

A Comparison of 2 Reformed Catechisms: Heidelberg & Westminster

Heidelberg Catechism

Date: 1563 in Heidelberg, Germany

Who: Zacharius Ursinus & Caspar Olevianus

- *Ursinus* was a 28-year old Theology Professor at the Heidelberg University.
- *Olevianus* was a 26-year old preacher for Frederick III, who requested the Confession.

Goal: To prepare a Reformed catechism for young people, pastors, and teachers.

Validity: Approved by a Heidelberg Synod in January of 1563.

Unique Facts:

- This catechism contains more scripture references than most because the authors wanted it to be an “*echo of the Bible*”.
- The 129 questions and answers are divided into 3 parts, mirroring the book of Romans.
- The Heidelberg Catechism is often nicknamed “*The Book of Comfort*”.
- It has been translated into numerous European, Asian, and African languages.
- It remains the most widely used and praised catechism of the Reformation.

Westminster Catechism (Shorter & Larger)

Date: 1643-1648 in Westminster Abbey, England

Who: The Westminster Assembly (151 total members)

Goal: To create a system of beliefs for the Church of England that would be Reformed *in worship, government, and doctrine*. The Confession was aimed at bringing the Church of England into conformity with the doctrine & practice of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland.

Validity: Approved in 1648, *along with its Directory for Public Worship & The Form of Church Government*.

Unique Facts:

- Every member of the Assembly took a vow to “*maintain nothing in point of doctrine but what I believe to be most agreeable to the Word of God.*”
- There were **1,163** recorded sessions of the Westminster Assembly meeting over a 5-year period.
- The Confession & Catechisms have influenced Presbyterianism more than any other book, alongside the Heidelberg Catechism and Calvin’s *Institutes*.
- The Shorter Catechism contains 107 questions, while the Larger, 196 questions. The Shorter Catechism is well known for its first question & answer: What is the chief end of man? “*To glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.*”

For sources & further reading, see:

- 1) “*Historical Introduction of the Westminster Assembly*”. Confessions of Our Faith: Fortress Edition. Tanglewood Publishing, 2012. Orange cover, pages xv-xxiii.
- 2) “*Historical Introduction to the Reformed Confessions*”. Edited by Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1999, pages ix-xiii.