



## CATECHISMS

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**CATECHISMS**, treatises for instruction in the fundamental tenets of a religious faith, cast in the form of questions and answers. In this article Zoroastrian catechisms are discussed. For Islamic “catechisms” in Persia see Šarʿjyāt.

Catechisms in the strict sense are rare in the extant Zoroastrian literature and do not constitute a distinct category. In most periods of the history of Zoroastrianism education of the laity in doctrinal matters was apparently left to the discretion of individual teachers.

*A Sasanian catechism.* That a formal catechism was used in Sasanian times to prepare children for investiture with the *kusti* (sacred girdle; q.v.), is, however, suggested by the opening passage of the *Čīdag andarz ī pōryōtkēšān*: “Every person who reaches the age of fifteen should know these things: “Who am I? Whose am I? From where have I come? Whither shall I return?”. . .” These questions are followed by the appropriate responses (Kanga, 1960, pp. 1f., 20f.; cf. Boyce, 1984, p. 99). Parts of the same formula occur in other collections of *andarz* (precepts; Shaked, pp. 115, 185; Jamasp-Asana, p. 57; Kanga, 1948, p. 4), which suggests, however, that the text as a whole was no longer recognized as a distinct treatise for religious education by the time the *andarz* works were written down in their final form, in or after a.d. the 9th century.

*Modern catechisms.* In response to confusion and discord aroused in the Parsi community in India by contact with Western missionaries and scholars in the 19th century learned Parsis began to write treatises expounding their own



understanding of Zoroastrianism. Some of these works were composed in the form of questions and answers, perhaps modeled on Christian catechisms. Notable among them are J. J. Modi's *A Catechism of the Zoroastrian Religion* and S. H. Jhabvala's *Catechism on Zoroastrianism*. The content of these treatises must be considered in the light of the controversies between orthodox and reformists which divided the Parsi community. Modi evidently attempted an exposition of the faith that would not be controversial, focusing on belief in the existence of Ahura Mazdā, immortality of the soul, and individual responsibility. Jhabvala's work, on the other hand, shows pronounced reformist tendencies, including the view of evil as a test created by Ahura Mazdā for mankind and ritual as of secondary importance.

The influence of such Parsi reformist ideas can be recognized in at least one Persian catechism, K. Š. Kermānī's *Ā'īna-ye ā'īn-e mazdayasnī*, in which Zoroastrianism is represented as a monotheistic faith; this work is thought to have played a part in promoting tolerance of Zoroastrianism among educated Iranian Muslims (cf. Boyce, 1979, p. 220).

There is nothing to suggest, however, that within the Zoroastrian community such catechisms were more influential than similar works in other formats (e.g., Kermānī, 1908; Modi, 1914). They are simply one part of the body of religious treatises from which individual teachers select material for instruction.

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