

**A CRITIQUE**  
By  
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An Examination of  
*Great Commission Credentials*  
and Other EMDA Articles  
#3

There is not one single quote in the book which states EMDA before modern times! No writer before our own times believed EMDA so far as Bro Fenison has demonstrated in *GCC*. I have called upon him and all other EMDA men to produce just one quote from history which explicitly states you must have a mother church to constitute a church and the grand sum total of these references could be inscribed on the head of a pin with a crayon! [LUF. p. 166].

Because there is no direct evidence that Graves ever believed EMDA Bro Fenison and others are compelled to deal in generalities when quoting him. I give samples. Referring to *Old Landmarkism*. Bro Fenison says:

Only twice in this book does he refer directly to how churches are constituted, and in both instances he attributes it to a previous existing church rather than by “direct authority.” In the first instance he explicitly claims that authority to constitute a church is given in the Great Commission to the church:

*“If the church alone was commissioned to preserve and to preach the gospel, then it is certain that no other organization has the right to preach it – to trench upon the divine rights of the church. A Masonic Lodge, no more than a Young Men’s Christian Association.....have the least right to take the gospel in hand, select and commission ministers to go forth and preach it, administer its ordinances and ORGANIZE CHURCHES.” – Ibid., p. 36.*

In the second instance, Dr. Graves is referring to the origin of the Waldenses. Concerning the Waldenses, Graves believes that they received their original church constitutions from “the apostolic churches.” He says:

*“I believe are the successors of the apostolic churches, and from them received their constitution, their baptisms, and ordinances....” – Ibid., p. 112. [GCC. 118. SSOL. 168. Emphasis by Bro Fenison but not indicated as such.]*

Contrary to what Bro Fenison infers by these quotes, Graves does not here say how a church is constituted! And what Bro Fenison says is absolutely false. He says of Graves:

...in both instances he attributes it to a previous existing church rather than by ‘direct authority.’ Ibid.,p.36.

Read both of these quotes above carefully and you will see this assertion by Bro Fenison is without the least shadow of support! It is pure invention! In the first quote Graves is not talking about how a church is constituted but about who has the authority to preach. And as for the emphasized words *organize churches*, there is nothing in the quote to say exactly how it is to be done. Bro Fenison merely assumes Graves means EMDA!

Bro Fenison is greatly attracted to the phrase *and from them received their constitution*. But again, there is nothing here to tell how Graves thought a church was constituted. Especially note that the assertion that Graves *explicitly claims the authority to constitute a church is given in the great commission*. Yet there is not a word of this in Graves' statement. Nor is there any such statement in Old Landmarkism, or it would have been all over the cover of *GCC*! Nor is there a word in the Great Commission which says any such thing. We will deal with the claims of *GCC* and the Great Commission in a later article, the Lord willing.

Bro Fenison is very bold when he says:

Neither can one identify themselves with historical Landmarkism and believe in 'direct authority'. *GCC*. 156.

Again:

It is undeniable that Dr. Graves, along with all major leaders among the Landmark movement... denied the so called doctrine of 'direct' or 'vertical' authority in the Great Commission. *GCC*. 118-119.

Really?

Where did Graves make any such statement?

Why did Bro Fenison not give us quotes to prove these assertions? Certainly if Graves taught *Direct Authority*, these statements by Bro Fenison are plain misrepresentations! I believe I can prove that is the case! Also see *GCC*. pp. v, vi, 79, 123, 146, 195 where Bro Fenison makes similar unfounded and unsupported claims concerning Graves and Landmarkism in reference to *Direct Authority*.

But now rather than deal with generalities, assumptions, suppositions and the like (of which *GCC* overflows) I will give Graves words where he states *Direct Authority* for church constitution.

### **GRAVES TAUGHT DIRECT AUTHORITY EXPLICITLY**

Graves taught (contrary to Bro Fenison's claim) that a church receives its authority **directly** from Christ. One such sentence in Graves own words has more weight than a thousand pages in the style of *GCC*! Here is one reference among many:

Sec[tion]. 1.—Each particular Church is independent of every other body, civil or ecclesiastical, and receiving its authority directly from Christ.... [*Great Carrollton Debate*. 995-6].

This is a statement on the subject of what a church is and from whence it receives its authority in constitution, that is, how a group of saints in gospel order become a church. Here Graves excludes authority being given from *any other church* in the constitution of a new church as far as power, authority, or mother-hood, whether civil or ecclesiastical is concerned! In this quote Graves absolutely eliminates any flickering hope of EMDA! This means no local church, no association, no universal church whether visible or

invisible nor any other body or ordained minister is essential to constitute a church of Christ! [Cf. Crowell's statement, p. 5, GPP 4-1-08, to which Graves seems to refer]. And Graves tells us why this is. Because a church receives its authority by a means entirely exclusive of **every other body of any kind!**

Then how does a church receive its initial authority for constitution? Graves' answer is so clear that only EMDA men can misunderstand!

*Receiving its authority **directly** from Christ!*

There are at least two theories as to the source of authority in the constitution of a church according to Graves.

**1. This authority may come from some earthly entity, e.g., a presbytery, an ordained man, a church, a group of churches, an association, a hierarchy, or some other earthly authority.** Incidentally, Bro Fenison admits EMDA is *earthly authority!* "...established an earthly authority..."[GCC. 123].

**2. This authority may come directly from Christ without any other intermediary.**

Graves maintains position # 2 is correct.

First he gives the negative. This authority, he says, **does not come indirectly, obliquely or contingently!** This means the authority to constitute a church does not come via the circuitous, earthly, mother-church route! [GCC. 123]. It does not come through an ordained man or men! It does not come through a group of churches. In fact Graves absolutely excludes any ecclesiastical organization as a possible source of this essential authority to constitute a church!

But Graves does not stop with the negative but for the benefit of short-sighted EMDA brethren who cannot see facts when they are before them he states the positive! Graves uses the very terms to express his position which Bro Fenison claims he denies—**direct!**

If this were not sufficient, I will go further and prove Bro Fenison is opposed to Graves on a number of issues concerning church constitution and church matters. Now for the proof.

## **FENISON VERSUS GRAVES**

### **FENISON VERSUS GRAVES ON *DIRECT* AUTHORITY**

Fenison:

...Graves.... denied... direct'... authority... [GCC. 123].

Graves:

...receiving its authority directly from Christ...[GIW.552 ].

What does *direct* mean? *Direct* means *straight*! In a direct line! This demands the authority for church constitution, according to Graves, comes exclusively from Christ **directly** to those who desire to compose a new church when they covenant together according to Mt. 18:20! Graves excludes EMDA, denying it any place in church constitution!

### **FENISON VERSUS GRAVES ON MT. 18:20**

Fenison:

Matthew 18:20 was not given by Christ as a rule to constitute churches. [GCC. 21].

Graves:

Christ said, where two or three are gathered in my name [authority], there am I in the midst of them. [NGIW. 135. The bracketed word is Graves' ].

Again Graves expands on this subject and it is a veritable tsunami to EMDA!

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,...there is a Church of Christ...= [Graves. Quoted by Jarrel. *Baptist Church Perpetuity*, p.1].

Graves has more:

#### **CONSTITUTION ARTICLE I.**

Section 1.—A Church of Christ is a company of believers immersed upon a profession of an evangelical faith, voluntarily associated, on terms of perfect equality, in a covenant or agreement, implied or expressed, to receive the New Testament as their only rule of faith and practice, and to be governed by its teachings in all things. [GIW. P. 552].

And again:

It is true that two or three baptized individuals can organize a Church, provided they adopt the apostolic model of government, and covenant to be governed by the sole authority of Jesus Christ. [Graves. *Great Carrollton Debate*. 975].

### **FENISON VERSUS GRAVES: IS AN ORDAINED MAN ESSENTIAL FOR CONSTITUTION**

Fenison:

The authority denoted by letters of dismissal, gathering under the direction of church authorized, church ordained men, validates the action of covenanting themselves to be a New Testament Church. [GCC. 141].

Graves:

>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. [Jarrel. *Baptist Church Perpetuity*, p.1].

### **FENISON VERSUS GRAVES ON ECCLESIASTICAL—DIVINELY INVESTED AUTHORITY**

Fenison:

In regard to origin they are the product of a preceding church of like faith and order. [GCC. 36]. Old Landmarkism requires first the existence of a true gospel church and the exercise of its authority or there can be no constitutions of new churches. [GCC. 96].

Graves:

Therefore, each assembly was a complete Church, and being complete in itself, it was independent of all other like bodies in other localities, and being each independent it was divinely invested with all the powers and prerogatives of a Church of Christ. [NGIW. 125].

### **Fenison Versus Graves On Delegated Authority**

Fenison:

Old Landmarkism denied 'direct' authority and demanded that the Great Commission established an earthly authority .... [GCC. 123].

Which demands delegation by this *earthly authority*.

Graves:

This power, with all her [the church's—JC ] other prerogatives, is delegated to her, and it is her bounden duty to exercise it; she cannot delegate her prerogatives. 'Quod delegatur non delegatum est' is a legal maxim as old as the civil code. What is delegated can not be delegated. [OL. 48].

### **FENISON VERSUS GRAVES ON CHURCH DEPENDENT OR INDEPENDENT IN CONSTITUTION**

Fenison:

...it is the "ye" that are reproduced as the direct historical product of link to link organic succession ... The Great Commission "ye" stands forever as a denial to the so called doctrine of direct authority and spontaneous church constitution. [GCC. 144].

That is, every church according to Bro Fenison's position is dependent upon another church for its constitution.

Graves:

Therefore, each assembly was a complete Church, and being complete in itself, it was independent of all other like bodies in other localities, and being each independent it was divinely invested with all the powers and prerogatives of a Church of Christ. [*NGIW*. 125].

Each particular Church is independent of every other body, civil or ecclesiastical, and receiving its authority directly from Christ, it is accountable to him alone. [*GIW*. 552].

Of course the reader is able to see that Bro Fenison is diametrically opposed to Graves as these several quotes prove beyond question! How then can Bro Fenison make such blatantly false claims? It must be because he knows he is preaching to the choir and they will never question nor investigate!

Bro Fenison proves he is not a competent judge of what Graves believed. He misreads Graves! He misstates his position. He misquotes him! He misrepresents Graves in a most scandalous manner! And he does this on almost every single page! EMDA men ought to be outraged that anyone would dare to so misrepresent Graves, or any other man, as Bro Fenison has done! Do these men care nothing for the truth?

Somehow Graves' statement of his position carries more weight with me than what Bro Fenison *supposes* Graves believed!

EMDA is stripped, denuded, and rejected by Graves and proven to be no part of Landmarkism!

In another article we will take up Bro Fenison's misrepresentation of other authors referred to in his book.