



The Grace Proclamator and Promulgator

“To testify the gospel of the grace of God.” Acts 20:24

PUBLISHED AS A MISSION PROJECT OF PILGRIMS HOPE BAPTIST CHURCH

Vol. XVI, No. 4

April 1, 2000

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CONSTITUTION OF CHURCHES

by
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INTRODUCTION

What do Landmark Baptists believe as to the essentials of church constitution? What does Baptist history say on this subject? Scripture is the only authority on this subject, as on all others, but history does show what our forefathers believed. It would be especially enlightening to know what the men who were responsible for **resetting** the Old Landmarks in the 19th century believed on this subject.

At this present time some Landmark Baptists contend Landmarkism teaches a theory which I will now define.

THE THEORY STATED

These brethren teach that in order to constitute a church, authority must be given by an already existing church for the purpose of organizing. They go on to say the authority of Christ was conveyed to the church and that only a church can pass this authority on to another group. They also say that this is the only way for a church to get “life,” and they compare it to a mother giving birth to her child. If for any reason a group does not get this authority, or this **permission to exist**, it is not a true church, it will be born dead. It may be exact and Scriptural in every other doctrine and point of order, but if this authority is wanting, then it is a false church. One can easily see that if this theory is true, this authority is not a matter of indifference. It is not a contingency but an absolute necessity on which all depends. No authority, no church. This is the Shibboleth distinctly pronounced on church organization according to the authority

theory.

We will call this the **authority theory**. It is obvious that these brethren are in the affirmative position. Those who deny it are in the negative. Therefore it is their responsibility to produce Scripture and to establish historical evidence to support this theory. If they fail to do this while yet contending for this theory, they are arguing from silence. I mention this because some have suggested that we who are in the negative are making an argument from silence! When I deny any false position for which someone contends, am I responsible for finding evidence for his error?

The brethren who put forth the authority theory say things like this concerning church constitution: “I believe this doctrine is in the Bible.” “I think I can see it in the NT.” “It seems reasonable to me that it must be that way.” “This is the way the old churches did it.” “Otherwise you have spontaneous generation.” “This is one of the Old Landmarks.” “I accept it on faith.” “If you don’t accept this position on the constitution of churches, then you are not a Landmark Baptist,” or “If everyone was honest and sincere they would agree with us.” “All life comes from antecedent life.” One of the most frequent statements is “Like begets like.”

NAME CALLING

Some of our brethren who hold to the authority theory call those who differ with them, apostate Landmarkers, neo-Landmarkers, New Lighters, and other such terms. They have further charged others with being dishonest,

THE GRACE PROCLAMATOR AND PROMULGATOR (USPS #000476) is published monthly (subscription free) by the authority of Pilgrims Hope Baptist Church, 3084 Woodrow, Memphis, TN 38127. Periodical postage paid at Memphis, TN 38101.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE GRACE PROCLAMATOR AND PROMULGATOR, 3084 Woodrow, Memphis, TN 38127

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having ulterior motives, and have made other unfounded charges against them. I ask each of you to answer in your own heart these questions:

Is this the spirit of Christ?

Is this how we ought to speak about each other when we differ?

Is this that kind of love by which all men can gage those who are the disciples of Christ?

The reader will find nothing of the kind here. My desire is to search for the truth and I will

abuse the character of no man in the pursuit.

INK SPOT INTERPRETATION

Some of the brethren who hold to the authority theory are able to see things that others cannot see. They are like those who look at an ink spot and see a rushing locomotive. But when anyone else looks at the ink spot, all they see is a dark blotch on the paper. After carefully looking at their ink spot, all I can say is they have a fertile imagination! To all such, with all due respect and deference, I call for proof. I mean I want Scripture proof. Real, solid Scripture. Inferences, suppositions, theories, and guesses are worthless and inadmissible as evidence. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isa 8:20).

ARE THE SCRIPTURES A PERFECT RULE OF PRACTICE?

Are the Scriptures the perfect rule of practice as well as faith? [II Tim 3:16]. J. R. Graves answers: "If Baptists deny this [that a positive law must be clearly indicated and cannot be left to be inferred-JC] they must repudiate one of their most cherished and distinguishing principles, i.e., that the Scriptures are a perfect rule of *practice* as well as faith." [Alien Baptism, P. vi]. Now I hold that Sovereign Grace Landmark Baptists, who contend for the authority theory, are unintentionally repudiating this most cherished principle because they maintain there is a law for the constitution of churches that Scripture does not spell out, which they cannot, with all their searching, find. In fact, the Word of God is silent upon the authority theory!

We contend for this Truth of God—That He left no essential doctrine or practice to be inferred. Not one. We do not properly get our instructions from inference, conjecture, surmising, implication or guessing. Far from it. In fact, we can only get essential teaching **from positive statements of Scripture**. Therefore I oppose with all my might every doctrine, every dogma, every theory that is not clearly stated in the Word of God! This is Baptist ground! Everything else is the sinking sand of tradition.

Take the matter of an offended member. Scripture expressly spells out the steps to be

taken. Nothing is left to be inferred. In the case of immorality of a church member, the requisite action is clearly laid down in positive terms. The church is to exclude such a one. If he repents, they are to restore him and reconfirm their love to him. The work of the ministry is essential to the well being of a church. The qualifications of the pastor are spelled out. Nothing is left to be inferred. As to the woman's place in the church, this is not a matter of inference. It is not left to be deduced from clues that the average person would never be able to find, but Scripture plainly states the case. Take the law of baptism. Is this clearly stated? Is the mode definitely defined? Take equality of members in the church. Is this stated in definite or indefinite terms? Again, take the Lord's Supper. Is this ordinance stated in a positive way or is it an ordinance of inference? I believe these things are so positive, so clear, so explicitly stated that they cannot be misunderstood. Even a young child can grasp the meaning of these positive laws of the NT because they are clear, sharp and unmistakable.

This is the Baptist position and it has been proclaimed and defended by Baptists through the ages. This is why we don't sprinkle for baptism. This is why we don't believe the wine becomes the blood of Christ. No proof. No clear teaching for these false doctrines. Therefore, for every doctrine, every teaching, every practice essential to the church for acceptable worship, there is a clear positive statement in the Word of God. Implications and suppositions, therefore, cannot be the basis of our doctrines.

Now if this premise is true, there must be clear evidence in both Scripture and History for the authority theory. For, if Scripture has this teaching, it will be clearly stated. Yea, such a foundational matter must be so clearly stated in Scripture that a fool though a wayfaring man can read and understand it! [Isa. 35:8]. It is unthinkable that the Word of God could leave such an essential to be gathered by inference. And if this principle were a doctrine of Baptists in history, then their records, confessions, and books, could not, on such a monumental doctrine, be silent. Strange as it seems, however, Scripture reveals no such principle! And to the further dismay of those holding the authority theory, Baptist History (up the late

1800s) offers no consolation, unless I have overlooked it.

Men who say the authority theory is taught in Scripture cannot give the place where it is stated or even an example of its use! So what do they do? They write reams on the constitution of a church and never quote a Scripture! When they do quote Scripture, they quote passages that mention the church but say nothing about constitution, or of authority but nothing of constitution or they quote Scriptures about churches voting but nothing about church constitution, or they quote Scriptures mentioning neither church nor constitution. They satisfy themselves with that which is not revealed, not expressed, and not declared in the Word of God! They depend on implicit traditions whereas they ought to depend on explicit revelation!

If it is a Bible law that churches must be constituted by another existing church, it should be a simple thing for these brethren to give us the text that states this. If the Bible does not give such a law, then why do they contend it is an essential? Is the Bible not clear? Is not Scripture sufficient for doctrine and practice? Is there any essential in doctrine or practice that is not plainly revealed in the Word of God? By what means are we to verify our doctrines if not from the plain teaching of the Word of God? Let the brethren who hold to the authority theory answer.

Thus when these brethren attempt to defend the authority theory of church constitution they give us a maze of inferences. It is painful just to read over the convoluted explanations, the hair-trigger deductions, and the knight-jump interpretations one must make to arrive at this doctrine. Not one positive statement in the Word of God has ever been produced for this doctrine by these brethren! Why not?

C.D. COLE

This is the reason C.D. Cole wrote: "There is no account in the New Testament of any mode of procedure by which churches were organized . . ."

"It seems evident from the New Testament that Jesus gave no formal prescription for the organization of any church . . ."

"Baptist churches come into being today

somewhat after this manner. A group of believers in a community wish to become a church. The members in conference will make this wish known to other churches, and these churches send messengers to counsel them in accomplishing their desire. For the sake of order and recognition these messengers will inquire into their belief, and if it is thought wise, the visitors endorse their articles of faith and recommend their constitution as an independent church. These visiting brethren do not organize the church. Since the church is to be self-governing, it must of necessity and logically be self-constituted. And so those wishing to become a church enter into a covenant to that effect; and another church is born. The help from the outside is for the sake of order and fellowship and is not absolutely essential." (*Definitions of Doctrine, The New Testament Church*, P. 7, 8).

While these brethren cast C.D. Cole out of their synagogue, because of this statement, let them produce the place where Scripture states a church must be constituted by church authority!

Notice that brother Cole says supporting churches "Do not organize the church"! "The help is not absolutely essential." This is good testimony!

J. M. PENDLETON

J. M. Pendleton was a strong leader among Landmark Baptists in the 1800s. It was his article that Graves published in *The Baptist*, in 1854 entitled, "Old Landmarkism" that gave rise to this term being used among Baptists. Of course, one would think Pendleton knew what the Old Landmarks were, and how to constitute a church, to say the least.

Did Pendleton teach the authority theory? In spite of what some say, I don't believe anyone can produce a line from his *Manual* or other writings to support this claim.

It is amazing but some of the brethren contend that Pendleton meant that churches who were granting letters to some of their members, who wished to enter into the constitution of a new church, did by this phrase—"It is well for this purpose to be stated in the letters"—grant authority to the new group to be a church! [*Pendleton's Manual*, P. 15].

We will consider what Pendleton had to say for himself on this subject but first let's see what the authority theory maintains the above phrase does. This theory demands that the churches, both mother and daughter, must have understood this phrase in Pendleton's manual, "It is well for this purpose to be stated in the letters," to be what was so essential that without it there could be no constitution. Otherwise you have churches granting authority without knowing it, you have the forming church getting their authority without knowing it! None of the churches involved knew a thing about it and none of the other churches or pastors present at the organization knew neither from where this authority came nor where it went!

This raises more questions than it can answer.

Is this what Pendleton meant?

How did these churches and pastors know this was Pendleton's meaning?

Did Pendleton give this definition of this phrase elsewhere?

If all this authority were tucked surreptitiously into this little phrase how could anyone know that?

Do the words of this phrase really say one church must give authority to start another?

How do we know this is what Pendleton meant?

The answer to these questions is that these brethren who hold to the authority theory know what Pendleton meant and they will tell us so we can know. That is how it must be! All of this when Pendleton never said a word about it! A judge would laugh such "evidence" out of court and it is a shame when Baptists swallow it whole like a raw egg, with a gulp!

They then go on to say that when churches grant letters for members to go into the constitution of a new church **that is the authority!** They would not, for one moment, allow such a procedure today, but when they are pressed into a corner, they will take any shadow of an excuse and try to use it as an argument, because that is all they have.

Think about it for a moment. If the authority theory is what Pendleton meant in his *Manual*, what a monumental blunder he made. For I confess that had someone not told me that he

believed the authority theory, and wrote about it in his Manual, I should never have dreamed that was his meaning. His words not only do not convey this meaning, but they absolutely forbid that idea! In other words, if Pendleton believed the authority theory—that a church cannot be constituted unless another church gives authority and that authority is so essential that any group who does not have it is not a church—then, he flunked English 101. But when one reads for himself what Pendleton wrote, there is no hint of the authority theory. He will find, further, that he expresses his ideas with clarity and precision, being the scholar he was.

Was Pendleton contending for the authority theory?

Pendleton does not say: “If you don’t include my phrase when you grant a letter, you cannot constitute a church!” He had just stated what does constitute a church on the previous page and it does not fit the authority mold. I quote:

“And as churches in all ages must be formed after the apostolic model, it follows that where penitent, regenerate, baptized believers in Christ are found, there are scriptural materials for a church. Such persons having first given themselves to the Lord, and then to one another, in solemn covenant, agreeing to make the will of Christ as expressed in his word their rule of action, are, in the NT sense of the term, a *church*.” [P. 14]. This makes the authority brethren shake like they had the St Vitus’ Dance, and there is no relief for it but repentance. There it is. Read it for yourself!

But Pendleton does not stop there. He goes on to say, “This being done, the letters of dismission are read, and the parties concerned resolve by solemn vote to consider themselves an independent church.” This is high-handed treason in the minds of those who maintain that a mother church must constitute a group as a church, but it is allegiance to the Old Landmarks as Pendleton practiced them!

Surely no intelligent man can think for one moment that if to Pendleton’s mind it was absolutely essential for another church to constitute a group into a church and without that authority no church could be formed, I say, surely no intelligent man can think Pendleton would leave this unsaid, leave it to be inferred,

skip over it, or encode it in a mere phrase! It would be careless, yea criminal, to leave out such an essential, as he certainly did, and much more criminal to state the exact opposite, that where such persons give themselves to the Lord and to one another in a covenant, such persons, are, in the NT sense of the term, a church! But this is Pendleton’s mark.

Was Pendleton an apostate Landmarker? Was he a neo-Landmarker? Did he believe church authority was essential to constitute a church? Would he be welcome in our pulpits today? Let my brethren be wary of how they answer.

EDWARD T. HISCOX

Edward T. Hiscox, in 1859, wrote *The Baptist Church Directory*. In 1893 he wrote a completely new volume called *The New Directory for Baptist Churches*. This latter volume, he is careful to tell us “is entirely in harmony with previous manuals, as to Baptist polity, and neither abrogates nor antagonizes any of the fundamental principles announced or advocated in those previous issues.” [Preface, P. 8].

I was quite surprised to learn that some of our authority brethren hold up Hiscox as a Baptist who taught the authority theory, as I have been reading *The Directory* for nearly forty years but had never read of the authority theory therein. Not only does Hiscox not subscribe to this theory, he absolutely opposes it!

In the section on “churches Constituted” he does indeed speak of letters being granted for the purpose of forming a new church, [p 53]. But this is not church authority. In his very first paragraph on this subject Hiscox writes: “Churches are constituted by voluntary covenant on the part of those who wish to become members.” No authority man ever wrote such a sentence, nor do they believe it to be true! But Hiscox goes on to say: “The process by which new churches are constituted is very simple. The necessity for, and the practicability of, organizing one, must be decided by those who are to constitute it, and who are to bear the expense and responsibility of its support,” [P. 53].

Then on the next page he says: “The ‘Constituting act’ would properly and

appropriately be the unanimously voting—perhaps by rising— a resolution like this: ‘Resolved, That, guided as we believe by the Holy Spirit, and relying on the blessing of God, we do, here and now, by this act, constitute ourselves a Church of Jesus Christ to perform His service, and be governed by His will, as revealed in the New Testament . . . Such an act makes such a company of disciples, ipso facto, [in fact—JC] a Church of Christ with all the rights, powers and privileges of any New Testament Church’,” [P. 54].

Lest the reader over-read these words let me emphasize some of them.

Hiscox is here telling us what the “**Constituting act**” of a new church is.

1. **It is not the authority of a mother church**, whether understood or formal.
2. **It is not granting letters for the purpose of organizing** which constituted a new church.
3. **It is not the delegated authority from another church** that constitutes a church.
4. **It is not combined efforts of the two groups.** That is, it was not the granted authority of a mother church in combination with the church being formed that was the act of constitution.

No. Not at all! The author gives no room for such dodges.

Nor does he leave his readers to doubt as to what does constitute a church.

He says, the “**Constituting act**” is **unanimously voting a resolution**. Then he gives a sample of such a resolution and there is no authority derived in that resolution from any other church on earth. But just to make sure no one misunderstands his words he restates his concept in other words, thusly: “**Such an act makes such a company of disciples, ipso facto, a Church of Christ . . .**” [emphasis added].

What makes a group a church? The **act** of constitution.

Who does this? Who Constitutes a group? The group themselves. And this act makes such a company of disciples a church in fact!

I confess my ignorance as to how Hiscox could make his words more clear than he has. I also fail to understand how any reasonably

intelligent person could read these words and maintain they mean what our authority brethren say they mean unless driven to it by the power of tradition!

Does this make Hiscox a Neo-Landmarker, or an apostate Landmarker? Did he know how Baptists formed churches? Is this the same thing for which our authority brethren are contending?

J. R. GRAVES

In the next place I want to consider what J. R. Graves taught about the Constitution of churches. J. R. Graves needs no introduction. He was a giant among Baptists in the 1800s and his stature still looms large even though his body has been sleeping in his grave just over one hundred years. Baptists owe a great debt to Graves for resetting the Old Landmarks. No doubt he was specially called of the Lord to this work. To ask if Graves knew what a Landmark Baptist was or if he knew what was necessary to constitute a church is to play the fool.

Yet, I am astounded when men maintain that the Old Landmarkism of J. R. Graves included the authority theory as one of the Old Landmarks! Have these men ever read Grave’s books?

W. A. Jarrel in his book Baptist Church Perpetuity, chapter one quotes Graves: “The late and lamented scholar, J. R. Graves, LL. D., wrote: ‘Wherever there are three or more baptized members of a regular Baptist church or churches covenanted together to hold and teach, and are governed by the New Testament,’ etc., ‘there is a church of Christ, even though there was not a presbytery of ministers in a thousand miles of them to organize them into a church. There is not the slightest need of a council of presbyters to organize a Baptist church.’”

I was shocked when I first heard some deny Graves ever wrote these words! They don’t like what Graves said and wish to discredit the quote. I can’t blame them. If Graves said this, it is the Waterloo of the authority theory. I certainly wish Jarrel had given the source of this quote, but cannot believe Jarrel fabricated these words and then claimed Graves wrote them! Such would be an awful act of dishonesty.

Jarrel says specifically on P. 6: “Nearly all the quotations within this volume having been made in person by its author—excepting a very few, and they from reliable sources—the reader can use them with the greatest assurance.” The only reason these words of Graves are questioned is because they pulverize the authority mold. As to the source, I have never personally found these words in any book by Graves but I suspect they are taken from a later edition of *The Tennessee Baptist*. If anyone knows the source of this quote, please share it with me.

Graves wrote *Old Landmarkism* and he is careful to tell us: “I think it is no act of presumption in me to assume to know what I meant by the Old Landmarks, since I was the first man in Tennessee, and the first editor on this continent, who publicly advocated the policy of strictly and consistently carrying out in our practice those principles which all true Baptists, in all ages, have professed to believe.” [P. xiv, 1928 ed.]

It will come as quite a surprise to some that the Old Landmarks of Graves do not include the theory that one church must constitute another. In fact, Graves clearly expels this idea from his books.

Take ***Old Landmarkism***. In this book Graves sets out what the marks of a scriptural church are. On pp 27-112 he gives seven essential marks of a church. Unfortunately, he forgot to put in the authority theory or the essential of church constitution by authority of another church! Imagine one of our authority brethren writing even an article, much less a book, and leaving out this essential! But Graves does not include this in his seven marks of a church! I wonder why?

Furthermore, Graves writes this:

“Now Christ, being omniscient, knew that in after years men would originate and multiply false churches bearing a striking resemblance to his true ones, and that his disciples would be liable to be deceived and misled into them, and must we not believe that he did not only give the marks and characteristics by which his own true churches could be distinguished, but that he so particularly described them in all their main features, so that wayfaring men—the masses of the common people—could unmistakably

distinguish and select them out of a hundred false and rival ones. This must be so. Can we then for a moment believe that Christ or his apostles could so particularly describe all the important marks and characteristics of a true church of Christ without describing its principles of government so clearly that its form could be undoubtedly determined.” [***New Great Iron Wheel***, P. 124-5].

Then again on P. 125 he proceeds to “An Examination of the Scriptural Features of a Christian Church Compared with those possessed by the Methodist Societies.” He lists these things that a church must do to be a scriptural church. After discussing the structure of a NT Church he says on P. 127: “Then your ‘church’ (?) Has never yet done one of the five or six distinct duties Christ commands and requires each of his churches to do, the first among these is: —”

“(1.) To voluntarily organize themselves, by mutual covenant, into A Christian assembly . . .”

Is this what the authority theory teaches? Not on your life! But this is exactly what Graves taught. This is not **neo-Landmarkism**. It is **Old Landmarkism!** Those who agree with Graves are not apostate Landmarkers. What men are now calling Neo-Landmarkism and Apostate Landmarkism is the very thing Graves taught!

Graves did not leave out what he considered to be an essential for church constitution, yea, not merely an essential, but *the essential!* Graves starts at the beginning. He is telling Methodists how to constitute a scriptural church and he will leave out no essential foundation stone. Yet, he does not tell them that they must have authority from another scriptural church to constitute a scriptural church! Imagine! J. R. Graves giving the essentials of a NT Baptist Church and failing to include the first essential!

But Graves goes on. On P. 134 he says the seventh essential characteristic of a scriptural church is:

“Each particular church is a body of Christ complete in itself, and absolutely independent of all other religious organizations.

“This is so evident upon the face of the Scriptures I see not how to make it more manifest.

“The proof given that the very word ekklesia

(an assembly) denotes a complete church, equally implies its independency, i.e., that it is dependent upon no other body for its existence or self-perpetuation, or the discharge of all the functions and trusts of a Church of Christ."

Graves denies that a church depends upon any other body for its existence, but the authority theory says every church depends upon its mother for its existence, and if that should be missing, then it cannot possibly be a church! The views of Graves and the authority theory are absolute opposites! It would seem that one or the other is wrong.

What possible meaning could we put on Graves statement that a church is not dependent upon any other body for its existence, than that there is no church which is essential to the constitution of another church?

He goes on to say on P. 135, "Let it be borne in mind that no other religious organizations were known in the apostolic age save the local assemblies, and they were addressed and recognized throughout as the equal of each other, regardless of their numbers or localities."

Graves then describes what he believes to be the authority for constituting a church. And contrary to what we are now told, he did not find this in another church. Listen:

"Christ said, where two or three are gathered in my name [authority], there am I in the midst of them," Mt 18:20. The brackets and the term "authority" are added by Graves.

Just to be sure the reader (who may not have this book) understands, let me emphasize that Graves is here arguing that two or three can constitute a church, without any outside authority. I will point out that on the next page he quotes Tertullian thusly "Ubi tres ecclesia est, licet laici," and he translates: "Three are sufficient to form a church although they be laymen." That Graves is quoting this with approval and that he sees it as based upon Mt 18:20, is evident from the whole discussion and also from the fact that he uses the same quote in *Old Landmarkism*, P. 41. How strange that men polish Graves' tomb but throw dirt on those who say the same thing today!

These principles for which Graves contends with all his power, are not isolated but are strewn throughout his books like manna, and it

seems to me a shame that brethren refuse to pick it up but continue to loath this bread! [Nu 21:5].

Time after time in Graves books [e.g., *Old Landmarkism*, *New Great Iron Wheel*, *Intercommunion*, *John's Baptism*, and several others, q.v.] he mentions "church constitution," "church organization," "church essentials," "churches irregularly constituted," and many other such terms. He literally crosses the concept of "scriptural church organization" times without number, yet —not one time did he ever mention the authority theory! Could anyone who believed this theory do that? I mention some of these references for those who want to check for themselves. I give the page number and the book only. [*Intercommunion*, P. 12, 20-21, 31, 54, 156, 107, 109; 124, 153, 287, 311]. [*Old Landmarkism*, 1928 ed., P. 41, 44, 45, 49, 27, 141, 150, 169, 174, 205, 228, 28, xiv].

Clearly J. R. Graves did not believe that one church had to constitute another. No man could write the books he did and leave out this essential if he believed it. Nor could any man write these things above quoted from his books and yet believe the authority theory, that one church had to constitute another. You might as well try to put fire and water in the same box! Let the reader survey Graves' other books, as I have, and see for himself. Graves never states or suggests the authority theory, but rather he held to a view that cannot co-exist with the authority theory.

Was Graves a neo-Landmarker?

Did he understand the issues? Was he ignorant? Did he contend for the Old Landmarks for his whole life and then come down to the end ignorant of the very principles of Landmarkism? Did he know what the Old Landmarks were? On Graves tombstone these words are inscribed and lest they be forgotten I quote them:

Brethren I will that ye remember the words I spake unto you while I was yet present with you.

But some have not only forgotten his words, they have changed the truths for which he stood, have **changed the Old Landmarks**, and,

by their new doctrine, the authority theory, have made J. R. Graves himself a “**neo-Landmarker!**”

A. C. DAYTON

Next we will consider another great Landmark Baptist and co-laborer of J. R. Graves, a scholar, and author of several books highly esteemed among sound Baptists. One of these books is a novel entitled: *Theodosia Earnest* in two volumes. The second volume is entitled: *Ten Days Travel In Search of the Church*. It is an outstanding presentation of the Landmark position and was originally published by the American Baptist Publication Society, but now by the Baptist Book Shelf, PO Box 13, Nappanee, IN 46550.

The whole purpose of the book is set forth in Dayton's own words. This volume is to determine “the true nature and constitution of a scriptural Church of Jesus Christ.” [P. IX]. We may be absolutely certain that in nearly 500 pages, Dayton will cover every essential of a true church in these ten days of travel. Especially is this true when he further tells us “What has been written upon it [the true nature and constitution of a scriptural Church of Jesus Christ] has, until recently, been mostly inaccessible to the common people; and much of it, we humbly conceive, has not been suited to give them entirely correct impressions even if they had seen it.” Dayton prepares his readers to expect “the true nature and constitution of a scriptural Church of Jesus Christ,” but if the authority theory is right, Dayton not only did not achieve his goal, he did not even know what these essentials were!

Time without number in this book Dayton defines a church. He lists the essentials of church organization and shows why false churches are not churches. For instance:

“Here, then, is the embodiment of the scriptural idea of a Church of Jesus Christ. It is an assembly of those who have repented of sin, believed on Christ, and then have been baptized: who meet together in regular order to break the bread and drink the wine in his remembrance, and to transact business in his name.” P. 76.

Again on P. 93 he says: “When other

Churches [than that of Jerusalem—JC] were formed at Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and Colosse, each of them was an independent and complete within itself as this one was. This was the model after which they all were fashioned. “What, then, do we find the Church of Christ actually to have been? Simply a local assembly of baptized believers meeting by **his authority** to administer his ordinances, and transact the business of his kingdom in his name.” [Emphasis added; but Dayton italicizes from “simply” to the end of the quote—JC].

This is Dayton's definition! He has authority **not from another church**, yea, not even the church at Jerusalem—but from Christ!

On P. 115 Dayton again drives home his idea of a church and how it is constituted:

“His Church is not allowed to call any man, or any set of men, its master. Its members are alike subject to Christ, and all alike responsible to him alone. But how, then, could they be governed? How could discipline be maintained: how could the purity of the body be preserved? There were laws, but how could they be applied, and by what authority enforced? This was the grand problem. In its solution, Paul says the manifold wisdom of God was made known to the principalities and powers in heavenly places. His plan was very simple, and, wherever it has been fairly tried, has been found perfectly effectual.”

He then goes on to say:

“He made every one a priest and a king. He invested every member with the right to execute his laws, but only when assembled with the brethren. As many as could conveniently unite came voluntarily together and by mutual consent were constituted an ‘ekklesia’, or official assembly, of Christ. It was subject to *his* laws; it acted by *his* authority; it used *his* name to give a sanction to its acts; and as he had *authorized* it, and conferred on it all its authority, so he promised to be in its midst by his Spirit, and to ratify in heaven what it did upon earth.”

While words have any meaning, Dayton's words are impossible to harmonize with the authority theory! Yea, his words are to those who contend for the authority theory the most flagrant heresy! Dayton is teaching that the authority is not in a church to constitute a

church. It is not in the bishop or in an association, not in a presbytery, not in letters granted for the purpose of organization.

Well, where is it then?

Why, it is in Christ!

Dayton italicizes the pronouns that refer to Christ and to the word "authorized."

Furthermore he says without hesitation, bated breath, or without red face: "**As many as could conveniently unite came voluntarily together and by mutual consent were constituted an 'ekklesia', or an official assembly, of Christ.**" [see also P. 120].

The remainder of this excellent book is devoted to developing the "Signs or Marks by which to recognize a true Church of Jesus Christ."— P. 138. There are nine of these that are tabulated on P. 480. Not one of the nine marks calls for church authority to constitute a church. What this means, according to the authority theory, is that either Dayton did not know what the marks of a Scriptural church are, or he left out the most essential! Nor in this whole book is there even the suggestion that one church must constitute another and without such authority, there can be no scriptural church. Rather it is denied time and again. This book does not merely maul the authority theory; it devours it, hoof, tail, and horn.

Dayton also wrote *Alien Baptism* and this book was highly recommended by J. R. Graves who wrote the introduction in 1858. On P. 167 Dayton has this to say about churches:

"But now, as the King has gone to Heaven, whom has He left to attend to the business of the kingdom in His absence? Who shall appoint officers? Who shall receive new members? Who shall dispose or exclude the unworthy? Who shall provide for all that is needful for the purity, the permanence and the extension of the kingdom? He provided for all this before he went, by directing as many of the citizens of the kingdom as could conveniently meet together, to assemble and organize themselves into a "*church*," which should in its corporate capacity attend to all these matters. It is this Church which must receive the profession of faith, determine on its genuineness and administer the baptism."

Note carefully that Dayton tells how a church

is constituted: "He provided for all this before he went, by directing as many of the citizens of the kingdom as could conveniently meet together, **to assemble and organize themselves into a 'church' . . .**" Imagine one of the authority brethren making such a statement! Imagine what they would call any living man who wrote the same thing. Yet, ironically, they claim Dayton as a great contender for the authority theory!

Assuming Dayton was a Landmark Baptist, by what means are those who now teach the same thing as he did castigated by terms of apostate or neo-Landmarker?

CONCLUSION

The great problem with the authority theory is that there is no Scripture for it. The Scripture leg on this subject is so short we might as well say it is like the hind legs of a snake, "they ain't got none!" If you think I have overstated this, demand of these brethren a text that clearly states the theory. Demand the same kind of proof you do for the doctrine of regeneration or election. Demand of them historical records (before the last century) that clearly states this theory. Demand of them a clear "Thus saith the Lord." Things will get very quiet!

The authority theory maintains that the great Landmark leaders in the last century could not even distinguish the non-essentials from essentials. They not only overlooked a major landmark, but they flatly rejected it. For Graves, JMP, Dayton and the others, so far as I have been able to find, not only do not contend for this "essential", but actually oppose it!

Did not these men know what was required to constitute a church? Were they ignorant of how to constitute a Scriptural church? Did they just forget this essential in writing their books? I asked one of the authority brethren if these men were Landmark Baptists [given what they say in their books—for he admitted he had never read them!] if they did not believe in the authority theory for constituting churches. He replied with a negative! His honesty drove him to the unthinkable conclusion that the men who were primarily responsible for resetting the old Landmarks in the 1800s did not know what they were!

It seems to me from these quotes from Dayton—Graves, Pendleton, and others—that those who argue for the authority theory, that one church must give authority to start another, and call those who don't agree with them such names as apostate Landmarkers cannot escape their own fire. This epithet boomeranged on them! But those who believe that scripturally baptized saints can organize themselves into a church stand squarely with the Old Landmark brethren of the 1800s. I believe they would instantly extend their hands to us on the constitution of churches.

Our authority brethren are now enmeshed in the teeth of their own machinery and the grinding is relentless. For if their theory is true, this theory must have been in place among Landmark Baptist churches during the 1800s, otherwise it does them no good. But according to these leaders of the Landmark movement, the authority theory was not one of the Landmarks, yea; it cannot be found in their writings. In fact, they go much further. They clearly demonstrate that churches are, and necessarily must be, self-constituted! Therefore, according to the brethren who hold the authority theory, their churches do not have this essential authority and consequently their whole system is ground up cog by cog.

Bouquets and Brickbats

GEORGIA: We sure appreciate the paper. I enjoy it very much. It is the most sound paper that of know of in print today. May the Lord bless you in the good work you are doing there with the paper and the church. Pray for us here . We are still working on our church building. We do not have it finished yet but we do not like too much having it finished. We are meeting in the fellowship hall. We will soon be where we can moved into the auditorium.

May the Lord bless you and yours is my prayer.

MISSISSIPPI: Thank you for the sermon on unconditional election by Bro. Wayne Cox. I think I heard him preach it at Central. It is one of the best on the subject I have every read.

TENNESSEE: I am so glad you printed the sermon by Bro. Wayne Cox on election. I could

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almost hear him preaching it as I read it.

WWW: Love your web site. Thanks.

WWW: Just read your article "Chain Link..." I like your style, appreciate the quotes, and agree: "Show me your list of churches back to the Jerusalem church."

WYOMING: I really enjoyed the latest issue of *The GP&P*. The sermon by Elder Wayne Cox was almost as good as if I had heard him in person. But the letter from the Italian Baptist living in Bedford, in Great Britain encouraged me and met me where I am.

WWW: WebSite—Excellent work! I will try to get it to as many Followers of Christ as I possibly can.

WWW: Let those who accuse you of causing division and of not being loving enough toward those heretics who assault the word of God and the Lord's people be reminded of the words of a

great preacher of the past. "A magazine which is not outspoken, and is destitute of principle, is a literary nuisance." —Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

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NEW TESTAMENT BAPTIST CHURCH
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 There will be an all-day fellowship on Saturday, June 3, 2000 with preaching.
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Bethel Baptist Church
 2424 Ridgecrest Dr.
 Choctaw, Oklahoma 73020
October 19-21, 2000
 Speakers Not All Confirmed
 The Editor will be speaking in this conference. We will give the other speakers when all are confirmed.
 Royce Smith, Pastor
 (405) 769-6551

BIBLE CONFERENCE
MORRIS FORK BAPTIST CHURCH
 Laun, West Virginia
June 23-25, 2000
 Speaker List Not Complete At This Time
 The Editor will speak in this conference.
 Eld. John Kohler Pastor

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UNITY BAPTIST CHURCH
 Paron, Arkansas
MAY 5-6, 2000
 Speakers
 Friday Evening 7:00
 Eld. Lindy Davis, Eld. Wayne Camp
 Saturday Morning 10:00
 Eld. Fritz Heidenreich, Eld. Wayne Camp
 Saturday Afternoon
 Eld. Steve Raines, Eld. Wayne Camp
 Eld. Earl Smith, Pastor
 Phone: (501) 354-4100

BIBLE CONFERENCE
GRACE MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH
 1004 Jonathan Street
 Dothan, Alabama
JUNE 9-11, 2000
 Speakers list not yet complete. The editor will be speaking on Friday evening and Saturday morning.
 Pastors
 Eld. Joe Bell (334) 793-2750
 Eld. Ed Colley (334) 693-2478

NINETEENTH ANNUAL SOVEREIGN GRACE BIBLE CONFERENCE
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