

**Ambiguity, Nuance, and Baptist Rhetoric on the Cooperative Program, 1925-27—and Beyond**

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**Introduction: From 1913 to 2009**

Structural re-examination and reorganization are not new in Southern Baptist life, especially in the Twentieth Century, when Baptists began extending and intensifying their cooperative efforts on missions. Thus, the recent push for a “Great Commission Resurgence” (GCR) presents no surprise to Southern Baptists and has a long precedent.<sup>1</sup>

As far back as 1913, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) commissioned a committee to

make a careful study and a thorough examination of the organization, plans and methods of this body with a view of determining whether or not they are best adapted for eliciting, combining and directing the energies of Southern Baptists and for securing the highest efficiency of our forces and the fullest possible enlistment of our people for the work of the Kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

This “Efficiency Committee” reported in 1914 with recommendations covering topics from procedures to streamline the Convention’s annual proceedings to requesting cooperation among the three nation- or South-wide Boards (Foreign, Home, and Sunday School) as well as with the state conventions, even addressing issues of apportionment and collection of funds. Echoing the committee’s commissioning from 1913, the report demonstrates that even then, Baptists’ main focus was on missions, with the Committee recommending “a complete alignment of all our denominational forces...in purpose, spirit and practice with the program of Christ as set out in the great commission.”<sup>3</sup> The final report of this committee, in 1915, even addressed ideas floated around Baptist circles today, such as the combination of the Home and Foreign Boards (now the North American Missions Board, NAMB, and the International Mission Board, IMB, respectively).<sup>4</sup> In 1915, the committee reported, “the vast majority of your Commission do not think it would be wise or expedient to consolidate the two Boards...it will be far better to leave

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<sup>1</sup> “Toward a Great Commission Resurgence,” <http://www.greatcommissionresurgence.com>, accessed 8/4/09. For a more extensive survey of such movements in the Twentieth Century, see Karen O’Dell Bullock, “Southern Baptist Identity: Shaped by Convention Action,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 31:4 (October 1996), 36-46.

<sup>2</sup> *Annual*, Southern Baptist Convention (hereafter SBC), 1913, 60-70.

<sup>3</sup> “Report of Commission on Efficiency to the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Annual*, SBC, 1914, 69-78.

<sup>4</sup> “GCR: Merge mission boards, chairman of North American Mission Board says,” *Baptist Press*, May 5, 2009 (accessed August 4, 2009), <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=30426>.

the machinery of administration substantially as it is rather than take decisive and hurtful action looking to radical changes.”<sup>5</sup>

Then as now, Southern Baptists have been reorganizing and reevaluating their convention structures, attempting to achieve both promoting missions and efficient convention management. Since 1925, the Convention has been structured around the Cooperative Program, whose history must be traced through these two objectives. With this mindset, the debates over the Cooperative Program during its establishment, 1925-27, can be seen more clearly as concerning either (a) structural efficiency, debating the centralization of Convention control, or (b) emphasizing missions, debating how moneys should be allocated to emphasize missions—and what kind of missions. Debates over missions often dominate, with efficiency debates being targeted more toward how to make missions more efficient. These areas often interconnect due to two key characteristics of Baptist discourse: ambiguity and nuance; but for the purpose of clarity, in this paper they will be dealt with separately.

Baptists have been debating these issues since the inception of the Cooperative Program, and today’s debates are similar if not identical to debates from 1925-27. The discourse over the establishment and formation of the Cooperative Program, as published in the paper of the General Association of Kentucky Baptists (now the Kentucky Baptist Convention), the *Western Recorder*, provides an excellent case study of ambiguity and nuance in Baptist rhetoric and debate, hopefully clarifying current debates over a “Great Commission Resurgence” when seen in comparative perspective.

### **The Historical Origins of the Cooperative Program: Efficiency and Missions**

The rise of the Cooperative Program must be viewed in light of its historical context and precedents. Traditionally, the myriad Baptist causes (the State, Home, and Foreign Mission Boards, pension funds for pastors, Sunday School Board, the seminaries, and hospitals) depended on “colporteurs,” or speakers solicited to raise funds for specific causes, making special appeals at churches and local associations. This “society system” could quickly overwhelm churches, with each agency or mission seeking audiences in churches, forcing churches to prioritize whom to fund—effectively opening greater giving to those colporteurs that could speak best or make the most emotional appeal to congregants, regardless of their ministry

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<sup>5</sup> “Report of Commission on Efficiency of the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Annual*, SBC, 1915, 22-25.

sponsor.<sup>6</sup> Reflecting back, the *Western Recorder* assessed the society system as causing “an unfraternal competitive spirit...in which case the causes that were nearest the churches would be able to make the dominant appeal on the basis of personal interest.”<sup>7</sup>

Beyond these moral implications, the society system was based on sporadic giving rather than “systematic giving,” contributing to greater financial instability from the individual church level on up through the Baptist structure. Lay organizations first established precedents of pursuing greater emphases on missions and then increased efficiency in giving. The first of these, the Women’s Missionary Union (WMU), formed in 1888, promoted missions education in an organized manner. Later, the Layman’s Missionary Movement (LMM) formed in 1906, making concerted efforts to make giving more efficient, in order to help emphases on missions work. The increase in lay businessmen’s involvement in Baptist missions led to calls for “more business in religion” at an LMM revival advocating “more religion in business.”<sup>8</sup> The aforementioned Efficiency Committees of 1913-15 were symptomatic of this trend as a mobilization to address Convention structure.

Both the LMM and WMU also contributed by introducing alternative methods for more efficient collections. The WMU’s creation of the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for Foreign Missions, in 1918, offered a way for the Foreign Mission Board to collect substantial moneys while working through existing Baptist structures at the state-, association-, and church-levels, with the WMU’s organization as the liaison. An innovation from Murray, Kentucky, the “box system,” (a form of giving undesignated gifts to the church for distribution to the various “colporteurs” visiting) was expanded on by the LMM.<sup>9</sup> The LMM conducted an annual “every-member canvass,” visiting each family home to distribute “duplex envelopes,” which allowed congregants to distribute their money between local causes or the local church, in one pocket, and special designated national or international causes in the other.<sup>10</sup>

These early efforts demonstrate the Baptist tendency toward emphasizing missions as well as organizing themselves efficiently (for the purpose of better serving missions), but did not demonstrate a concerted, denominational movement towards these two goals. Instead, the

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<sup>6</sup> David L. Rowe, “From Colporteurs to Cooperative Program: A Century of Southern Baptist Stewardship and the Rise of the Southern Baptist Convention,” *Baptist History and Heritage*, 41:2 (Spring 2006), 94.

<sup>7</sup> “Can Southern Baptists Go Back to 1918?,” *Western Recorder*, April 7, 1927: 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Pulling Together: The Cooperative Program and World Missions* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1985), 53.

<sup>9</sup> Box method source

<sup>10</sup> Rowe, 95-96.

aftermath of the First World War (1914-18) paved the way for true national Baptist organization and coordination. An ambitious drive to raise the titular \$75 million for Baptist causes via a wartime-like mobilization, the “75-Million Campaign,” begun in 1919, was particularly symptomatic of the American national “moment” after the First World War, where the US intervention in Europe proved decisive the conflict and US diplomacy dominated the post-war settlement. America had emerged as a leading world power, with a flourishing and mobilized economy; as such, optimism permeated the entire nation as well as Southern Baptists. As the *Western Recorder* put it in an editorial looking back on the origins of Baptist mobilization,

After the armistice [1918], the Christian bodies took up their tasks with a perspective that had suffered injury from war experience. The idea of material efficiency was dominant in the money objectives set by the various bodies in their drives. We ‘went over the top’ in getting up money quotas as our boys had done in France.<sup>11</sup>

This observation, aided by hindsight, hints at an overly optimistic (and allegedly materialistic) attitude arising out of the war, with the result that by 1920, the Campaign had attracted promises of upwards of \$90 million as churches over-pledged in the post-war economic optimism.<sup>12</sup> As a consequence, the Mission Boards and Baptist entities for whom these pledges were intended borrowed their expected share of the \$90 million and expanded their operations—before having actually received the moneys.

From historical perspective, the hubris seems clear: with the financial boom of the war years, which contributed to the post-war optimism, also came a post-war recession. Despite progress toward reaching the goal in the first few years of the campaign, giving fell off at the end of the campaign, leaving the denominational bodies with huge debts, since Baptists only raised around \$50 million of the promised \$90 million. As early as 1923, the Convention recognized the need to look to the future, past the 75-Million Campaign (in order to continue the best cooperative effects brought on by the campaign, but also to pay its growing debts), establishing a Future Program Commission.<sup>13</sup>

The Future Program Commission’s 1925 report, coinciding with the final year of the 75-Million Campaign, initiated the Cooperative Program (hereafter referred to as CP) as Southern

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<sup>11</sup> “Special Prayer for the Annual Assemblies of Baptists,” *Western Recorder*, October 29, 1925.

<sup>12</sup> Albert McClellan, “The Origin and Development of the SBC Cooperative Program,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 10:2 (April 1975), 72.

<sup>13</sup> *Pulling Together: The Cooperative Program and World Missions* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1985), 53-54.

Baptists currently know it. The 1925 presentation combined many of the efficiency measures forwarded by the LMM and WMU in order to correct the glaring financial situation, while seizing the initiative of the 75-Million Campaign that had inadvertently brought down the Convention's finances. As the 1925 report summarizes, "sane and business-like provision must be made."<sup>14</sup> The Program went beyond collecting for a single program, CP, to distribute these funds to support all levels of Baptist life (a practice known as a "unified budget," in use by the General Association of Kentucky Baptists since 1915).<sup>15</sup> While the system has evolved since 1925, the "Unified Budget" system operates in much the same way. Under the Program, state conventions receive agreed-to percentages of undesignated offerings from local churches, take an agreed-to percentage for its own functions, and then divide the remainder according to agreed-to percentages between the various SBC organizations. The "agreed-to" percentages are at each stage determined and voted on by the churches, the state conventions' annual meetings, and the SBC's annual session, respectively (each with budget committees typically recommending percentage divisions).<sup>16</sup> State conventions thus serve as the "collecting agent[s]" for all statewide and subsequently South-wide missions work.<sup>17</sup> The Program also incorporated emphases from the efficiency movement earlier in the century, promoting churches' using annual budgets and the Every-Member Canvass in order to contribute their gifts monthly rather than annually, moving toward a program of systematic giving.<sup>18</sup>

### **Centralization Controversies, 1925-27: Exemplifying Baptist Nuance**

CP's inception in 1925 culminated nearly 40 years of movement toward efficiency in Baptist structures, with the goal of better serving missions-based causes. However, as in any democratic constituency, debates over *how* to allocate these moneys and to organize the Convention around the CP immediately entered Baptist discourse. Between 1925-27, CP faced two camps of opposition, which often intertwined: (1) those opposed to the CP in the first place, favoring

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<sup>14</sup> "First Annual Report of Future Program Commission to Southern Baptist Convention," *Annual*, SBC, 1925, 27.

<sup>15</sup> James Duane Bolin, *Kentucky Baptists 1925-2000: A Story of Cooperation* (Nashville, TN: Fields Publishing, 2000), 76.

<sup>16</sup> W.E. Grindstaff, *Our Cooperative Program* (Convention Press: Nashville, 1965), 34-35. Also more recently outlined in *Pulling Together*, 61-67.

<sup>17</sup> C.M. Thompson, "For Him—We Must Win Kentucky for Christ," *Western Recorder*, September 10, 1925: 3.

<sup>18</sup> "First Annual Report of Future Program Commission," 36-37. The *Western Recorder* regularly featured M.M. McFarland frequently between 1925-27, discussing the need for Biblical stewardship and "systematic giving."

designated gifts and special appeals over “soulless” giving to the CP;<sup>19</sup> and (2) those feeling that the Foreign Mission Board, especially in its and the other Baptist entities’ debt situations, should receive higher allocations of CP funds. Those favoring the second argument often encouraged the methods of the first argument, but many leaders were found in between, favoring both the encouragement of the CP as it was and increased Foreign Missions giving simultaneously, or at least refusing to see the two goals as in zero-sum competition or as mutually exclusive.

Though missions was the dominant topic, the debate over the first camp of opposition to CP (the anti-centralizers) provides an excellent view of the way Baptist discourse doubled back on itself, expressing both vagueness but also nuanced positions. The initial adoption of CP in 1925, as has been shown, was done with little controversy, as all had seen the need for a systematic, proportional system of giving to fund the debts incurred after the 1919 campaign. Nearly all of the State Conventions affirmed CP in their annual sessions later in the year, and as the Program’s director, C.E. Burts, put it, “our people, for the most part, recognize that the principles of the Cooperative Program are sound and have come to stay. They are justified both by theory and experience.”<sup>20</sup> Kentucky’s state convention proved no exception, with the only discussion centering on the right of Baptists to give designated gifts, affirmed in a resolution from W.O. Carver<sup>21</sup> modifying the Executive Board’s report, which affirmed the CP.<sup>22</sup>

Even in the largely non-controversial discussions in 1925 of CP as a method of efficiency, hints of Baptist ambiguity, or more nearly nuance, appear in the justification of CP as not contradicting the traditional Baptist value, the autonomy of the local church. The need to placate this value is apparent in the affirmation of the ability to designate offerings despite the institution of CP, but Baptist bodies institutionally discouraged it, apparent from the Program’s 1925 SBC report, “while we recognize the right of individuals and churches to designate their gifts, we urge most insistently that contributions be made to the whole program.”<sup>23</sup> While these steps might seem to contradict the foundation of CP (all giving undesignated funds, allowing institutions to allocate them) in order to placate the anti-CP minority, even supporters of CP saw no

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<sup>19</sup> Most explicitly and passionately outlined in G.S. Dobbins, “Supplying a Fundamental Need,” *Western Recorder*, October 1, 1925: 5.

<sup>20</sup> C.E. Burts, “‘The Good Old Ways’ and the New Methods of Denominational Financing Contrasted,” December 3, 1925: 16.

<sup>21</sup> “Resolution from W.O. Carver,” *Annual*, General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1925, 22.

<sup>22</sup> “Report of the Executive Board of General Association of Baptists in Kentucky,” *Annual*, General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1925, 17-21.

<sup>23</sup> “First Annual Report of Future Program Commission,” 35-36.

contradiction between autonomy and centralization, with T.B. Ray affirming the CP by declaring “individualism and cooperation” as the Baptists’ key words.<sup>24</sup> As the *Western Recorder* would later phrase it, “it is our Baptist privilege also to co-operate. . . . why use our liberty to ‘scotch’ co-operation?”<sup>25</sup>

More intense opposition to the general trend of “centralization” became encapsulated in 1926, coming out of a message by the President of the South Carolina Baptist Convention, denouncing “denominational machinery.” President A.T. Jamison put in particularly favorable Baptist terms, saying “every movement of the Holy Spirit, has usually clashed with some piece of ecclesiastical machinery. . . . It seems a curious paradox that, though every movement of the Spirit seems to clash with old machinery, we are yet unable to dispense with machinery. It is ordained that we must have it in furthering the work of our Lord.” He also appeals to the autonomy and responsibility of the local church, asserting “the cause is always weakened when local people look to some general central agency and pass up responsibility to them.” The difficulty of analyzing this address and the support it received lies in its ambiguity, created by Jamison concluding with an indirect attack on the 75-Million Campaign:

I claim no degree of Solomonic wisdom in saying this thing in the denomination is wrong or that. It is not for me to point out mistakes made in the 75-Million Campaign. Surely we all went into that scheme with pure motives and with zeal for the Kingdom. Nor shall I even assert that certain changes should be made to our present plans. My effort is to call attention to certain principles. You are competent to deal with particulars.<sup>26</sup>

Jamison’s criticisms of the 75-Million Campaign may be a criticism of its implementation, with the Boards leading the Convention into debt by spending promised money before receiving it, or it may be a criticism of the centralizing aspect of the campaign entirely, the component affirmed in the adoption of CP.

The disclaimer about “present plans,” and simply affirming “principles,” may explain the proudly pro-CP *Western Recorder*’s support and echoing of the address—and provide another instance of Baptist nuance. An editorial the same week the “Denominational Machinery” address was published declared, “the accepted voices of religious faith have seemed to speak in terms of

<sup>24</sup> T.B. Ray, “The Two Great Baptist Words,” *Western Recorder*, July 16, 1925: 4.

<sup>25</sup> “Suggested Rules for Giving,” *Western Recorder*, February 24, 1927: 13.

<sup>26</sup> A.T. Jamison, “Denominational Machinery,” *Western Recorder*, January 14, 1926: 3-4. Another South Carolina pastor put these sentiments more forcefully, illustrating by a high-handed and didactic method the rebuking of denominational leaders by a professorial God; W.J. Langston, “Where Are We Now?” *Western Recorder*, January 21, 1926: 5-6.

expediency and ‘efficiency’ oftener than in those of spiritual power and devotion... have they been characterized by trust in money and machinery? Has the materialistic spirit so captivated preachers and religious leaders that they believe ecclesiastical machinery will generate spiritual power?”<sup>27</sup> The use of “materialism” thus associates “denominational machinery” with modernism, the key focus of the 1920s culture war on such topics as evolution and liberal theology.<sup>28</sup> However, nuance (or “doublethink,” as some might suggest, albeit in no way sinister in the Orwellian sense) again clouds analysis of this rhetoric as anti-CP, for the *Recorder* also seems to target its rhetoric elsewhere, assuring readers “we have no quarrel to make on any organizational machinery now operative. We have no plan to propose to gear it differently.” Indeed, it advises that the Convention structure be utilized to make any reforms, affirming “the executive committee of the Convention is the proper body to take any formal action.”<sup>29</sup> The *Recorder* seems to affirm the idea of “voluntary cooperation” which affirms Baptists’ “right to co-operate”<sup>30</sup> while still warning against over-centralization—adhering to Jamison’s “principles.” As the year progressed, this nuanced position became clearer, with many Baptists opposing over-centralization on principle but accepting some centralization in the CP as a necessity. Thus, the idea ultimately seems to become pro-CP (although ambiguously), affirming the “machinery now operative” but opposing “tinkering and novelties.”<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, the expansion of the powers of the Executive Committee in 1927, the source of much Baptist debate that year, was seen as a victory for streamlining the Convention *and* reducing centralized power. The Committee’s expansion came from proposals by another Efficiency Committee, commissioned in 1926 to address the Convention’s problems streamlining CP funds to help finance missions work and reduce the Boards’ debts. The *Recorder* strongly endorsed this, acknowledging that “Baptists are by temperament and principle keenly watchful against centralization. We hope they always will be.” However, with this basis (expressed in the previous year’s outcry over “denominational machinery,” apparently as a general principle), it affirms that “a democracy can co-operate, and it can delegate duties to its representatives without centralization. We believe that the giving of added duties to a Southern Convention Executive

<sup>27</sup> “Shall We Be Guided by Worldly or Spiritual Mandates—Which?” *Western Recorder*, January 14, 1926: 12-13.

<sup>28</sup> This may be comparable to current conservative Baptist conflicts with evolution and liberal theology in the context of *post*-modernism. Many such articles may be seen in the *Western Recorder* from 1925-27, with evolution, modernism, and materialism denounced in nearly every issue by at least one article.

<sup>29</sup> “What Is the Major Need of Southern Baptists in the New Year?” *Western Recorder*, January 7, 1926: 11-12.

<sup>30</sup> “The Main Road is Open; the Track is Clear. Come, Let’s Go!” *Western Recorder*, August 4, 1927: 12.

<sup>31</sup> “Correlation Among Baptists,” *Western Recorder*, February 18, 1926: 11.

Committee... would rather add to than lessen democracy and local autonomy and initiative among Southern Baptists.”<sup>32</sup> At 1927’s Louisville Convention, the plan was heartily affirmed, being seen as “not more plan but power; not more machinery but more steam,”<sup>33</sup> with “the 1927 Convention [having] registered the unmistakable desire of Southern Baptists to simplify our machinery.”<sup>34</sup>

Ultimately, the 1926-27 debates over “denominational machinery” thus resulted not in a rebuke but an affirmation of CP, despite Jamison’s vague language in his South Carolina address on the subject. Indeed, 1927 can be seen as a critical turning point in the organization of CP and the SBC, bringing to fruition much of the LMM’s and the 1913-15 Efficiency Committees’ goals of “more business in religion,”<sup>35</sup> forcing the Boards to fund their debts and limit expenditures to those receipts.<sup>36</sup> From this case, we may see that ambiguity and nuance factor into Baptist discourse, and thus what seems to be opposition may in fact be a nuanced view strengthening a position, such as the strength of CP. As the SBC returned to Louisville discussing efficiency in 2009 and now discuss it in the GCR meetings, Baptists may well pay heed to J.B. Trotter’s analysis of the 1926 “denominational machinery” controversy, acknowledging “in some quarters there is an impression that we are developing into a centralization of power out of harmony with the genius of the denomination.” Despite these disagreements, or misunderstandings, he admonished Baptists to “‘prefer one another’ and try to see the good in our brethren.”<sup>37</sup>

### 1925: Opening Salvos of the Missions Debates

Debates and controversies over the organization of the Convention illustrate nuance and ambiguity in Baptist discourse from 1925-27, but the significant part and the natural extension of the concerns for efficiency was then how to promote missions and evangelism best. The foundations of this debate were laid in 1925 after the adoption of CP at the 1925 Convention in Memphis. Pro-CP articles and advertising began appearing in the *Western Recorder*, justifying the new program to the Baptist public as an efficient and adequate solution to the Convention’s

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<sup>32</sup> “More Duties Proposed for Convention Executive Committee,” *Western Recorder*, April 14, 1927: 11.

<sup>33</sup> W.D. Nowlin, quoted in “What of the Convention and the Results Secured Through It?” *Western Recorder*, May 12, 1927: 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Louie D. Newton, quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> For example, the LMM’s warning to the Boards on spending, reported in “Baptist Business Men Counsel Caution By Convention Boards,” *Western Recorder*, April 28, 1927: 13.

<sup>36</sup> Laid out in “Recommendations of the Efficiency Committee,” *Western Recorder*, March 31, 1927: 7, 9, 28-29.

<sup>37</sup> J.B. Trotter, “The Fine Art Of Walking Together,” *Western Recorder*, August 12, 1926: 26-27.

debt problems, albeit a gradual one, placing responsibility on pastors to urge stewardship and congregants to give according to the tithe. The Convention President, George McDaniel, declared, “every Baptist preacher in the South who leads an evangelistic service ought to feel conscience bound to present the Co-operative Program,” placing responsibility for increasing giving in individual churches’ pastors.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, CP advertising urged increased giving by congregants, saying that the program was adequate to meet all Baptist needs since the one-tenth-of-income tithe would produce \$150,000,000.<sup>39</sup> Advertisements also assured of CP’s ability to provide for “all of our activities with reasonable adequacy,” using as an example the program’s allowance even for special projects, like covering the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary’s expensive expansion to its current location.<sup>40</sup>

The Foreign Board initially seemed to embrace this approach, echoing the CP promotions’ tactics to encourage giving—although not explicitly to the CP (or even the Foreign Board, for that matter). In its report on the July Board meeting, the Board echoes the need for communication of the program by pastors, placing the ultimate responsibility there, since “the solution of our problem is to be found in the zeal of those of us who are pastors in keeping aflame the missionary passion of our people.”<sup>41</sup> In the Board’s direct appeal to Baptists, the Board “reiterate[s] our loyalty to the Co-Operative Program,” but here ambiguity remains, with the Board asking “pastors and people” to “spread the information of the urgent need of the Board.”<sup>42</sup> In both its report and its appeal, the Board does not call for pastors to promote CP, but “missionary passion” and “the urgent need of the Board,” respectively. While not necessarily promoting giving to or publicizing Foreign Missions *above* CP, ambiguity remains.

This debate intensified over the late summer and fall, leading up to the Foreign Board’s October meeting. Advocates of the CP’s existing format anticipated criticisms of the plan, responding by emphasizing the CP as the road to a solution of the Board’s debt problems. The Board’s own Associate Secretary explicitly promoted this, saying that “there can...be but one slogan for all of us, and that is, ‘Put on the 1925 Program [CP] in the churches now.’ This is a practical way to help.”<sup>43</sup> *Western Recorder* editorials and CP advertisements also stressed the

<sup>38</sup> George W. McDaniel, “A Revival of Stewardship,” *Western Recorder*, June 18, 1925: 5.

<sup>39</sup> “More Regular Givers are Hope of Baptist Causes,” *Western Recorder*, June 11, 1925: 32.

<sup>40</sup> “Here is Convention’s Plans for Paying Our Debts,” *Western Recorder*, May 28, 1925: 17.

<sup>41</sup> “Report on the Report of the Foreign Mission Board,” *Western Recorder*, July 2, 1925: 4.

<sup>42</sup> “To the Baptists and Baptist Churches of the South,” *Western Recorder*, July 2, 1925: 8.

<sup>43</sup> T.B. Ray, “The Two Great Baptist Words,” *Western Recorder*, July 16, 1925: 4.

ability of the CP, if all would back it, to provide for the Foreign Board's concerns; however, the critical addition is that both promote the Foreign Board as one cause among many, emphasizing other Baptist causes alongside it. The *Western Recorder* thus supports giving to help missions, **“because we love Foreign Missions,”** but adds **“and every other cause served by Baptists.”**<sup>44</sup> Similarly, a CP advertisement does not isolate Foreign Missions concerns, but lists all the other mission boards and Baptist causes as being provided for under the program.<sup>45</sup> SBC publicist Frank Burkhalter explicitly laid out the response to particularism in an earlier article, asserting that “every interest embraced in the Co-operative Program, state and Southwide [SBC-level], is sorely in need of every dollar it can get,” and thus advocates giving to the CP as a way to help “all of our general enterprises.”<sup>46</sup>

The Foreign Mission Board's argument had been framed by private writers early in the summer, outlining key arguments to be used by the Board and its proponents: questioning Baptists' commitment to missions while asserting the priority of Foreign Missions. One of the private authors questioned Baptists' commitment to foreign missions at all given the CP budget's failure to raise Foreign Board allotments to pay for its expansions since 1919, such that “scores of young people, feeling the leading of God, have prepared to go and carry the gospel to all the world” but are “compelled to remain at home.”<sup>47</sup> Articles from J.F. Love, the Secretary of the Foreign Board, used these bases to appeal for “either a larger percentage in the apportionment of the proceeds from the Southwide Co-operative Program for 1925” and/or “the privilege of going afield for special designated gifts”—a perfectly natural response, according to Burkhalter.<sup>48</sup> Love questions commitment to foreign missions in the CP first by comparison, saying “Southern Baptists spent for religious purposes at home last year more than Thirty-three Million Dollars, and gave to Foreign Missions considerably less than one and a half millions.”<sup>49</sup>

Despite these doubts, the Foreign Board also assured Baptists of its support of the CP, albeit ambiguously. For example, the Board holds that “individual Baptists only are stewards of money for any cause,” thus seeming to lay responsibility with individuals to give more, but also places some guilt for its cutbacks on the Convention, rhetorically wondering the consequences “if the

<sup>44</sup> “Foreign Mission Support and the Spirit of Co-operation,” *Western Recorder*, July 16, 1925: 11. (Emphasis in original.)

<sup>45</sup> “Our Baptist Success Lies Only in Cooperative Program,” *Western Recorder*, July 30, 1925: 19.

<sup>46</sup> Frank E. Burkhalter, “The Surest Source for More Baptist Money,” *Western Recorder*, May 28, 1925: 26.

<sup>47</sup> J.M. Kester, “Our Missionary Crisis, or, Are We Missionary Baptists?” *Western Recorder*, June 4, 1925: 24.

<sup>48</sup> Burkhalter, “The Surest Source for More Baptist Money,” 26.

<sup>49</sup> J.F. Love, “Consider Foreign Missions,” *Western Recorder*, July 16, 1925: 26.

denomination forces the Board to give up some of the fields.”<sup>50</sup> The Board also seems to promote giving to CP, admonishing Baptists in one ad to “unite heartily in heroic support of our Cooperative Program.”<sup>51</sup> However, it also advocates giving to the Foreign Board outside of CP (although not advocating reducing CP giving), citing the example of “a brother who is a liberal supporter of the Co-operative Program, but who finds it possible to do something extra for Foreign Missions in its great straits.”<sup>52</sup>

Soon after, the Foreign Board at its October meeting fully adopted this strategy, sending out a request to the State Conventions for a Special Offering to help pay off its debt, as “over and above” CP giving.<sup>53</sup> The *Western Recorder* regarded this skeptically, saying “the trouble about ‘special gifts over and above regular contributions’ is that in the large majority of instances they are not ‘over and above,’ though they are special.”<sup>54</sup> Rather, the editorial favors “faithful support of the denominational budget” to “take care of the needs and aid in removing the deficit against every Baptist cause from Foreign Missions to the smallest agency supported,” again bringing in the argument of the CP aiding *all* causes, not just Foreign Missions.<sup>55</sup>

The Foreign Board’s appeal continued through the fall and winter, aggressively pushing Baptists to focus on foreign missions, though reiterating faithfulness to the CP. The Board placed supporting the Special Offering in drastic terms, imploring “every one [sic] who loves the Lord Jesus, loves foreign missionaries and foreign mission work, to remember that the time has come for Southern Baptists to take care of their foreign mission work if they purpose every to take care of it.”<sup>56</sup> Private writers also weighed in, with particularly harsh criticism from missionaries, asking “““What in the world is the matter with Southern Baptists? Do they no longer believe in sending the Gospel to the lost souls in heathen lands?...’ Shame on us we are spending many times as much for education at home as we are spending on preaching the gospel to millions of perishing lost souls in other lands!”<sup>57</sup> Annie Goldsby also accused Baptists of having “lost our vision—or perhaps we never had a vision—of a soul-hungering world. We are thinking of our

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<sup>50</sup> J.F. Love, “Grave Crisis—A Call to Prayer,” *Western Recorder*, October 1, 1925: 4-5.

<sup>51</sup> “A MOMENTOUS HOUR for Foreign Missions,” *Western Recorder*, October 1, 1925: 30.

<sup>52</sup> J.F. Love, “Hear the Missionaries,” *Western Recorder*, August 13, 1925: 26.

<sup>53</sup> W.O. Carver, “The Foreign Board Meeting,” *Western Recorder*, October 29, 1925: 5.

<sup>54</sup> “Special Gifts ‘Over and Above Regular Contributions,’” *Western Recorder*, October 29, 1925: 13.

<sup>55</sup> “Baptists Asked to Take Care of All Agency Deficits Through the Budget,” *Western Recorder*, October 29, 1925: 13.

<sup>56</sup> J.F. Love, “Light and Shadows in a Foreign Board Meeting,” *Western Recorder*, November 12, 1925: 26.

<sup>57</sup> Hugh S. Wallace, “The Debt is Killing the Missionaries,” *Western Recorder*, December 10, 1925: 10.

own selves, of our interests; maybe we are thinking of the work at home.”<sup>58</sup> The Foreign Board moderated these statements, framing its appeal as an affirmation and extension of CP, not a challenge to it.<sup>59</sup>

Kentucky Baptists, strongly behind the CP (implemented on a state-level since 1915), saw this as reasonable. The General Association of Baptists in Kentucky debated the Report on Foreign Missions’ call for the Special Offering<sup>60</sup> in the context of an amendment calling for the special offering to apply to all CP entities’ debts, not just Foreign Missions, on the rationale that “every interest included in the Unified Budget is now in a serious crisis. We believe, therefore, that we cannot afford to discriminate between these worthy and suffering interests, all of which are dear to our hearts.”<sup>61</sup> A substitute resolution, however, reiterated the Foreign Board’s call for a Foreign Board-only offering,<sup>62</sup> and ultimately Kentucky Baptists opted to support the Special Offering (as did all other state conventions), seeking to support *both* the CP *and* Foreign Missions through the offering, much like CP’s acceptance of the WMU’s special Lottie Moon Offering—for 1925 merged into the special offering. The *Western Recorder*’s reporting on the debate is instructive as to the duality of Kentucky Baptist minds: “A lot of folks spoke on the subject, some for the special offering and some against it. Some of the brethren thought it would hurt the budget; others said that it would be a good start for the next year’s work. A number of the brethren who are staunch budget folks acceded to the fact that we must have a program, but that this program right now must include the emergency of paying the Foreign Mission debt.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, pro-Foreign Missions Annie Goldsby, of Kentucky, also revealed this dualism in her article, since after decrying focusing on home missions she added, “I do not say that the work at home should be diminished.”<sup>64</sup> Indeed, almost to “correct” this, the *Western Recorder* soon after justified the Special Offering as “an emergency measure” but promptly affirmed that “we now re-dedicate ourselves to the budget,” noting that “in the nature of the [offering], the regular needs of the Board cannot be thus taken care of.”<sup>65</sup> The Foreign Board also acknowledged Baptists’

<sup>58</sup> Annie L. Goldsby, “Does It Matter to You?” *Western Recorder*, December 17, 1925: 21.

<sup>59</sup> See various J.F. Love editorials in *Western Recorder* from late 1925: “Overwhelmingly Important” (November 5, pp 10 and 16); “Light and Shadows” (November 12, p 26); “A Four-Fold Plea” (November 26, p 6); and an advertisement, “Foreign Mission Board’s Suggestion of a ‘Christmas Love Offering’” (December 10, p 9).

<sup>60</sup> “Report on Foreign Missions,” *Annual*, General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1925, 69.

<sup>61</sup> “Report of Committee on Threlkeld Resolution,” *Annual*, General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1925, 72.

<sup>62</sup> “Chadwick Motion on Foreign Missions,” *Annual*, General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1925, 73.

<sup>63</sup> Robbie Trent, “The General Association of Kentucky Baptists Meets,” *Western Recorder*, November 9, 1925: 4.

<sup>64</sup> Goldsby, 21.

<sup>65</sup> “The Foreign Mission Collection and the 1926 Budget,” *Western Recorder*, January 7, 1926: 12.

sacrificial giving in the offering, affirming “Southern Baptists love Foreign Missions. That is the plain lesson which this remarkable outpouring of love gifts to Jesus at Christmas time holds.”<sup>66</sup>

These 1925 debates over the allocation of CP moneys for missions illustrate the nuanced position of the State Conventions (at least Kentucky, and certainly its Baptist paper), favoring backing the CP as the method towards greater missions giving—but still yielding, perhaps, to the emotional appeals of an offering for missions. In addition, the debate shows ambiguity in the rhetoric of the Foreign Mission Board and its proponents, sometimes backing CP fully while at other times backing it with caveats or concerns—perhaps reflecting a true commitment to CP, but seeking a greater focus on foreign missions. The rhetoric of 1925 not only provides an introduction to examining the rhetoric in the more heated debates of 1926-27 over CP allocations, but also an initial parallel to current debates. As seen, the 1925 Report of the Foreign Mission Board asserted that the 1925 allocations for Foreign Missions had forced the Board to “abandon fields which are rich in promise.”<sup>67</sup> This is similar to current rhetoric over changing the CP formula, as SBC President Johnny Hunt’s declaration that cutting the sending of missionaries is “not an option” in conjunction with IMB President Jerry Rankin’s call to modify the CP formula.<sup>68</sup> 2009’s upcoming special Lottie Moon “Christmas in August” Offering appears similar as a special offering in an extraordinary situation. As in 1925, concerns also remain over its effects on other offerings and the sustainability of such appeals.<sup>69</sup> Certain dynamics of the situation may be different (i.e. the SBC president *and* Foreign Board chair advocating the offering in 2009, whereas the SBC president gave no input, at least in the Baptist press, in 1925), the situations are certainly comparable.

The compromises also seem to demonstrate that Baptists had and have a great deal of common ground. In 1925, the Foreign Board reiterated its “loyalty to the Cooperative Program,” but in advocating pastors to promote giving, focused particularly on its own needs and the primacy of foreign missions.<sup>70</sup> This need not be seen as conflicting, given Foreign Board Associate Secretary T.B. Ray’s firm support both of Foreign Missions *and* CP. His commentary

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<sup>66</sup> J.F. Love, “January 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Foreign Mission Board,” *Western Recorder*, January 28, 1926: 27-28.

<sup>67</sup> “Report on the Report of the Foreign Mission Board,” 4.

<sup>68</sup> Shawn Hendricks, “Hunt, Rankin urge Baptists to reprioritize,” *Baptist Press*, May 21, 2009 (accessed 8/7/2009), <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=30536>. See also Paul Chitwood, “IMB Chairman: ‘Change CP Formula’,” *Baptist Press*, May 26, 2009 (accessed 8/7/2009), <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=30560>.

<sup>69</sup> Mark Kelly, “‘Christmas in August’ offering welcome, but not a long-term solution, IMB’s Rankin says,” *Baptist Press*, August 5, 2009 (accessed 8/13/2009), <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=31020>.

<sup>70</sup> “To the Baptists and Baptist Churches of the South,” *Western Recorder*, July 2, 1925: 8.

advocated increased participation in CP *in order* to raise Foreign Missions revenues, saying “there can...be but one slogan for all of us, and that is, ‘Put on the 1925 Program in the churches now.’ This is a practical way in which to help.”<sup>71</sup> The pro-CP *Western Recorder* also gave room for compromise, applauding the Virginia Baptist Convention’s distribution giving “Foreign Missions fifteen percent more than suggested by the Southern Baptist Convention,” but not in a zero-sum situation, since “Virginia Baptists have habitually been large and loyal contributors to Home Missions and it will be seen that Home Missions has not suffered.”<sup>72</sup> Despite disagreements, the 1926 SBC reported “the discussion showed that foreign missions lies very near to the heart of Southern Baptists.”<sup>73</sup>

### **1926-27 (and 2009-10?): Intensification of the Missions Debate**

Baptists’ common love of missions has not diminished debate over how to distribute moneys for it. The debates over missions allocations intensified into 1926-27, as debts exacerbated the Mission Boards’ financial position, and the Foreign Board in particular stepped up its push for greater percentages of CP giving. The rhetoric of this period, in which the SBC at its 1926 and 1927 meetings, in Houston and Louisville respectively, strongly affirmed the CP and its existing formula, provides an interesting comparison to current debate over possible changes in CP giving specifically, but also Baptist organization to emphasize missions generally. That both eras of CP- Foreign Missions debate culminated in Louisville (1927 and, as may be seen, 2009) provides an interesting backdrop to comparison.

Writers and proponents of the CP formula as it stood largely kept up their rhetoric from 1925, affirming the need for more money for foreign missions, but forwarding increased giving to CP as the real solution, not necessarily reapportionment of funds. The Foreign Board also adopted a firm pro-CP stance during the first half of 1926, when Baptist discourse centered on the “denominational machinery” controversy; in its advertising and commentaries it advocates “hearty, sacrificial, liberal giving to the Co-operative Program” to “pay its debt.”<sup>74</sup>

Amid the debates over taking up special collections for SBC entities’ debts, however, the discourse in favor of the CP status quo (relatively) did strongly forward ideas of solidarity within

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<sup>71</sup> Ray, 4.

<sup>72</sup> “The Virginia Baptist Distribution to Southwide Causes,” *Western Recorder*, January 14, 1926: 11.

<sup>73</sup> Robbie Trent, “Southern Baptist Convention in Its 1926 Session,” *Western Recorder*, May 27, 1926: 6-7, 23, 26.

<sup>74</sup> “FOREIGN BOARD FACTS,” *Western Recorder*, February 25, 1926: 28. Also re-iterated in a commentary by J.F. Love, “The Greatest Appeal for Foreign Missions,” *Western Recorder*, April 8, 1926: 9.

CP and the need for submission of individual entity interests to the whole. The *Western Recorder* looks optimistically at the idea of all entities cooperating, feeling “it is possible for a Southwide agency to put its whole heart in its own work and at the same time to pray for and adjust itself to the needs of every other cause of Baptists.”<sup>75</sup> Other Southern Baptist writers took more aggressive stances, challenging the SBC to ensure that “every object in the budget must be more interested in the success of the whole program than in its own success. Every piece of literature from any interest in the Program should find room to say that all who are contributing to the support of the Program are supporting that particular interest.” The writer extends this thinking even to the point of needing “folks who are willing to support a plan in which they themselves may not believe, just because brethren in whom they have confidence believe in the plan.”<sup>76</sup> One author, who sponsored the resolution for the 1925 Special Foreign Missions Offering, took an almost disciplinary tone, saying “when any organization unanimously approves...and pledges its heartiest support of [the] Budget, it ought to be understood that...the organization so voting, and every individual so voting, himself proposes to make his contributions in accordance with this Budget and through the methods adopted by the Commission. This principle seems so clear and so obvious that one hesitates even to say any word insisting upon it.”<sup>77</sup> While addressing calls for another special “debt-paying” campaign, the strength of the rhetoric is notable; similar discourse continues over how to express dissent with CP today, although with forces somewhat reversed. Now, SBC President Johnny Hunt appears to challenge CP, saying that “if states are not willing to release greater percentages and greater dollars to the nations, they are going to find people like Johnny Hunt designating their dollars where they want it themselves instead of sending it to them when they’re not listening to us.” The key difference in 2009, however, is that the controversy now seems to center on state conventions as well as the national convention. Also, Dr. Hunt was speaking as an individual member—who is in fact increasing his own church’s CP giving “between...50 and 100 percent,” again demonstrating Baptists’ nuance in position and common ground standing behind more giving and missions.<sup>78</sup>

Current issues of the division of CP funds, and the very relationship, between the State and National conventions did figure into the debates of the 1920s, such as over divisions of CP funds

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<sup>75</sup> “Correlation Among Baptists,” *Western Recorder*, February 18, 1926: 11.

<sup>76</sup> John L. Hill, “Program’s Future Is Now Assured,” *Western Recorder*, February 25, 1926: 10.

<sup>77</sup> W.O. Carver, “The Co-Operative Budget and the Convention Interests,” *Western Recorder*, March 18, 1926: 9.

<sup>78</sup> Johnny Hunt, in James A. Smith, Sr., “Hunt personalizes GCR commitment as model to denomination,” *Florida Baptist Witness*, July 30, 2009 (accessed 8/14/2009), <http://www.floridabaptistwitness.com/10522.article>.

between the state and national bodies. The original goal of the Cooperative Program, and the source of much current controversy<sup>79</sup>, was for a 50-50 division of funds between the state conventions and the South-wide causes, not altered until 1970.<sup>80</sup> The 50-50 goal was first laid out in 1925, with the Future Program Commission “recommend[ing] to our constituents that they divide their offerings for denominational purposes upon a basis of 50% for Southwide purposes and 50% for State purposes.”<sup>81</sup> The 1926 convention report modified this objective ambiguously, advocating 50-50 on a church and not statewide level, with “every church...reaching if possible a standard of a 50-50 division between local and outside causes.” Indeed, one caveat in the 1926 CP report emphasized state convention control, stipulating “that the state treasurers be asked to take out of the total distributable receipts all expenses before the funds are divided, and remit the amounts due according to the percentages of distribution adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention and the State Convention.”<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, a commitment to dividing Cooperative Program dollars by 50% for state, 50% for South-wide missions was a priority in Kentucky, which adopted the principle in 1925 based on a July 8, 1924 recommendation for a 50-50 division of funds.<sup>83</sup> The *Western Recorder* vigorously criticized the states not conforming to this recommendation, accusing them of having “allowed themselves to yield to the temptation to keep out the larger proportion of the gifts of the churches to supply needs within their own borders.”<sup>84</sup> Later, the paper affirmed the fact that “Kentucky Baptists believe that certainly not less than half of the money we raise should go to Southwide activities.”<sup>85</sup> This commitment had strong grassroots support, seen in the Union Association’s vision of CP from the local church and up, such that

out of every dollar the local church gets, it keeps fifty cents and gives fifty cents to our general causes; out of every dollar our general cause gets the state keeps fifty cents and fifty cents goes to

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<sup>79</sup> For example, see discussion from “Tim Guthrie: Moving Forward...Part 4b,” 4/11/2009 (accessed 8/6/2009), <http://sbctoday.com/2008/04/11/tim-guthrie-moving-forwardpart-4b/#more-171>. Or, Wade Burleson, “The Confusing Future Direction of the SBC,” 6/24/2009 (accessed 8/6/2009), [http://kerussocharis.blogspot.com/2009\\_06\\_01\\_archive.html](http://kerussocharis.blogspot.com/2009_06_01_archive.html).

<sup>80</sup> Robert A. Baker, “The Cooperative Program in Historical Perspective,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 10:3 (July, 1975), 175.

<sup>81</sup> “First Annual Report of Future Program Commission,” 34.

<sup>82</sup> “Statements and Recommendations Concerning Co-operative Program for 1927,” *Annual*, SBC, 1926, 49.

<sup>83</sup> Bolin, 75. See also the totals from the “Report of the Executive Board of General Association of Baptists in Kentucky,” *Annual*, General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1925, 19.

<sup>84</sup> “Conditions to the Success of the Baptist Unified Budget,” *Western Recorder*, March 24, 1927: 11.

<sup>85</sup> “Fellowship and Equality Between Baptist Bodies, State and Southwide,” *Western Recorder*, June 30, 1927: 11.

the whole South; and out of every dollar the whole South gets, it keeps fifty cents and sends fifty cents to the world beyond.<sup>86</sup>

Despite the strong backing given a 50-50 division, supporters of CP pushed back vigorously against perceived attempts to wrest individual conventions' control of these decisions. Robert H. Pitt, editor of one of the Baptist papers, most vigorously expressed these concerns, demanding "the Convention...ought [not] to undertake to direct the policies of the denomination with regard to their State interests." Pitt backs the 50-50 distribution, acknowledging other states' non-compliance as an "unfortunate fact," but utterly rejects any attempt to correct this via top-down structure.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, the *Western Recorder* agrees "States ought not to dominate the convention through their State organization, but they ought to co-operate as far as possible with the convention. Certainly [the national convention] ought not to undertake to control or direct the business of the State organizations."<sup>88</sup> Again Baptist nuance—or even self-contradiction, according to one's view—manifests itself, as Baptists affirm the centralizing CP, but only on a voluntary basis, attempting to affirm both individualism and cooperation simultaneously.

The heart of the criticism of states' distributions of CP funds seems to be that the states were retaining too much, to the detriment of the nationwide, and especially the international, missions efforts. The Foreign Mission Board adopted this tack in later 1926 and through 1927, asking Southern Baptists in October 1926 "to take a calm, a prayerful and a conscientious invoice of denominational work. Has there been at home or in any single department of the home work any such retrenchment as the Foreign Mission Board has already practiced, to say nothing of the more drastic action which is taken at this October meeting? Can the denomination justify in the eyes of God and to a lost world the scale of our home expenditures in the face of such retrenchment as the denomination is forcing the Foreign Mission Board to make?"<sup>89</sup> The *Western Recorder*, state convention leaders, and CP advocates vigorously defended the CP formula, defending state conventions' use of funds, and state missions itself, as a critical component of Foreign Missions, using the state conventions' roles as collectors of CP funds as defense, not criticism. Even in 1925, Kentucky's state convention leader, Dr. C.M. Thompson, defended the role of state missions in other missions, saying "the reason we are giving thousands instead of

<sup>86</sup> "Report on Co-operative Program at Union Association," *Western Recorder*, September 23, 1926: 32.

<sup>87</sup> Robert H. Pitt, "Let the Convention Manage Its Own Business," *Western Recorder*, February 11, 1926: 10.

<sup>88</sup> "'Pooling' the Debts," *Western Recorder*, May 13, 1926: 9.

<sup>89</sup> "Resolutions Passed by Foreign Mission Board at October Meeting," *Western Recorder*, October 21, 1926: 16, 28-29.

hundreds of dollars to Foreign and Home Missions and the other interests in the Unified Budget is because of our vigorous State Missions Program.”<sup>90</sup> Writers also insisted that State Missions, not the other missions endeavors, was making the true sacrifice for the overall success of CP, as according to the *Western Recorder*, “so far as our own observation has gone, there was very little or no response in most of the States in the way of an enlargement of the working staff to take care of this greatly enlarged burden [collecting for CP].”<sup>91</sup>

In early 1927, these justifications of state missions came in response to an increasingly clear attack on CP distribution of funds. Here we begin to see comparisons to the current debates, as much of the rhetoric appears similar, with prior ambiguity becoming clearer. The *Western Recorder* responded particularly angrily to statistical arguments being used to discredit CP commitment to foreign missions:

Now to seek to further [Foreign Missions] by exaggerated or even untrue statements is so foolish that no one but a tyro should be guilty of it. Yet we ran across this statement blazoned prominently on a printed placard the other day: ‘Southern Baptist churches spent in 1925 \$36,700,000 at home and \$2,200,000 for Foreign Missions—\$18 each for self and \$1 for the world.’ ... Foreign Missions is tremendously great beyond all cavil. To the end of helping Baptists more quickly to realize its greatness, it is to be hoped that the kind of advocacy we have here illustrated may not embarrass it in the house of its friends. We equally object to this method when it is used in appeals for Home Missions, State Missions, Education, Hospitals, or other causes. Better no propaganda than such propaganda.<sup>92</sup>

While not propaganda, 2009 features a similar argument, from a document referenced by SBC President Johnny Hunt, and apparently circulated at the first GCR task force meeting August 11-12 in Atlanta, concluding “Southern Baptists spend \$1.31 per person for missions in North America” in comparison to “\$0.04 per person for missions to reach the world.”<sup>93</sup> In 1927 the SBC responded by advocating increased support of CP, in order to help pay the Missions’ debts by increased volume if not percentages. One Baptist editor framed it in a realistic if unflattering light, that even “if the Co-operative Program does not give the Foreign Board an assured future, the collapse of that Program would certainly not improve the Board’s prospects. In our opinion

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<sup>90</sup> “Report of the Executive Board of General Association of Baptists in Kentucky,” 1925, 18.

<sup>91</sup> “On Effectuating the Budget,” *Western Recorder*, March 31, 1927: 12.

<sup>92</sup> “Extreme Statements Do Not Help,” *Western Recorder*, January 20, 1927: 13.

<sup>93</sup> James A. Smith, Sr., “‘Alarming’ or ‘meaningless,’ missions funding analysis has attention of SBC president,” *Florida Baptist Witness*, August 11, 2009 (accessed August 12, 2009), <http://www.floridabaptistwitness.com/10632.article>.

the only hope for this Board, as for all the others, is to be found in the Co-operative Program.”<sup>94</sup> Any comparisons of the conclusions reached out of the 2009 Louisville Convention on these matters to the 1927 Louisville Convention will likely have to wait until the GCR task force’s report in Orlando in 2010.

One fundamental disagreement underlying all of the missions allocation debate is that of prioritization in missions. In light of 2009’s emphasis on the Great Commission, even the very use of the term “Great Commission” has rhetorical implications as to what that *means*. In the 1925-27 debates, this can be analyzed by reading somewhat between the lines. For example, an author from 1925 asserts the priority of Foreign Missions, asking “shall we place greater emphasis on one department than on another. Undoubtedly yes. Our first and bounden duty... is to evangelize,” citing Matthew 28:19 as one Scriptural basis for evangelism; Matthew 28:19 notably primarily references foreign missions (“to the ends of the earth”).<sup>95</sup> Thus, the author prioritizes foreign missions within the Great Commission by asserting their congruence: the Great Commission, from Matthew 28:19, or 18-20, *is* primarily foreign missions.

In contrast, CP proponents cited Acts 1:8, which includes local, regional, and national foci for missions. For example, C.M. Thompson of the Kentucky state convention used Acts 1:8 as his secondary preface verse in his 1926 address to the convention, then as his primary preface in 1927.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, a 1926 advertisement created by the state convention to promote CP giving quotes Acts 1:8 as the “why” for giving, and extends the metaphor explicitly, saying “Kentucky Is Our Judea!”<sup>97</sup> The significance of Acts 1:8 as a moniker for pro-CP giving is apparent given the study cited earlier challenging it; the author, Daniel Palmer, accuses CP giving of taking “the sequencing of Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth” as “a sequencing of spending priority rather than logical ordering. The text is not a directive to spend more at home than abroad. It is a directive to begin where you are and move outward.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Z.T. Cody, in “Views on the Budget and Campaigns for Debt,” *Western Recorder*, April 28, 1927: 11-12.

<sup>95</sup> J.A. McCord, “Putting First Things First,” *Western Recorder*, June 11, 1925: 30. Interestingly, the Center for Great Commission Studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, where the GCR “Axioms” author Danny Akin is president, lists Matthew 28:18-20 as its focus: <http://www.sebts.edu/cgcs/default.aspx>.

<sup>96</sup> “Report of the Executive Board of General Association of Baptists in Kentucky,” 1926, 15; “Report of the Executive Board of the General Association of Baptists in Kentucky,” *Annual*, General Association of Baptists in Kentucky, 1927, 17.

<sup>97</sup> “Clear It Up Next Sunday,” *Western Recorder*, October 7, 1926: 29.

<sup>98</sup> Smith, Sr., “‘Alarming’ or ‘meaningless,’ missions funding analysis has attention of SBC president.”

The interpretation Palmer ultimately makes in fact seems coherent with the traditional interpretation of CP in 1925-27, as what I would call “holistic missions,” valuing missions at every level and seeing funding goals in terms of increasing *all* missions spending, not only one portion. Thus, the pro-CP writers and advertising focus on giving more, emphasizing equity in their rhetoric, such as CP advertisements calling for Baptists to give to CP “WHO WANT TO BE FAIR TO EVERY CAUSE,”<sup>99</sup> since “EVERY OBJECT IS WORTHY”<sup>100</sup> (emphasis in originals). Or, more colloquially, “as one brother expressed it...when you have four flat tires you can not make headway by pumping up only one of them. You have got to pump up all four of the tires if you would go ahead and make speed.”<sup>101</sup> Part of the justification for this type of system is in recognition of the power of the Foreign Missions cause to pull Baptist hearts and thus purse strings. The *Western Recorder* and Kentucky’s Dr. Thompson defend state missions as aiming “to train and enlist the Baptists already won for world conquest. This training and enlistment is also vital so far as every phase of Baptist Co-operative Endeavor is concerned.”<sup>102</sup> The *Recorder* acknowledges, “What about State Missions? ...Not much of romance. Not much of the picturesque. Little of the intriguing background of unique stories about strange people and strange places.”<sup>103</sup> The *Recorder*’s most powerful argument for this, and a “holistic missions” perspective based in Acts 1:8 came by quoting missions heroes of the Baptist faith:

Dr. Gambrell quotes Dr. Edward Judson, son of the great Apostle to Burmah [sic], as follows: ‘We must be sure that our foreign missions spirit is genuine, and not a mere fad. The sure test is whether we are interested in everything lying between the heathen and ourselves. To many of us distance lends enchantment. We burn with enthusiasm over the miseries of people far away, but are limp and nerveless as regards suffering close by.’ ...In this connection we remember that that great Southern Baptist missionary to China, Dr. R.H. Graves, said: ‘My first prayer every morning in Canton, China, is for American home missions, for the sake of Canton, China.’ ...Read again and reflect on Acts 1:8. It is our Lord speaking.<sup>104</sup>

Over the fall of 1927 the *Recorder* used a military analogy to justify state and national missions, viewing state and home missions as “the base of supplies,”<sup>105</sup> or “the base camp of the army of the Lord,” which though “one does not visualize...in a heroic way” but “saves up his

<sup>99</sup> “‘Watch Your Step’ Kentucky Baptist,” *Western Recorder*, September 16, 1926: 32.

<sup>100</sup> “Let Us Shower Christ’s Cause With Cash In April,” *Western Recorder*, March 31, 1927: 32.

<sup>101</sup> Arthur J. Barton, “The Houston Convention As I Saw It,” *Western Recorder*, June 3, 1926: 26-27.

<sup>102</sup> C.M. Thompson, “Primacy of State Missions,” *Western Recorder*, September 9, 1926: 3.

<sup>103</sup> “The Christ-Honoring Cause of State Missions,” *Western Recorder*, September 9, 1926: 11.

<sup>104</sup> “Lopsidedness in Missions,” *Western Recorder*, March 4, 1926: 13.

<sup>105</sup> “The Whole Program,” *Western Recorder*, August 11, 1927: 8, 16.

imagination mainly for the furthest [sic] fronts of the warfare.” Nonetheless, “he does not fail to support it—for itself and also for the front line.”<sup>106</sup>

The analogies are emphatically reiterated, demonstrating the high level of passion for the issue—as also shown by those favoring higher percentages for Foreign Missions. The fact recognized by all remains, however, that **“the great integrating force that brought together and now holds together the Southern Baptist Convention, was and is missions.”**<sup>107</sup> Beyond the heated rhetoric, these issues over which Baptists debate continually also continually bring them together, allowing them to reconcile nuanced positions (such as favoring CP, but acknowledging Foreign Missions need) and to reserve judgment on ambiguous positions (such as acknowledging CP, but still offering concern over the lack of Foreign Missions emphasis). The sides and amounts have shifted slightly from 1925-27 to 2009, but only slightly. Baptist rhetoric, and nuance in *both* “individualism and cooperation” will surely lead to compromise and fellowship now as nearly eighty years ago.

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<sup>106</sup> “State Missions,” *Western Recorder*, September 8, 1927: 11-12.

<sup>107</sup> “Great Baptist Opportunity at Louisville Convention,” *Western Recorder*, April 21, 1927: 11-12. (Emphasis in original.)