

CRITIQUE #5

By

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An Examination of *Great Commission Credentials* and Other EMDA Articles

In this continuing Critique of Bro Mark Fenison's book *Great Commission Credentials*, and other EMDA articles, we look at Bro Fenison's attempt to turn the Salem church's self constitution, [LUF. 60] into an EMDA constitution.

THE SALEM CHURCH CONSTITUTION

Salem, Mississippi

The organization of this church was mentioned by Bro Cockrell in SCO [87-88] but he did not give this quote by Christian:

This community was called the Salem Baptist Church; but it was constituted, not only without a presbytery of ministers, but without the presence of a single ordained minister. >They simply agreed to meet together statedly,= says Bond, >and worship God according to his Word, and to exercise good discipline over one another, and called Elder Curtis to preach to them...' John T. Christian, *History of the Baptists*. Vol. II, 333. [Cf. GCC. 198].

Bro Cockrell issued a challenge [SCO. 84] to find a church constituted with no connection to another church or without a missionary. Bro Fenison comments on Bro Cockrell's challenge:

Examples where pure 'direct authority' is involved in the constitution of a church are extremely rare in American Baptist History. So rare that Elder Milburn Cockrell in his book entitled 'Church Constitution' challenged his opponents to find cases where no ordained minister, or letters of dismission, or mother church was connected to a constitution. Bro Cockrell was not denying it could be done, but it would be difficult to find. [GCC. 198].

Bro Fenison said I could find **only one** in LUF. [GCC. 198]. Actually there are seven! [LUF. 60-66]. Here is what Bro Cockrell actually said:

What they need to prove the new hypothesis is to show that three baptized members constituted themselves into a church with no connection to another church and without a missionary. Milburn Cockrell. *SCO*, p. 84.

One can see at a glance that Bro Fenison has modified the statement of Bro Cockrell considerably. He makes the singular into the plural *cases*. He adds "letters of dismission" and is able to tell us what the author thought but did not express.

Bro Fenison then says:

Bro. Settlemoir has grossly misrepresented this case. The whole

truth of the constitution of this church is obtained only when both histories are considered together. [GCC. 200].

Apparently he means by *both histories* Christian's *History* and *A complete History of Mississippi Baptists*, by Leavell & Bailey, published in 1904. He asserts the whole truth concerning the constitution of this church can only be obtained when both of these histories are compared. If this is so, then Bro Cockrell did not have the truth on this church in SCO [86-87] because he did not even mention Christian's *History of the Baptists* on the Salem Church—and this means he could not have known the truth according to Bro Fenison! But why limit this to two histories? What about Bond's *History*? What about Boyd's, Newman's and McLemore's histories?

In *LUF* [60-61] where I referred to the constitution of this church as an example of a church constituted without EMDA I referred to the book Christian quoted (he gave only the last name) and I took the author to be *John Bond* when in fact he was *T.M. Bond*. I discovered this error when I examined the book [T. M. Bond. *A Republication of the Minutes of the Mississippi Association from its Organization in 1806 to the Present Time*, 1849] and wish to correct that error here. [Cf. Christian. Hist. II. 333].

Bro Fenison goes on to quote Bro Cockrell:

“They prudently postponed the matter until they could correspond with the parent church in South Carolina, from WHOSE AUTHORITY they held their letters of church membership. In the mean time the young converts were recognized as candidates for membership in the church, and were properly cared and encouraged in the discharge of all their Christian duties.” (Milburn Cockrell, *Scriptural Church Organization*, 2nd ed., p. 74 quoting “A Complete History of Mississippi Baptists, Vol. 1, p. 24). – Emphasis mine.

He then makes this statement:

Settlemoir must have read and knew this since he quoted both sources! The history cited by Christian clearly demonstrates that this constitution did not occur apart from seeking the authority and direction of the parent church and only after obtaining it. In the mean time while they waited upon the “parent church” for authority to act, the unbaptized converts were recognized as candidates for membership “in the church” – referring to the parent church as no other church was yet constituted. [GCC. 200].

Did I grossly misrepresented this account? We will examine this objection.

First let it be noted that I have read these various histories mentioned above on the Salem church and its constitution. The question now is: Did this Salem group *seek authority from the parent church* to constitute? This is Bro Fenison's assertion. If they did so, Bro Fenison is responsible to bring forth the evidence by direct quotes.

He needs to *prove* his claim. Has he done that? Can he do it?

Note first that Bro Fenison claims there is only one church mentioned in this paragraph.

In the mean time the young converts were recognized as candidates for membership in the church, and were properly cared and encouraged in the discharge of all their Christian duties.

I think this is a complete misunderstanding of the quote. It seems to me the church mentioned here is clearly the Salem Church. These candidates for membership were waiting baptism in the Salem Church—not the Pee Dee Church in SC! The proof of this is easy. They were baptized by Bro Curtis before he returned to SC.

But how could these candidates have been cared for and encouraged by the church in SC? Does Bro Fenison think they had a Lear Jet at their disposal so they could fly the SC pastor out to MS and minister in Salem and then fly back to SC for the next service there?

The question this church in Salem had and what they communicated with the parent church about was not authority to constitute—which is Bro Fenison's idea—for they had already constituted in 1791! The question they had was what should they do about baptizing new converts, since they had no ordained man among them! They did not, incidentally, baptize in the name of the church in SC nor baptize them into that church!

Note carefully, the question of the Salem Church:

This brought up in the minds of these pioneer workmen in the Lord's vineyard a very interesting question for solution. Who could administer the ordinance of baptism according to the faith and order of the church? Curtis was only a licentiate, and was not authorized, according to the polity of Baptist churches, to administer baptism, and yet there were persons desiring the ordinance, who exhibited the usual evidences of conversion. The matter was postponed until by letter they could consult the parent church in Carolina. The church in that State on receiving this interesting communication from the "Natchez Country," took the matter under consideration and returned the answer: "That there was no law against necessity, and under the present stress of circumstances the members ought to assemble and formally appoint one of their number, by election, to baptize the converts." This advice was acted upon and Richard Curtis baptized the converts. Thus the first church in Mississippi was organized without a presbytery of ordained ministers. [Christian. Hist. II. 333-4].

When Bro Fenison reads this paragraph he boldly claims:

Mother church authority is written all over this example when both histories are consulted for the fuller picture. The parent church considered the uniqueness of their plight and gave them special authority as already valid church members to constitute themselves into a church and select a member

and ordain that member to administer baptism to the new converts. [GCC. 200].

One can only register amazement at this! Bro Fenison sees words which the text does not contain. He finds not only **authority**, but **special** authority! Where did this church grant anybody authority to constitute or for anything at all? How could they ordain without an ordained man if ordination means laying on of hands? How could they constitute without an ordained man? How could this group in Salem receive the Holy Spirit without an ordained man, as EMDA holds? [SCO.81]. Remember Bro Fenison and Bro Cockrell insist you must have an ordained man to do these things! A few examples will illustrate this point:

As such, it is authority to bring such disciples into church membership by one of two ways. Newly baptized believers were brought into church membership either by directly adding them to an existing church (Acts 2:41-42) or by a church ordained man constituting them into a new church (Acts 13:3; 14:22-23). [GCC. iii].

Ordained men were involved in the gathering of every church recorded in the New Testament. [GCC. 29]

Also, once a church is constituted under the authority of a church sent, church authorized, and church ordained man of God that the new church ought to follow the same procedure. [GCC.36].

Also, they did not believe that a baptized believer who was not ordained could administer the ordinances: [GCC. 37].

Below, we shall see that they had only two ways to practice “gospel order” and both were backed by church vote and church authority: (1) Church ordained and church sent men for the stated purpose to gather churches; (2) Church letters of dismissal for the stated purpose for gathering a church under the guidance of a church ordained man or men. [GCC. 39].

As a necessary conclusion, new churches do not evolve but are made by this process and are constituted under the authority of a previously existing New Testament Church and/or its ordained representatives. [GCC. iv].

But here in the case we are considering Bro Fenison has no ordained man available, yet he is able to jump-start a church without the ordained man with only the single battery of supposed church authority-current! Of course Bro Fenison’s reading is slanted by his EMDA leanings and he sees everything off-kilter. Others see this letter from the SC church in an entirely different light! Whence the difference? Christian calls this communication from SC, *advice*! Leavell & Bailey see it as *advice* [SCO. 88]. Bro Fenison calls it *authority*! There is no misprint in Christian or Leavell & Bailey so how did they read one thing and Bro Fenison another?

Nothing in this letter indicates that the Pee Dee Church thought they were giving *authority* for anything! They do not use the word *authority*. They use no synonym for *authority*. The church at Salem did not ask for *authority*! Why not? They did not think they were receiving *authority*! In fact, if EMDA had been in the minds of these Baptists of MS, they never would have met together at all! So *the SC church did*

not rule! It did not decree! It did not command! It did not give birth! It did not beget a new church!! What did this church do? It gave *counsel!* It gave *advice!* It gave *guidance!* It said *there is no law against necessity!* It **recommended** what to do about baptizing without an ordained man. This is the whole of their *recommendation* and it was apparently nothing more. Thus for Bro Fenison to make this into an EMDA grant of authority to constitute when there is no such word anywhere in the records of either church is like whistling under water!

In historical matters primary documents have more weight and take precedence over all other data. In this case we have the minutes of the Salem Church and I quote:

Original Minutes of First Baptist Church

October 1791. The Baptists of the vicinity of Natchez met by request of Richard Curtis and William Thompson at the house of sister Stampeley on Cole's Creek, and formed into a body, receiving (or adopting) the following articles or rules, considering it necessary that such as have a mind to join the church are only to be received by letter or experience. [Boyd. *Popular Hist. Bap. MS.* 18; Cf. McLemore. *Hist. MS Baptists.* 14].

Some questions are in order. What did they do? They met together! Mt. 18:20. What did they intend to do? To constitute a church? What then? They formed into a body. What is that? What kind of body? A church body! What else could it be? The YMCA? How did they do this? In what manner? By adopting the articles listed in the minutes and covenanting together on these articles and rules which follow! When did they do it? October 1791. When did this church communicate with the church in SC? Not until after this organization when they had converts waiting for baptism according to their own records. If this was not a church, what was it? How could any group more clearly claim their constitution than did the Salem church?

This church had Church Rules, a Church Covenant and Articles of Faith! The charter members are listed!

Charter Members:--The charter members were seven in number; viz:-- Richard Curtis (pastor), William Thompson (recording clerk), William Curtis, John Jones, Benjamin Curtis, Ealiff Lanier, and Margaret Stampey. [Church records. Boyd. 20].

Keep in mind it was at least August 1795 before Curtis left for SC [Christian. Hist. II. 335]. As Curtis was in SC for two and one half years, it was probably 1798-99 before Curtis made his way back to Salem. It was impossible for this church to claim they were constituted in 1791 according to Bro Fenison's scenario.

Thus we have the testimony of these marvelous church records. We have also the record of these historians, especially Bond, who personally interviewed at least one member of this church who was still living in 1849 when he wrote and who had been an eye witness of the founding of this church! [Bond. 3]. These records are all

consistent and clear with self constitution but they fly in the face of EMDA! This church was expressly constituted in 1791 without any authority from any other church on earth. There was no ordained man present. This nails EMDA to the wall as far as the constitution of this church is concerned!

There is one expression in this history by Leavell & Bailey which some might question if it does not imply EMDA. They say:

The hitherto oppressed and down-trodden Baptist community met in conference, and, under the superintendence of their beloved Richard Curtis, who presided as moderator, they completed their organization 'in due and ancient form,' as a regular Baptist Church. This was probably in the summer of 1798.

The term *completed their organization* refers to the installing of officers which the church did not do until Curtis returned from SC. [Cf. Summary of Church Discipline of Charleston Association. Dever. Polity. 118; Keach. Glory of a Gospel Constituted Church p. 6.].

Bro Fenison's attempt to make it appear EMDA was in operation in this constitution is altogether unworthy of his abilities and one can only be surprised at the attempt.

In conclusion we have these noted Baptists such as Bond, Christian and the first authors of The Baptist Association of MS who recorded this statement

This community was called the Salem Baptist Church; but it was constituted, not only without a presbytery of ministers, but without the presence of a single ordained minister. They simply agreed to meet together stately, and worship God according to his Word, and to exercise gospel discipline over one another, and called Elder Curtis to preach to them... [Bond. Republication. Min. MS. Bap. Association. 4; John T. Christian, *History of the Baptists*. Vol. II, 333]

without any disclaimer, without any objection that this language should not be taken at face value and stating contrariwise that a church must have authority from a mother church to constitute. This certainly brings the claim of Bre Cockrell and Fenison that EMDA was the universal practice of Baptists into utter disrepute! Bond says nothing of the kind when stating how this church was constituted! Christian does not question the validity of this organization without a presbytery, without a single ordained man and without any earthly authority of any kind! Leavell & Bailey do not question it. Boyd does not question it. McLemore does not question it. Newman does not question it. The Baptist Association of MS printed this record at least twice without any explanation or disclaimer! Had EMDA been a doctrine among them they would have certainly taken exception to the constitution of Salem church.

Bro Fenison accused me of *grossly misrepresenting* the case of the Salem Church. Is his statement true or false? The jury will have no trouble finding the correct verdict!