

Defending J. R. Graves

Box 1504, Louisville, Ky., April 13, 1959.

Brethren Edwin L. McDonald, Don Hook,
(Copy to Dr. Norman W. Cox, Editor of the Quarterly Review) -:

The study of the Baptist Bodies in the U.S.A., given in the recent issue of THE QUARTERLY REVIEW, is a very timely and wholesome study, of great value to the denomination, and is conducted in a way to do justice to all parties and to promote fellowship among Baptists. That the more moderate of these, people of very strong Baptist convictions, should not be read out of the denomination would be a lamentable point of view.

There are a few statements, in the midst of the good, to which I wish to call attention, hoping they may be at some time corrected as publicly as the error corrected was published. That is the essence of good journalism.

Ps. 10, 11 seems to me unjust and untrue about J. R. Graves and J. M. Pendleton. That Graves^S consistently, avowedly and by long practice a loyal convention man, should be called the "father of the movement" of current Landmarkism seems to me gravely ^Rslandering. Today Landmarkism means anticonventionism, or that stigma is of its essence. To read that back into the issues of last century, largely unknown to the Baptists of our present time, is, I repeat, to slander the heroic dead. Your paper is published in Tenn. That Tenn. is so largely Baptist today, instead of predominantly Methodist, is largely because J. R. Graves fought and won the battles of the denomination when Ditzler and others were veritable popular Goliaths over the land, intimidating and cowing our people on every hand.

You miss the issue in Pendleton's tract, I believe, in saying that he held that "such societies cannot give authority to preach". No society gives authority to preach. That is open to every believer, directly by the authority of the Holy Spirit. The issue was the recognition of Pedobaptist ministers as officially pastors.

It would stand out in local situations, most of our churches being in rural or town communities. To invite the Pedobaptist pastor into the pulpit on a level with Baptist pastors, who were leading an effort to restore and maintain in life a New Testament Christianity, definitely anti-pedobaptist and antiaffusionist, etc., is to recognize disobedience as equal to obedience, and reduce the New Testament to the level of, say, the Methodist Discipline. That was the issue, and that the Landmark stand in that day. With it went the affirmed loyalty to all the New Testament doctrines at issue in any given local situation.

It is hardly fair to Graves to identify HIS doctrine of the kingdom of God with Baptist churches, without explanation. The impression inevitably left is the denial by him of the salvation of any but Baptists. This was a debater's tactic. Graves believed that the phrase "born of water", John 3:5, referred to baptism, as Nicodemus would know it in the ministry of John the Baptist. He held that as the Twelve Tribes of Israel constituted the kingdom of Israel, so the Baptist churches constitute the kingdom of God in its present form of obedient organized and associate life, as successor to the theocratic kingdom of God in O.T. times, especially in the prophecies of Daniel, so central in these debates.

Now that position was familiar in his day, for he made it so. But it is not familiar today. I never met a Baptist, so far as I know, that held the Graves position on that subject. Now, in our times, his view is neither known nor known of. To quote him, therefore, as believing that only Baptists are in the kingdom of God (which we believe to be composed of all that are born again) is simply to defame his memory, an act of pure slander.

Also on p. 11, we read: "Close communion, another Landmark distinctive". If that be true, the entire Southern Baptist constituency is Landmark. In so far as loyal to ^{its own} doctrinal deliverances

Of course, the "Landmarkers" of the Graves type never did "go out from the Convention". They are in it still by the hundreds of thousands.

The popular use of the word Landmark a generation ago had outgrown the single issue discussed above and had become a name for loyalty to Baptist doctrine on all lines. Here is part of an article by J. B. Gambrell, of April 30, 1908: "One brother raises the question of the differences between Dr. Graves and 'Dr. Gambrell', and maintains that Dr. Graves was not a Convention Baptist. It is taken, of course, that the brother means to be candid, but it must be assumed, when this candor is admitted, that he does not know what a Convention Baptist is. A Convention Baptist is a man who believes in Conventions and belongs to Conventions. Dr. Graves was that sort of a man. Dr. Hall was that sort of a man, and not many years before Dr. Hall's death he stated in the Flag, he would not leave the Convention. Dr. Eaton was that kind of a man, and yet Dr. Graves, Dr. Eaton, Dr. Hall and 'Dr. Gambrell' all differed in some things concerning Conventions. These we all deemed matters to be settled in the Conventions. But all were for the Conventions.... For many years, Dr. Graves and the writer sat together in the Southern Baptist Convention, also Dr. Hall. We three were always opposed to union meetings and alien immersions. And until the new crop of Landmarkers came on, we were regarded as Landmarkers, but in the Convention were men who believed in union meetings and in alien immersions..." Now these two articles would ignore the current popular use of Landmarker all the life of Graves, Hall and Gambrell and thousands of others, and give it only its lately acquired meaning of a body of anti-Convention separatists, including belatedly in the classification men who were never separatists from the Convention, but determined to their dying day to stay in it.

I was the successor of J. N. Hall, in his home church and

which was also his last pastorate. I have a whole book of clippings from Hall, Gambrell, Chenault of Kansas, my brother and others proving that Hall never left the Convention, gave half his money for missions to the Convention, half to Gospel Missions (direct), refused to join in the Texarkana meeting, attended the Kansas City Convention, complained bitterly to the secretaries because his name was left out of the official "delegates" from Ky. in the Con. Minutes and so on.

J. N. Hall edited two pages in THE WESTERN RECORDER in the 1890-ies, was no more an anti-Convention Baptist than Dr. Eaton. I am on the Historical Com. of four, in Walnut Street Church, which has all the literary remains of Dr. Eaton under study. In these is a letter from Eaton to Hall, just before Hall's death, counseling him as to the attitudes to be taken in the first Texarkana meeting of the general "General Association". I attended the second meeting of this, still not definitely anti-Convention, to start off with, but developing toward that end during its deliberations. I got my church to reject it, on the report of my mother, another messenger and myself. Bogardites from several states on both sides of the Mississippi came to my church and canvassed the membership from house to house to get them to expel me from the pastorate and call one of their number, so they could make the old home church of J. N. Hall the center of a separatist movement in Ky., such as developed in Ark. It came to naught because they failed to capture, even by such means, the church they aimed to use as a springboard. Hall repeatedly says in the many clippings I have from the FLAG that he is not agsint the Convention, only against the "money basis", but not against the General Association in Ky. at all. Very well! In the Convention of 1931, E. C. Routh moved the doing away with the money basis and the present system of messengers from the churches, and that became part of the ^{substituting}

faith and practice of Southern Baptists. Are we all Landmarkers now, forsooth because Graves, Hall, Eaton, Routh and all the rest of us are messengers of the churches, and ^{no longer} delegates of the State Board or of Associations, on the basis of \$250 given to the work?

In the next article, open also to some of the above charges, we have this added slander and grave insult: "Dr. J. R. Graves, Dr. A. C. Dayton, Dr. J. M. Pendleton, and others were powerful proponents of a sort of "high church" theory which made the first New Testament church and all succeeding churches or associations of churches coterminal with the kingdom of God." I had, personally, far rather a man would spit in my face than to call me "high church". It is a slander and an insult, and when it becomes known generally that any sound Baptist is to be labelled in this evil manner, you will see a lot of men protesting and eventually, if the fight has to be made to stop ~~the~~ campaign, you will see associations on either side of the Mississippi adopting resolutions in self-defense. HIGH CHURCH has a definite, long known, well defined meaning of sacramentalism and sacerdotalism, the Romeward trend of Anglican High Churchmen and similar groups. ~~Do not~~ try to pin that evil name on people who believe just the opposite of all HIGH CHURCHISM, namely, salvation by grace, church ^{is} of voluntary congregations of the saved, cooperating through associations, boards and conventions, but NOT FORMING THEM. The fight of J. B. Gambrell's life was against this notion that conventions ^{or} associations are "associations of churches". How often Gambrell said and wrote (he was my teacher in Ecclesiology in the Seminary and I read his papers (he was editor of two in Texas) from my first pastorate till his death) that a Convention is not a church, is not composed of churches, has no church function, does not receive members ~~into~~ churches, does not baptize, does not discipline people in the life

of churches, does not call ^(ordain pastors or) ~~pastors or~~ terminate their pastorates. A CONVENTION HAS ABSOLUTELY NO CHURCH FUNCTION.

At the beginning of page 20, is repeated the statement that J.N. Hall "did leave" the convention. I deny the statement.

Now it just so happens that I have ample contemporary documentary evidence that J.N. Hall regarded with horror the B.M.A. of Texas and at Kansas City was considering a public apology to Dr. Gambrell and others because their defense of the money basis had drawn from Hall criticism which might seem to suggest that he sympathized with Hayden and other B.M.A. leaders. That statement is based on letters of R.M. Chenault of Kansas, to whom he said these things. Of course, these anti-conventionites want to use the name of Hall and Graves to their ends. But we would be sorry defenders of our own convention life if we yielded such weapons into their hands.

Coming back to the "close" communion reference, it seems to refer to Baptists who limit the Lord's Supper to the sole church observing it. But that is not the terminology that gives that idea. Close communion means the usual Southern Baptist position.

The statement on p. 23 is untrue, both for its meaningless use of the word LANDMARK and because it is contrary to facts. "... cooperation was almost an unknown word among our Landmark brethren before 1950." The question was as to "methods" OF COOPERATION.

I have noticed no misstatements as to other groups. The old Fundamentalist movement, so long headed up by ^{by laws,} the then-editor of the Watchman-Examiner, is perhaps a little optimistically classified as "having sought to safeguard the [~] orthodoxy... of their denomination", p. 24. I think perhaps that is too broad. "Orthodoxy" is right thinking in general. Theirs was a very narrow platform, and is today, in the Conservative setup. I have published their position in Brazil as

"conservative" in their central theology (the Bible, salvation and the Trinity), "liberals" in ecclesiology (open communion and perhaps alien immersion, in some cases - not all their men agree) and radical premillennialists. Now that isn't orthodoxy, as the word would have its normal meaning to Southern Baptist readers. But that is hardly a matter of inaccuracy of statement of their avowed ideals then. When the "Conservatives" came into Brazil, it was under the leadership of my friend, Clyde Hankins. He left them soon because he said they had broken their word to him, not to make theirs an open-communion movement in Brazil. They right away opened up a ~~new~~ work in one or two of our centers and made it a carnival of open communion practices, though hedging later. But Hankins quit them on that account.

These few words, taken from the issue of the Review cited, are a tiny part of it, and it seems to me fine and wholesome in its general effect. These phrases cited seem to me mere echoes of a propaganda among Southern Baptists to besmear, with a false meaning of the word LANDMARK BAPTIST, men who thought of themselves originally as Landmark Baptists, but not in this very modern sense. That is a campaign now. It ought to stop.

I shall devote a further study to J.M. Pendleton. He was a dear friend of my grandfather and father. My grandfather named one of my uncles for him, the grandfather of Wendell Rone. I am sure the references to him are slanderous, too, but I do not have the proof, as I do so amply in the case of Hall. I shall go to the Seminary and get that proof. I like to cite sources.

Till then, I am,

Faternally, yours,

W. C. Taylor