of what any who are not saved have to fear.

On the whole, I think it will be evident that those who have expressed with such wonderful unanimity the present views of the Free Churchmen of England have had in their minds grown-up persons, and the evangelical theologies, and the changes wrought of late years in those theologies, far more than the children for whom the Catechism is professedly written. Their Christianity is, in substance, what I have called the revived theology of the Church of England, but coloured by worn-out controversies and cumbered with ineffectual definitions.

A "colourless Christianity" sounds like something wrong, but I am not quite sure what character the word "colourless" represents. If the colour intended is of the kind which marks different countries on a map, and therefore denotes what is peculiar to a community or an age, then we might say that we find in the Church Catechism a colourless Christianity. The teaching contained in it is free from the raw colours of denominational and dogmatic Christianity with which the Free Church Catechism is lingeringly patched. It is, moreover, almost entirely without such definitions as those which the Free Church representatives have thought themselves bound to offer to the children of their communions. It does not define Christianity, God, Sin, the Atonement, the Trinity, the Bible, Prayer, the Church, the Ministry, the Future State. Its one definition is that of a Sacrament, which is not in the Catechism which the Office for Baptism had in view. The Church Catechism is so far undistinctive that it might be used—with the single exception that its implying of infant baptism would not suit the Baptists—by all the evangelical bodies, by the Roman and the Greek Churches, and even by some of the Unitarians.

But if the word "colourless" is taken as meaning anæmic, then the teaching of the Church is not that to which it ought to be applied. The calculated statements of propositional theology do not exactly beat with a living pulse or glow with a living colour. Our Church teaching assumes that God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, and has taken us from earliest infancy into fellowship with Himself—a fellowship which calls for ever-growing knowledge of God and His ways, and demands a life in accordance with it; a fellowship which covers all human relations and activities, and which is charged on God's side with helps and promises. It seeks to awaken our children into a consciousness of their connection with the living God. It is emphatically undenominational and undogmatic because it is catholic, personal, and vital, because it instructs in a Gospel rather than in a religion.

J. LLEWELYN DAVIES.

