

Synergy, Cooperation, and Autonomy: The Southern Baptist Experience

Roger S. Oldham

A two time graduate of MABTS, Dr. Oldham has been vice president for Convention communications and relations with the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee since 2007. He previously served as pastor at Broadmoor Baptist in Brinkley, Arkansas and First Baptist in Martin, Tennessee.

The collaborative missions and ministries of the Southern Baptist Convention rest foundationally on four pillars, forging what one writer called a denominational “consensus”¹ that has allowed the Convention to develop an impressive array of cooperative ministries.

The four pillars are (1) a common missional purpose, (2) shared doctrinal beliefs, (3) mutual trust, and (4) voluntary cooperation.² To the extent that these four pillars have been broadly embraced by Southern Baptists, the Southern Baptist experiment has thrived. When Southern Baptists’ collective commitment to one or more of these pillars has shown signs of decay, the entire enterprise has been imperiled.

For example, W. A. Criswell, long-time pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, and SBC president in 1970, told messengers to that year’s SBC annual meeting, “[I]f ever we lose [our] missionary passion we shall dissolve like a rope of sand.”³ He continued, “Our worldwide missions program holds us together with cables of steel. We may differ over many things, but we are one on this; namely, the desire to see men brought to Christ throughout the nations of the globe.”⁴

Four years later, in preparation for the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the Cooperative Program, James L. Sullivan, Baptist Sunday School Board president, coupled Criswell’s two analogies into a compelling image to describe Southern Baptists’ work funded through the Cooperative Program (CP) as a “rope of sand with strength of steel.”⁵ Begun in 1925, the CP is Southern Baptists’ channel of giving, through which a local church can contribute to the ministries of its state convention and the missions and ministries of the SBC with a single monthly or weekly contribution.⁶

In 2004, Morris H. Chapman, former SBC president (1990–1992) and former SBC Executive Committee president (1992–2010), used Sullivan’s metaphor at a conference on Baptist identity hosted by Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. He asked the question, “How important is the concept of cooperation to Southern Baptist identity?” After giving a terse, three-word answer—“It is foundational”⁷—he elaborated:

The “Rope of Sand” is James L. Sullivan’s description of our cooperative polity. Since the rope has been in existence, it has proven in many ways to be as strong as steel. Conversely, the material used to weave the rope obviously is fragile, and remains strong only as long as it remains tightly woven, even strengthening under stress. When Southern Baptists are not bound tightly together, there can be only one anticipated result, a dismantling of the rope. At first, a few grains of sand may drop from the rope without much notice, but once the sand begins to move, one grain against another, the entire rope will disintegrate at warp speed. This does not mean the bricks and mortar will fall as did the walls of Jericho. Like the cathedrals of Europe, some semblance of structure may stand for generations, but they no longer will house a mighty force of God’s people who came together with

stouthearted biblical convictions, determined obedience to the Great Commission, a passionate love for the lost, and a compassionate heart for the hurting.⁸

Two movements within Southern Baptist life over the past forty years underscore and illustrate the fragile yet resilient character of Southern Baptist work—the Convention’s “battle for the Bible” over the past three decades, culminating with the adoption of the revised *Baptist Faith and Message* at the 2000 SBC annual meeting in Orlando, Florida,⁹ and the Convention’s adoption of the Great Commission Task Force (GCTF) report ten years later at the 2010 SBC annual meeting, also in Orlando.¹⁰

A Common Missional Purpose

From the Convention’s founding in 1845, Southern Baptists have believed they have an important role to play in world evangelization, trusting they can accomplish more by working together than they can by working alone.¹¹ The Convention’s inaugural Constitution stated, “We, the delegates from missionary societies, churches and other religious bodies of the Baptist denomination in various parts of the United States, met in convention in the city of Augusta, Georgia, for the purpose of carrying into effect the benevolent intentions of our constituents, by *organizing a plan for eliciting, combining and directing the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort for the propagation of the gospel* (emphasis supplied).¹²

Article II of the Constitution further set forth the Convention’s *raison d’etre*—to promote foreign and domestic missions in cooperation with likeminded brothers and sisters.¹³

Thirty-six years later, the Convention adopted its first set of bylaws. The “one sacred effort” phrase was restated in its preamble, amplifying the Convention’s focus on world evangelization by calling itself “to endeavor *more energetically and systematically* to elicit, combine, and direct the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort for the propagation of the Gospel” (emphasis supplied).¹⁴

This missional thread is woven through annual mission board reports and major addresses preserved in the *SBC Annuals*. It is also the focus of Convention-wide movements such as “A Million More in ’54,” an effort to enroll one million individuals in small-group Bible study in a single year, followed thirty years later by the “8.5 [Million] by ’85” and “Challenge 10/90” campaigns held in conjunction with “Bold Mission Thrust,” an initiative during the last two decades of the twentieth century to reach the nations with the Gospel.¹⁵

More recently, the Great Commission Task Force called on Southern Baptists to “make an unconditional commitment to reach the nations for Christ, to plant and serve Gospel churches in North America and around the world, and to mobilize Southern Baptists as a Great Commission people.”¹⁶ Its first recommendation, adopted in 2010, is posted online at SBC.net and states: “As a convention of churches, our missional vision is to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the world and to make disciples of all the nations.”¹⁷ This remains Southern Baptists’ common missional vision.

Shared Doctrinal Beliefs

From its founding, Southern Baptists were firmly committed to the centrality of Scripture as the basis for the tenets of their faith and practice. During the nineteenth century, they found common ground through earlier Baptist confessions of faith, notably the 1833 New Hampshire Confession of Faith as modified and popularized by J. Newton Brown in his 1853 *Baptist Church Manual*.¹⁸

Theologian John L. Dagg's *Manual of Theology* (1857) and *Manual of Church Order* (1858) were also influential,¹⁹ with Dagg being asked by the Convention in 1879 to develop a catechism containing "the substance of the Christian religion, for the instruction of children and servants."²⁰

Cooperating churches were also heavily influenced by notable Baptist scholars such as Basil Manly Sr., Basil Manly Jr., John A. Broadus, J. B. Jeter, E. C. Dargan, William B. Johnson, R. B. C. Howell, Richard Fuller, P. H. Mell, and James P. Boyce, founder of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The latter five served as presidents of the SBC from 1845–1888, imbuing the Convention with a strong doctrinal heritage.

In 1925, facing new theological and social pressures, Southern Baptists felt it prudent to adopt their own confessional *Statement on Baptist Faith and Message* to provide doctrinal guidance for the churches and institutions of the Convention.²¹ Thirty-eight years later, with burgeoning controversy over the historicity of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, a new edition of *The Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M)* was adopted by the Convention in 1963.²²

By 1971, messengers were expressing dissatisfaction with Article I of the 1963 *BF&M* through motions at SBC annual meetings, seeking to clarify that the Bible in its entirety was (and is) the Word of God.²³ After almost thirty years of Convention-wide debate, messengers addressed the inerrancy of Scripture through another edition of *The Baptist Faith and Message*.²⁴ The 1963 edition of *The Baptist Faith and Message* stated that the Bible is the "record of God's revelation of Himself to man"; the 2000 revision stipulated that the Bible "is God's revelation of Himself to man" (emphases supplied).²⁵ The 2000 *BF&M* also issued clear statements on pressing social issues such as racism, pornography, homosexuality, and other challenges to the Christian life.²⁶

Three articles in *The Baptist Faith and Message* represent significant contributions Baptists have made to the stream of Christian thought—distinctively Baptist positions on the Church as an autonomous body of baptized believers, banded together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, serving the Lord and one another with covenantal love (Article VI); the nature of Christian baptism and the Lord's supper in Christian worship (Article VII); and the personal responsibility "of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ" to be fully engaged in evangelism and missions (Article XI).

Mutual Trust

During the Conservative Resurgence, Southern Baptists were convinced that the recovery of biblical inerrancy as a core theological commitment would secure the Lord's continued blessings for numerical and spiritual growth.²⁷

By 2006, however, SBC statistical indicators were raising alarms. The SBC solicits an annual statistical snapshot from its cooperating churches through an instrument called the Annual Church Profile (ACP). For six successive years, beginning in 2000, annual reports showed that

year-to-year membership was growing at less than 1 percent per year.²⁸ The number of reported baptisms declined by fifty thousand over the same six-year period.²⁹

When the 2007 ACP report was released in April 2008, it sent shock-waves across the Convention. Total membership in Southern Baptist churches had declined. Even more alarming, baptisms hit their lowest point since 1987.³⁰ Both measures have continued this downward trend. Baptism numbers in 2015 were lower than any time since 1946, and total membership had fallen by more than one million since 2006.³¹

The 2007 report triggered hand-wringing and finger-pointing about potential causes for these declines.³² Mistrust over how Convention funds had been spent and distrust about the theology, organization, and personal motives of fellow Southern Baptists escalated.

The following year, this sense of discontent was fanned into flame when the sitting SBC president, following the lead of an SBC entity leader, declared the Convention was “bloated” and “bureaucratic” and in need of renewal, with a resultant call for a Great Commission Resurgence modeled after gains of the Conservative Resurgence.³³

Though the 2009 SBC annual meeting exposed numerous flash points of acrimony and debate,³⁴ the meeting proved catalytic for a pivotal transition of the Convention. Over the next twenty-four months, the Convention adopted the Great Commission Task Force report authorized at the 2009 meeting (June 2010); adopted sweeping recommendations flowing out of the GCTF report (June 2011); saw changes in presidential leadership at its two missions entities and its Executive Committee (all in 2010); adopted twelve recommendations of a report designed to increase participation of ethnic church leaders in response to a referred motion at the 2009 meeting (June 2011); and reduced the percentage of Cooperative Program funds going to the SBC Executive Committee, shifting the difference to the International Mission Board (June 2011).

With so many dramatic changes in such a short time, new SBC Executive Committee (EC) President Frank S. Page set out to “rebuild trust by reducing bureaucracy” in preparation for the 2011 SBC annual meeting.³⁵ He reduced EC staff by 19 percent, cut the EC budget by 14 percent, and presented SBC messengers a Cooperative Program allocation budget that directed “95 percent of Cooperative Program dollars to international missions, North American church planting and evangelism, and seminary education.”³⁶

Page invited the SBC president, the eleven SBC entity heads, executive directors of the forty-two state Baptist conventions that cooperate with the SBC, and leaders of numerous Southern Baptist ethnic and racial fellowships to join him in signing a historic document called “Affirmation of Unity and Cooperation.” More than sixty Southern Baptist leaders joined him on the platform at the 2011 SBC annual meeting to demonstrate unity among and between these key Southern Baptist leaders.³⁷

Two of the Affirmation’s pledges addressed the fragile nature of cooperative relationships—“We pledge to maintain a relationship of mutual trust, behaving ourselves trustworthily before one another and trusting one another as brothers and sisters indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God (Philippians 4:8; Ephesians 4:20-32; 2 Peter 1:3-8),” and “We pledge to attribute the highest motives to those engaged in local church ministries and those engaged in denominational service in any level of Convention life—motives that originate within hearts truly desiring to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we also serve (1 Samuel 2:3; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 7:1-5).”³⁸

Page has since appointed a Calvinism Advisory Group, whose 2013 report helped calm rising theological tensions,³⁹ four ethnic and racial advisory councils, a mental health advisory

group, a smaller church/bivocational ministry advisory council, a woman's ministry advisory council, and a younger leaders advisory council, all with the goal of building bridges and rebuilding trust across the Southern Baptist landscape.⁴⁰

Voluntary Cooperation

The final section of the Great Commission Task Force report opened with these words: "Southern Baptists hold to an ecclesiology that honors and affirms both autonomy and cooperation."⁴¹ It continued: "[W]e cannot direct individual Christians, local churches, associations, or state conventions to take any particular or specific action. . . . However, our doctrine of the church does not prevent us from challenging, encouraging, admonishing, and advising one another at all levels of SBC life for greater passion and effectiveness in pursuing the Great Commission."⁴²

This local church independence was enshrined in the Convention's 1845 constitution. The final clause of its Article II acknowledged that the Convention "shall fully respect the independence and equal rights of the Churches."⁴³ Article IV of the current SBC constitution is equally clear: "While independent and sovereign in its own sphere, the Convention does not claim and will never attempt to exercise any authority over any other Baptist body, whether church, auxiliary organizations, associations, or convention."⁴⁴

This principle of non-coercive cooperation is amply illustrated in Scripture. In their 2005 book *One Sacred Effort*, Chad Owen Brand and David Hankins posited a "theology of cooperation,"⁴⁵ drawing special attention to the collaborative nature of the Jerusalem Conference and the resultant letters sent to the Gentile churches (Acts 15)⁴⁶ and Paul's encouragement for Gentile churches across the realm to contribute financially to the ministry needs of their Jewish brothers in Christ in the church at Jerusalem.⁴⁷

The Old Testament also provides examples of cooperative service. When Israel entered the land of promise, the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half-tribe of Manasseh had already received their inheritance on the east of Jordan (Numbers 34:15). Nevertheless, they fulfilled their promise to help Joshua in the conquest of the Promised Land (Joshua 1:12–18; 22:1–6).

During the post-exilic era, the people worked cooperatively to rebuild the walls around Jerusalem. Apportioned along the wall according to their tribes and their families, each worked in support of the others for the benefit of the whole (Nehemiah 3–4).

Other Old Testament examples describe voluntary (freewill) offerings for the service of God's House:

- In preparation for the construction of the Tabernacle, the people presented freewill offerings to Moses (Exodus 35), bringing their offerings every morning throughout its construction (Exodus 36).
- Anticipating the Temple to be built by his son, David challenged the people to offer gifts for Solomon to use when he began its construction (1 Chronicles 29).
- During Hezekiah's reform, freewill gifts for the service of the Lord were encouraged, received, and disbursed for daily service in the house of God (2 Chronicles 31).
- Following the Exile, people voluntarily gave to construct the house for God's glory (Ezra 1) and for the day-to-day ministry of the rebuilt Temple (Ezra 3).

- When Ezra later led a group to return to Jerusalem, the people gave cooperatively for the service of the House of God (Ezra 7 and 8).

More than 42,600 of the Convention's 46,793 cooperating churches⁴⁸ have 250 or fewer persons in Sunday worship.⁴⁹ In 2015, these churches contributed 42 percent of all Cooperative Program gifts.⁵⁰ On the other end of the spectrum, only 167 churches run two thousand or more in Sunday worship.⁵¹ In regard to the Convention's diversity, 10,665 congregations (churches and church-type missions with weekly services) are predominately non-Anglo.⁵²

When churches work in collaboration, churches of all sizes and every ethnic composition have a seat at the table and are empowered to participate in the Kingdom initiatives they believe in so strongly. They are able to address national and international ministry goals that would otherwise be out of the reach of the majority of individual churches. Pooling their resources levels the playing field. Every church can play a vital role in reaching beyond its own Jerusalem with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁵³

Conclusion

In 1973, Elmer Towns predicted that collaborative ministries of denominations would be replaced by what he called "super-aggressive churches" with no need of a denominational apparatus to accomplish bold Kingdom purposes.⁵⁴ While there will always be a certain number of strong churches that can do mighty ministries on their own, there is still a place for a network of churches of every size and economic status to impact the world with the Gospel. Despite current challenges of declining evangelistic effectiveness and church membership at the local church level, SBC ministries continue to flourish.

At the end of the most recent reporting year, the six SBC seminaries reported more than twenty thousand students enrolled for at least one course through their various degree programs, with a full-time equivalency of 7,976 Southern Baptist students in training for ministry.⁵⁵ The North American Mission Board (NAMB) reported 926 new church plants, bringing the five-year total of new churches to more than 4,700.⁵⁶ NAMB reported more than one-half of these new churches have been planted in some of the most culturally-diverse areas of America's major cities.⁵⁷

Following a year-long financial reset, the International Mission Board (IMB) reported in November 2016 that its trustees celebrated a balanced budget for the first time in two decades. The mission agency also reported the appointment of fifty new fully-funded missionaries, stating its goal to appoint an additional 451 field personnel in 2017 to replace the estimated 350 missionaries who will retire from service or otherwise transition to other ministries. The agency projects a net increase of 3 percent to its overseas missions force.⁵⁸

The Southern Baptist Convention is not a perfect organization. It has experienced many times of testing and will be tested in the future. Trust will be strained. A group of churches will believe it has a better plan for reaching the nations with the Gospel. Voluntary cooperation will seem a poor investment. Some churches will deviate from their founding orthodoxy.

The beauty of denominational synergy is that the long-term vitality and sustainability of the Convention's ministries, supported by a network of churches, are not dependent on the continued viability of any single church. By pooling their resources to "establish and advance Great Commission work," the SBC provides an opportunity to "create a synergy in which the

impact of the whole can be greater than the sum of the individual parts, giving churches a way collectively to express their convictions and realize their vision.”⁵⁹

¹ David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2008).

² See, for example, W. A. Criswell’s presidential address at the 1970 SBC annual meeting in Denver, Colorado, “Criswell Urges SBC: Hold Fast to Doctrine, Missions,” *Baptist Press*, June 1, 1970, 1, <http://media.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/3003,01-Jun-1970.pdf>; Roy L. Honeycutt, “Southern Baptists: A Trusting People?,” *Baptist Press*, February 14, 1995, 7–8, <http://media.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/7925,14-Feb-1995.pdf>; and Morris H. Chapman, “Axioms of a Cooperating Conservative,” a paper presented at the “Baptist Identity Conference” (Jackson, TN, Union University, April 5, 2004), <http://www.baptist2baptist.net/Issues/BaptistPolity/cooperatingconservative.asp>.

³ “Criswell Urges SBC: Hold Fast to Doctrine, Missions,” 1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ James L. Sullivan, *Rope of Sand with Strength of Steel* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1974).

⁶ By definition, “The Cooperative Program is Southern Baptists’ unified plan of giving through which cooperating Southern Baptist churches give a percentage of their undesignated receipts in support of their respective state convention and the Southern Baptist Convention missions and ministries.” See “Proceedings,” Item #27, *Southern Baptist Convention Annual* (Nashville, TN: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2007), 60, and <http://www.sbc.net/cp/default.asp>.

⁷ Chapman, “Axioms.”

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “Proceedings,” Items #112–19, *Southern Baptist Convention Annual* (Nashville, TN: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2000), 76.

¹⁰ “Proceedings,” Items #73–97, *Southern Baptist Convention Annual* (Nashville, TN: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2010), 77–97.

¹¹ This common phrase is woven throughout Southern Baptist documents and opinion pieces. For a recent illustration, see Randy Davis, “‘Getting’ the Cooperative Program,” *SBC LIFE*, vol. 25, no. 2, Winter 2016, 15.

¹² “Preamble and Constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Richmond, VA: H. K. Ellyson, Printer, 1845), 3.

¹³ Article II of the original Constitution stated: “It shall be the design of this Convention to promote Foreign and Domestic Missions, and other important objects connected with the Redeemer’s kingdom, and to combine for this purpose, such portions of the Baptist denomination in the United States, as may desire a general organization for Christian benevolence, which shall fully respect the independence and equal rights of the Churches.” See endnote 12 above, 1845 *Proceedings of the SBC*, 3.

¹⁴ “Bylaws,” *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Session of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Cincinnati, OH: Elm Street Printing Company, 1881), 6; cf. “Proceedings,” Item #53, p. 17 of the same 1881 SBC Annual.

¹⁵ Frank William White, “Sunday school enrollment growth shows largest increase since 1976,” *Baptist Press*, February 11, 1992, 4–5, <http://media.sbhla.org.s3.amazonaws.com/7390,11-Feb-1992.pdf>.

¹⁶ Quotation from the preamble of “Penetrating The Lostness: Embracing a Vision for a Great Commission Resurgence among Southern Baptists,” the final report of the Great Commission Task Force of the Southern Baptist Convention, “Proceedings,” Item #73, *Southern Baptist Convention Annual* (Nashville, TN: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2010), 77.

¹⁷ “Proceedings,” Item #73, “Recommendation One,” *Southern Baptist Convention Annual* (Nashville, TN: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2010), 87; see also <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/missionvision.asp>.

¹⁸ William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, second revised edition, ed. Bill J. Leonard (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2011), 376–78.

¹⁹ John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (N.p., SC: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857; rpt., Harrison, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 1990); and *Manual of Church Order*, (N.p., SC: The Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1858; rpt., Harrison, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 1990).

²⁰ “Proceedings,” Item #16, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Session of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Atlanta: Jas. P. Harrison & Co., 1879), 14–15.

²¹ “Proceedings,” Item #53, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN: Marshall and Bruce, 1925), 70–76.

-
- ²² “Proceedings,” Items #112–122, *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN: SBC Executive Committee, 1963), 63.
- ²³ “10. SBC Referral: Requesting Study of *The Baptist Faith and Message*,” Background Material for the September 19–20, 2016, SBC Executive Committee meeting (Nashville, TN: SBC Executive Committee), 126–40, <http://www.sbcec.org/documents/ECBookSep2016.pdf> (password protected).
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ For a comparison of the wording of “Article I. The Scriptures,” from the three editions of *The Baptist Faith and Message* (1925, 1963, and 2000), see the side-by-side “Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” posted at <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.
- ²⁶ A letter from chairman of the 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message* committee that outlined the goals of the committee and the recommended changes it made to this current edition of this Convention-adopted statement of faith is posted at <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmchairman.asp>.
- ²⁷ Jason K. Allen ably illustrated this in his chapter, “A Never-Changing Witness in an Ever-Changing World: The Enduring Southern Baptist Mandate,” in *The SBC and the 21st Century*, ed. Jason K. Allen (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 3–4.
- ²⁸ Rob Phillips, “SBC baptisms lowest since 87,” *Baptist Press*, April 23, 2008, <http://www.bpnews.net/27890/sbc-baptisms-lowest-since-87>.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Carol Pipes, “ACP: more churches reported; baptisms decline,” *Baptist Press*, June 7, 2016, <http://www.bpnews.net/46989/acp-more-churches-reported-baptisms-decline>.
- ³² A cursory reading of numerous analytical articles in *Baptist Press*, state Baptist papers, and numerous Southern Baptist blogs revealed that trust among and between pastors, associational leaders, state convention leaders, and SBC leaders had sagged to a low ebb.
- ³³ See Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary President Danny Akin’s “Twelve Axioms for a Great Commission Resurgence,” reported by Jason Hall, “Seminary head calls for great commission resurgence, streamlining denomination,” *Baptist Press*, April 16, 2009, <http://www.bpnews.net/30282/seminary-head-calls-for-great-commission-resurgence-streamlining-denomination>; 2009 SBC President John Hunt’s Ten-point Declaration for a Great Commission Resurgence, listed in “SBC president’s declaration calls for a ‘great commission resurgence,’” *Baptist Press*, April 28, 2009, <http://www.bpnews.net/30387/sbc-presidents-declaration-calls-for-a-great-commission-resurgence>; and James A. Smith Sr., “GCR: Akin discusses its history, intent,” *Baptist Press*, May 5, 2009, <http://www.bpnews.net/30430/gcr-akin-discusses-its-history-intent>.
- ³⁴ The SBC Committee on Order of Business recommended that the SBC president rule out of order one-third of the thirty-one motions introduced by messengers from the floor at the 2009 SBC annual meeting, noting that several “reflected harshly on particular individuals,” Keith Hinson, “Motions: GCR task force endorse,” *Baptist Press*, June 25, 2009, <http://www.bpnews.net/30774/motions-gcr-task-force-endorsed>.
- ³⁵ “SBC natl, state leaders sign unity pledge,” *Baptist Press*, June 13, 2015 <http://www.bpnews.net/35533/sbc-natl-state-leaders-sign-unity-pledge>.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Mark Kelly, “Unity, cooperation pledge tops EC agenda,” *Baptist Press*, June 14, 2011, <http://www.bpnews.net/35539/unity-cooperation-pledge-tops-ec-agenda>.
- ³⁸ For the full statement of “Affirmation of Cooperation and Unity,” see “Proceedings,” Item #29, *Southern Baptist Convention Annual* (Nashville, TN: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2011), 59–60.
- ³⁹ For a history of the Calvinism Advisory group, see <http://www.sbclife.net/Articles/2013/06/sla1>. To read the final report and see the individual comments of each member, see <http://www.sbclife.net/Articles/2013/06/sla5>.
- ⁴⁰ The appointment, meetings, and reports of these advisory groups have been chronicled in *SBC LIFE*, the official news journal of the SBC Executive Committee, and can be researched at <http://www.sbclife.net>.
- ⁴¹ “Penetrating The Lostness,” the final report of the Great Commission Task Force of the Southern Baptist Convention, “Proceedings,” Item #73, “Challenges to All Southern Baptist Churches” section, *Southern Baptist Convention Annual* (Nashville, TN: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2010), 89.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ See endnotes 12 and 14 above, 1845 *Proceedings of the SBC*, 3.
- ⁴⁴ “Constitution,” *Southern Baptist Convention Annual*, (Nashville, TN: Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, 2016), 7.

-
- ⁴⁵ See especially chapter 3, “Toward a Theology of Cooperation,” in Chad Owen Brand and David Hankins, *One Sacred Effort: The Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2005), 53–77.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 66–67.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 67–68.
- ⁴⁸ Carol Pipes, “ACP.”
- ⁴⁹ Statistical research developed by the SBC Executive Committee staff during the Fall of 2016 from the 2015 Annual Church Profile report, research from the North American Mission Board’s Center for Missional Research based on the 2014 ACP report, and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary’s Caskey Center for Church Excellence based on the 2013 ACP report.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵² *Ibid.*
- ⁵³ Frank S. Page, president of the SBC Executive Committee, made this point in “The Cooperative Program and the Future of Collaborative Ministry,” in *The SBC and the 21st Century*, ed. Jason K. Allen (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 14–16.
- ⁵⁴ Elmer Towns, *Is the Day of the Denomination Dead?* (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson, 1973).
- ⁵⁵ “Ministry Reports to the SBC,” *Annual of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN: SBC Executive Committee, 2016), “Seminary Comparative Data,” 198.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, “North American Mission Board,” 197.
- ⁵⁷ Mike Ebert, “Class of 2015 church plants impacting communities,” *Baptist Press*, May 12, 2016, <http://www.bpnews.net/46846/class-of-2015-church-plants-impacting-communities>.
- ⁵⁸ Julie McGowan, “Trustees: IMB celebrates balanced budget,” *Baptist Press*, November 11, 2016, <http://www.bpnews.net/47882/trustees-imb-celebrates-balanced-budget>; and McGowan, “50 new missionaries appointed by IMB,” *Baptist Press*, November 14, 2016, <http://www.bpnews.net/47886/50-new-missionaries-appointed-by-imb>.
- ⁵⁹ *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Closer Look* (Nashville, TN: SBC Executive Committee, 2016), 5, <http://www.sbc.net/pdf/acloserlook.pdf>.