

ANTIQUARY

The Rediscovery of the Manuscripts of the Larger Catechism of Westminster Assembly of Divines

I have been asked in this foreword to recount the rediscovery of the manuscripts of the Westminster assembly's Larger catechism. This is not the sort of thing that historians tend to write about, but it is the sort of thing that we talk about, usually over a cup of tea or pint of bitter. But as it happens, I have an appropriate beverage and I can recall the moment clearly. The only thing about the event that I forget is the one thing that historians are always supposed to remember: the date.

In the winter of 2002, or perhaps the autumn of 2001, I took the bus from Cambridge to the Bodleian Library in Oxford to look at Nalson 22. As most every graduate student in history knows, a basic principle in manuscript hunting is to take provenance seriously: where there is one manuscript, there may be more. That there was a manuscript of the Westminster assembly in the Bodleian Library was noted by S. W. Carruthers, the English presbyterian who published photographs of it in 1957. Carruthers must have known that there was more to the collection that would interest Westminster assembly historians, but he was an antiquarian before a historian and his approach to primary sources was always quixotic and desultory.

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1. See *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Thirteenth Report, Appendix, Part I. The Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Portland, Preserved at Welbeck Abbey*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for Her Majesty's Stationery Office, by Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1891) 439; 441.

The manuscript that Carruthers found was a holograph, the handwritten original, of the assembly's Shorter catechism. The document was once owned by John Nalson (bap. 1636), an English clergyman who had intended to write a history of the English civil war, beginning with his *Impartial Collection of the Great Affairs of State* (2 vols., 1682-3). Explicitly designed to rival John Rushworth's pro-parliamentarian *Historical Collections*, Nalson somehow obtained original copies of many state papers. While acknowledging that Nalson's acquisitions may leave some questions left for the ethicists, historians are thankful for the relocation of parliamentary papers since the vast majority were lost in the 1834 fire which destroyed all but one of the parliament's medieval and early-modern buildings.

Carruthers had noted the extant manuscript, but was a little coy about the details of his research. He mentions tracing the original copy to the Duke of Portland's personal library which suggests that he had become aware of an annual report in Her Majesty's Commission for manuscripts. The Commission was (and is) occupied with describing otherwise unknown English libraries, including the Duke's fabulous collection. In the appendix to the annual report of 1891, the commission described Portland's repository of manuscripts, among them the volume of manuscripts once owned by John Nalson.¹ During the twentieth century the Duke's papers, including his Nalson volumes, were distributed to a variety of libraries. The volume now known as Nalson volume 22 ended up in the Bodleian.

I had consulted all of the published manuscript catalogues of the Bodleian, and was as yet unaware of the HMC report (although even if I had the report before me, it would have proved incomplete). But at any rate, I was not expecting any great success in the Duke Humphrey's reading room of the Bodleian library that morning. Surely, if there was more to see, Carruthers would have mentioned it somewhere, and I had read everything that he had ever published.

On the other hand, when Carruthers had published a note about the assembly's manuscript Westminster Confession of Faith (now held in the Westminster College Library in Cambridge), he had failed to announce that there were five other documents of the assembly bound into the same volume. Leaning a little too heavily on Carruthers' own idiosyncratic reporting methods, the library was unaware of the importance of these documents. Indeed, when I had asked the college librarian if I might be permitted to examine the volume containing the Confession, I was informed that it only contained some "church papers."

As I filled out the little paper slip requesting Nalson 22, I did cling to a thread of hope that my Bodleian experience just might be a Westminster college one. There just might be some papers that Carruthers found unimportant—perhaps even a portion of the assembly's minutes, for there were lost portions. On the other hand, countless other trips to libraries

had left me empty-handed, and so it was useful to tell myself that I was making this trip because it is the historian's duty to chase down leads, however unlikely the results.

I waited for the Bodleian's slow but sure fetchers to produce the document. I told myself that it would simply be a treat to have in my hands the holograph of the assembly's Shorter catechism—something which Carruthers himself had not enjoyed, for he asked others to photograph and examine the manuscript. I also needed a break from my work with the original minutes of the Westminster assembly and the wretched handwriting of Adoniram Byfield, the assembly's chief scribe. And I was a little curious to see what Nalson 22 would look like, for one almost never knows what will arrive when a manuscript is ordered. Manuscripts vary greatly in size, in length and, if they are not scrolls, in the number of folios (a folio is the front and back of a page). They are usually kept in rolls tied with ribbons, in boxes, or are bound into volumes.

Nalson 22 ended up being a bound volume, a large one, and I laid it on the foam book rest before me with care. I opened it at random and, according to the reader across the table, who happened to see my face and came quickly to my aid, I looked like I had seen a ghost. Indeed I had, for there on the page before me was the unmistakable hand of Adoniram Byfield himself. Four lost pages of the minutes of the assembly were neatly bound into this huge collection of documents. I felt like a man who had opened an old trunk in the attic and found a pouch of gold on top of a pile of gold, for this document was only one of many.

After assuring my friend that there was nothing terribly wrong, and that in fact everything was wonderfully right, I sent off a postcard to my doctoral supervisor, Prof. John Morrill, and another to my friend and soon-to-be colleague, Prof. David Wright. This was clearly an excuse for a celebration. Although there were no further minutes of the assembly, document after document bound into Nalson 22 was written on the same stationery that the assembly used in writing its minutes. Folio after folio was filled with rough drafts of assembly texts, letters, explanatory notes and petitions, all holographs—originals signed by the assembly leadership and its scribes. This would surely re-shape my work for the next few years. Given that I had already discovered that the documents at Westminster College were important assembly materials, these 440 pages of additional papers meant that I could no longer publish minutes of the assembly. Historians needed an edition of the assembly's minutes and papers.

I also told John Bower about the manuscripts, for he was producing his massive thesis on the Larger catechism at this time. As Chris Coldwell explains in the introduction to this volume, Bower collated microfilm copies of the manuscripts for his unpublished 2006 critical edition. Since then Bower has revised the text of the manuscripts after multiple trips to the

Bodleian to consult and collate the holograph copies there. Dr. Bower and I are now organizing our free time by producing a series of transcripts and critical editions of all the assembly's key texts that will not be included in the Oxford University Press edition of the assembly's minutes and papers. And noting that Carruthers' intent was not to "reproduce in minute accuracy" accidentals such as punctuation, spelling and capitalization, John is completing the first accurate edition of the Westminster Confession of faith and Shorter catechism. We plan to produce editions of the assembly's directory for church government, directory for public worship and two other texts not previously recognized as assembly productions.

In the meantime, students of the assembly can thank Chris Coldwell for these carefully produced transcriptions of the two surviving manuscripts of the Larger catechism. Chris has been untiring—and remarkably successful—in his efforts to further and foster new research in the post-Reformation period. His own productions have found their way into the hands of more than one thankful historian in Cambridge, and into many libraries around the world. This elegant new production of a much-neglected theological text is a most welcome addition to a quickly-growing assembly corpus.

On the following pages are sample pages from *The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly: A Transcription of the Surviving Manuscripts with Notes*. ■

To the Right Hon.^{ble} the Lords &
Comons assembled in Parliam.^t
The humble Advice of the Assembly of
Divines sitting at Westminster,
Concerning a Larger Catechisme.

To the Right Hon[ourable] the Lords & Com[m]ons assembled inParliam[en]t. The humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines sitting at Westminster, Concerning a Larger Catechism. A Free hand rendering by Jerry Kelly of the title of the Manuscript in Hand "A" of the Westminster Larger Catechism (Nalson 22 ff. 158r-177v, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Reproduction on the binding and title pages, *The Larger Catechism of the Westminster Assembly: A Transcription of the Surviving Manuscripts with Notes*, transcribed and edited by Chris Coldwell, with forewords by J. Ligon Duncan, Ph.D. and Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, Ph.D. (Westminster Letter Press, 2009), published in regular, deluxe, slipcase and clamshell editions.

The Larger Catechism

Manuscript in Hand "A"

¹fo. 159r
I

To the Right Hon:^{ble} the Lords &
Comons assembled in Parliam^t.
The humble Advice of the Assembly of
Divines sitting at Westminster,
Concerning a Larger Catechisme.

[1] *Quest*: What is the cheife & highest end of man?

Ans: Mans cheif & highest end is, to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.

[2] *Qu*: How doth it appeare² that there is a God?

Ans: The very light of nature in man, & the Workes of God, declare plainly that there is a God: But his Word, & Spirit only do sufficiently & effectually reveile him unto men for their salvation.

[3] *Qu*: What is the Word of God?

Ans: The Holy Scriptures of the Old & New Testament are the Word of God, the only Rule of Faith & obedience.³

[4] *Qu*: How doth it appeare that the Scriptures are the Word of God?

Ans: The Scriptures manifest themselves to bee the Word of God, by their Majesty,⁴ & purity, by the consent of all the parts, & the Scope of the whole, which is,⁵ to give all glory to God; by their light & power to convince, & convert sinners, to comfort & build up beleivers unto salvation:⁶ But, the Spirit of God, bearing witnes by,⁷ & with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it, that they are the very Word of God.

1. Fo. 158v is blank. The questions are not numbered in either manuscript.

2. Or "appeare, that" (Bower, 139). There is a smudge in the copy.

3. This "o" appears to be lowercase (B, 139).

4. In MSa it is often difficult to determine if an "M", "S", "W" or "O" is capitalized or not. In this instance the "M" is clearly uppercase. When the determination of case is

doubtful, the best guess will be in the text and the alternate reading placed in the footnote.

5. Bower appears to place the comma between "which" and "is" (140). This may be simply a spacing error, as Bower's method is to arrange the variants in a tabular form under the text from the authoritative first printed edition.

6. Or "Salvation" (B, 140).

7. No punctuation (B, 140).

Manuscript in Hand “B”

The Larger Catechism

To the Right Hon^{ble}; the Lords e’ Coñons
 assembled in Parliamen^t
 The Humble Advise of the Assembly of
 Divines sitting at
 Westminster
 Concerning
 A Larger Catechisme.

fo. 133r

[1] Qu:¹ What is the Chief, & highest end of Man?

Ans: Mans chief & highest end is, to glorify God, & fully to enjoy him, for ever.

[2] Qu: How doth it appear that there is a God?

Ans: The very light of nature in man, & the Works² of God, de«clare plainly,³ that there is a God; but⁴ his Word⁵ & Spirit onely do sufficiently & effectually reveale him unto men for their salvation.

[3] Qu: What is the word of God?

Ans: The Holy Scriptures of the Old & New Testament, are the word of God;⁶ the onely rule of Faith & Obedience.

[4] Qu: How doth it appear, that the Scriptures are the Word of God?

Ans: The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God, by their majesty, & purity, by the consent of all the parts, & the scope of the whole;⁷ which is to give all glory⁸ | to God, by their light & power to convince & convert sinners, to comfort & build up beleevers unto salvation: But the Spirit of God, bearing witness by & with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to perswade it, that they are the very Word⁹ of God.

fo. 133v

1. MSb is inconsistent in abbreviating Question and Answer, and did not underline, a common notation for emphasis, rendered in the italic face in print.

2. Not “Workes” (B, 139).

3. Comma missed (B, 139).

4. Not “But” (B, 139).

5. As with MSa it is often difficult to distinguish lowercase and uppercase W’s

in MSb. In doubtful cases the less likely reading will be noted in a footnote. There is no comma after “Word” (B, 139).

6. Or “God, the”; the ‘dot’ is faint.

7. Or “whole,”; the ‘dot’ is faint.

8. Catchword: “to God”. MSb uses “catchwords.” These are footnoted rather than repeating the text in the transcription.

9. Or “word” (B, 139).

The Larger Catechism

Manuscript in Hand “A”

ing, revileing, or any wayes opposing of Gods trueth, grace & wayes; making profession of Religion in hypocrisy, or for sinister ends; beeing ashamed of it, or a shame to it, by uncomfortable,^{169A} unwise, unfruitfull, & offensive walking, or backslideing from it.

[114] **Qu:** What Reasons are annexed to the Third Commandment?

Ans: The Reasons annexed to the third Commandment, in these words, “The Lord thy God” and, “for, the Lord will not hold him guiltlesse that taketh his name in vaine” are, because hee is the Lord «&» our God, and therefore his Name is not to bee profaned, or any way abused by us; especially, because he wilbee so | farre from acquitting, & spareing the transgressors of this Commandment, as that hee will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment, albeit many such escape the censures & punishments of men.

fo. 168v
22

[115] **Qu:** Which is the fourth Commandment?

Ans: The fourth Commandment, is, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy: six dayes shalt thou labour, & do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it, thou shalt not do any work; thou, nor they son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, «nor» thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For, in six dayes, the Lord made heaven & earth, the sea, & all that in them is, & rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, & hallowed it.”

[116] **Qu:** What is required in the fourth Commandment?

Ans: The fourth Commandment requireth of all men, the sanctifying, or keeping holy to God, such sett time as hee hath appointed in his Word; espresly, one whole day in seven, which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and, the first day of the week, ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world,^{169B} which is the Christian Sabbath; and, in the New Testament, called, the Lords Day.

*169. A. The word “uncomfortable” was changed to “unconformable” in the Kincaid edition of 1781, and carried through the first edition by Blair and Bruce (1803), but was corrected in the 1810 and 1815 editions. It was changed back in their other editions, through that of 1841. The change remained in the tra-

ditional text from that point. Due to the late introduction, the long string of PCUSA/PCUS American editions are correct, but at this writing not the modern ARP standards, or those of the BP, OPC, PCA, and RPCNA.

169. B. Not “world; which” (B, 216).

Manuscript in Hand “B”

The Larger Catechism

maligning, scorning, reviling, or any ways opposing of Gods truth, grace, & ways; making profession of Religion in hypocrisy, or for sinister ends; being ashamed of it, or a shame to it, by uncomfortable,²¹⁷ unwise, unfruitfull, & offensive walking, or backsliding from it.

[114] Q. What Reasons are annexed to the third Commandement?

A. The Reasons annexed to the third Commandement, in these words, «“The LORD thy God” and» “For the LORD will not hold him guiltlesse that taketh his name in vain,” are, because «hee»²¹⁸ is the Lord, & our God, & therefore his name is not to be profaned, or any way abused, by us; especially, because he will be so far from acquitting & sparing the transgressors of this Commandement, as that he will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgements,²¹⁹ albeit many such escape the censures and punishments of men.

[115] Q. Which is the fourth Commandement?

A. The fourth Commandement is “Remember the Sabbath²²⁰ day to keep it holy: Six days shalt thou labour, & do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God; in it thou shalt²²¹ not do any²²² work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor they maydservant, nor thy cattell, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the IORD made heaven, & earth, the sea, & all that²²³ in them is, & rested the seventh day; wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.[”]

[116] Q. What is required in the fourth Commandement?

A. The fourth Commandement requireth, of all men, the sanctifying, or keeping holy to God, such set time²²⁴ as hee²²⁵ | hath appointed in his Word;²²⁶ expressly,²²⁷ one whole day in seven; which was the seventh, from the²²⁸ «beginning of the world» to the Resurrection of Christ; & the first day of the week ever since, & so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian Sabbath, & in the New Testament called the Lords day. fo. 145r

*217. See 169a on the facing page.

218. The word “God” erased.

*219. MSa and printed texts have “judgement” singular.

220. Or “sabbath”.

221. The word “do” erased.

222. Word erased.

223. Word erased.

*224. This was changed to “times” in the traditional text. See Endnote D.

225. Catchword: “hath ap=”.

226. “word” (B, 215).

227. Not “expressly” (B, 215).

228. Words or a long word deleted.