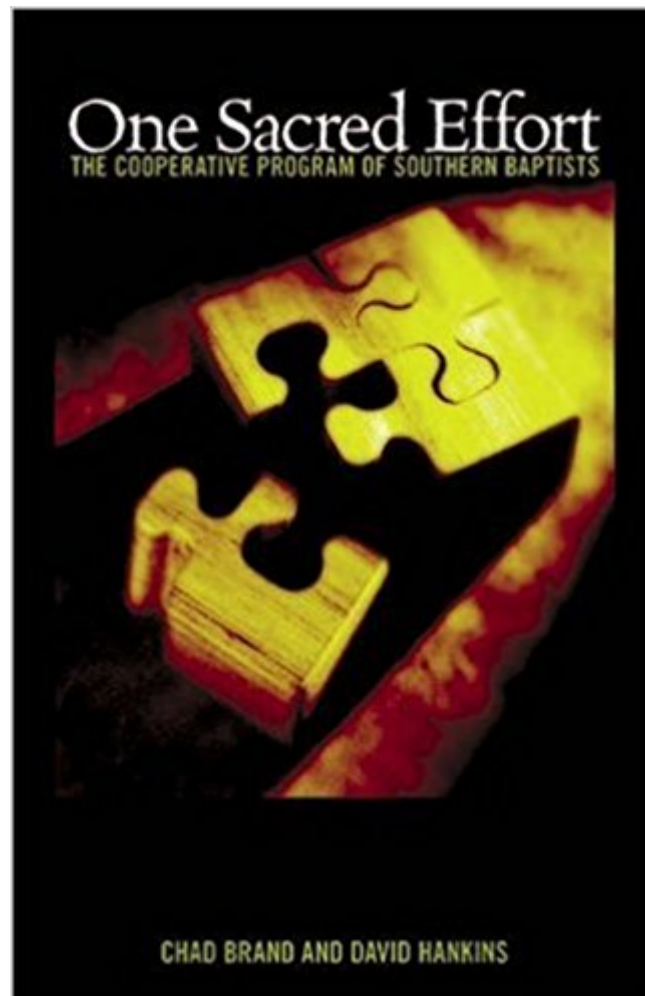




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One Sacred Effort: The Cooperative Program Of Southern Baptists



Synopsis

The preamble of the original constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention describes the purpose of the SBC as “eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the whole denomination in one sacred effort, for the propagation of the Gospel.” These words are not only historically significant; they convey the mission and purpose and distill the distinct facets of the SBC Cooperative Program. One Sacred Effort looks close at this unique and enduring ministry operation.

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Customer Reviews

Chad Brand is associate professor of Christian Theology at Boyce College of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. David E. Hankins is executive director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention. He has served as vice president for the Cooperative Program of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention. In this position, he gave direction to the development and promotion of Cooperative Program ministries and giving for Southern Baptist churches, state conventions, and the SBC.

I bought this book for my own edification. It is very detailed and met my expectations. It does seem to be written more for classroom use, but I don't know that it actually is. I would have given it another star but it is a little wordy, could have been written a bit more succinctly, and doesn't cover everything i.e. doesn't deal with local conventions. I would buy this book again but it would be nice to have a list of available resources to keep current.

Great history and great model still today

This book is great for knowledge of the Southern Baptist Cooperative program. I do, however, wish the authors would have been a little less theologically complex. The complexity of some of the chapters can easily confuse, and often bore the reader, and I have to admit I was expecting a little more user-friendly approach to reading this.

Really lets you know religious histories, comparisons and why Baptist are who we are.

A really good read for a Southern Baptist on Missionary work of the church. I definitely recommend this book.

Very good information about the southern baptist convention

This book is a historical and instructive survey of the SBC Cooperative program. The other reviewers seem to overlook the fact that a book of this sort is simply not meant to be entertaining or exciting. It is meant to be informative. It cannot be any more exciting than the history it relates or the SBC cooperative program it is describing, regardless of the authors' writing skills. The book is dry at parts, but complaints about the first five chapters are unnecessary. These chapters seek to lay a historical context, a totally appropriate layout for a book whose purpose is to inform students about the SBC. The history is substantial and well-researched, the theology can be complex but that is not the authors' faults- theology can simply be complex. The authors do their best to outline the Biblical support for SBC ecclesiology and the cooperative program. As far as functionality the book achieves its purpose; it is informative and accurate. If you choose to read this book to your children at night, you don't possess the insight to review the book on here. If you decide to bring it along on a vacation for an exciting and fast-paced read, you don't deserve to have your opinion heard anywhere on the internet. If you are a student required to read this book for class it accomplishes its purpose in what I felt to be a reasonably tolerable fashion, given the topic. Let's use some common sense people...you wouldn't complain about Mein Kampf being depressing and inflammatory. You wouldn't critique Harry Potter for being historically inaccurate. Don't knock this decent book for not being entertaining- Brand and Hankins are historian-theologians, not fictional authors.

The Baptist Vision Baptists, though like other religious groups in some ways, are very distinct from other groups within the Free Church tradition. The chapter concerning the vision of Baptists sought to differentiate Baptists from other religious denominations, sects, and religions. Discussing and comparing historical trends and movements within Christianity, the section affirmed Baptist commitments to the authority of Scripture alone, individual soul liberty, the groups' wholesale and biblically-mandated missional nature, and the fact that the Church is a local, autonomous group of believers under the direct authority and tutelage of its head, Christ himself. Whatever Baptists are, they are at least what was mentioned within this chapter.

The New Testament Church: Charismatic, Congregational, Centrifugal The New Testament church was a very distinct entity within its early years; it was charismatic, congregational and centrifugal. The New Testament church was charismatic in the sense that they were a Holy Spirit empowered, baptized, and led group of eschatological people bringing God's good news of reconciliation to the ends of the earth. Baptists are charismatic meaning they rely on the gifts of the spirit for ministry on a day to day basis. The New Testament church was also congregational which meant it lacked the exhaustive hierarchical leadership found prevalently in the Episcopal and Presbyterian forms of Church government today. Each local Church was self-sustained and led within itself from called and equipped leaders. The early Church was centrifugal meaning they saw their mission as extending to all peoples in every place. Baptists are very much like the early Church.

Toward a Theology of Cooperation Chapter three seeks to add biblical ballast in the ship of cooperation amongst Baptist congregations. Though each church is autonomous, Baptists have agreed to work together for the furtherment of the Gospel to the nations from the very beginning of our existence. By discussing various events in the book of Acts such as the Jerusalem council, Paul's love offering for the needy churches, the listing of other workers, and a host of other instances in Scripture, the authors affirm that local churches should and are expected to work together in their missional endeavors. The cooperative effort amongst local congregations must always guard themselves from two common compromises: doctrinal minimalism and affirming other non-biblical ecclesiastical structures for the sake of efficiency.

Churches on Mission: Following and Funding the Great Commission How the cooperative efforts of Baptist missions were funded historically and the structure of early Baptist groups were the subjects of the fourth chapter. Money and financial fidelity are frequent themes throughout Scripture and an immensely important, practical concern for churches working together. Baptists reject the means of funding that were corrupted within the Roman Catholic Church and shy away from Reformers such as Calvin and Luther as well. From the Baptist Missionary Society to the Philadelphia Association to the Triennial

Convention to others, Baptists have pulled their funds set aside within local congregations for Gospel work. Certain structural concerns and models led various other groups to form and dissemble as Baptists sought the best way to work alongside one another.

The Southern Baptist Convention: Stewards of a Larger Work

Chapter five discussed the early formation and efforts of the Southern Baptist Convention. Until the cooperative program was formed in 1924, various methods and means were used to fund Baptist work in the world. To allow the Baptist group to work more efficiently than it had using the Seventy-Five Million Campaign, the coop program was created through the efforts of convention leaders and participants. Projected revenue gained from church members pulling together in their giving was split between state conventions and the SBC itself. Problems, hurdles and issues had to be tweaked and overcome for the program to succeed and function as it does today.

Getting Down to Business: The Southern Baptist Annual Meeting

The sixth chapter discussed the inner-workings of the annual SBC meeting. After a few modifications, the SBC meeting occurs yearly for a two-day period at a designated location. The meetings are attended by various messengers who are qualified individuals who represent and are designated by local SBC churches. Mixtures of documents have been created concerning the government of the meetings as well as the appointment of leaders who fulfill specific roles within the denomination throughout their tenure. Meetings occur where business is discussed and debated on the floor via MOBs until votes are cast on the business itself. The authority over the convention lies within the designated messengers of the local bodies.

The Distribution System: Allocating the Cooperative Program

The contents of the seventh chapter concern how the money originates and is allocated within the SBC's cooperative program. The process is as follows: the member gives a specific amount to the Church, the Church decides how much to send to the state office, that projected amount is sent monthly to the state convention, the state convention records and allocates the money through the acknowledgement of the voted amount, the amount is sent to the Executive Committee, and the money is disbursed to the various ministries that were voted on at the annual meeting. The efficiency of the program is evident and praised for conducting itself with Baptist beliefs concerning church autonomy.

Network to the World: Southern Baptist Organization

Southern Baptist Churches usually recognize three organizations that help the churches extend their mission: the local convention, the state convention, and the Southern Baptist convention. Local Baptist associations meet the needs of their geographic area and existed for fellowship, encouragement, and the extension of needed ministries. State conventions are volunteer-based organizations that represent the local churches of a given area. State conventions are responsible for a litany of ministries that include Sunday school training, the operation of

children's homes, the allocation of funds in the coop program, and other things. The Southern Baptist convention oversees missions, theological education within the seminaries, publication of Christian information, and a host of other commissions aimed at cultural renewal through Gospel engagement.

The Entities that Serve Southern Baptists

Chapter nine discussed the entities that the Southern Baptists utilize in their gospel engagement past and present. After an historical perusal which discussed the nature of 19th century culture and American Christianity in general, the authors listed and described the various organizational ministries that the SBC uses: Lifeway, Seminaries, NAMB, etc.

Inspiring Confidence in Cooperation: The Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention

Because the convention only meets annually two days a year, the executive committee is responsible for work not otherwise assigned to other SBC entities. The executive committee performs numerous tasks on behalf of the denomination: conducts financial decisions concerning gifts given to the SBC, works toward the arrangement and management of the meeting, controls legal matters, reports convention news, handles convention relations, develops the coop program, and presides over the Southern Baptist foundation. The committee functions to make sure the other entities within the SBC flourish.

Tensions, Trends, and Troubles

Chapter 11 makes clear that the coop program is not without its tensions, trends, and troubles. Because of various denominational struggles such as the conservative resurgence, many problems have arisen within the program. The relationship between state conventions and Baptist colleges has become obscure, negative designations affected the allocation of funds, and second state conventions formed. Three trends also create issues for the coop program: the desire to give directly to the ministries without indirect use of the program, working with parachurch organizations instead of those affiliated with the denomination, and people who wish to give to other people instead of institutions. Already strained, the coop program also faces a financial battle as church offerings decline.

Future Challenges: The Cooperative Program in the Twenty-First Century

Will the coop program not only survive but flourish despite current problems and tensions? Chapter 12 addresses this pressing concern and calls Baptists to work together as their common mandate requires. While maintaining a proper balance between local ministries and missions ventures, Baptists need to work together with like-minded congregations to further their ideals and values within the wider culture. The chapter closes with ministerial plea to push the coop program to the forefront of Southern Baptist life as a missional funding avenue and to educate the common Baptist about the bible's teaching on stewardship and tithing. The book itself closes pastorally with the authors desiring leaders within the church to teach and train their congregants concerning the mammoth needs of the world, the strategy Baptists have come up with, the results

that stem from the success of that plan, and the obligation to missions all Christians have in virtue of their union with a going, preaching, and saving God. Thoughts about the Book Because I had never read anything about the cooperative program to begin with, the book was very informative. I am proud that Baptists have joined together for kingdom work in this way. The great problem that the program will face is funding as the nation with the richest people in the world continue to give less and less annually. If Church leaders shared more information about the coop program within their churches, giving to the program may increase in the future. I appreciate the program's faithfulness to the Baptist belief concerning the autonomy of the local church. There does seem to be some inherent tension between completely autonomous bodies working under the umbrella of a denomination but Baptists seem to have walked that tightrope quite smoothly. For those interested in this issue, this book is an ok introduction. It appears to come off though as Baptist propaganda at times. The reader ought to be warned.

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