

A Panegyric in Honour of John Clarke

In March of 2011, Bro. Fellure from Victory Baptist Church in Milton, Florida (Victory Baptist Press) wrote an open letter defending his position that Roger Williams started the first Baptist church in America, and repudiated Baptist church succession. He immediately received many reproofs and rebukes from Landmarkers (including myself). In response, Bro. Fellure wrote a book a 21 page booklet further attempting to prove his point.

He said he did not care to debate the issue. He is quoted as saying, “we believe debating is a work of the flesh and a mark of carnality.” Now to me, if you are going to push an error, you should be willing to debate it. One-sided opinion is not the method for teaching truth. Many offered to debate, no doubt. I also wrote two letters, neither of them as yet responded to by anyone from VBC. Without debate, how can both sides be presented? How can error be challenged? Man is not infallible, so his teaching should not be a one way street. Imagine what confusion we would have in this world without debate?

For the sake of posterity and to disprove his positions, I am documenting my response to Bro. Fellure. I think this may be of use in the future, so I am making this record.

Before proceeding any further, I must make clear my opinion of Brother Fellure is still at a high level. Such disagreements should not be cause for any ill feelings. I love him as a brother beloved. He is a great preacher, and a diligent servant of our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe he is a better man than I am. My purpose for writing is simply to add balance and show the right side of the argument.

I hope no one is offended. Let’s receive my point of view as added commentary on this subject, adding proper balance to the other side. My points are simple enough. I do not try to confuse. The plain and true way is obvious to the truth seeker.

N. Sebastian Desent, Ph.D., Th.D., D.D, Pastor of Historic Baptist Church, Rhode Island.

My First Letter dated 3/8/11

Dear Brother Fellure,

This is brother Desent from RI (www.HistoricBaptist.org). You preached at our church almost 20 years ago when we just started. We still publish the word of God. You were an encouragement and I think very highly of you.

First, I want to say that I allow my brethren their own opinions, and I appreciate your courage to address a controversial issue. I do not hold differing opinions against my brethren [but I do hold differing views at times]. Please do not take this letter as an attack, but rather a referral to another side that you may not have heard.

Secondly, we at Historic Baptist are Landmark Baptists. We are independent, but we were sent out of Baptist Tabernacle in Shreveport when J.G. Tharpe (Mr. Baptist) was pastor. That church was ABA in its early days before going independent. We hold to those same principles of Landmarkism and succession. From reading the New Testament I find where Paul wanted to present the Corinthian church as a chaste virgin to Christ. Christ is the Head of the church, even as the husband is head of the wife. That is how we strive to present ourselves as a church – holy and acceptable to Jesus. Just as I want my wife to be faithful and obedient, the Lord wants the same of us.

Thirdly, because I have lived and served in R.I. over 20 years (first started in 1986), I have done a lot of research on “the first church” in RI, and on Roger Williams and John Clarke. I disagree with statements about how great Roger Williams was. Also, a lot of writers “know not of what they say” when talking on this subject.

Please allow me to offer some facts:

1 Dr. John Clarke owned almost all of “Rhode Island,” which is the island (Aquidnick) itself, and basically was the leader of the state. Clarke purchased (with others) the land March 24, 1638. The property on the other side of the bay and connected to the mainland is referred to Providence Plantations. Roger Williams established Providence. Clarke’s grave is still here in Newport, R.I. Bro. Faggart and the Baptist Preservation Society he leads

were instrumental in placing a new stone near his grave, remembering the man and his dedication to the Lord. The original headstone is worn almost to the point of being illegible. We were there when that new stone was dedicated, and I led two local teenagers to the Lord who were watching and not understanding what was going on. We three placed our hands on the market when thanking God for their salvation. I made mention that every time they passed that place they should remember “where” they got saved. We are in Wickford, R.I., established as an outpost in 1637. Wickford is just on the other side of the bay.

2 Dr. John Clarke did start the first Baptist church in America in 1638. That church (Union Baptist) is still active, and although not a KJV church, it still is somewhat evangelistic and has saved people in it. John Clarke and his fellow Baptists were persecuted for their faith (as Baptists). The second pastor of that church in Newport – Obadiah Holmes – was whipped in Massachusetts for his refusal to submit to the established church there. These men were true Baptists who came over from England as true Baptists. John Clarke was a Baptist for over 40 years, till his death.

3 John Clarke was the key person in the start of R.I. as a state. If you read the 1663 R.I. State Charter (please do), you will see that it was John Clarke who spent 14 years of his life fighting for religious freedom for his little state. R.I. was the FIRST STATE in the history of mankind to allow freedom of worship, approved by a king. R.I. was the last of the 13 colonies. They joined last because they wanted to maintain their independency and *already had* religious freedom. The other colonies offered them nothing. When you read R.I.’s charter, you will notice of the 24 men mentioned, John Clarke is first. Roger Williams listed eleventh of the names of the people responsible for this charter. He was not a major player.

4 You will also note that the first synagogue in this country is found Newport, R.I. (1658). The understanding of religious freedom in R.I. was well known, and even George Washington referred to R.I. as “the little Baptist State.” The French Huguenots settled in R.I. in the East Greenwich area (the town where I live) around 1686. Quakers settled in Newport around 1657 (a Quaker girl was persecuted in Boston, Mass., if you remember).

5 The church in Providence was mentioned in John Winthrop’s journal in March, 1639. That is likely the date of the church. If you do research you will see where the original buildings and documents prove this. When rebuilding the buildings and re-writing history, they tend to switch dates because Roger Williams is more politically correct. A thorough investigation of the facts and original documents will show this. It is well known that Williams had himself “baptized” by Ezekiel Holliman in late 1638 – **months after Clarke purchased Newport.**

6 Roger Williams was NOT the first pastor or founder of the Providence church. Original church records and testimonies of people who were members of that church prove this fact. He was not associated with that church. Roger Williams left Massachusetts because he was being persecuted for his religious ideas (which were not Baptist – he had Anglican and Puritan background) and knew he could find rest and refuge in R.I. He was thought to be a Baptist for about 4 months (without scriptural baptism) and then left to go to the Indians. He became a Seeker and is known to have said that he was not convinced the Baptists had the right doctrine.

That church in Providence loves the idea of being the “First Baptist Church,” but it is not true. They have a female pastor the last time I checked and are not a gospel-preaching church. I should not like to be associated with them. However, in the research I have done, I believe we would find our line through the Newport church.

Baptists went everywhere, and most notably was their work in Virginia, where their persecution is well recorded. God bless them. The Governor of Virginia – the one with the famous words, “give me liberty or give me death,” defended Baptists.

7 There is a book by Ford [*The Origin of the Baptists*, by S.H. Ford, LL.D. – <http://www.reformedreader.org/history/ford/toc.htm> or <http://history.landmarkbiblebaptist.net/Ford.html>] which shows a trail of churches from Paul the Apostle to the U.S. I suggest you offer that in your Bookstore, along with others on the history of the Newport church.

I hope this is a help.
God bless you, brother.
N.

My Second Letter dated 4/4/11, after reading Bro. Fellure's Booklet

Thanks for the letter. I read the paper Bro. Fellure wrote on the First Baptist Church. He pushed a lot of info supporting the Providence Church, but neglected a proper balance of similar documentation on John Clarke being the founder of the First Baptist church in America. As a proper researcher he should put equal effort studying the opposite view, to prove or disprove. It appears he mainly defended his previous assumption without proper extensive research and balance. He even resisted and honest debate on the subject. We who know the truth have no fear of debate.

I have lived and served the Lord (by his grace only) nearly 25 years in RI and have done extensive research. I also am a Landmarkist. It bothers me that much misinformation is being distributed, and this latest paper adds to it. Many will be misinformed. We publish a book on the subject of baptism and the scriptural authority to baptize (free of charge) that I would gladly send to our brother if he would read it. However, because it disagrees with his view, I will wait to be asked before sending it.

Much of the references Bro. Fellure supplied had confusion on the dates for the Providence church. Many gave 1639 as the date. The issue is not what authority did Williams have (and he had none – just because people say he started a Baptist church, doesn't make it so), but what are the true dates – 1638 (Newport) vs. 1639 (providence). If Bro. Fellure had a conversation with Williams (a Seeker) I doubt they would agree on much (for he wasn't a Baptist). A man with his doctrine should not have started any church. But again, that is not the issue.

John Clarke, in March of 1638 found a place of refuge in Aquidnick, RI. He is referred to as the “elder of the church there” and “their minister,” in documents dating to that year. **Only a person who resists the truth would assume John Clarke and his companions, who were better Christians than most I meet today, did not assemble and worship as a church as soon as they settled. It is obvious and expected, because of the reason why they settled in RI – they wanted to worship freely.** [This pretty much settles the argument. Bro. Fellure event quotes it on page 12 of his booklet. Knowing the character of John Clarke, how could anyone contend he did not have church services for nearly a year, and not until after Roger Williams was baptized??? Only ignorance would claim a group needs a building in order to constitute a Baptist church.] With Bro. Fellure's liberal definition of what constitutes a Baptist church, How can he say what John Clarke (who was a Baptist before he came to America) and his brethren had together in Newport does not qualify as a Baptist Church? Think about it....

Roger Williams was baptized late in 1638.

Usually, once a man writes his thoughts, he will find it hard to adjust. However, once a man writes his thoughts, it has to pass peer review.

Secondly, I resent and am disturbed by the teaching that Jesus' church he built and referred to in Matthew 16 and 18 was not the local church. How ridiculous a statement that is. The Lord instructed his baptized disciples to “tell it to the church” in certain judgments (Matthew 18). I am disappointed with the improper teaching in respect to the church that Bro. Fellure put in writing. Again, with the liberal definition of what constitutes a Baptist church, how can he contend what Jesus had was not that?

Then, if he truly wants to know the truth on succession, I suggest he go to the New Testament and show me where a church just started out of nothing without one being sent. [He will not find it....] The New Testament (and it is not a hard study) shows clearly how churches were started. I know Bro. Fellure and I know he is a man that honors the word of God. I know we agree on the New Testament being our rule of faith. We should then use the New Testament and prove the right way, not personalities, preachers, and other historical charters. I know our brother believes the book, but he has tread into an area for which he rightly receives reproof.

I have repeatedly read where naysayers of church succession always appeal to human writers, but never to the New Testament. However, supporters of that scriptural way, appeal to the New Testament. Why is that?

I am a Baptist because I believe that is the church the Lord started. If Bro. Fellure believes that is not the case, then his reasons for being a Baptist are no better than the evangelical. I do not know what his reasons are, so I do not assume. He ought to write that paper. I have (http://www.historicbaptist.org/documents/Why_Baptist.pdf). I should like for our brother to define who does (or does not) have authority to baptize, and put that in writing. Let me add that this study in the New Testament is very simple – just define from the New Testament who baptized.

Lastly, I do appreciate the attitude Bro. Fellure has. More important than pushing one's views is that we honor the Lord and have charity one for another. Truth will persevere. Facts are stubborn things. None of us walks on water – that is reserved for our King. And, until he comes, we need to be obedient to his commandments. We can disagree, but we should not be disagreeable.

I know you love the Savior and His Book!

Appreciate you all,
N. Sebastian Desent
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www.HistoricBaptist.org

Here is a Copy of the Booklet Written by Jim Fellure

Did Roger Williams Start the First Baptist Church in America?
Is the "Baptist Church" the Bride of Christ?
What About Landmarkism or the Baptist Church Succession Theory?

Preface

I trust the reader will forgive us for breaking editors' rules by not placing our footnotes at the bottom of the pages in this booklet. In this particular format, we feel it will be much easier to follow the references by placing them at the end of each quote.

Also, the reader will notice a difference of one year in the starting date for the First Baptist Church in America among historians. Some claimed it was 1638, while others recorded 1639. Since the First Baptist Church of Providence uses 1638 as their starting date, we have used that date as well.

Did Roger Williams Start the First Baptist Church in America?
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Introduction

This booklet started as a brief, four page article on the First Baptist Church in America. Once it was posted on the internet and published in our bimonthly Newsletter, we received more response from it than any other article we have ever published.

We now send forth this expanded edition (with much more documentation) trusting it will help those who read it to better understand the issues at hand and also that our wonderful Lord will use it for His own honor and glory.

If perchance you read this booklet and have a different view on the issues discussed, I trust you will not think to harshly of us for exercising our freedom of conscience in these matters.

In Christ,
Jim Fellure

The First Baptist Church in America

Over a period of five or six months, I have checked dozens of books and documents by Baptist writers and secular historians and have even accessed government records concerning our Baptist heritage in America. I have found that in 1638, Roger Williams started the First Baptist Church in America at Providence, Rhode Island. We acquired the beautiful picture of the First Baptist Church in America and had it professionally matted, framed, and appraised at a local framery. I then wrote a brief, one-page biography of the life and ministry of Roger Williams to accompany the picture.

We advertised the picture in the bimonthly VBP Newsletter for January/February, 2011, as representing the most strategic landmark of Baptist history and freedom of religion in America and put it on our online bookstore. Immediately, criticism and "reproof" started. I have received numerous emails and letters informing me that Roger Williams did not start the first Baptist church in America. The critics claim even though Williams embraced Baptist doctrine and was baptized by immersion, he was not baptized by a qualified person; therefore, he was not qualified to start a Baptist church. The opposition has come from those who follow the

Page 2

Baptist Bride, Landmark, or the Baptist Church Succession philosophy. They believe John the Baptist, or Jesus Christ, started the first Baptist church, and these groups say the first Baptist church was started by converts who were baptized by John the Baptist. Their philosophy teaches Christ gave that church the authority to baptize other converts into that church, and each time a new church was started out of the previous church, the authority to baptize converts into the church was passed on to the next church in the chain.

Those who promote this philosophy believe the process has continued to the present day, without a break in the chain.

There are some in these groups who go a little farther and teach that in order to be in the Bride of Christ, not only does one have to be in the chain of Baptist Church Succession, but he must also abide faithful to Christ until death.

To make sure there will be no misunderstanding, and so our readers will know I am not misrepresenting those who follow the "Baptist Bride, or Baptist Church Succession" theory, the following quotes are taken, word for word, from the doctrinal statements of two different, but very reputable and prominent Baptist Churches.

#1. The bride will be made up of the faithful members of the Lord's New Testament Baptist Churches. There are others that will be saved but the bride of Christ is the chosen of the elect. Others will be guests at this great wedding.

Page 3

#2. We believe the church was founded by Christ during His personal ministry and has had a continuous existence unto this day...

1. Jesus started a church in 30 A.D.

2. From this Church that Jesus started in Jerusalem came other churches holding to the same tenants taught by Jesus Christ.

3. These churches "not called Baptist", as of yet went into the dark ages.

4. During these days of the dark ages the Protestants gave us our names of Anabaptist which means rebaptizers.

5. After the dark ages and protestant reformation the church that Jesus started is now called the Baptist church.

6. Thus today the church started by Jesus is an Independent Baptist church that holds the truths of the King James Bible. These...principles are the stand and teaching of _____ Baptist Church, and we are committed to hold to these truths. The time has come as Baptist to reteach and reemphasize that Jesus started a church in his earthly ministry, and that church is not a Catholic or Protestant church but an Independent Baptist Church.

In 1644, Dr. John Clarke started the First Baptist Church of Newport, located just forty miles south of Providence.

Page 4

Because Dr. Clarke had been baptized by another Baptist, who had been baptized by another Baptist, etc. (supposedly all the way back to John the Baptist without a break in the chain, which has no historical support), the Landmark Theory people claim his church was the First Baptist Church in America, and they reject Roger Williams as even being a Baptist.

Where Victory Baptist Press differs with such a philosophy is that out of the fifteen times the word "Baptist" is used in the Bible, it is always referring to John, the man who was baptizing, and there is no indication John was starting a church, and when Jesus said "...upon this rock I will build my church..." (Matthew 16:18), He was not referring to a local Baptist Church, He was referring to the "...church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven..." (Hebrews 12:23). "...written in heaven" is a very interesting phrase. It would be hard to support the idea that God will wait until a saved person is baptized in water by a "qualified Baptist" to write their name in heaven.

The Bible teaches that when a person truly repents of their sins and puts their trust in Jesus Christ, and Him alone, for salvation, at that very instant he is baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, which is the church of the firstborn. (1 Corinthians 12:13). The New Testament Church is also called "His body" in Colossians 1:18.

Page 5

This truth is found again in the book of Romans, which is addressed to "...all that be in Rome,...called to be saints" (Romans 1:7). Paul had not been to Rome, but he admonished them because he considered himself a part of the same body as those saints at Rome, and it was not because of a particular water baptism; it was because they were in Christ. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another" (Romans 12:4 & 5).

According to these verses, all saved people in this age are a part of the church which is His body, and all would agree the church of the firstborn is the espoused bride of Christ. Even the Baptists in America who wrote the "Philadelphia Confession," their doctrinal statement in 1742, said in chapter 27, *The catholic or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ, the head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.*

So, those Baptists believed in the universal church, and according to The Baptist Encyclopedia edited by William Cathcart,

Page 6

The Kehukee Association of North Carolina, founded in 1765; the Kettocton Association of Virginia, founded in 1766; the Warren Association of Rhode Island, organized in 1767; the General Association of Baptists, organized in 1783; the Elkhorn Association of Kentucky, formed in 1785; the Holston Association of Tennessee, established in 1788; and the Charleston Association, established in 1751; all adopted the Philadelphia Confession.

Cathcart goes on to say, —*Asplund mentions several other early Baptist Associations that adopted the Confession of Faith, - that is the Philadelphia. But further reference to this question is needless.*— (Page 266 & 267, *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, edited by William Cathcart, D.D., published 1881.)

We believe—Billy Sunday and J. Wilber Chapman, who were Presbyterians; saved Methodists like the blind hymn writer, Fanny Crosby, Sam P. Jones, "Fighting Bob" Shuler, and Bob Jones. Sr.; and Congregationalists like D. L. Moody, or C. I. Scofield; J. Vernon McGee, M. R. DeHaan, R. A. Torrey, A. W. Tozer, "Uncle Bud" Robinson, and millions of others who were saved but not baptized in water by a "qualified" Baptist— are nonetheless, a part of the church that "...Christ... loved..., and gave himself for...;" and will some day "...present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing;..." (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Page 7

The writers trying to prove the Baptist Church Succession theory, find historical records of little pockets of Christians that taught and practiced some of the doctrines and practices Baptists believe and practice today, and even though they were not called **Baptist**, they include them in “the chain.” However, in some cases there are several hundred years between those groups, with no historical link to each other.

Historically, there are no records of churches that taught and practiced Baptist doctrine and principles that were linked to each other without a break in the chain all the way back to Christ. To explain away the problem of no continuous link, some will resort to the “underground chain” theory. That is, you can shake the chain here, and it will rattle all the way back to John’s day, proving it is linked all the way back to him. When they find places in history where there was no Baptist church, they claim “the chain went underground.”

The “linked chain” theory is only one of the many analogies I have heard to support the “Baptist Church Succession” theory, but a clever analogy does not make a theory true. I could tell you that I stepped on a dog’s tail in Atlanta, Georgia, and five years later when a dog barks in Detroit, Michigan, I assume it’s the same dog. So, the dog’s tail must be seven hundred miles long and run underground. If you are of a sound mind you would know that story was untrue, and I know the “Underground Chain” theory is not true.

Page 8

Another popular analogy is that if you find some churches in the New Testament believing and practicing certain truths, and you find churches today believing and practicing those same truths, you can conclude that the later are descendants of the first through New Testament Baptist Church Succession, linked by water baptism, administered by a “qualified” person. However, genealogies are not supported by similarities, but by names. A Smith begets a Smith (or whatever the name may be), and there are no “Baptist” churches in the Bible to beget other Baptist churches. There are no spiritual genes passed down to a Baptist church through baptism that will cause that church to believe or behave in any certain way, regardless of who administered the baptism.

If a Church is found today believing and practicing the same thing the churches believed and practiced 2000 years ago, I would not assume they were linked to each other through an unbroken chain of Baptist Church Succession. My assumption would be that both churches had been influenced by the truths of the same Book.

Historically, the only records of continuous links of the Baptist church in America I have found, are through conventions, associations, fellowships, etc. For example, the American Baptist Convention (ABC) traces its history back through the Northern Baptist Convention and the Triennial Convention,

Page 9

and finally to the First Baptist Church in America started by Roger Williams in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1638. In 1845, in Augusta, Georgia, a group of Christian men who disagreed with some practices of the Triennial Convention, separated from them and formed the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). In 1932, another group separated from the ABC and formed the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC). In 1905, a group of men in Arkansas, organized the Landmark movement, previously promoted by J. R. Graves (he was a very prominent and powerful influence in the SBC and was reported to be the founder of “Landmarkism”), into the American Baptist Association (ABA).

The Baptist Missionary Association of America (BMA) split out of the ABA in 1950, and it is common knowledge that most independent Baptist churches have their historical roots in the Southern Baptist Convention. The Baptist Bible Fellowship, the Bible Baptist Fellowship, the World Baptist Fellowship, and the Independent Baptist Fellowship International can all trace their history back to Dr. J. Frank Norris, an ordained Southern Baptist pastor who left the SBC and promoted and influenced the independent, fundamental, Baptist movement. Men such as Dr. John R. Rice, Dr. Jack Hyles, Dr. Lee Roberson, Dr. Harold Sightler, Dr. Shelton Smith, Lester Roloff, and many others had their roots in the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention has its roots in the Triennial Convention from which came the Northern Baptist Convention and the

American Baptist Convention, which are all linked back to Roger Williams and the First Baptist Church in America at Providence, Rhode Island. All of these men listed have had a great influence on Baptist history in America. One such man, Dr. Jack Hyles, was saved, educated, and ordained as a Southern Baptist preacher. In 1959, he became the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana, which at that time was affiliated with the American Baptist Convention.

While Dr. Hyles pastored that church, attendance increased to 20,000 per Sunday with a membership of over 100,000. If Landmarkism or the Baptist Church Succession theory were true, and the link went back through Dr. John Clarke and finally back to John the Baptist, then not one of the pastors mentioned previously, or the converts who were saved and baptized under their ministry, are legitimate Baptists, and none of them will be in the Bride of Christ.

One quote aptly states the following about the First Baptist Church in America at Providence:
This church was not founded on a man, but on the Bible. It was not founded as a result of a line of Baptist churches down through history. It was founded because some saved men believed the Bible and wanted to follow the New Testament example of what a true church should be. Even after Williams left, it continued to follow the New Testament and was not

adversely affected. It was not the man who founded the church who was important, but the New Testament principles on which he founded this church. They called themselves Baptists because that was the best name they could choose to describe what they believed, and the name identified them as Bible believing people. This church had no ties to anyone or any other church, yet this was a Baptist church as much as any Baptist church ever was. They were a New Testament church, not because of a succession of churches or men, but because they formed their church on the principles of the New Testament. That made them, in the eyes of God, as legitimate a church as any Paul founded. The sole authority for any true church is God's Word, and not its founder or its heritage. Not once in the New Testament do you find even a hint that a church was legitimate because it was founded by Paul or called itself by a particular name.

It would be very difficult for a Baptist preacher who is passionate about the "Baptist Bride" position to study history with an unbiased opinion. However, if a person ever admits Roger Williams started the First Baptist Church in America, and if there is a historical link of our Baptist heritage that goes back to Williams and the First Baptist Church of Providence, and not Dr. John Clarke at Newport, then the "Baptist Church Succession" theory falls apart.

If one starts with an untrue philosophy and studies history to prove his position, somewhere along the line he will have to deny, alter, revise, misrepresent, or ignore the historical records. However, history cannot be revised, and in the words of another, "Truth has no agenda."

Many Baptist preachers in our day who say Dr. John Clarke started the First Baptist Church in America, claim he did it in 1638, and some give the date as early as 1637. According to many records of history, Dr. Clarke and a group of his followers left Boston in 1638, but they did not start a Baptist church; they established a new colony and drew up a compact which read, *We whose names are underwritten, do hereby, solemnly, in the presence of Jehovah, incorporate ourselves into a Body Politic, and as he shall help, will submit our persons, lives and estates unto our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and to all those perfect and absolute laws of his given us in his Holy Word of Truth, to be guided and judged thereby. —They found in the Word of God warrant for their civil government, and claimed for it divine authority. It was, nevertheless, "a democracy of popular government," and no one "was to be accounted a delinquent for doctrine."* (Page 228, *The Baptist Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, edited by William Cathcart, D.D., published 1881.)

One of today's Baptist writers, in an attempt to make the First Baptist Church in America start as early as 1637 with Dr. John Clarke as its pastor, said, *The first Baptist congregation in America existed in its infant form by the winter of 1637. Clarke's family and eighteen other families traveled*

to New Hampshire at this time in search of religious liberty. The group that left Boston, being so zealously involved in their form of religious teachings, surely must have had organized preaching services even as they were on the move. **We, admittedly, have no concrete evidence that Clarke organized them into a church** and administered scriptural ordinances at this time; however, knowing his enterprising spirit, strong Baptist convictions, his desire to be biblical, and his future faithful service, **we assume** this traveling congregation was properly ordered. [Emphasis mine.] The following account of the Churches at Newport, Rhode Island was taken from the USGenWeb Archives and appeared in the Newport Daily News, March 28, 1854.

From the holy principle in his soul (Dr. John Clarke), being desirous to promote the interest of Jesus Christ, as well as to assist in founding a colony for the comfortable accommodation of their secular affairs, he attempted, and by the help and blessing of Christ, gathered and constituted a Church.”...”This was done, as near as can be gathered, about the year 1644—

Page 14

six years after founding the colony. (USGenWeb Archives by Susan W. Pieroth, <pieroth@ix.netcom.com>)

The record is clear. Dr. Clarke and his followers did start a new colony, and there are references made by other writers about a church in this colony where Dr. Clarke preached, but out of all the books and documents I have read, I have not found one historical record stating Dr. John Clarke started any Baptist church before 1644. Some historians claim 1639 as the most probable date, but all records I have found agree Roger Williams did start the First Baptist Church in America.

Hopefully, the following historical information will help the reader come to their own conclusion about this issue. Dr. Thomas Armitage provides evidence that Roger Williams founded the First Baptist Church in Providence, the first Baptist Church in America, since it was started before Dr. John Clarke founded The First Church at Newport in the “point of time.” Dr. Armitage also provides us with an inscription on the bell in the steeple of the First Baptist Church building that was erected in 1774-1775.

For freedom of conscience, the town was first planted; Persuasion, not force, was used by the people;

Page 15

This church is the eldest, and has not recanted, Enjoying and granting bell, temple, and steeple. (Page 668 & 669, A History of the Baptists, Traced by Their Vital Principles and Practices From the Time of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ to the Year 1889, by Thomas Armitage, D. D., LL. D., published 1890.)

John Asplund called the First Baptist Church at Providence, ...the oldest church on the continent. (Page 14, *The Universal Register Of The Baptist Denomination In North America*, by John Asplund, published 1794.)

Roger Williams (1603-1683) joined with a dozen others in forming the First Baptist Church on American soil. (Page 289, Dictionary of Baptists in America, edited by Bill J. Leonard, published 1994.) In his spiritual pilgrimage Roger Williams gathered only one church—The First Baptist Church in America. (Page 1, FIRST, The First Baptist Church in America, by J. Stanley Lemons, Ph.D, [history professor at the Rhode Island College for 39 years], published 2001.) The author, Lewis Peyton Little, said, Baptist churches were being organized north and south of Virginia during the seventeenth century; one

Page 16

at Providence, Rhode Island, in 1639, and one in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1682; (Page 12, Imprisoned Preachers and Religious Liberty in Virginia, by Lewis Peyton Little, published 1938.) ...the Baptist Church in Providence organized in 1639, was the first Baptist Church formed in America. (Page 22, An Account of the Churches in Rhode Island [presented at an adjourned session of the twenty-eighth Annual Meeting of the Rhode Island State Convention, Providence, November 8, 1853, by Henry Jackson, pastor of the Central Baptist Church of Newport, Rhode

Island], by George H. Whitney, published 1854.) In reference to the First Baptist Church at Providence started by Roger Williams, Samuel Green Arnold says, *Some time between this date (August 8, 1638) and the following spring, when the account of the baptism of Williams, Holliman and ten others, is recorded by Winthrop, the event then related occurred, which places the formation of the First Baptist Church in America probably in the autumn of 1638, and certainly prior to the 16th of March, 1639.* (Page 107, *History of the State of Rhode Island, Providence Plantation*, Vol. 1, second edition, by Samuel Greene Arnold, published 1874.)

Page 17

In the chapter "FIRST CHURCH, PROVIDENCE," of his book, author David Benedict says, *This church, which is the oldest of the Baptist denomination in America, was formed in March, 1639.* (Page 450, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World*, by David Benedict, published 1850.)

In the chapter "Roger Williams and the First Baptist Church in America," Albert Henry Newman said, *...about March, 1639, two years after his banishment, he repudiated the baptism he had received in infancy, and was immersed by Ezekiel Holliman, who before he left Massachusetts had shown a strong inclination toward Baptist principles. Williams then proceeded to baptize Holliman and eleven others. Thus was founded the first Baptist church in the New World.* (Page 79 & 80, *A History of the Baptist Churches in the United States*, by Albert Henry Newman, D.D., LL.D., published 1915.) In reference to the baptism of Roger Williams and eleven others at Providence, Rhode Island, in 1638, Oscar S. Straus said, *"This event has been generally looked upon as the establishment of the first Baptist church in America."* (Page 101, *Roger Williams, The Pioneer of Religious Liberty*, by Oscar S. Straus, published 1894.)

Page 18

Mr. Ezekiel Holliman was selected to baptize Mr. Williams, who then baptized the administrator and ten others. This event occurred in March, 1638-39. Thus was founded the first Baptist church in America,... (Page 165, *Memoirs of Roger Williams, The Founder Of The State Of Rhode Island*, by James Knowles, published 1834.)

Professor George P. Fisher, the able instructor in the chair of Ecclesiastical History in Yale College says, (*The Colonial Era*, p. 143),—*In 1638 Williams was immersed by an Anabaptist named Holyman, and then he himself immersed Holyman and ten others. There was thus constituted the first Baptist Church in America.—* (Page 126, *The Baptism of Roger Williams*, by Henry Melville King, published 1897.)

Thomas Holliman, was chosen to baptize Mr. Williams, who then baptized the other. This was in March, 1639. A church was immediately formed, of which Mr. Williams became pastor...The second Baptist church in Rhode Island was formed at Newport in 1644 by Dr. John Clark and eleven others. (Page 462, *Baptist History: From the Foundation of the Christian Church to the Close of the Eighteenth Century*, by J. M. Cramp, D.D., published 1800?)

Page 19

The Baptists, however, continued to prosper and increase in numbers. They still claim Roger Williams as the founder of the First Baptist Church of America. (Page 78, *Roger Williams*, a biography by Mary Emery Hall, published 1817.)

Referring to the men who held to the "freedom of conscience," and the baptism of Roger Williams along with eleven others, Isaac Backus said, *And the men who were for such liberty, soon formed the First Baptist Church in America.* (Page 50, *Church History of New England from 1620 to 1804*, by Isaac Backus, published 1839.)

Even though this booklet is not primarily about Roger Williams, he is the one God used to Start the First Baptist Church in America, and later, through his influence the freedom of religion was established in our country. Dr. David Gibbs in his excellent book, *One Nation Under God*, said, *Wherever the story of freedom is told, Rhode Island's founder, Roger Williams (1603-1683), must be remembered. He was a true pioneer for Christian liberty. Today, Williams is sometimes*

represented in American history textbooks as a liberal who rejected Puritan doctrine; a virtual unbeliever. That image is

Page 20

totally false. Roger Williams was a man completely shaped by his faith in Jesus Christ. (Page 110, *ONE NATION UNDER GOD, Ten Things Every Christian Should Know About the Founding of America*, by Dr. David Gibbs, Jr.)

One writer, more able than I, expressed my sentiments exactly: *Our history is being stolen from us right before our eyes, and the next generation will have no idea of the truth of how we became who we are as a people...*

At Victory Baptist Press we have no intention of "revising" history or reading into the historical records events that did not happen in order to promote our agenda.

Conclusion

We believe all saved people are in "The Church" which is the body and espoused bride of Jesus Christ. We also believe the body of Christ is as invisible and universal as salvation.

Anywhere on the planet (Universal) that a person trusts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, there is at that very instant an inward (invisible) work of grace. We further believe there should be an outward, physical, visible manifestation of that inward work of grace in a changed life. We also believe the person who has the inward work of grace in salvation is

Page 21

simultaneously baptized by the Holy Spirit into the invisible body of Christ, which is the church of the firstborn, written in Heaven, and nowhere in Scripture is the church called "Baptist." In fact, if there had never been a Baptist church in America, and if neither Dr. John Clarke nor Roger Williams had ever been born, it would be totally irrelevant to the existence of the church of the firstborn, which is the body and bride of Jesus Christ.

We also believe that after salvation a saved person should be baptized in water and identify with and serve Christ through a local church that is striving to believe and practice according to the New Testament. We choose to be members of Victory Baptist Church of Milton, Florida, a King James only, independent Baptist church.

Now brethren, please believe me when I say that it is not our intention to create contention or strife. In fact, a debate on the subject has been suggested, but we believe debating is a work of the flesh and a mark of carnality. Besides, I have many friends who take the Baptist Bride position. Our home church has many friends, and maybe even a few members, who embrace the same theory. Some great preachers who follow the same theory come to our home church as guest speakers, and some writers who follow the Landmark Theory have some great historical information. One such example would be *The Trail of Blood*, by J. M. Carroll, which VBP prints

Page 22

and sells. There are others, but suffice it to say, though we disagree with the supposed link between all the true Baptist churches, we will fight for another person's right to believe and practice according to his own conscience.

We hope you can, but If you cannot fellowship with us for believing and practicing as we do, I understand and would never ask a person to violate his conscience in such matters.

The End.