Catechizing at Home, 1740–1870: Instruction, Communication and Denomination

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Catechizing played an important part in domestic religious education in Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as in the better documented early modern period. However, its significance has been neglected in comparison with family prayers (often deemed to be an expression of patriarchy), Sunday observance or even private prayers. This article analyses the incidence of catechizing across religious denominations in Britain from 1740 to 1870, and within selected overseas missionary families. Drawing on a wide range of personal memoirs, the article analyses the range of contexts and relationships within which catechizing could occur. These included not only household worship (which could be conducted by women) but also relationships between siblings. It demonstrates that catechizing could provide opportunities for asking questions and spending 'quality time' with parents and / or children, rather than embodying an alienating form of rote-learning. The article therefore challenges many stereotypes relating to family domestic education, relating to themes such as patriarchy, denominational difference and adult-child interaction.

The 'Catechism as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer' of 1549 was one of the, if not the, earliest forms of universal instruction in the reformed English church, intended to induce conformity. All 'youth and ignorant persons' were to go to church on Sundays to be instructed, while heads of household were instructed to catechize their dependants.[1] The simplest version, in the Book of Common

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[1] Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), 191–3. The Prayer Book Catechism of 1549 was enlarged in 1604 and revised in 1661–2: Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England, c.1530–1740*

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Prayer, covered the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the sacraments.[2] While the Church Catechism had similarities to those written by Luther and Calvin,[3] Dissenters also wrote their own versions, notably the Shorter or Westminster Catechism of the Westminster Assembly (1643–8), and others by Baptists, Quakers and Unitarians, as well as Roman Catholics.[4] Moreover, historians of the early modern period have argued that catechizing could involve informal questioning, facilitate the acquisition of literacy and promote more advanced intellectual engagement.[5]

However, the historiography of catechizing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has been less positive. Although it has been recognized that catechizing was an important tool of the eighteenth-century church, and that most clergy were diligent about public catechizing, its frequent restriction to Lent reinforced older historiographies of eighteenth-century religious decline.[6] A strong strand in nineteenth-century educational history regarded catechetical teaching to labouring- or working-class children as a form of social control, at best tedious, at worst intended to reinforce Anglican hegemony.[7] A dominant historiography of family religion has associated the 'rise' of evangelical religion from the 1780s onwards with family prayers as

(Oxford, 1996), 71–4, 122–3; William Jacob, *The Clerical Profession in the Long Eighteenth Century, 1640–1840* (Oxford and New York, 2007), 236–41.

[2] Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 190; Scott Mandelbrote, 'The Bible as Didactic Literature', in Sara Pennell and Natasha Glaisyer, eds, *Didactic Literature in England, 1500–1800: Expertise Reconstructed* (Aldershot, 2003), 75–137, at 92.

[3] Charles Wallace Jr, 'Susanna Wesley's Child-rearing Letter', in idem, ed., *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings* (Oxford, 1997), 367–76, at 371–2, 378; Green, *Christian's ABC*, 17–21, 62, 71, 279.

[4] Green, *Print and Protestantism*, 191–3; idem, *Christian's ABC*, 43, 83–6.

[5] Green, *Christian's ABC*, 266–74; Mandelbrote, 'Bible', 92–4.

[6] Phillip Tovey, *Anglican Confirmation, 1660–1780*, Liturgy and Worship Series (Aldershot, 2014), 195–6, 230; Jacob, *Clerical Profession*, 237–42; Michael Snape, *The Church of England in an Industrialising Society: The Lancashire Parish of Whalley in the Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2003), 20–2.

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

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the bedrock of domestic devotion, making no reference to catechizing.[8]

This article calls in question the frequent dichotomy constructed by literary scholars and historians of education between teaching of the Anglican catechism, which has been regarded as dull and restrictive, and other forms of more 'liberal', conversational domestic education allegedly practised by Dissenters.[9] Instead, it shows how all denominations had their own catechisms, and that pedagogy in Anglican households could include a questioning approach rather than mere rote-learning. While concurring with more recent authors that domestic religion persisted from the seventeenth century into the eighteenth, and that evangelical claims to have initiated the 'religion of the home' were exaggerated,[10] it demonstrates how domestic catechizing continued into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Above all, it seeks to contribute to the history of children by recovering the perspectives of the young (however difficult the task) on a central aspect of eighteenth-century pedagogy. Gender issues are also considered: religious education has frequently been regarded as the preserve of females, while the respective roles of parents have also

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

[9] Aileen Fyfe, 'Reading Dissenting Children's Books in Late Eighteenth-Century England', *HistJ* 43 (2002), 453–73, at 470; Marion Amies, 'Amusing and Instructive Conversations: The Literary Genre and its Relevance to Home Education', *HE* 14 (1985), 87–99, at 91–2; Michele Cohen, 'The Pedagogy of Conversation in the Home: "Familiar Conversation" as a Pedagogical Tool in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England', *Oxford Review of Education* 41 (2015), 447–63, at 454.

[10] W. M. Jacob, '"Conscientious attention to publick and family worship of God": Religious Practice in Eighteenth-Century Households', in John Doran, Charlotte Methuen and Alexandra Walsham, eds, *Religion and the Household*, SCH 50 (Woodbridge, 2014), 307–17, at 312; Jeremy Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation and Reform, 1660–1828: The Archbishops of Canterbury and their Diocese* (Oxford, 2000), 238; Karen Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2012), 46–7.

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been regarded as significant in relation to ongoing debates about masculinity, motherhood and gender roles.[11]

How was childhood understood in this period? The age of majority for those who had resources to inherit was twenty-one,[12] yet pauper children as young as seven might be apprenticed. Anna Davin has noted, however, that children in service were likely to have been in a semi-dependent position: indeed, it has been argued that some people never attained full adult status.[13] No typology exists of commonly held Protestant understandings of the chronological development of children's spirituality. By contrast, seven as the age of first communion has been perceived as a landmark for Roman Catholic children.[14] Nevertheless, Protestant writers of catechisms and other devotional material for the eighteenth-century young showed an awareness of the differing cognitive and spiritual needs of children of different ages and, as discussed below, Isaac Watts and John Wesley adapted their catechetical materials accordingly, particularly for younger children. While a systematic analysis of catechisms published for different age groups and educational levels is beyond the scope of this article, analysis of domestic practice can contribute to a broader understanding of shared ideas about children's spirituality and religious development.

Sources

My primary aim here is to 'recover' family practices and children's experiences, rather than to document the content and production of texts. However, the problem with a routine practice such as catechizing is that it was frequently unrecorded.[15] The sources used cover many different parts of Britain, as well as English-speaking locations overseas, and include manuscript collections, home instruction

[11] Anthony Fletcher, *Growing up in England: The Experience of Childhood, 1600–1914* (New Haven, CT, 2008), 99–106, 245. For a reiteration of the 'separate spheres' thesis, see James Marten, 'Family Relationships', in Heywood, ed, *Cultural History*, 19–38, at 21.
[12] Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1988; first publ. 1982), 165–6.
[13] Anna Davin, 'What is a Child?', in Stephen Hussey and Anthony Fletcher, eds, *Childhood in Question: Children, Parents and the State* (Manchester, 1999), 15–36, at 22.
[14] Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, transl. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth, 1973; first publ. 1962), 122–4.
[15] Jacob, '"Conscientious attention"', 307–12.

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schemes and published editions of letters, diaries and childhood recollections. Many different Protestant denominations and types of Anglican churchmanship are represented, and the families of a number of clergy, ministers or missionaries are probably over-represented. Inevitably, memoirs and letters were more likely to survive from the middling and upper ranks, but collections of autobiographies have been particularly useful for accessing the experience of families in the labouring class.[16] These memoirs, like the descriptions of pious children in missionary and other memoirs, are subject to the problems of retrospective reconstruction and genre writing;[17] nonetheless, specific rituals and practices may provide a more definite focus for memory than more diffuse emotional experiences.

Background

The period between 1740 and 1870 witnessed many religious changes, notably the emergence of Methodism from the 1740s, the 'rise' of evangelicalism from the 1780s, the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 and the appearance of the Oxford Movement from 1833. Throughout the period, catechisms were a benchmark for maintaining orthodoxy and could have enormous political significance.[18] Controversies over the teaching of the Church Catechism have been regarded as crucial in the foundation of the National Society in 1811, and in preventing agreement about the nature of state-funded education until the 1870 Education Act forbade the teaching of any specific creed or formulary in state-funded schools.[19] There is evidence of catechizing throughout the period. In the early 1700s, clergy distributed catechisms to the labouring poor in Kent, Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, and reported

[16] For example, Thomas Jackson, *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*, 6 vols (London, 1838–64).
[17] Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Children in History: Concepts of Nature and Society', in Geoffrey Scarre, ed., *Children, Parents and Politics* (Cambridge, 1989), 3–24, at 5; D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), 293–319.
[18] See Robert Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England, 1662–1962* (London, 1965), 171; Robert G. Ingram, *Religion, Reform and Modernity: Thomas Secker and the Church of England* (Woodbridge, 2007), 81; Gregory, *Restoration*, 238; Green, *Christian's ABC*, 43.
[19] Eric Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed: Working-Class Children in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester, 1994), 144.

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that some parents were catechizing their children at home.[20] Indeed, Michael Watts has argued that domestic catechizing in labouring and middling-sort families laid the foundation for many Methodist conversions.[21]

The first part of this article aims to establish basic patterns, such as the age of instruction, when catechizing occurred and by whom it was conducted. The second addresses children's responses, illuminating themes such as the relationship of catechizing to religious experience, parents as pedagogues and denominational difference. The focus throughout is limited to catechisms designed for a religious purpose.

Ages, Times and Catechists

Susanna Wesley (1669–1742) was accustomed to begin religious teaching soon after her children began to talk, starting just after 1690. The Wesley children were taught

> as soon as they could speak, the Lord's Prayer, which they were made to say at rising and bedtime constantly; to which as they grew bigger, were added a short prayer for their parents, and some collects; a short catechism, and some portions of Scripture … as their memories could bear … .[22]

Adam Clarke's family were taught 'with the earliest dawnings of reason' to commit to memory parts of the Church Catechism and the Shorter Catechism.[23] Four was frequently mentioned in life-story writing as a significant age.[24] Two early Methodist preachers, born in 1738, Thomas Taylor (the son of a Presbyterian tanner) and George Story, both from Yorkshire, later claimed that they had been able to recite the Shorter Catechism or the Church Catechism to their respective ministers aged four.[25] Thomas Priestley asserted the same of his brother Joseph (1733–1804) with reference to the

[20] Gregory, *Restoration*, 238; Jacob, *Clerical Profession*, 238; Green, *Christian's ABC*, 122.
[21] Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1: *From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978), 423.
[22] Wallace, ed., *Susanna Wesley*, 371.
[23] James Everett, *Adam Clarke portrayed*, 2 vols (London, 1843–4), 1: 14–15, 38.
[24] Fletcher, *Growing up*, 99.
[25] Jackson, *Lives*, 5: 1–2, 218.

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Shorter Catechism.[26] Other references to four- or five-year-olds learning the Church Catechism can be found in the 1740s, 1760s and 1840s.[27] The ages of six and seven were mentioned in the 1760s, the early 1800s and 1870.[28] However, Henry Venn, author of the popular *Complete Duty of Man* (1763), did not approve of teaching very young children and only started 'formal instructions' when they were eight.[29] Isaac Watts (1674–1748) also believed that content should be age-related, and very concrete for children under seven.[30]

Learning and performing the catechism could develop throughout the child's life-cycle, with differing levels of difficulty. On Sundays, in the 1820s, five of the six children of the high church Young family of Limehouse (born between 1815 and 1823), aged three to eight, had to learn or recite one of a series of catechisms, whilst the eldest, aged ten, had to learn or write the collect.[31] The younger children learned Watts's *First Catechism*, the Church Catechism, the *Mother's Catechism*, *Crossman's Catechism* and *Crossman's Questions*.[32] Mrs Young's schedule prescribed the most intensive weekday catechetical instruction (up to four or five times each week) for children between the ages of six and nine; her elder and younger children had less catechesis.[33] The diarist Emily Shore (1819–39) recorded how her mother taught her with her younger siblings, three girls and two boys, born between 1819 and 1825, when they were aged between

[26] *Memoirs of Dr Joseph Priestley to the Year 1795, written by himself, with a Continuation to the Time of his Decease, by his Son, Joseph Priestley, and Observations on his Writings, by Thomas Cooper … and the Rev. William Christie* (London, 1809), 5.
[27] Fletcher, *Growing up*, 249, 115, 117, for Hester Thrale's children; Manchester, JRL, Fletcher-Tooth Papers (hereafter: MAM, Fl), Box 23, manuscript autobiography of Mrs Mary Fletcher, Part 1, 1; Chester, Cheshire RO, Journals of William Charles Cotton, vol. 11, fol. 3, June 1846 (Microfilm 3).
[28] Francis Bamford, *Dear Miss Heber: An Eighteenth-Century Correspondence* (London, 1938), 2; Florence White, *A Fire in the Kitchen: The Autobiography of a Cook* (London, 1938), 43; Ernest Gray Sandford, ed., *Memoirs of Archbishop Temple by Seven Friends*, 2 vols (London, 1906), 1: 19.
[29] Henry Venn to Joseph Stillingfleet, 25 January 1785, in *The Letters of Henry Venn, with a Memoir by John Venn* (Edinburgh, 1993; first publ. 1835), 429.
[30] Green, *Christian's ABC*, 271–4.
[31] London, Museum of London (hereafter: MOL), Young Education Scheme (hereafter: YES), 48.85/6, Schemes of lessons, 1825–31.
[32] MOL, YES, 48.85/6, List of books; *The Catechism broke into Short Questions; to which is added an Explanation of some words, for the easier Understanding of it: Together with some Prayers for the Use of Charity Schools* (London, 1830 edn).
[33] MOL, YES, 48.85/6, Schemes of lessons, 1825, 1827.

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six and twelve.[34] Catherine MacFarlane (1879–1946), who had been brought up in the Free Church of Scotland and lived in Glasgow, noted that 'thirteen was a serious age', at which she could 'recite the Shorter Catechism and chapters of the Old and New Testaments'.[35]

The Church Catechism had an end point and a purpose, as knowledge of it was a requirement for Anglican confirmation. While Phillip Tovey's case studies identify confirmation as usually taking place at the age of fourteen, the age could vary from ten to twenty-two.[36] In the diocese of London, fourteen was the expected age from the 1760s, rising to fifteen by 1798.[37] In the nineteenth century, fifteen to sixteen was a usual age. John Henry Newman (1801–90) recalled that 'of course I was word perfect in the Catechism at the age of fifteen'.[38] Fanny Keats was confirmed in 1819, aged fifteen,[39] and Charlotte Yonge was also fifteen when she was prepared for confirmation by John Keble by working through the Catechism and the communion service.[40] The high church Agnes Cotton was sixteen when she used her elder brother William's catechetical lecture cards.[41]

Unsurprisingly, catechizing is usually referred to across the period as a domestic devotional exercise on Sunday: for the 1750s, 1760s and 1770s, the early and late 1800s, and on Sunday evenings specifically in the 1740s and 1820s.[42] On weekdays, it might comprise part of schoolroom exercises, as with the Youngs in the 1820s, schoolmaster Roger Langdon's children in the 1860s and 1870s, and Lydia North Paget's domestic teaching in the 1850s and early 1860s.[43]

[34] Margaret Emily Shore, ed., *The Journal of Emily Shore* (London, 1891), 27–8 (23 December 1832).
[35] Catherine MacFarlane Carswell, *Lying Awake: An unfinished Autobiography and other Posthumous Papers* (London, 1950), 35.
[36] Tovey, *Anglican Confirmation*, 199, 249, 257, 316, 334.
[37] Mary Clare Martin, 'Children and Religion in Walthamstow and Leyton, 1740–1870' (PhD thesis, University of London, 2000), 358–66.
[38] John Henry Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (London, 1890 edn), 1.
[39] Marie Adami, *Fanny Keats* (London, 1937), 277–9.
[40] Christabel Coleridge, *Charlotte Mary Yonge: Her Life and Letters* (London, 1903), 119.
[41] Oxford, Bodl., MS Acland d.118, fol. 113, Agnes Cotton to William Charles Cotton, 1844.
[42] Bamford, ed., *Dear Miss Heber*, 2; Everett, *Adam Clarke portrayed*, 1: 14–15; Almyra Gray, ed, *Papers and Diaries of a York Family, 1764–1839* (London, 1927), 21; Shore, ed., *Shore Journal*, 27–8 (1832).
[43] MOL, YES, 48.85/6, Schemes of lessons, 1825–8; Langdon, *Life*, 67; Jeanne Peterson, *Family, Love and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* (Bloomington, IN, 1989),

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Whereas Luther assumed that mothers would be teaching their children, Anthony Fletcher has argued that from the Reformation on, catechizing was the father's responsibility, and that many fathers were 'warm, intimate and caring', rather than harsh patriarchs.[44] There is some consensus that there was a transition from the educational importance of the father, with the mother supplanting the father by the mid- to late nineteenth century,[45] and some consider this led to a 'crisis' of masculinity.[46] However, family evidence is more complicated. A number of this article's eighteenth century subjects were catechized by their fathers, including Mary Bosanquet and also Faith Hopwood, whose mother was engaged in 'nursing the young ones' and 'left external matters' to their father.[47] The Free Church of Scotland Robert Haldane (1805–77), high churchman Bishop George Augustus Selwyn (1809–78) and low church London businessman Richard White (b. 1822) also catechized their children, from the 1830s to the 1870s.[48] Nevertheless, mothers might lead the process from the seventeenth century onwards.[49] These included the Presbyterian mother of Adam Clarke in the 1760s,[50] Frederick Temple's mother in the Ionian islands from 1821,[51] Sarah Selwyn in New Zealand during the 1840s and the Free Church Mary Ann MacFarlane in the 1870s and 1880s.[52] In the 1840s and 1850s, the Congregationalist Mrs Henderson of

36; Cambridge, Selwyn College Library, 'Reminiscences by Mrs S. H. Sarah Selwyn, 1809, 1867, with an Introduction and Notes by Edith Evans, typed from a Typescript held by the Library of the Auckland War Memorial Museum' (January 1892), 7, online at: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/037748>, last accessed 8 September 2018; Coleridge, *Yonge*, 96; White, *Fire*, 43; Fletcher, *Growing up*, 239, 228; Roger Langdon, *The Life of Roger Langdon, told by himself, with Additions by his Daughter Ellen* (London, 1909), 23–6, 67.

[44] Fletcher, *Growing up*, 130.

[45] Tosh, *Man's Place*, 90–3; Christina Hardyment, *Dream Babies: Child Care from Locke to Spock* (Oxford, 1984), 31–45; Leonore Davidoff, Janet Fink and Katharine Holden, *The Family Story*: *Blood, Kinship and Intimacy* (London, 1999), 125, 149.

[46] Tosh, *Man's Place*, 90–3; Davidoff, Fink and Holden, *Family Story*, 125, 149.

[47] Fletcher autobiography, Part 1, 1; Gray, ed., *Diary*, 21.

[48] White, *Fire*, 43.

[49] Mandelbrote, 'Bible', 94.

[50] Everett, *Adam Clarke portrayed*, 1: 14–15.

[51] Sandford, ed., *Temple Memoirs*, 18.

[52] Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2003), 140, 47; Cheshire RO, Cotton Journals, vol. 11, fol. 3, June 1846 (Microfilm 3).

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British Guiana used to catechize her household on Sunday evenings on the sermon and their Sunday school lessons, as well as the school-children who sat in the gallery in chapel.[53] Roger Langdon (b. 1829), the future scientist and stationmaster, learnt the catechism at a Sunday school run by his parents.[54] Governesses also acted as catechists, notably for Georgina Sitwell (b. 1824), the daughters of Lady Ilchester in Somerset, and the Strangeways children (aged ten, five and seven) from 1783.[55]

Siblings might also act as religious instructors.[56] In 1819, the poet John Keats sent his sister Fanny, aged fifteen, very detailed answers based on the Church Catechism to help her with her confirmation preparation.[57] By 1828, it was reported by Mrs Young of Limehouse that her daughter Emma (aged ten) 'assists in instructing the little ones in their Catechism and map of Canaan'. Horace (aged six) 'repeats his catechism with Lucy and Sidney' (aged seven and eight).[58] In the 1870s, Florence White's elder brother (aged fifteen) and his friend (aged fourteen) used to help her learn the catechism on Saturdays to recite on Sunday mornings, after which she received a cooked breakfast as a reward.[59] The catechism could also interest teenagers and adults. In 1846, Agnes Cotton wrote how, at prayers in Oxford, her brother-in-law, the future professor of medicine, Henry Wentworth Acland, 'talks about the catechism guided by an old Exposition by Wm Bishop of Gloster when I know not. We all take a turn, in reading the texts referred to.'[60] Catechism work could also form a part of sociability for younger children. In 1765, seven-year-old Mary Heber wrote to her father: 'Last Sunday afternoon I went to church and when we came home and was [*sic*] reading our books and saying our catechism, in came my aunt and cousin Glencowe.'[61] Grandparents might be involved. In 1858, Acland's

[53] Thomas Henderson, The *Missionary's Wife* (London, 1855), 99.
[54] Langdon, *Life*, 23.
[55] Fletcher, *Growing up*, 239, 222, 228.
[56] Linda A. Ryan, *John Wesley and the Education of Children: Gender, Class and Piety* (London and New York, 2018), 44.
[57] Adami, *Keats*, 71–2. The Keats siblings were orphans after the death of their father in 1804 and their mother in 1810.
[58] MOL, YES, 48.85/6, 1825.
[59] White, *Fire*, 43.
[60] Bodl., MS Acland d. 189, fol. 114, Agnes Cotton to William Charles Cotton, 7 February 1847.
[61] Bamford, *Dear Miss Heber*, 2.

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daughter Sarah Angelina (1849–1930) reported: 'I am just going to say my catechism to Grandmamma.'[62] In the 1890s, the grandmother and aunt of Captain Edward Kenyon's children insisted on hearing them try to recite parts of it.[63] Ministers might come to teach it at home.[64] No clearly gender-differentiated pattern of catechizing emerges across the period.

Pedagogy and Children's Responses

Many historians and literary scholars have regarded catechizing as a routine practice of repetition in contrast to the more experimental educational approaches used, by, say, the Edgeworths.[65] Although catechisms were written in a question and answer format, and despite the recognition that much learning occurred through 'familiar conversation',[66] recent historians and literary scholars have represented Anglican catechizing as rigid. Aileen Fyfe, for example, argued that 'in the catechism the child had no flexibility or autonomy', whilst children had more freedom in Dissenting education.[67] Yet while the Shorter Catechism was taught by Dissenters, both Anglicans and Nonconformists argued for the importance of understanding.[68] Watts, who in 1730 produced a series of catechisms aimed at different educational levels, wrote: 'The business and duty of the teacher is not to teach words, but things. Words written in the memory, without ideas or sense in the mind, will never incline a child to his duty, nor save his soul.'[69] Watts 'thought catechizing was an ideal medium of instruction for the young', as it 'broke material into short segments,

[62] Bodl., MS Acland d.106, fol. 36, Sarah Angelina Acland to Mrs Sarah Acland, 2 May 1858.
[63] Taylor, 'Memoirs', 1: 23–5.
[64] Louisa Clara Meyer, *The Author of* The Peep of Day: *Being the Life Story of Mrs Mortimer* (London, 1908), 8; Green, *Christian's ABC*, 228.
[65] Alan Richardson, *Literature Education and Romanticism*: *Reading as Social Practice, 1780–1832* (Cambridge, 1994), 64–77.
[66] Cohen, 'Pedagogy as Conversation', 447–63.
[67] Fyfe, 'Reading', 470; Amies, 'Amusing and Instructive Conversations', 91–2.
[68] Mandelbrote, 'Bible', 92; Tovey, *Anglican Confirmation*, 197, 231.
[69] Isaac Watts, *Catechisms: Or, Instructions in the Principles of the Christian Religion and the History of Scripture, composed for Children and Youth, according to the different Ages. To which is prefix'd a discourse on the Way of Instruction by Catechisms, and the best Manner of composing them* (London, 1730), 17; Green, *Christian's ABC*, 271.

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the questioning stimulated curiosity and a reply, and this to-and-fro was "familiar" like a conversation'.[70] Anglicans also produced differentiated texts: for example, John Lewis, whose catechism written specifically for the 'poor and unlearned' of Kent had gone into thirty-four editions by 1778.[71] John Wesley wrote a simpler version of the Church Catechism in his *Instructions for Children*, as he regarded the Church Catechism as too complex.[72] Clerics argued for the importance of understanding,[73] as did some parents,[74] although it was reported in 1704 that some thought rote-learning sufficed.[75] In what follows I will discuss these themes in relation to children's learning, notably the links between catechisms and religious experience, parents as pedagogues, and texts and denominationalism.

Religious Experience

Teaching the Church Catechism could provide an opportunity for religious experience, stimulated by personal interaction. Thus the Anglican Mary Bosanquet recalled: 'On Sabbath-evenings, my dear father used to instruct us in the Church catechism. At those seasons I can remember asking many questions … I wished to know whether anyone ever did love God with all their heart, and their neighbour as themselves.'[76] She recounted subsequently being converted to Methodism aged eight, with the assistance of a servant girl, but against the wishes of her family.[77] In this narrative, her early experience of learning the catechism was the starting point for her spiritual autobiography, not unlike the labouring-class examples cited by Watts.[78] Mary Bosanquet's concerns closely resembled those of Faith Hopwood, born in 1751 in York, who came from an

[70] Green, *Christian's ABC*, 272.There were no 'proofs' or Scripture references in his version for young children.
[71] Sylvia Stevens, *Quakers in Northeast Norfolk, 1690–1800* (Lampeter, 2012), 273; Wallace, ed., *Susanna Wesley*, 371; Gregory, *Restoration*, 273–8; Green, *Christian's ABC*, 228.
[72] [John Wesley], *Instructions for Children*, 4th edn (Dublin, 1744).
[73] Jacob, *Clerical Profession*, 237; William Wilson, *The Instructor: Conducted by the Parochial Ministers of Walthamstow* 1 (1836), 210.
[74] MOL, YES, 48.85/6, 1825, Rule 1.
[75] Green, *Christian's ABC*, 122, 228.
[76] Fletcher autobiography, Part 1, 1.
[77] Ibid. 4, 5.
[78] Watts, *Dissenters*, 1: 426–8.

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evangelical background. Hopwood's diary recalled 'being required to repeat the catechism, collects and portions of Scripture', which 'occasionally led to serious examination whether I loved God with all my heart' as well as to fears about her future state.[79] Richard Hill (1732–1808), the first evangelical MP, was repeating the catechism one Sunday evening as a child of eight or nine, when 'I found my heart sweetly drawn up to heavenly objects'. The *Evangelical Magazine* of 1799 contained an 'Anecdote' in which a youth 'was convicted by being catechized'.[80] After learning the Westminster Assembly's Catechism in the 1850s, one seven-year-old Henderson child in British Guiana asked searching questions about the doctrine of assurance and God's love, which surprised her mother.[81] Thus asking questions or spiritual enlightenment could occur throughout the period as a result of catechetical engagement in different denominations, and could be perceived as assisting the spiritual development of adults.

Parental Engagement

Some parents were so dedicated to their task as religious educators that they wrote catechisms for their own children. Susanna Wesley wrote an exposition of the Apostles' Creed and the Ten Commandments.[82] The biographer of the nonjuror John Bowdler (1746–1823) recalled Bowdler's mother's 'peculiar turn for conveying instruction', and how she drew up a 'comprehensive' and 'plain' explanation of the Catechism that anyone could understand.[83] The Quaker Abiah Darby wrote an introductory catechism for her own children and those of her Quaker meeting in 1754, which was printed in 1763.[84] The father of Mary Elizabeth Haldane (1825–1925) 'wrote two catechisms for us, which we learned; one was on the

[79] Gray, ed., *Papers*, 21.
[80] Cited in Paul Sangster, *Pity my Simplicity: The Evangelical Revival and the Religious Education of Children, 1738–1800* (London, 1966), 41–2.
[81] Henderson, *Missionary's Wife*, 100.
[82] Wallace, ed., *Susanna Wesley*, 371.
[83] Thomas Bowdler, *Memoir of John Bowdler, Esq.* (London, 1825), 20.
[84] Stevens, *Quakers*, 273; Abiah Darby, *Useful Instruction for Children, by way of Question and Answer* (London, 1763), iii, v–vi.

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Lord's Prayer, the other on the general doctrines of the Bible. I think now that both were rather beyond us.'[85]

Children's reactions and experiences clearly varied. Adam Clarke, son of a schoolmaster and small farmer in Ireland, whose mother started with the Apostles' Creed when he was six, recalled: 'I had a godly puritanic mother. For my mother's religious teachings, I shall have endless reason to bless my Maker.'[86] Emily Shore, a clergyman's daughter, recorded how every Sunday evening, after tea, they said 'some parts of the Catechism, mamma commenting as we go on in the simplest manner. I believe none of us are taught anything which is not thoroughly explained and I am afraid this is too unusual.'[87] By contrast, the children of Octavius Temple, commandant in the Ionian Islands and later lieutenant-governor of Sierra Leone, were expected to read the catechism with no explanation. Frederick (1821–1902), the future archbishop, recalled: 'My six year old birthday was a far more terrible day than the earthquake', as he and his siblings were all expected to say the Catechism by heart. 'I succeeded, and got what was then a large sum of money – sixpence.'[88]

Nevertheless, children might take control of the process. It was reported of Leslie Stephen that 'after one short struggle', he 'submitted with much docility to Watts' *Catechism*, but had a curious way of insisting on giving answers in his own words before he would give those that had been cut and dried'.[89] In 1846, Bishop Selwyn's son Willie, aged four or five, was 'saying his catechism to Mrs S.', and 'on the question being put, rehearse the Articles of thy belief, he wanted to open his prayer book and read the Athanasian creed instead of repeating the apostles' … he said the entire orders the former to be had [*sic*] on Trinity Sunday … he is never so happy as when reading the Prayer Book'.[90]

Not all children enjoyed learning the Catechism. Augusta Drane, a future Catholic convert and prioress, from a high church family, recorded how their religious education in the schoolroom was 'dry

[85] Elizabeth Sanderson Haldane, ed., *Mary Elizabeth Haldane (1825–1925): A Record of a Hundred Years* (London, 1925), 45.
[86] Everett, *Adam Clarke portrayed*, 1: 14–15.
[87] Shore, ed., *Shore Journal*, 27–8 (23 December 1832).
[88] Sandford, ed., *Temple Memoirs*, 1: 16, 19. There were eight surviving children, born between 1806 and 1823.
[89] Frederic W. Maitland, *Life of Leslie Stephen* (London, 1906), 25.
[90] Cheshire RO, Cotton Journals, vol. 11, fol. 3, June 1846 (Microfilm 3).

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in the extreme': 'We said the Church Catechism, but I cannot call to mind any explanation ever being given on religious subjects.'[91] Although Charlotte Yonge claimed that '[i]n religious knowledge I was forward. We always said the Catechism every Sunday', she also 'always wished everything of the kind, except teaching the school children, to be over as fast as possible'. Nonetheless, she remembered being prepared for confirmation by Keble as 'an especial blessing'.[92] Captain Edward Kenyon (1854–1937), son of a Queen's Counsel, recalled: 'My mother used to teach us the catechism and read Sunday books to us, especially Miss Yonge's on the Collect, Catechism, etc.'[93] As a father, he did not wish to repeat this, but relatives insisted on hearing the children recite parts of the Catechism, to the children's dismay.[94]

Texts and Denominationalism

The Assembly or Shorter Catechism was taught throughout the period in Dissenting households.[95] Betsey Doddridge (1731–6), daughter of the prominent Nonconformist minister, was described as trying to teach a catechism to her dog, indicating this could be a child-initiated activity.[96] The Shorter Catechism contained a far greater number of biblical references, or 'proofs' supporting the statements of doctrine, than the Prayer Book Catechism of the Church of England.[97] Abiah Darby thought that the absence of these from her catechism would make it easier, although there were still 106 questions.[98] The future Unitarian minister Eliezer Cogan (1762–1855) learnt the Assembly's Catechism as a child, although 'its stern theology had by that time lost its hold of his father's mind, who told him,

[91] Bertrand A. H. Wilberforce, *A Memoir of Mother Frances Raphael, OSD (Augusta Theodosia Drane): Sometime Prioress Provincial of the Congregation of Dominican Sisters of S. Catherine of Siena, Stone; with some of her Spiritual Notes and Letters* (London, 1895), xx.
[92] Coleridge, *Yonge*, 17.
[93] Edward Ranulph Kenyon, 'Letter to my Grandchildren', 5, in private hands.
[94] Frances Margaret Taylor, 'Memoirs, Book I, 1894–1927', 23–5, in private hands.
[95] Walthamstow, Waltham Forest Archives, Acc. 10185, Joel Johnson memoir, 1731; Green, *Christian's ABC*, 80–3.
[96] Malcolm Deacon, *Philip Doddridge of Northampton, 1702–51* (Northampton, 1980), 67, 158 n. 67.
[97] Mandelbrote, 'Bible', 92.
[98] Darby, *Useful Instruction*, iii, v, vi.

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"he need not learn the proofs"'.[99] Others considered them useful. In the 1810s, the Congregational minister George Collison wished the young Anglican Bevans, who attended his chapel in Essex, 'to learn this and called sometimes to hear them repeat it'. Their niece, the family biographer, later asserted: 'The Scripture proofs it contains were of great use to them.' Although their Anglican uncle George Bevan initially disapproved violently, he later relented.[100] Many Congregational missionaries' families, such as the Hendersons in the 1840s and 1850s, also learned the Shorter Catechism.[101] Annie Small (b. 1857), daughter of a Free Church of Scotland missionary in India, learned 'the first question and answer of the Shorter Catechism'.[102] However, by 1892 the Congregational missionary James Kennedy was regretting its 'setting aside' by families.[103]

There were sometimes surprising connections between the texts used by Anglicans and Dissenters. Since Adam Clarke's father was Church of England, and his mother Presbyterian, they were taught both the Church Catechism and the Shorter Catechism.[104] Although the Hackney Phalanx prevented the SPCK from publishing Watts's catechism in 1831,[105] it was used even in high church families, for instance by the Youngs, as well as by the evangelical Stephens.[106] Some Anglicans never learnt the Church Catechism, even when confirmed: the former evangelical G. W. E. Russell (1853–1919) was taught the Nonconformist Shorter Catechism instead; he suspected this was because the Church Catechism was 'too Sacramental'.[107]

Yet, other evidence indicates domestic instruction in the Church Catechism was still considered de rigueur by Anglicans. The religious education of William Sharpe in the early 1800s was influenced by his Unitarian relatives, and his Anglican schoolmaster felt his 'education

[99] *Memoir of the late Eliezer Cogan, from the* Christian Reformer *for April 1855* (London, 1855), 5; Priestley, *Memoir*, 5.
[100] Meyer, *Author*, 8–9.
[101] Henderson, *Missionary's Wife*, 100.
[102] Olive Wyon, *The Three Windows: The Story of Ann Hunter Small* (London, 1953), 10.
[103] James Kennedy, *Memoir of Margaret Stephen Kennedy* (London, 1892), 235.
[104] Everett, *Adam Clarke portrayed*, 1: 14–15.
[105] Edward Churton, *Memoir of Joshua Watson*, 2 vols (London, 1861), 2: 11–16.
[106] MOL, YES, 48.85, List of books, 1825.
[107] George W. E. Russell, *The Household of Faith: Portraits and Essays* (London, 1902), 240–1.

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in church matters, catechism etc.' had been neglected.[108] When the Quaker Eliza Fox, at school in Chichester about 1800, explained: 'Please, ma'am, I never say catechism! … the whole school turned their open eyes upon me', and the children asked questions such as 'What church did I go to on a Sunday? And did we say Catechism and the Belief?'[109]

Leslie Stephen's biographer claimed that 'his first days at Eton were made laborious by the Anglican catechism, as he had been brought up on Watts', again indicating that knowledge of the Church Catechism was an expectation in Anglican establishment circles. Stephen later wrote of its 'most irritating explanation of the Lord's Prayer'.[110]

Conclusion

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

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

[108] Kew, TNA, Sharpe Papers, Box 13/91, William Sharpe memoir, fol. 33.
[109] E. J. Fox, *Memoir of Mrs Eliza Fox: To which Extracts are added from the Letters and Journals of her Husband W. J. Fox* (London, 1869), 8–9; Fletcher, *Growing up*, 254.
[110] Maitland, *Stephen*, 25.

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sisters might help younger siblings. Evidence from schools indicates that knowledge of the Anglican Church Catechism was expected in many quarters, while in many Nonconformist families the Shorter Catechism was learned. Domestic catechizing could constitute a form of familiar conversation, rather than being qualitatively different. While a quantitative assessment of its frequency is impossible to attain, given that such a routine practice may not have been recorded, this article has opened up possibilities for future study, such as how children actually learned their catechism. It also draws attention to the need for more studies of religious practice throughout the *longue durée*, to make it more feasible to assess continuities across the early modern and modern periods.

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