

Westminster Confession, Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms - Wikipedia

The **Westminster Confession of Faith** is a Reformed confession of faith. Drawn up by the 1646 [Westminster Assembly](#) as part of the [Westminster Standards](#) to be a confession of the [Church of England](#), it became and remains the "[subordinate standard](#)" of doctrine in the [Church of Scotland](#) and has been influential within [Presbyterian](#) churches worldwide.

In 1643, the [English Parliament](#) called upon "learned, godly and judicious Divines" to meet at [Westminster Abbey](#) in order to provide advice on issues of worship, doctrine, government and discipline of the Church of England. Their meetings, over a period of five years, produced the confession of faith, as well as a [Larger Catechism](#) and a [Shorter Catechism](#). For more than three hundred years, various churches around the world have adopted the confession and the catechisms as their standards of doctrine, subordinate to the [Bible](#). For the [Church of Scotland](#) and the various denominations which spring from it directly, though, only the Confession and not the Catechisms is the subordinate standard, the Catechisms not being re-legislated in 1690.

The Westminster Confession of Faith was modified and adopted by [Congregationalists](#) in England in the form of the [Savoy Declaration](#) (1658) and by [Particular Baptists](#) in the form of the [Second London Baptist Confession](#) (1677/1689). English Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and some others, would together come to be known as [Nonconformists](#), because they did not conform to the [Act of Uniformity \(1662\)](#) establishing the Church of England as the only legally approved church, though they were in many ways united by their common confessions, built on the Westminster Confession.

Historical situation

The Assertion of Liberty of Conscience by the Independents at the Westminster Assembly of Divines, painted by [John Rogers Herbert](#), c. 1844

During the [English Civil War](#) (1642–1649), the [English Parliament](#) raised armies in an alliance with the [Covenanters](#) who by then were the [de facto](#) government of [Scotland](#), against the forces of [Charles I](#), King of England, Scotland and Ireland. The purpose of the Westminster Assembly, in which 121 Puritan clergymen participated, was to provide official documents for the reformation of the Church of England. The Church of Scotland had recently overthrown the bishops imposed by the King and reinstated presbyterianism (see [Bishops' Wars](#)). For this reason, as a condition for entering into the alliance with the [English Parliament](#), the [Scottish Parliament](#) formed the [Solemn League and Covenant](#) with the English Parliament, which meant that the Church of England would abandon [episcopalianism](#) and consistently adhere to reformed standards of doctrine and worship. The Confession and Catechisms were produced in order to secure the help of the Scots against the king.

The Scottish Commissioners who were present at the Assembly were satisfied with the Confession of Faith, and in 1646, the document was sent to the English parliament to be ratified, and submitted to the [General Assembly](#) of the [Scottish Kirk](#). The [Church of Scotland](#) adopted the document, without amendment, in 1647. In England, the [House of Commons](#) returned the document to the Assembly with the requirement to compile a list of proof texts from Scripture. After vigorous debate, the Confession was then in part adopted as the Articles of Christian Religion in 1648, by act of the English parliament, omitting section 4 of chapter 20 (Of Christian Liberty), sections 4–6 of chapter 24 (Of Marriage and Divorce),

and chapters 30 and 31 (Of Church Censures and Of Synods and Councils). The next year, the Scottish parliament ratified the Confession without amendment.

In 1660, the [Restoration](#) of the British monarchy and Anglican episcopacy resulted in the nullification of these acts of the two parliaments. However, when [William of Orange](#) replaced the Catholic [King James VII of Scotland and II of England](#) on the thrones of Scotland, England and Ireland, he gave royal assent to the Scottish parliament's ratification of the Confession (but not the Catechisms), again without change, in 1690.^[1]

Contents

The confession is a systematic exposition of Calvinist theology (which [neo-orthodox](#) scholars refer to as "[scholastic Calvinism](#)"), influenced by [Puritan](#) and [covenant theology](#).^[2] It includes doctrines common to most of [Christianity](#) such as the [Trinity](#) and [Jesus'](#) sacrificial death and [resurrection](#), and it contains doctrines specific to [Protestantism](#) such as [sola scriptura](#) and [sola fide](#). Its more controversial features include the covenant of works with [Adam](#), the Puritan doctrine that assurance of salvation is not a necessary consequence of faith, a [minimalist conception of worship](#), and [Puritan Sabbatarianism](#).

It states that the [Pope](#) is the [Antichrist](#), which was a very common belief in seventeenth-century England.^[3] It also stated that the Catholic [mass](#) is a form of [idolatry](#), that the civil magistrates have divine authority to punish heresy, and rules out marriage with non-Christians.

Holy Scriptures, the Trinity and predestination

The confession begins with a definition of the [Bible's](#) content as well as an explication of its role within the church. Chapter 1 declares that the Bible, both [Old](#) and [New Testaments](#), is the [inspired](#), written [Word of God](#). As the Word of God, the Bible is considered "the rule of faith and life." The Holy Scriptures are said to possess [infallible truth](#) and divine authority, containing "all things necessary for [God's] own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life", so that no new [revelations](#) or [human traditions](#) can be added to it. The Confession of Faith states that, in the original languages, the Bible was kept pure and authentic. Because of this, the [Scriptures alone](#) are the church's final authority in all religious disputes. The confession states that "the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture" is "the supreme judge" of [councils](#), [ancient writers](#), doctrines, and [private revelation](#).^[4]

After describing the [attributes of God](#), chapter 2 of the confession endorses the traditional doctrine of the [Trinity](#), which holds that the one and only [God](#) exists as three persons, "of one substance, power, and eternity", namely, [God the Father](#), [God the Son](#), and God the [Holy Spirit](#).^[5]

Chapter 3 affirms the Calvinist doctrine of [predestination](#): that God foreordained who would be among the [elect](#) (and therefore [saved](#)), while he passed by those who would be [damned](#) for their [sins](#). The confession states that from [eternity](#) God did "freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass". By God's decree, "some men and [angels](#) are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death."^[6]

Chapter 4 recounts the [Genesis creation narrative](#) and affirms that human beings were created in the [image of God](#) with immortal [souls](#), having fellowship with God and [dominion over other creatures](#).^[7] Chapter 6 recounts the [Fall of Man](#) whereby humans

committed [original sin](#) and became subject to [total depravity](#). According to the confession, the consequence of the fall and sin is that sinners are guilty before God, under [divine wrath](#) and the [curse](#) of the [law](#), and, ultimately, subject to [spiritual death](#).^[8] The confession states that the fall and all other sins were foreordained by [divine providence](#); however, the confession also teaches that sin "proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God". God cannot be the author of sin because he is entirely holy and righteous.^[9]

Covenant theology, Christ's mediation and free will

Chapter 7 is a description of [covenant theology](#), which holds that God has dealt with humans through various [covenants](#). In the first covenant, a covenant of works, [Adam](#) and his descendants were promised life on the condition of perfect obedience. The fall made it impossible for man to keep this covenant, so God made another covenant, this one called the covenant of [grace](#). In the covenant of grace, God freely offered sinners life and salvation by [Jesus Christ](#). As part of this covenant, God promises to give the elect the Holy Spirit to make them willing and able to believe.^[10]

According to the confession, the covenant of grace was administered differently in the time of the law (during Old Testament times) and in the time of [the gospel](#) (during and after New Testament times). Under the law, the covenant was administered by promises, [prophecies](#), [sacrifices](#), [circumcision](#), the [paschal lamb](#), and other [types](#) and ordinances instituted among the [Jewish people](#). These all anticipated Jesus Christ, the promised [Messiah](#), and were sufficient to give the elect of that time [forgiveness of sins](#) and eternal salvation. The confession teaches that under the gospel, the covenant of grace is dispensed more fully through the preaching of the Bible and the administration of the [sacraments](#) of [baptism](#) and the [Lord's Supper](#).^[10]

Chapter 8 declares that Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, was chosen by God the Father to be the [mediator between God and man](#) and hold the [threefold office](#) of prophet, priest, and king. It affirms his [incarnation](#), [virgin birth](#), and [dual nature](#) as both God and man. In his human nature, Christ was [without sin](#). He was [crucified](#) and [buried](#), and the confession teaches that he was bodily [resurrected](#) and afterward [ascended into heaven](#) where he [intercedes on behalf of the living](#). It also teaches that [Christ will return to earth](#) to judge the world.^[11]

Chapter 8 also describes Christ's [sacrificial](#) death as [satisfying](#) God's justice and attaining both humanity's [reconciliation with God](#) and everlasting life for the elect. Salvation is granted to individuals by means of the word of God and the Holy Spirit, who persuades them to believe and obey.^[11] Chapter 9 teaches that man's will is free, and that because of the fall, man lost the ability to do anything spiritually pleasing to God, and man's will became enslaved to his sinful nature. Man, after conversion, regains the ability to please God and to choose good, but sin remains within. Complete [sinless perfection](#) is only attainable after death in the state of [glorification](#).^[12]

Salvation

Further information: [Ordo salutis](#)

Chapters 10 through 18 describe various phases or aspects of salvation. The confession teaches that—by the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the word—God [effectually calls](#) the elect out of the state of sin and death toward [faith](#) in Jesus Christ and spiritual life. It teaches that "elect infants" and "all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word" are [regenerated](#) and saved.^[13]

Chapter 11 covers the doctrine of [justification](#). It affirms the Reformation doctrines of [justification by faith alone](#) and the [imputation of Christ's righteousness](#) to the elect (the Catholic teaching of [infused righteousness](#) is specifically rejected). Justification can never be lost, but the justified are still able to sin and, as a result, [confession](#) and [repentance](#) must be ongoing.^[14] Chapter 12 states that all who are justified also partake in the grace of [adoption](#) and become [children of God](#).^[15] In addition, those who are effectually called and regenerated are also [sanctified](#). In sanctification, the dominion of sin is eliminated and [lust](#) is weakened and suppressed as the individual grows in [holiness](#).^[16]

Chapter 14 defines saving faith as that which enables people to believe to the saving of their [souls](#). The confession states that it is the work of the Holy Spirit and is ordinarily accomplished by the preaching of the word. Saving faith is strengthened and increased by the preaching of the word, the sacraments, and prayer. This faith enables a person to believe that whatever is revealed in the Bible is true and to rest on Christ alone for eternal life.^[17]

Chapter 15 stresses the need for [repentance](#) alongside saving faith. While repentance (rejecting sin and committing to obey God's commandments) does not earn forgiveness (which is the result of divine grace), the confession states that no sinner "may expect pardon without it." The confession also describes the role of private and public [confession of sin](#) in the life of a Christian.^[18] Chapter 16 explains the role of [good works](#) (actions done in obedience to God's commandments) in the Christian life and their relationship to salvation. Good works are said to be the result of the Holy Spirit's influence and are evidence of true faith; however, good works cannot earn or merit salvation or forgiveness of sins.^[19]

Chapter 17 presents the doctrine of the [perseverance of the saints](#), which holds that it is impossible for those effectually called to "fall away" from the state of grace or, in other words, lose their salvation.^[20] Chapter 18 states that believers can receive [assurance of faith](#). This assurance is based on "the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God". The confession does not teach that assurance is instantaneous upon conversion; rather, it states that "a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties, before he be partaker of it".^[21]

Law, Christian liberty and worship

Chapter 19 discusses [God's law](#) and [Christian ethics](#). The confession states that while the ceremonial parts of [biblical law](#) have been [abrogated](#) under the New Covenant, the [moral](#) law as described in the [Ten Commandments](#) and the "general equity" of the civil law in the Old Testament remains binding to all people and nations. While true believers are neither "justified, or condemned" by the law, it serves "as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty". The confession also teaches that the Holy Spirit enables "the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done."^[22]

Chapter 20 states that "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men." The purpose of [Christian liberty](#) is to enable Christians to "serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him." The confession warns that Christian liberty cannot be used to justify sinful behavior or to resist lawful secular and church authority.^[23]

Chapter 21 describes the acceptable parameters of [Reformed worship](#) as governed by the [regulative principle of worship](#). It also outlines a [Puritan Sabbatarian](#) position in regards to

Christian behavior on [Sunday](#), the [Christian Sabbath](#).^[24] Chapter 22 describes the appropriate use of [oaths](#) and solemn [vows](#), which are part of religious worship because the person calls upon God.^[25]

Civil government and marriage

Chapter 23 describes the role of the civil authorities in relation to the church. Governments are ordained by God to maintain justice and peace and to punish evil doers. The [civil magistrate](#) has no right to interfere with the preaching of the word of God or administration of the sacraments. The [power of the keys](#) is reserved exclusively to church authorities. Nevertheless, the civil magistrate has a duty to preserve church unity, suppress heresy, and prevent corruption and abuse within the church. To fulfill these obligations, the magistrate has authority to convene [synods](#) and ensure that its deliberations are agreeable to "the mind of God."^[26]

Chapter 23 also teaches that Christians are obligated to pray for civil authorities and to obey lawful commands. A magistrate's legal authority is not lost because of unbelief or religious differences. The confession denies that the [Pope](#) has any jurisdiction over civil magistrates or authority to deprive magistrates of their office if he determines them to be heretics.^[26]

Chapter 24 covers Reformed teaching on [marriage](#) and [divorce](#). Marriage is to be [heterosexual](#) and [monogamous](#). The purpose of marriage is to provide for the mutual help of husband and wife, the birth of [legitimate](#) children, the growth of the church, and the prevention of "uncleanness." The confession discourages [interfaith marriage](#) with non-Christians, Roman Catholics, or "other idolaters". In addition, godly persons should not be "[unequally yoked](#)" in marriage to "notoriously wicked" persons. [Incestuous](#) marriage, defined [according to biblical guidelines](#), is also prohibited. The only grounds for [divorce](#) are [adultery](#) and willful abandonment by a spouse.^[27]

Church

Chapter 25 addresses [Reformed ecclesiology](#) or the teachings about the [Christian Church](#). The confession teaches that the church is [catholic](#) (or universal) and both invisible and visible. The [invisible church](#) is made up of all the elect who will ever live. Christ is the [head of the church](#), and the church is the [body of Christ](#) and the [bride of Christ](#). The [visible church](#) includes all people alive throughout the world who "profess the true religion" and their children. It is described as the [kingdom of Christ](#) and the house and family of God. The confession teaches that there is no ordinary possibility of salvation outside of the visible church. It is said that Christ gave to the visible church "the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God" for the perfecting of the [saints](#).^[28]

The confession teaches that local churches can be more or less pure depending on how faithfully they adhere to correct doctrine and worship. Yet, it acknowledges that even the purest churches might contain some theological error, while other churches have become so corrupted that they can no longer be called churches of Christ but instead are of [Satan](#). The confession affirms that only Jesus Christ can be head of the church. It states that the [pope](#) is an [Antichrist](#) who "exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God."^[28]

Chapter 26 presents Reformed teaching on the [communion of saints](#). This is the spiritual union that Christians have with Christ and with one another that allows them to share in the grace, suffering, death, resurrection, and glory of Christ.^[29]

Sacraments

Chapter 27 summarizes Reformed sacramental theology. It states that [sacraments](#) were established by God as "signs and seals" of the covenant of grace to represent Christ and his benefits, to visibly differentiate members of the church from the rest of world and draw them to God's service. The confession teaches that in every sacrament there is a spiritual relation between the sign and what is being signified; because of this, the names and effects of one are attributed to the other. The effectiveness of a sacrament depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit and the [words of institution](#), which contains a promise of benefit to [worthy receivers](#). The confession teaches that only ordained ministers can provide the sacraments, of which there are only two: [baptism](#) and the [Lord's Supper](#).^[30]

Chapter 28 presents a summary of [Reformed baptismal theology](#). Baptism joins a person to the visible church and signifies the person's [union with Christ](#), regeneration, forgiveness of sin and [newness of life](#). Individuals should be baptized in water using the [Trinitarian formula](#) ("in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"). [Baptism by immersion](#) is not necessary; [affusion](#) and [aspersion](#) are acceptable modes. The confession approves of [infant baptism](#) if one or both parents are Christians. While it teaches that neglecting baptism is a "great sin", the confession does not endorse [baptismal regeneration](#). It states that it is possible to be regenerated without baptism, and unregenerated with baptism. This is because the effectiveness of baptism is not tied to the moment in time it is administered; the grace promised is granted by the Holy Spirit to the elect according to God's own will and at the time of his choosing. According to the confession, baptism is to be received only once.^[31]

Chapter 29 summarizes Presbyterian beliefs about the Lord's Supper. It states that the sacrament is to be observed in the church until the end of the world "for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death; the sealing all benefits thereof, unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto Him; and, to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body."^[32]

The confession states that the Lord's Supper is not the actual [sacrifice of Christ](#) but rather a commemoration of Christ's one sacrifice for the remission of sins and an offering of praise to God. It explicitly condemns the Roman Catholic Church's teaching of "the popish sacrifice of the [mass](#)".^[32] It also rejects the Roman Catholic doctrine of [transubstantiation](#), which states that after consecration by a priest the bread and wine miraculously become the [body](#) and [blood of Christ](#). Rather, the confession teaches that communicants receive the body and blood of Christ and all the benefits of his death spiritually by faith, while the bread and wine remain physically unchanged. Ignorant, wicked and ungodly persons may eat the bread and wine, but they do not receive Christ. Instead, these unworthy persons are "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" and commit great sin; for this reason, such persons should not be admitted to the sacrament.^[32]

Church government and discipline

Further information: [Presbyterian polity](#)

Chapter 30 describes the role of church officers, who are appointed by Christ to govern the church. These officers hold the [keys of the kingdom](#), giving them power to [discipline church members](#) through admonition, suspension from the Lord's Supper for a period of time, and [excommunication](#), according to the severity of the offense. Church discipline is for the purpose of leading sinful church members to repentance, deterring others from similar behavior, vindicating the honor of Christ, and preventing the wrath of God from falling on the entire church.^[33]

Chapter 31 states that [synods](#) and church councils have authority to settle religious controversies, make rules for the church and public worship, and judge cases of misconduct in the church. While synods may be called by civil authorities, they only have jurisdiction over ecclesiastical affairs and are not to intervene in civil affairs except "by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary; or, by way of advice".^[34]

Eschatology

Chapters 32 and 33 concern [Christian eschatology](#). Chapter 32 describes what occurs after death—while the body decomposes, the immortal [soul](#) immediately returns to God. The souls of the righteous are then made perfect in holiness and received into heaven where they "behold the face of God" and wait for the redemption of their bodies. The souls of the wicked are sent to hell where they remain in torment until the judgment. The confession rejects the idea of [purgatory](#) because it is not present in scripture. The confession teaches that on the last day, those alive will not die but will be changed, and all the dead will be [resurrected](#) with the same bodies they had when alive. The bodies of the unjust will be "raised to dishonour", but the bodies of the just will be raised "unto honour" (See also [Glorification](#)).^[35]

Chapter 33 describes the [Last Judgment](#) in which the Father will give Christ authority to judge all [apostate angels](#) and every person that has lived on earth. Those judged will "give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds" and will "receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil." God's purpose in dispensing judgment is to show the glory of his mercy—by saving the elect—and of his justice—by the damnation of the reprobate. The righteous will receive [eternal life](#) in the presence of God, and the wicked will receive eternal torment and destruction. The date and time of the Last Judgment is unknown.^[36]

Westminster Larger Catechism

The **Westminster Larger Catechism**, along with the [Westminster Shorter Catechism](#), is a central [catechism](#) of [Calvinists](#) in the [English](#) tradition throughout the world.

History

In 1643 when the [Long Parliament](#) of England called the [Westminster Assembly](#) to produce the [Westminster Confession](#), it also asked for a directory of "catechising". The Assembly asked [Herbert Palmer](#) to produce a draft of the Larger Catechism. [Robert Baillie](#) and other [Scottish](#) delegates found the work disappointing. In December 1643 a committee was formed to write the Catechism. In January 1647 the [Assembly](#) gave up writing one [catechism](#) and split it into two. The [Westminster Shorter Catechism](#) was to be "easier to read and concise for beginners" and the Larger Catechism was to be "more exact and comprehensive". The Catechism was completed by the [Westminster Assembly](#) in 1647. It was then adopted by the General Assembly of the [Church of Scotland](#) in 1648 and (with modifications relating to the civil magistrate) by the [Presbyterian](#) Synod of [New York](#) and [Philadelphia](#) in 1788, and by the [Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.](#), upon its formation the following year. In 1967, it was dropped by the [United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.](#) in the formulation of their *Book of Confessions*. However, it was embraced by the successor denominations such as the [Presbyterian Church \(U.S.A.\)](#) in that church's [Book of Confessions](#) as well as the more conservative successors, the [Presbyterian Church in America](#) (PCA), the [Orthodox Presbyterian Church](#), the [Evangelical Presbyterian Church](#), and the [Bible Presbyterian Church](#).

Westminster Shorter Catechism

The **Westminster Shorter Catechism** is a [catechism](#) written in 1646 and 1647 by the [Westminster Assembly](#), a [synod](#) of English and Scottish theologians and laymen intended to bring the [Church of England](#) into greater conformity with the [Church of Scotland](#). The assembly also produced the [Westminster Confession of Faith](#) and the [Westminster Larger Catechism](#). A version without Scripture citations was completed on 25 November 1647 and presented to the [Long Parliament](#), and Scripture citations were added on 14 April 1649.

Background

[Catechesis](#) is a practice of teaching the Christian faith. New converts to Christianity were taught through lectures during the first four centuries of the Church's existence, but this practice was largely abandoned with the rise of [Christendom](#). [Christian humanists](#) and [Protestant Reformers](#) sought to revive the practice, including the [Reformed](#). [John Calvin's Genevan Catechism](#) was especially influential among the British Reformed. The most popular British catechisms included works by [John Craig](#), [James Ussher](#), [Herbert Palmer](#), [John Ball](#), and [Anthony Tuckney](#).^[1]

On [John Knox's](#) return to Scotland after long exile because he was deemed by the authorities a heretic, the *[First Book of Discipline](#)* (1560) was drafted. It required that a [Sabbath](#) afternoon session be set aside for examination of young children in catechism, and this practice eventually was adopted in the [Kirk](#). Catechizing became a part of life in the Scottish Churches with itinerant catechists being employed to instruct the people — a practice that continued into the 19th century.

In 1643, the [Westminster Assembly](#), which was designed to bring the two national churches into greater conformity, was convened at the height of the [English Civil War](#) to reform the [Church of England](#). When the [Solemn League and Covenant](#) was as a result signed between the English and Scots the Assembly's work also became the framing of "four points or parts of uniformity": a Confession of Faith, Form of Church Government, Directory for Worship, and Catechizing.^[2]

Composition

Although the church in Scotland (the Kirk) had produced *The New Catechisme according to the Forme of the Kirk of Scotland* in 1644, it was aimed particularly at children and youth, and was not adopted by the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Twelve or fourteen of the members of the Westminster Assembly had produced catechisms themselves prior to the Assembly. Herbert Palmer was one of the most respected catechists in the country, and it was expected that his catechism, first published in 1640, would be the basis for the Assembly's. It appears that this idea was abandoned by the committee assigned to the catechism after some work in 1645, followed by another failed attempt at a single catechism from the Summer of 1646 to 14 January 1647. At this point, the committee decided that it would need to produce two catechisms rather than one, as the needs of ministers and children were very different. The committee also decided to wait until the completion of the [Confession of Faith](#), and to base the catechisms off this document rather than the Apostles' Creed. The [Larger Catechism](#) was completed and forwarded to Parliament on 22 October 1647, and another committee was set up for the Shorter Catechism composed of Herbert Palmer as chairman, [Charles Herle](#), [Thomas Temple](#), [John Lightfoot](#), John Greene,

Philip Delme, [Edmund Calamy the Elder](#), and [Stanley Gower](#). When Palmer died soon after the constitution of this committee, another committee was formed with only Anthony Tuckney, [Stephen Marshall](#), and John Ward, along with [Samuel Rutherford](#) (one of the Scottish commissioners, who could not vote).^[3]



[Anthony Tuckney](#)

Anthony Tuckney is believed to be the most influential of the committee members on the Catechism. The previously published catechisms of James Ussher and John Ball, as well as the theology of [William Perkins](#) were also relied upon,^[4] however many of the similarities between the Assembly's Shorter Catechism and earlier ones may be explained by the common theological vocabulary of the time.^[5] The Shorter Catechism was largely based on the Larger Catechism, though the Shorter may have incorporated more of the earlier abandoned catechism than the Larger. It was sent to Parliament on 25 November 1647, a little over a month after the Larger Catechism. Scripture citations were added on 14 April 1648.^[6] It was passed Parliament 22–25 September^[7] and ordered to be printed with the title *The Grounds and Principles of Religion Contained in a Shorter Catechism*.^[8] The Church of Scotland approved it in July 1648, and it passed the [Scottish Parliament](#) in February of the next year.^[6]

Form and content

The purpose of the Shorter Catechism is to educate children and others "of weaker capacity" (according to a preface written by the Church of Scotland) in the [Reformed](#) faith. It is based on the Larger Catechism, which was intended for use by ministers as they taught the faith to their congregations in preaching.^[6] The Catechism is in a question and answer format, which had been popularized by [Martin Luther](#) as a way to help children learn the meaning of the material, rather than simply memorizing the [Lord's Prayer](#), [Ten Commandments](#), and [Apostles' Creed](#) as had been the practice prior to the Reformation.^[9]

The catechism is composed of 107 questions and answers. The first 12 questions concern [God](#) as [Creator](#). Questions 13-20 deal with [original sin](#) and the fallen state of man's nature. Questions 21-38 concern [Christ](#) the Redeemer and the benefits that flow from redemption. The next set of questions, 39-84, discuss the [Ten Commandments](#). Questions 85-97 teach concerning the [Sacraments](#) of [Baptism](#) and [Holy Communion](#). The final set of questions, 98-107, teach and explain the [Lord's prayer](#). This organization mimics the earlier [Heidelberg Catechism](#) used by many [Continental Reformed](#) churches.

The most famous of the questions (known to a great many Presbyterian children) is the first:

Q. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Legacy

The Church of Scotland approved the Westminster Shorter Catechism in 1648, and thereafter it was the manual for instruction. However, because a significant portion of the Scottish Highland population spoke only [Gaelic](#), the Synod of Argyll in 1649 instructed seven of its ministers to translate the Westminster Shorter Catechism into that language. The result was published that same year, and the Gaelic Shorter Catechism continued to play a part in church life for decades after it had ceased to be used in the English speaking churches. The [Free Church of Scotland](#) still presents a Bible to a child who can answer all 107 questions accurately at one sitting.