



# AN EXPOSITION ON THE SHORTER CATECHISM

INCLUDES THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION  
AND THE LONGER CATECHISM

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CHRISTIAN HERITAGE





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## PUBLISHER'S INTRODUCTION

Alexander Whyte (1836-1921) was a leading Scottish churchman of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He occupied the prestigious pulpit of St George's Free Church of Scotland in Edinburgh, where he succeeded the noted preacher and theologian Dr. Robert S. Candlish. From 1909 he was also Principal of New College, Edinburgh.

Whyte was a prolific author. In addition to his *Exposition of the Shorter Catechism* his writings include *Bible Characters* (also published by Christian Focus), *Bunyan's Characters*, *The Life, Walk and Conversation of Jesus*, and *The Apostle Paul*. He also published biographical studies, including books on Samuel Rutherford, James Fraser of Brea, Thomas Goodwin and Thomas Shepherd.

In some ways Whyte is an enigma: although he urged his hearers and readers to read Puritan literature, yet he supported liberal theologians in their studies which undermined much of the previous conservative theological outlook of the Scottish Presbyterian church. In this volume, Whyte includes many comments from Puritan and other Reformed theologians and writers.

Whyte was a strong supporter of the union between the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church which took place in 1900 with the formation of the United Free Church of Scotland.

In this edition of Whyte's *Exposition of the Shorter Catechism*, a few changes have been made. First, the book was initially designed for use in Bible Classes and contained study questions at the end of each chapter; since many of these questions alluded to books now no longer available, it was decided to omit them. Second, in his explanations of the Catechism's Answers, Whyte would direct his reader to consult particular volumes, and since many of these are no longer in print, these directions are also omitted. Third, Whyte often directs his readers to compare the words of the Shorter Catechism with those found under the same theme in the Westminster Confession of Faith and in the Larger Catechism; in order to enable the user to follow Whyte's direction, we have included at the end of the volume the text of both the Westminster Confession and the Larger Catechism.

In connection to the Westminster Confession of Faith, Christian Focus publishes, in its Christian Heritage imprint, Robert Shaw's *Exposition of*





*the Westminster Confession*, and in its Mentor imprint, *The Westminster Confession of Faith in the Twenty-First Century*, a three-volume set in which a range of modern Reformed scholars discuss the teachings of the Westminster Confession.





## QUESTION 1

### What is the chief end of man?

*Answer: Man's chief end<sup>1</sup> is to glorify God,<sup>2</sup> and to enjoy him for ever.<sup>3</sup>*

If an assembly of philosophers had been convened at Athens to compose a catechism of religion and morals for the youth of Greece, to a certainty it would have opened with the very question before us. For almost all the dialogues and discussions of the fathers of moral philosophy revolve around this supreme and everlasting question, What is the final cause and chief end of man? Moral philosophy can put this question, but it is a theology drawn from the Holy Scriptures that can alone supply the answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.

It has often been pointed out, that full as the Shorter Catechism is of ripe Christian doctrine, it is at the same time cast into a thoroughly scholastic shape. The Westminster Divines who drew this document were deeply-read and scholarly men. 'It is perhaps new to some of our readers to be told, that the profound distinctions of an Aristotle and a Bacon are employed in the construction of that humble primer called The Shorter Catechism' (Macfarlan's Preface to Paterson's Catechism).

*Man's chief end ('chief and highest end', Larger Catechism).*

Our well-known word *end* most commonly carries the sense of a limit, a boundary, a termination. But it also means an aim, a purpose, an intention, a design. And it is in this latter sense the word is used in the

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1. So much of every Question, both in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, is repeated in the Answer as maketh every answer an entire proposition, or sentence, in itself; to the end the learner may further improve it upon all occasions, for his increase in knowledge and piety, even out of the course of catechizing as well as in it (Cornelius Burgess, Prolocutor; Henry Roborough, Scriba; Adoniram Byfield, Scriba).

For an excellent account of the Westminster Assembly, from which the Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms emanated, the student is recommended to read the introduction to John MacPherson's *Exposition of the Westminster Confession*.

2. 1 Corinthians 10:31: Do all to the glory of God. Romans 11:36: To whom be glory for ever. Amen.

3. Psalm 73:25: Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. Verse 26: God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. Verse 28: But it is good for me to draw near to God.





text. The student will at once see that this question and answer carefully recognize other ends in man besides his 'chief' end. For it could not with propriety be said that man had a 'chief' end unless he had also inferior, secondary and subordinate ends. The Catechism does not concern itself with them, but it is aware of their existence; it implies them in passing by them to pursue man's chief end.

*to glorify God*

Glory in its scriptural use is a divine word setting forth, struggling to set forth, a divine thing. The divine glory is the revelation of the divine perfections in the works of creation, providence and redemption. God's glory stands originally in His possession of all being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth; and He is glorified in the manifestation of Himself to all His receptive and responsive creatures. 'The glory of God,' says Calvin, 'is when we know what He is.' 'Glory is the divinity manifest' (Bengel). In the fourth verse of the seventeenth of John we are supplied with an explanation of this work which will admit of being adapted and applied to the whole creation of God. In our Lord's report and prayer contained in that great chapter, He says, 'I have glorified Thee on the earth.' And then, as if in explanation, He adds, 'I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do.' Now this same explanation of the word, carried through the whole creation, and adapted to the nature and capacity of each part, will make the meaning of this great word as clear as it is capable of being made. 'Man's chief end,' therefore, is to 'finish the work God has given him to do,' and what that work is the Catechism will labour in both its parts to set forth.'

*and to enjoy him*

Joy is the purest, deepest and most satisfying delight that can possess the heart of man; and the Scriptures continually set forth God as man's chiefest joy. As thus: 'In Thy presence is fulness of joy.... Then will I go to God, my exceeding joy.... Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.... before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.' See Answer 38: 'perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.'

*for ever*

Never to end, eternal, everlasting. These words *for ever* occur four times altogether in the Catechism. In the answer before us they assure us that our enjoyment of God shall never come to an end. The very same words





are found along with the pains of hell in Answer 19; with the continuance of two distinct natures in Christ in Answer 21; and with God's kingdom, power, and glory in Answer 107.

### Uses

1. Thomas Carlyle, in speaking against modern materialism in 1876, made this confession: 'The older I grow, and I am now upon the brink of eternity, the more comes back to me the first sentence of the Catechism which I learned when a child, and the fuller and deeper its meaning becomes, "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever."' And Dr Binnie says: 'Of the numerous excellences that have endeared the Westminster Shorter Catechism to so many churches on both sides of the Atlantic, I am disposed to reckon this among the greatest, that it opens with such a solemn announcement of the nobility of human nature. I know no other Catechism that opens so grandly.'

2. 'Indeed, this seems properly to be an affair of divine revelation. In order to be determined what was designed, in the creating of the astonishing fabric of the universe we behold, it becomes us to attend to, and rely on, what *He* has told us, who was the architect. He best knows His works which He has wrought' (Edwards).

## QUESTION 2

### What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

*Answer: The word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments<sup>1</sup>, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.<sup>2</sup>*

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1. 2 Timothy 3:16: All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Ephesians 2:20: Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.

2. 1 John 1:3-4: That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.





The student who would understand and appreciate the Shorter Catechism must at every turn attend to the construction and development of this orderly and elaborate work. The foundations of all religion, natural and revealed, have already been laid in the doctrine, 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.' And now the second Question naturally and logically asks: 'What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him?'

#### *The Word*

The Word of God is the title of a Divine and Eternal Person before it is applied in a subordinate and historical sense to the communications made through Him, and recorded in the Holy Scriptures (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 19:13). And all the divinity and authority of the written word are ultimately derived from the original divinity and authority of that Divine Person who is the Eternal and Living Word. 'Therefore, as all revelations from heaven are duly designated by the title of the Word of God, so the highest place must be assigned to that substantial Word, the source of all inspiration, which, as being liable to no variation, remains for ever one and the same with God, and is God' (Calvin).

The Word of God in the text, however, does not bear this high sense. 'The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience' (Larger Catechism).

#### *the scriptures*

Anything written, writings, documents; but now universally used by way of distinction to describe the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments.

#### *the Old and New Testaments*

The word *testament* was originally a term of law. And in legal language it still designates that testifying instrument by means of which a man declares his will as to the disposal of his possessions after his death. The word is used repeatedly in this sense in the Epistle to the Hebrews. To explain fully how it came about that this word *testament* stands as the translation of *covenant*, first in the Latin versions of the Scriptures, and then through the Latin in our own version, would lead us into matter unsuitable for this Commentary. Suffice it to say that the original Greek term is seen passing into our testament through the Scotch law word







*disposition*, and that the words *Old and New Testaments* are now appropriated to designate the two collections of canonical books belonging to the two great economies or covenants under which God has successively placed His people (see the Confession, chapter 7: 4-6).

‘The Greek word for covenant was never naturalized in the Latin of the Western and African Churches, and the writers of those Churches were for a time undecided as to what equivalent they should use for it, and wavered between *fœdus*, a ‘covenant’; *instrumentum*, a ‘deed’; and *testamentum*, a ‘will’. The earlier Latin writers, such as Tertullian, use both the latter words, but state that the last was the more generally accepted term. As such, it passed first into the early Latin versions of the Scriptures, and then into Jerome’s Vulgate, and so became familiar through the whole of Latin Christendom’ (Plumptre).

‘Tertullian (160-240) is the first writer, I believe, who uses the word “Testamentum” in its ordinary acceptance, though it seems to have been current before his time’ (Westcott).

*the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him*

A rule in its proper and original signification is an instrument by means of which we draw the straightest and shortest line from one point to another (Greek, *canon*, a reed or rule, whence come a series of English words, all implying the idea of straightness: cane, canal, channel, cannon, etc.). And accordingly, when the term is used in a moral and religious sense, it imports nothing else than a direction, or instruction, or command, by attending to which a man best attains the end desired. In the polemical phrase, *only rule*, there is a trace left of those burning controversies in which the Reformers and Puritans were engaged with Popish and Prelatic divines. This position was taken up against the Romish and Anglican practice of adding apocryphal writings and oral traditions to the rule of faith as it is contained in the canonical Scriptures. Hooker’s *Ecclesiastical Polity*, the greatest work of English theology, and one of the chief ornaments of English literature, rose out of this hot contention. It is a standard work on Anglican doctrine, and as such it is a *via media* between Romanism on the one hand and Puritanism on the other. The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, on the other hand, are thoroughgoing Protestant symbols on this as on other disputed questions. And the present doctrine of the Catechism is drawn directly against the Romanist position, which maintains that





revelation is partly written and partly unwritten; and that the rule of faith includes both Scripture and tradition.

‘Tradition is always represented by Romanists as not only the interpreter, but the complement of the Scriptures. The Bible, therefore, according to the Church of Rome, is incomplete. It does not contain all the Church is bound to believe; nor are the doctrines which it does contain therein fully or clearly made known’ (Hodge).

But one who once occupied the *via media* on this question, while yet he occupied it wrote thus: ‘Scripture has a gift which tradition has not; it is fixed, tangible, accessible, readily applicable, and besides all this, perfectly true in all its parts and relations; in a word, it is a sacred *text*. Tradition gives us little or nothing that can be handled and argued from. We can argue only from a text, we can argue freely only from an inspired text. Thus Scripture is in itself specially fitted for that office which we assign to it in our Article: to be a repository of manifold and various doctrines, a means of proof, a standard of appeal, an umpire and test between truth and falsehood in all emergencies.’

### Uses

1. ‘Alas! many have the Bible, and use it but little; and many use it amiss, because they know not its right name. It is well warrantably called, from its contents, on its title-page, the Old and New Testaments of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But how few, in reading this title, mind the use and virtue of the blood of Christ Jesus, which turned the covenant of God’s grace into the testament of Christ, and thereby sealed and confirmed all the good words and good things in that covenant!’ (Traill).

2. ‘Concerning the actual state of man in this world; considering, I say, what he is, any standard of duty which does not convict him of real and multiplied sins, and of his utter inability to please God of his own strength, is untrue; and any rule of life which leaves him contented with himself, without fear, without anxiety, without humiliation, is deceptive; it is the blind leading the blind; yet such, in one shape or other, is the religion of the whole earth beyond the pale of the Christian Church’ (Newman).