

## ON CATECHISI

BY RICHARD BAXTER.

When I look before me and consider what, through the blessing of God, this work, if well managed, is like to effect, it makes my heart leap for joy. Truly, brethren, you have begun a most blessed work, and such as your own consciences may rejoice in, and your parishioners rejoice in, and the nation rejoice in, and the child that is yet unborn rejoice in. Yea, thousands and millions, for aught we know, may have cause to bless God for it, when we have finished our course. And though it is our business this day to humble ourselves for the neglect of it so long, as we have very great cause to do, yet the hopes of a blessed success are so great in me that they are ready to turn it into a day of rejoicing.

I bless the Lord that I have lived to see such a day as this, and to be present at so solemn an engagement of so many servants of Christ to such a work. I bless the Lord that hath honored you, of this County, to be the beginners and awakers of the nation to this duty. It is not a controverted point, as to which the exasperated minds of men might pick quarrels with us, nor is it a new invention, as to which envy might charge you as innovators, or pride might scorn to follow, because you had led the way. No: it is a well-known duty. It is but the more diligent and effectual management of the ministerial work. It is not a new invention, but simply the restoration of the ancient ministerial work. And because it is so pregnant with advantages to the Church I will enumerate some of the particular benefits which we may hope to result from it, that when you see the excellency of it you may be the more set upon it, and the more loath, by any negligence or failing of yours, to frustrate or destroy it. For certainly he who hath the true intention of a minister of Christ will rejoice in the appearance of any further hope of attaining the ends of his ministry; and nothing will be more welcome to him than that which will further the very business of his life. That this work is calculated to accomplish this, I shall now show you more particularly. It would be a most hopeful means of the conversion of souls; for it unites these great things which most further such an end.

1. As to the matter of it: it is about the most necessary things, the principles and essentials of the Christian faith.

2. As to the manner of it: it will be by private conference, when we may have a *private opportunity* to set all home to the conscience and the heart.

The work of conversion consisteth of two parts: 1. The informing of the judgment in the essential principles of religion. 2. The change of the will by the efficacy of the faith. Now, in this work, we have the most excellent advantages for both. For the informing of

their understandings, it must be an excellent help to have the sum of Christianity fixed on their memory. And though bare words, not understood, will make no change, yet, when the words are plain English, he that hath the words is far more likely to understand the meaning and matter than another. For what have we by which to make known things, which are themselves invisible, but words, or other signs? Those, therefore, who deride all Catechisms as unprofitable forms, may better deride themselves for talking and using the form of their own words to make known their minds to others. Why may not writt'n words, which are constantly before their eyes and in their memories, instruct them as well as the transient words of a preacher? These "forms of sound words" are, therefore, so far from being unprofitable, as some persons imagine, that they are of admirable use to all. Besides, we shall have the opportunity, of personal conference, to try how far they understand the Catechism, and to explain it to them as we go along; and to insist on those particulars which the persons we speak to have most need to hear. These two conjoined,—a form of sound words, with a plain explication,—may do more than either of them could do alone.

Moreover, we shall have the best opportunity to impress the truth upon their hearts, when we can speak to each individual's particular necessity, and say to the sinner, "Thou art the man;" and plainly mention his particular case; and set home the truth with familiar importunity. If anything in the world is likely to do them good it is this. They will understand a familiar speech who understand not a sermon; and they will have far greater help for the application of it to themselves. Besides, you will hear their objections, and know where it is that Satan hath most advantage of them, and so may be able to shew them their errors and confute their objections, and more effectually convince them. We can better bring them to the point, and urge them to discover their resolutions for the future, and to promise the use of means and reformation, than otherwise we could do. What more proof need we of this than our own experience. I seldom deal with men purposely on this great business in private, serious conference, but they go away with some seeming convictions, and promises of new obedience, if not some deeper remorse and sense of their condition. O brethren! what a blow may we give to the kingdom of darkness by the faithful and skilful management of this work? If, then, the saving of souls—of your neighbor's souls—of many souls from everlasting misery, be worth your labor,—up and be doing. If you would be the fathers of many that are born again, and would see "of the travail of your souls," and would be able to say at last "Here am I, and the children whom thou hast given me."—up and ply this blessed work.