

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE
CHURCH CATECHISM, WITH A
VIEW TO ITS REVISION OR DISUSE,
IN A LETTER TO HIS GRACE THE
ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY**

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An examination of the Church catechism, with a view to its revision or disuse, in a letter to his grace the Archbishop of Canterbury by Anonymous

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BY
A SEPTUAGENARIAN.

" Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good."—1 THESS. v. 21.

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A LETTER,

¶c.

MY LORD,

I presume respectfully to address you on a subject of paramount importance to the religious welfare and prosperity of Great Britain—a subject, therefore, not undeserving the attention of the Primate of the English Church. And I have the greater satisfaction in doing so, inasmuch as from the time of your Grace's advancement to the See of London, I have retained a lively impression of your candour and courtesy—an impression received a short time before that event, while in conversation with a highly-respected and valued friend of your Lordship.

Your Grace is aware, that the introduction of the Factories' Bill into the House of Commons, by Sir James Graham, during last Session of Parliament, had the effect of directing the attention of the Nonconformists to the Church Catechism, and that their objections to that formula constituted one of the principal grounds of their opposition to the Bill. I believe, my

Lord, the Nonconformists admit some portions of the Catechism to be intrinsically good, but regard others as conveying erroneous views of essential Scripture truth ; and therefore that, viewed as a whole, it is calculated to obstruct, rather than promote, the formation of genuine christian character, and so to defeat the *main object* of christian instruction. With such sentiments, and conceiving they had just reason to apprehend that the *plan of education* embodied in Sir James Graham's Bill, if realized, would injuriously interfere with the communication—as to an extensive portion of the rising population of the country—of religious instruction, in their opinion more consonant with the Scriptures, one cannot reasonably wonder at their opposition to the Bill, or at the remarkable promptitude, co-operation, energy, and perseverance displayed by them in the prosecution of their object.

But, my Lord, if the Church Catechism be really liable to objections justly founded on the Scriptures, as the Nonconformists contend, reasons similar to those which occasioned their late exertions to prevent the use of it beyond the congregational limits of the Established Church, it may also be imperative, both on the Church and on the State, to adopt measures to prevent the use of it, in its present form, within those limits. And as, in consequence of the large addition lately made to the Church Education Fund, a

very considerable increase in the number of schools in connexion with the Establishment is contemplated, which, indeed, are partly in progress, the present appears to me not an unsuitable time for the Church to submit its Catechism to careful examination with a view to revision; in the prosecution of which work an impartial comparison with, and an inflexible adherence to the Scriptures would, of course, be indispensable.

As I feel no inclination, even at my advanced period of life, to urge others to engage in a work towards which I myself will contribute nothing, I purpose, in the present letter, with great respect and deference, to submit for the consideration of your Grace, independently of what others may have publicly advanced on the subject, that which has occurred to my own mind on what, at least, I conscientiously intended to be an unbiassed and impartial examination of the *Manual of Instruction* now in question.

In pursuing the proposed inquiry, my aim will be to follow the course of the Catechism itself, but it is probable that I shall sometimes find it necessary to deviate from this line; especially when the argument shall require portions of it, lying apart from each other, to be brought together in one view.

I beg leave, in the first place, to invite your Lordship's attention to the answer which the Catechism is instructed to make to the

“Question. *Who gave you that name?*”

“Answer. *My godfathers and godmothers in my baptism; wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.*”

I shall postpone my observations relating to the appointment of sponsors to a subsequent part of this letter, and, at present, restrict them to the latter clauses of the answer, viz. that in baptism the child, who is supposed to give the answer, was “made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.”

And first, I observe, that the arrangement of these particulars would, in my opinion, have accorded more with the suggestions of nature, order, and propriety, as well as the general tenor of Scripture, had the first two specified benefits, here alleged to be imparted to infants in their baptism, been placed in a reversed order. The invariable language of the New Testament relative to these points is, that such as have been made partakers of the blessings of the Gospel are born again of the Spirit, have become members of Christ by faith, and that being thus made children of God and disciples of his Son, they become heirs of everlasting life. I shall not, however, at present, enter into the relative merits of these two arrangements, but merely observe, that the order of the Catechism appears neither in the public nor private “Ministrations of Baptism”

inserted in the *Common Prayer*, nor, indeed, do the words "member of Christ" occur at all in either of them. Nevertheless, as every real child of God is also a member of Christ and an heir of glory, I shall confine my attention chiefly to the former of these three designations. And the first question of inquiry will accordingly be, "Whether, independently of a special revelation from heaven, it can be lawfully affirmed respecting any infant duly baptized, that by such baptism he was constituted a *child of God*, in the Scripture sense of this designation?" This question can only, of course, be satisfactorily determined by an appeal to the New Testament. This is the Statute-Book of christian law, and, I presume, it may be safely affirmed, that it recognises no extraneous or independent authority. By this Statute-Book all ecclesiastical institutes, laws, and regulations ought to be framed and should be tested; and there can be no appeal from it, except to the adjudications of the great day. And as it is the Statute-Book of the kingdom of God, to which all men are required by him to submit, so no "adjudged cases" of *their own* can possess any weight in that kingdom, except only as they are in strict accordance with the laws of the same; and, of course, absolutely speaking, none at all *as authorities*.

I am sure your Grace will also admit, that an appeal to the laws of God, in any case affecting

religion, should be made with the greatest solemnity, and that those laws themselves, when ascertained, should be conscientiously, implicitly, and promptly obeyed: that, consequently, if any thing be found in the creeds, or other formularies of a christian church, contrary to the express language and plain import of the Statute-Book, such religious community is bound to bring them into exact conformity with it.

Under these impressions, I proceed to cite from the New Testament some of those passages which have, more or less, direct reference to the *Answer* just quoted from the Church Catechism; and I shall confine myself, as already intimated, chiefly to the consideration of those which refer to that touching and dignified relation into which all real Christians—*i. e.* all Christians in the New Testament sense of the designation, are introduced,—I mean, that of *children of God!*

Your Grace need not be informed, that the spiritual nativity, by which an individual enters into the relation in question, is represented by our Lord, himself, as *essential to salvation*.* If, then, any consideration whatever can impress the mind with the transcendent importance of the subject before us, surely this is that consideration; I shall, therefore, introduce my proposed quotations, with the words of our Lord to which I have just adverted, as they are found in the nar-

* John iii. 3 and 5.