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## The Consistency of Scripture by Richard Bacon

**[Editor's Note: This is an edited transcription from the second lesson of a series Pastor Bacon taught on Westminster Larger Catechism Question 4. Part 1 appeared in the April-May, 1993 *Blue Banner* and was titled "The Majesty of Scripture."]**

The Larger Catechism continues in answer four to state that the Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God by their consistency, or by the consent of all the parts; by the harmony of Scripture. One part of Scripture does not speak against or contradict another part.

There are three characteristics of human or uninspired writings that we can use to compare to Scripture. If we understand the inconsistencies of human, uninspired writings, then it will give us a little bit better notion of why we understand the Scriptures to be inspired from the fact that Scripture has consistency in all the parts.

First: Fallen men are blind and unacquainted with the things of God. As a result, their writings are hardly ever consistent with themselves, much less with one another, as they speak of God. Because men are blinded by their depravity, they receive not the things of the Spirit of God. Men's writings are therefore seldom consistent with themselves. The writings of men are even more inconsistent with *other* men's writings. We start off with strike one: a lack of self-consistency, or consistency with others who are speaking about God.

Second: Men are likely to contradict one another when any scheme of doctrine is laid down by several men who are speaking from different ages and different areas of the world. For example, if one person speaks of the holiness of God in one age in one part of the world; some one else dealing with the same doctrine in another

age and another part of the world, will likely demonstrate some inconsistencies. There will be something less than "consent" of the parts. Strike two.

Third: The disagreement of men will show up especially if the authors were not of great wisdom; if they were not especially well educated; if the authors lived far apart from one another; if they had no acquaintanceship with one another during their own generation; if they were from subsequent generations; if they were from different ages. The farther apart men get in education, in the time in which they lived and in the area of the world in which they lived, the greater the likelihood is that they will contradict one another. Strike three.

We now have three things that are working *against* consistency. If we can see in the Scriptures that those three hindrances are overcome, then we have evidence that this book is the Word of God. Evidence does not fully persuade us to believe the Scriptures. We only become fully persuaded by the Spirit bearing witness in our hearts that the Scriptures truly are the Word of God. But this is evidence. It is one more reason we should understand the Scriptures to be true. If we do not believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God, this evidence is one more witness against us at the judgment.

First: Look at the fact that some prophecies and predictions were fulfilled much later. A prophecy or prediction was made by someone at one date and then at some later time that prediction or prophecy came to pass. It might be said that this has to do with prophecy and not consistency, but look specifically at the kind of prophecy that was fulfilled in Scripture themselves.

One example is in Isaiah 44:27-28. In fact, it is interesting to note that this is one of the places that are adduced to "prove" that the second part of the book of

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Isaiah could not have been written when it claims it have been written. Isaiah knew certain things that he “could not have known” because they happened long after the time he was writing the book. “That saith to the deep, be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers: That saith of Cyrus, He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.”

Isaiah predicted that it would be *by the decree of Cyrus* that the temple would be rebuilt in Jerusalem. Isaiah predicted this, calling Cyrus by name, one hundred and fifty years before Cyrus was born. Isaiah predicted this before the first temple had even been destroyed..

In Isaiah 45:1 and 4 we read, “Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut;... For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name; I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me.”

There is no reason for us to think that Cyrus was a Christian. He simply did what God decreed that he would do in helping the church. However, it is also true that Cyrus had not yet been born when Isaiah wrote this passage. Cyrus would not be born for another one hundred and fifty years. Yet God called him by his name in the book of Isaiah. Here there is tremendous *evidence* for the consistency of the parts.

Turn to Ezra 1:2-3, “Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.”

One hundred fifty years ‘earlier,’ Isaiah prophesied and called Cyrus by name. One hundred fifty years ‘later,’ all of it came to pass. It came to pass down to the spelling of the man’s name.

Second: There are specific predictions regarding Christ. Look at Acts 10: 42-43, “And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give *all the prophets witness*, that through his

name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”

We should therefore expect the Old Testament primarily to point to Christ. We should expect to be able to find predictions, prophecies about Christ, and then see them fulfilled in the New Testament Scriptures. So this is much like our first point regarding prophecies being fulfilled. Yet it is *more specific*.

First: It was predicted that Christ would come *in the flesh*. It was almost assumed in the Old Testament, but there are also some specific prophecies. In Isaiah 7: 14, “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall *conceive*, and bear a *son*, and shall call his name Immanuel.” The New Testament applies that to Christ. Christ was born in the flesh.

Look at Isaiah 9:6, “For unto us a child is *born*, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

We anticipate, by looking at these two verses in Isaiah, that Messiah will have a human nature; that he will come *in the flesh*. We expect that he will not simply come walking over a mountain someday, but will grow up as any child and such is the very thing we discover in the New Testament. Look at John chapter one for example. The Word, which was eternal, which was always with God, which always was God, became flesh. The Word took flesh upon himself.<sup>1</sup> In Galatians 4:4, in the fullness of time Christ was *born* of a woman, *born* under the law. Christ fulfilled the very prophecies that we just looked at in Isaiah. The testimonies of the gospel writers are that Jesus Christ fulfilled those very prophecies.

Second: It was predicted that Christ would *work miracles*. Scripture tells us, for example in Isaiah 35, that Messiah’s ministry would be accompanied by miracles. Speaking of Messiah, Isaiah 35:5-6 says, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap, as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.”

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<sup>1</sup> Compare John 1:1 to John 1:4.

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Now compare that passage with Matthew 11. John the Baptist was in jail and soon to be beheaded for his witness to Christ. As he was lying in jail, and the whole world seems to be crumbling around him, he sent some of his disciples to ask of Jesus, "Are you the Christ, or should we look for another?" Jesus answered, "Here is the evidence." He quoted Isaiah 35:5-6. "Go tell John that the eyes of the blind are being opened, the ears of the deaf are being unstopped, the lame are leaping, the tongues of the dumb are singing..." That told John that *Messiah has come!* Jesus said in essence, "I am the One!!"

Third: Scripture prophesied that Christ would be born into a **low estate**. It is difficult to select a single New Testament passage because this is everywhere assumed. We are told throughout that Christ walked where he went, he was hungered, that he was born in a stable. We are told that while the foxes have dens and the birds have nests, Christ had not a place to lay his head. Throughout the gospels we are told of the low estate of Christ and that *very thing* was prophesied of him in the Old Testament.

We read in Isaiah 52:14, "As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men." And in Isaiah 53:3, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Isaiah spoke of a man of low degree. That did not refer to his personal worth: he has infinite personal worth. But as far as the esteem of the world, he was born in a low degree.

Fourth: Scriptures prophesied that Messiah **would be "cut off."** That is another way of saying that he would die for his people. In Numbers 21:9, God told Moses to make a serpent of brass, lift it up and whoever would look to the serpent will live. Look at John 3:14: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." That saying signified the *death* he would die.

Isaiah 53:7, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." Isaiah prophesied that Christ would be slain, and that for the

sins of his people. (Reference verse 6 in this same passage.)

In Daniel 9:26, "And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined." Christ was cut off in the midst of Daniel's seventieth "week." Daniel used the term "week" for a period of seven years. In other words, there was a "year-day." So the period of seven "days," a "week," was a period of seven years. Interestingly, the gospels tell us that if we count from the time Christ was first baptized and entered upon his earthly ministry until his crucifixion, we find about three and one half years. So Christ was cut off in the midst of Daniel's seventieth "week." One of the reasons that the anticipation of the Messiah was so high at the time of Christ was that the people who could count the weeks from the time of the building of the temple according to Daniel until the time of Messiah, realized that the right number of years had passed. It was *the time* for Messiah. When Messiah was cut off in the midst of the week, after three and one half years of public ministry, he fulfilled that prophecy.

The predictions regarding the Christ were that he would come **in the flesh**, that he would **work miracles**, that he would be born in a **low estate**, that he would be **cut off** for his people, but not only that, but also, fifth, that he would be **exalted**. This idea gave the rabbis trouble. One Scripture speaks of the suffering servant and yet another Scripture, seemingly also about Messiah, speaks of the Messiah being exalted. Which is true? Christians understand that it is both, because his kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. His kingdom comes not by the sword, but by the Holy Spirit.

In Isaiah 52:13 we read, "Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high." That statement flows right into the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. In Psalm 68:18, "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."

Compare those predictions with Acts 1:9, "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." Christ ascended into heaven, he sat down at the right hand of God in heaven. Romans 1:4 says, "And

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declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” His resurrection declares him to be the Messiah, to be the Son of God. He is the Messiah, and declared and manifested as such by his resurrection, his ascension, and his session at the right hand of the throne of God.

In Philippians 2:5-8, Paul said, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Look at verse 9: “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.” There is no other name higher than his name. At that name “every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth. And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

His name has been *exalted* above every name because he is Lord. He is the Lord of everything — things in heaven, things on earth, things under the earth. When the world was created there were the three divisions: the heavens, the earth, and the things under the earth. Those are the three divisions of creation. (See also Exodus 20:4) Things in the heaven, things on the earth and things under the earth will *all* bow their knee to Jesus.

Sixth: Scripture prophesied that Christ’s glory would be *proclaimed throughout the earth*. In Isaiah 11:10, “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.” We see that Messiah, when he came would not only be an ensign for the Jew, but also for the Gentile. The gospel is not for the Israel, but also for the one outside Israel; for the one who had until that time been outside the covenant. In Psalm 110: 1-2, “ The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.” This prophecy is that Messiah will rule in the midst of those who had been enemies of the people of God. In Isaiah 60:1-3, “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the

darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.” The prediction was that the gospel would be proclaimed not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles.

Look at I Timothy 3:16, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” Paul said those things because these were all predicated of Christ in the Old Testament: that he would be seen in the world; that he would be manifest in the flesh; that he would work miracles; that he would be cut off; that he would be exalted; that his glory would be proclaimed; and so forth. All these things speak of Christ, and all of them were predicted of Christ in the Old Testament.

Seventh: Christ was spoken of as *the spring of our blessedness*. In Genesis 22:18, by Abraham’s seed shall “all the nations of the earth be blessed.” The fulfillment of that promise was a long time coming. From the time of Abraham to the time of Christ is about two thousand years. After all that time, after all that waiting, we see finally when Christ came, he was the spring of our blessedness.

In Psalm 72:17, the same thing was predicated of the Messiah: that he would be blessing for the whole world. In II Corinthians 6:2, we see the fulfillment of these prophecies. “For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

In Acts 3:26, “Unto you first God, having raised up his son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.”

Two thousand years before the birth of Jesus Christ, God predict that in the seed of Abraham all the nations of the world would be *blessed*. The New Testament authors inform us this seed of Abraham is Jesus Christ. They explain to us that this blessing is only in Christ. It is Christ by whom all the nations of the world will be blessed.

We must remember the difficulty we face with Scriptural consistency. It is necessary if Scripture is true that the Bible’s authors not contradict one another over

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a long period of time and in several parts of the world. Men, depending upon their own abilities, would be unable to speak and write the same message with consistency. Yet in Scripture we can see author after author, writing in different parts of the world, in different times, all speaking with respect to one and the same Christ. Further, we can see all these prophecies coming to their fulfillment yet later in Scripture. As we see these fulfillments taking place, we also see how “consent of the parts” of Scripture works together. We do not maintain that the Scriptures are Christomonistic (that they do not speak *only* of Christ). But we do maintain that they are Christocentric, that they speak *primarily* of Christ and that Christ is their central theme.

After Christ’s resurrection, as he spoke to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he reminded them that the Old Testament, that is to say, the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, testified of him. All of Scripture, because of the consent of its parts, finally resolve themselves on Christ. As we examine Scripture we should have Christ in mind. We know that the Scripture will testify of him. We should also be confident in the evidence that so many authors over so long a period of time in different parts of the world would speak so *unerringly* and *consistently* of Christ.

An objection that we hear from unbelievers when we speak to them about the Scripture, is that they claim that there are contradictions in the Word of God.

We start with the presupposition that Scripture cannot be *both* true *and* contradictory. How then do we resolve various seeming “contradictions” in Scripture?

First: Some of the old hand written manuscripts have copyist errors in them. For example, using the Arabic numbers that we use, suppose a manuscript has the number ten written as “1” and “0.” When someone copied it they may make it look like sixteen, like “1” and “6.” So the copyist writes down sixteen. That is an *example* of a copyist error. There are very few of them, but there are some. There are some corrupt manuscripts. The fact that manuscripts disagree among each other does not mean that the Word of God contains contradictions, it means that copyists are fallible. When a manuscript stands alone, or even when a group of manuscripts stand alone with a deviant reading, they are such a small minority as to become less than one percent. All the errors are not in one manuscript. That would make it easy, but it is not that way. Text critics

must compare manuscript with manuscript to find out what is the correct reading. Sometimes there are copyist errors, but they are uncommon.

Second: Sometimes in Scripture, the same person or the same place has different names. In one place in Scripture Moses’ father-in-law is called Jethro and in another place he is called Hobob. He is known by both names. Gibeah is also known as Kirjath-Jearim and is also known as Baalah. All three place names refer to the same location. The same person or the same place may sometimes have more than one name. That is another clue to reconciling Scriptures. When one passage says that a person went some place, and another passage says he went some ‘other’ place, perhaps it was the same place with two different names.

Third: Sometimes chronological differences, differences in a person’s age or how long a plague lasted, and so forth can be resolved by understanding the method of computing. If one prophet said a plague would last seven years, and another prophet said the plague would last another four years, it would not be a contradiction if one of the prophets said it in the midst of the plague. If he came in the middle of the plague and said there are still four more years, he may be right. If the other person said that the whole plague, from beginning to end would last seven years, then perhaps he is right. We have to look at the method of computing.

Fourth: The kings present a special problem, so when we hear objections having to do with the kings, the resolution may have to do with the way the ascension year has been computed. It may have to do with the fact that some of the kings reigned while their fathers were still alive. Some reigned while their fathers were off at war and then when their fathers came back they did not continue to reign. Some of the kings reigned by having someone oversee their reign for a period of time, and then reigned alone after coming of age.

Fifth: This one seems like such a straightforward resolution. It is amazing that people do not realize this, but the reason people object to Scripture is not from an intellectual problem. It is due to a desire to turn their backs on Scripture. But the straightforward resolution to an *apparent* contradiction is that two different Scriptures that seem to be contradicting each other might be treating *different subjects*. They might be speaking of two different things.

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Sixth: What may superficially appear to be a contradiction, may sometimes be resolved simply by realizing that sometimes God is speaking in absolute terms and sometimes he is using comparative terms. For example, there is a commandment, “honor thy father and mother.” Jesus said, “If you do not hate your father and mother, you cannot be my disciple.” That is a seeming contradiction. But the first is an absolute commandment, “honor thy father and mother.” The other is a comparative term: *compared* to our love for God, our love and honor for our parents should manifest itself far less.

Seventh: Sometimes seeming contradictions arise from the Scriptures treating people either in their private capacities or in their public capacities. For example, when the Scriptures say in one place, “Judge righteous judgment,” and in another place, “Judge not” is there a contradiction? It is only a superficial contradiction. We can resolve this seeming contradiction by simply acknowledging that when God says, “judge righteous judgment,” he is speaking of people whose capacity it was to be judging. “When you judge, judge righteous judgment.” The other passage in Matthew 7:1 is saying virtually the same thing. “Judge not, lest ye be likewise judged.” There Christ was saying, “judge righteous judgment.” He was not saying, “Do not judge at all,” because in that very passage he went on to say, “Beware of false teachers. Beware of false prophets. Beware of wolves dressed in sheep’s clothing.” How are we going to know of whom to beware? Christ said, “It is simple. Look at a tree: if it has bad fruit, it is a bad tree.” In the very context of “judge not,” Christ told us to make judgments. We can resolve many seeming contradictions by determining the various capacities, the various offices that the passage addresses.

Eighth: *Seeming* contraries may both be true if they are true in different respects. Of course, this could not be the case with *true* contraries. But with *seeming* contraries, we must look for the respect in which they are different and then determine if that difference is significant for a solution. Jesus let a woman break an alabaster box and pour costly ointment on him. Judas protested. Judas said that the ointment could have been sold and given to the poor. Jesus said, “The poor you have with you always, but not me.” In Matthew 28:20, he said, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the

world.” These statements *seem* to be contradictory.<sup>2</sup> But they are true in different respects. Spiritually, Christ is with us always. Physically, Christ was here until the ascension. At the ascension, he left the earth physically. He is still with us spiritually until the end of the age. We must understand that sometimes Scripture speaks of apparent contraries being true, but true in different respects.

Ninth: God speaks to different times and different dispensations.<sup>3</sup> Things are administered differently at different times in the history of redemption. Because things are administered differently, we sometimes see things that were done a certain way no longer done the same way at a different time in redemptive history. There was a time, for example, when God commanded every male to appear in Jerusalem three times in the year. Because Christ abolished the ceremonial law that is no longer required. This is not a contradiction. Jesus taught that the time was coming when men would *no longer* either in Jerusalem or in Samaria worship the Father. We must understand that sometimes a commandment which was given in one time or dispensation does not hold true in a subsequent dispensation. We must make *proper distinctions*, then, between times and administrations.

There we have nine hopefully helpful ways of resolving *seeming* contradictions in Scriptures. We must approach seeming contradictions from the standpoint of how we can resolve them. We must approach contradictions from the standpoint of how we can believe there is a consent of all the parts. This is simply to approach Scripture as believers. We must approach Scriptures as believers, and with the attitude that Scripture is true. Where there are seeming contradictions in Scripture, it is our understanding of Scripture that is faulty not the Scripture. ♦

Tapes of Pastor Bacon’s series on the Westminster Larger Catechism (through question 69 currently) are available from Blue Banner. Please write for a catalog of titles and pricing. P O Box 141084, Dallas, TX, 75214.
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<sup>2</sup> Let A = “I am with you always.” Then not-A would be “It is not the case that I am with you always” or “I am NOT with you always.”

<sup>3</sup> Don’t be afraid of the term “dispensation.” It simply means that God does not deal in the same manner at all times with all people. There are various administrations of God’s grace and the *administration* differs according to God’s will.

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# The Westminster Directory for Public Worship and The Lining of the Psalms

by Chris Coldwell

“Lining of the Psalms” is one of the practices the Steelites make a term of communion and a reason (among others) for separating or remaining separate from other churches.<sup>1</sup> Richard Bacon<sup>2</sup> in his *Defense Departed* does a fine introduction to the general problems and errors of the Steelites, and it is not my intent to go over that ground again. Here I would simply like to point out the degree of absurdity to which men can go when they bind themselves to the doctrines and commandments of men. “Lining of the Psalms” is a clear illustration of this.

The Steelites make “lining the psalms” necessary based upon their idea of “attainments.” For a refutation of the error of the Steelite view of attainments see the aforementioned paper by Pastor Bacon. It is the point of this paper to show that the necessity of lining was not an “attainment” of the First or Second Scottish Reformations, and as instituted it was not considered a “necessary” practice.

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<sup>1</sup> *Why the PCA is Not a Duly Constituted Church and Why Faithful Christians Should Separate from this Corrupted “Communion” Two letters from Larry Birger, Jr. to the session of his former congregation in the PCA, with an historical introduction* (Still Waters Revival Books web site). Birger insisted that lining of the Psalms was one of the reforms necessary to be instituted for him to remain in his PCA church. He writes: “<sup>2</sup> A repudiation of uninspired hymnody, and the singing only of Psalms from the aforesaid Psalter, and that being done by lining them out, as detailed in the Directory for Public Worship (that all in the assembly may be edified, not simply the most part).” The Directory nowhere indicates this as the reason for lining. This is Steele’s reason, but not the Westminster Divine’s. The Directory clearly allows for the practice if the majority of a congregation is illiterate. Nowhere does the Directory indicate that lining is necessary for edification. It was presented as an expedient resolution for a particular case (illiteracy) and not as a necessity.

Lining is rather pathetically defended as the only means of singing unto edification in *Continuous Singing, In The Ordinary Public Worship Of God, Considered In The Light Of Scripture And The Subordinate Standards Of The Reformed Presbyterian Church; In Answer To Some Letters Of Inquiry Addressed To The Writer*. By David Steele.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Bacon, *Defense Departed: Being a Refutation of “A Brief Defence of Dissociation in the Present Circumstances.”* This is available in printed form from Blue Banner Books, \$3.95. It is available for free at the FPCR web site, <http://www.fpcr.org/fpcrprc/defence.htm>.

## WESTMINSTER DIRECTORY FOR THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD

The Westminster Divines intended the *Directory for the Public Worship of God* to be an agenda or prescribed order, not a set of forms and words that tied ministers’ performance to the letter of the liturgy.<sup>3</sup> In fact one of the factors the Divines gave for rejecting the *Book of Common Prayer* was that the prelates had raised its stature such that no other way of worship was acceptable and the ignorant treated the book as an idol.<sup>4</sup> What the height of irony it is that any today would treat the Westminster Directory in a similar fashion! But, as the Westminster Divines acknowledged, even something initially good and useful to the church (e.g. the Book of Common Prayer), can become abused as to become a cause of offense, and even an idol and idolatry itself, like the Brazen Serpent that Hezekiah had destroyed (2 Kings 18:4).

### INTENT OF THE DIRECTORY

One need only look at the disputes among the compilers of the Westminster Directory to see that it was never intended as a liturgy binding to the letter. The Directory has several instances of compromise within it. The practice of using the form of the prayers as opposed to extemporaneous prayer was favored by some, opposed by others. Each wanted their specific view specified in the Directory. C. G. M’Crie cites Neal’s *History of Puritans* saying “those who were for set forms resolved to confine themselves to the very words of the Directory, while others made use of them only as heads for their enlargement.”<sup>5</sup> Between the Scots and the

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<sup>3</sup> Henderson says “ministers, although “not tied to set forms and words,” are “not left at random, but have their directory and prescribed order.” C. G. M’Crie summarizes Calderwood’s understanding of the Scottish order prior to the Westminster Directory: “we have, he declares, our agenda and an order to be observed in conducting divine service; and yet no one is tied down to the prayers or exhortations which are given as so many examples, in which, while structure and substance are indicated, there is no intention of binding ministers to the exact terms employed.”(p. 194-195).

<sup>4</sup> See *The Preface of The Directory for The Public Worship of God* in the Free Presbyterian Publications edition of the Westminster Standards.

<sup>5</sup> The Preface to the Directory (which the Scottish Kirk specifically pointed to as important in understanding the intent of the directory), while allowing the use of the forms, also warns against this becoming a trap to slothfulness. The Divines encouraged ministers not to limit themselves to only the words and that a minister “be careful to furnish his heart and tongue with further or other materials of prayer and exhortation, as shall be needful upon all occasions.”

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English Independents there was a great difference over coming to the table for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Compromise language was adopted, and the Church of Scotland in their adopting act maintained their practice as the correct one. Another instance that displeased the Scots was the addition to the Directory of the English practice of "lining the Psalm" which had been added when the Scots Commissioners were absent. They were allowed to prepare a paper on their objections, and what made it into the directory is hardly any kind of binding statement, but a very provisional one.<sup>6</sup> The phrase in question is merely a suggestion, and to treat it otherwise is a misunderstanding of the Divines' intent. To do so would certainly be contrary to understanding the document in the "plain tenor" of the words,<sup>7</sup> as the Scots phrase it in their adopting act for the Directory. Here they also specified that previous practices adopted in Scotland not denounced by the Directory (practices in the Books of Discipline, Book of Common Order, etc.) are not condemned.<sup>8</sup>

It very clearly was not the practice of the Scottish Kirk to "line the psalm" until the Westminster Directory brought the practice into the church. It perhaps was not even practiced until the nationwide implementation of the 1650 Psalter put the whole nation in the position of having to become acquainted with the new Psalter. Prior to the Westminster Assembly, it was the practice in many places to post the next weeks' Psalm selections in a

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<sup>6</sup> "But for the present, where many in the congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers, do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof." *The Directory for the Public Worship of God*, "Of the Singing of Psalms." See C. G. McCrie's *Public Worship in Presbyterian Scotland*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>7</sup> See Steele's *Continuous Singing*. The purpose of this piece is to condemn what the author calls continuous singing, as opposed to 'lining the psalm.' Steele's logic is poor, and he turns into a necessity, what the Westminster Divines proposed as a convenient remedy. It is lamentable that subsequent generations to the Westminster Assembly made this expedient into a binding rule (as Steele does), and that alone makes the practice worthy of the fate of the brazen serpent.

<sup>8</sup> "... the General Assembly... doth unanimously, and without a contrary voice, agree to and approve the following Directory, in all the heads thereof, together with the Preface set before it; and doth require, discern, and ordain, That, according to the plain tenor and meaning thereof, and the intent of the Preface, it be carefully and uniformly observed and practised by all the ministers and others within this kingdom whom it doth concern..." "It is also provided, That this shall be no prejudice to the order and practice of this kirk, in such particulars as are appointed by the books of discipline, and acts of General Assemblies, and are not otherwise ordered and appointed in the Directory." Assembly at Edinburgh, February 3, 1645. Sess. 10. Act of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, for the establishing and putting in Execution of the Directory for the Publick Worship of God.

prominent place so the congregation would be prepared to sing them the next week. It is the testimony of Calderwood<sup>9</sup> and Steuart of Pardovan,<sup>10</sup> that the people generally could either read or had the Psalms by heart. And while it evidently was the practice to have the selection read in its entirety prior to singing it, by the Minister, Reader, or Precentor, "reading the line" was not a known practice until the change to the new directory and Psalter.<sup>11</sup> There were also "song schools" instituted in many cities in the 16th century which carried over into the 17th century. Often, the master of the school served as Precentor in public worship, and it was sometimes the practice to have his students sit near him in worship to aid the singing.<sup>12</sup>

While lining was certainly a method proposed by the Directory if a church was generally illiterate, it was by no means the only way to achieve the goal of learning the tunes, nor was it a goal in and of itself. Lining was for the purpose of learning the psalm tunes, not a proposed form of singing. As outlined above the Scottish Church had other ways it had used in the past to ensure that church members learned the psalm tunes to be sung in public worship. The adopting act of the Directory specifically makes it clear that practices not specifically denounced by the Directory were not to be viewed as condemned by it. It is true there were some practices that the English wished the Scots to abandon, but these were handled "behind the scenes" so to speak, and we have record of those particular practices and the reasons for the changes. Nowhere is the practice of singing without giving the line condemned with the view of replacing it with lining. This is perfectly in keeping with the idea which the words of the Directory expressly indicate, that lining was a convenient or useful expedient to adopt where the majority of a congregation were unable to read. It was an expedient indifferent in nature, and not a thing of necessity, no more than using the exact words of the prescribed prayers was necessary. The problem is that an expedient adopted to aid the ignorant to learn the psalms became a cherished tradition in many quarters of the Scottish church and it was with great difficulty removed in later ages.

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<sup>9</sup> In his anonymous piece against the Psalter of King James.

<sup>10</sup> Pardovan's *Collections*.

<sup>11</sup> William McMillan, *Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church 1550-1638* (London, 1931), p. 82.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 81-82. McMillan is biased in the episcopal direction in some of his interpretation of the facts.

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## TWO HELPFUL SUMMARIES

What follows are two helpful summaries regarding the practice of “lining the psalms.” The first is from Nicholas Temperley, *The Music of the English Parish Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1:81-82. The second is from Andrew Edgar, *Old Church Life in Scotland* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1885), pp. 68-70, citing Walter Steuart of Pardovan’s *Collections* (first published in 1709 and many times after). *Collections* was an early attempt at collecting in an organized form the statutory practices of the Church of Scotland.

Temperley writes: “The Directory for publique worship had this to say ‘Of singing of psalms’: ‘In singing of psalms, the voice is to be tunably and gravely ordered: but the chief care must be to sing with understanding, and with grace in the heart, making melody unto the Lord. That the whole congregation may join herein, every one that can read is to have a psalm book: and all others, not disabled by age or otherwise, are to be exhorted to learn to read. But for the present, where many in the congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers, do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof.’ (Directory: 83-4) In this way was introduced the practice of ‘lining out’, which was to have far-reaching consequences of a kind undreamed of by the assembled divines. It is not very likely that lining out had been practiced to any significant extent before it was enjoined by the Assembly, and it may even have been a completely new idea. Bishop Wren, writing some notes in 1660 on the revision of the Book of common prayer, proposed the omission of the words ‘saying after’ for the general confession, partly on the grounds that ‘it gives some countenance to another uncouth and senseless custom, not long since brought in by some factions, one to read a line of a psalm, and then all the rest to sing it’ (Jacobson: 55). Playford spoke of ‘the late intruding Scotch manner of reading every line by the clerk before it is sung’ (PC 29: fol. A3r), but although the Scots had certainly taken up the custom, it is improbable that it was of Scottish origin, for the commissioners of the Church of Scotland had opposed the move to allow it when the matter was debated at the Westminster Assembly (W. Shaw: 1, 351n).<sup>13</sup> It quickly became a normal practice. By 1662 it was ‘a custom generally used in most if not all parish churches of this kingdom, as well among Presbyterian as others’ for ‘the psalms that is sung before and after sermon’ (Durel: 183). But it was doubtless a Puritan innovation, designed to make sure that the people sang and understood the words of the psalms,

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<sup>13</sup> Shaw writes: “...The Directory was finished and passed in the absence of the Scotch Commissioners, and on their entering the Assembly they expressed dislike at the permission accorded of reading the psalms line by line. It was accordingly referred to them to draw up something on the point, and to present it to the assembly (Mitchell, 21 and Lightfoot, 344). On the 27th, the final report was made, and the Directory adopted and ordered to be sent up (ibid., 23).

as well as the tunes they knew by heart. In addition it facilitated the introduction of a new version of psalms (Rouse: preface; PC 22: preface).”

Edger writes: “Pardovan states that ‘it was the ancient practice of the Church of Scotland, as it is yet of some Reformed Churches abroad, for the minister or precentor to read over as much of the Psalm in metre as was intended to be sung at once, and then the harmony and melody followed without interruption, and people did either learn to read or got most of the Psalms by heart.’ What is here called the ancient practice of the Church of Scotland in the rendering of praise, is just the practice that is observed at the present day. But soon after 1645 a different practice arose and continued long in the Church of Scotland. Pardovan says that when the new paraphrase of the Psalms was appointed to be sung - that is, when the present metrical version of the Psalms was introduced - ‘It was not at first so easy for the people to follow, and it became customary for each line to be read out by itself, and then sung.’ And it is worth noting, that this author, writing in 1709, thought that that new way should be abandoned and the old custom revived. The number of people that can read, he says, is now increased, and if the psalms to be sung each Sunday were intimated the Sunday previous, they might be got by heart by those that can not read. It is doubtful, however, if Pardovan is quite correct in his account of the origin of the practice of giving out the psalm line by line while it is being sung. The present metrical version of the psalms was not introduced into the Church of Scotland till 1650, but the Westminster Directory for public worship was adopted by the General Assembly in 1645, and the Directory recommends that ‘for the present, where many in the congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the minister, or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers, do read the psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof.’ It is more likely, therefore, that it was the recommendation in the Directory rather than the difficulty of following the new version that led to the practice of giving out the Psalms line by line. It is alleged that the Scots Commissioners at Westminster were much opposed to the insertion of that recommendation in the Directory - it was contrary, they said, to the usage in the Scotch Church, and it was not required by the backward state of education in Scotland — but the English divines were in love with it, and would have it, and as the Scots were anxious for uniformity of worship over the two kingdoms, the General Assembly took no exception to the clause. The practice was accordingly introduced into the Church of Scotland soon after, of giving out the Psalms in stalmets of one line at a time, and so popular did the practice become, and so essential a part of revered use and wont, that very great difficulty was found long afterwards in getting it discontinued. . . . Pardovan, we have seen, was anxious to have the practice abolished, and for that end he says, ‘it were to be wished that masters of families would path the way for the more easy introducing of our former practice by reviving and observing the same in their family worship.’ This suggestion was taken up by the General Assembly, and in 1746 the Assembly recommended to private families that in their religious exercises they should in singing the praises of God go on without the intermission of reading each line.” ♦

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