

# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments . . . . .	xiii
Abbreviations . . . . .	.xv
Introduction . . . . .	1

## PART I

### THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION | 5

1. From Missionary Society to a Convention of Churches . . . . .	7
2. The SBC Adopts a Cooperative Identity . . . . .	15
3. How Southern Baptists Cooperate on Mission . . . . .	25

## PART II

### GOD'S MISSION AND THE MISSION OF HIS PEOPLE | 41

4. Our God Is a Missionary God . . . . .	49
5. God's Mission and God's People . . . . .	55
6. The Early Church and Its Cooperative Mission . . . . .	65

**PART III**

**SOUTHERN BAPTISTS: A PEOPLE PURSUING GOD’S MISSION | 73**

7. A Proposal for Southern Baptist Cooperation. . . . . 75

8. Study Questions . . . . . 85

9. Name Index . . . . . 89

Subject Index . . . . . .91

Scripture Index. . . . . .93

*To Lesley*  
*To Rachel and Jacob*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Some say writing is a lonely task. This may indeed be true, but this book is the product of group effort. I do not write this to lay any responsibility for mistakes or bad writing on anyone else. Any errors are mine alone. However, this book is the result of the encouragement, prayer, and dedication of a large group of people.

First, I am grateful to the Southern Baptists. I dedicated this project, not only to Lesley, Rachel, and Jacob (see dedication), but to you. The Lord has used this convention to make me who I am. This book is an attempt to repay a debt.

Second, I am grateful to the faculty and staff at Southeastern Seminary. I am especially grateful to Steve McKinion and Greg Mathias for their patience, encouragement, prayers, and long conversations during this writing process. As well, I am grateful to Keith Harper and Amy Whitfield, who encouraged me along the way and were available to answer my questions.

Third, I cannot begin to express my appreciation to Danny Akin for his help. We have worked on this project on four continents, and in the air between them! The president of a seminary has dozens of distractions and outside commitments; however, he has always made time to provide help along the way. Without him, this would be an incomplete idea.

A special thanks to Ashley Clayton of the SBC Executive Committee, who helped me understand SBC reporting and statistics.

Finally, to my family: Mom and Dad, thanks for making sure I kept my head and kept the faith. To my children, Rachel and Jacob, thanks for all the mocking, prodding, and even your simple encouragement along the way. And finally, to my sweet wife, Lesley, only you know the sacrifice you have made. Without your encouragement, I would have never started; and without your continued encouragement, I could not have finished. “Thanks” is not enough, but that is all I can give here!



## ABBREVIATIONS

BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
NAC	The New American Commentary
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>





## INTRODUCTION

The Southern Baptist Convention has a rich heritage of cooperation. In fact, cooperation has been a hallmark of Southern Baptist identity since its earliest days. In 1845, Baptists from the southern United States gathered in Augusta, Georgia, and established a convention of churches for the express purpose of “eliciting, combining, and directing the energies of the Baptist denomination of Christians for the propagation of the gospel.”<sup>1</sup> In the years that followed, Southern Baptists developed a convention structure and identity that strengthened cooperation among churches and furthered this mission. Despite more than a century and a half of world crises, denominational conflict, and changes in convention leadership and structure, cooperation remains a defining feature of Southern Baptist life. This book tells the story, and describes the work, of Southern Baptist cooperation. It also shows how the Southern Baptist Convention is uniquely positioned to fully engage in God’s global mission.

In 2005, Chad Brand and David Hankins wrote *One Sacred Effort: The Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention*. This book has been used for more than a decade to teach Southern Baptist seminarians, pastors, and laypersons about the inner working and vision of the Cooperative Program (CP) as the unified funding mechanism for the ministries and missionary advance of Southern Baptists in this country and around the world. *One Sacred Effort* was important for Southern Baptists because it showed how the Cooperative Program remained an important tool as Southern Baptists recovered from denominational conflict and headed into a new millennium. Much has changed within the Southern Baptist Convention since 2005. These changes have created an opportunity for a new book on Southern Baptist cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> This statement is taken from the preamble of the original constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention. It has become a popular phrase and even a rallying cry for Southern Baptists over the years.

I wrote this book to address the needs of a new generation. *Together on God's Mission* traces Southern Baptist history, showing how and why we came to embrace this vision of a cooperative convention of churches. It also explores how this vision shapes denominational identity and structure. This historical study is followed by a biblical and theological section exploring how God's mission shapes the mission of the church. This section demonstrates that cooperation among churches is a key component of God's mission to redeem the nations and restore creation from the effects of the fall.

Though the idea of cooperation is a hallmark of Southern Baptist identity, it has been difficult to agree on exactly what "being cooperative" requires. For example, Baptist historian Bill Leonard argued that in the early twentieth century, Southern Baptist cooperation was essentially financial. He wrote, "To be Southern Baptist was to practice stewardship the Southern Baptist way."<sup>2</sup> Many Southern Baptists still appear to understand cooperation this way, maintaining that it should be measured entirely by financial support of the Cooperative Program. Others allege this definition is reductionist. In 2014, David Platt was elected president of the International Mission Board (IMB). One of the main criticisms leveled against the trustees for their election of Platt was that the congregation he pastored, the Church at Brook Hills, did not give enough through the Cooperative Program. Though the church made significant contributions to Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) causes, their use of alternate funding pathways was described as uncooperative.<sup>3</sup> North Carolina pastor J. D. Greear addressed this concern: "David has wrestled with the CP, but not because he doesn't believe in cooperating in missions. *Because he does.* . . . It's not news that the younger generation of Southern Baptists struggle with denominational loyalty, expressed in CP giving."<sup>4</sup> As we can see, Southern Baptists agree it is important to cooperate but differ on what this means.

These struggles seem to have, at least in part, contributed to a decline in Cooperative Program support as a percentage of churches' undesignated receipts. In

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<sup>2</sup> Bill Leonard, "Stewardship Promotion in the Southern Baptist Convention Since 1900," *Baptist History and Heritage* (1986): 8.

<sup>3</sup> According to a 2014 Baptist Press article by David Roach and Art Toalston, under David Platt's leadership, the Church at Brook Hills gave \$25,000 through CP each of the five calendar years leading up to Platt's election as IMB president. In 2013, the congregation gave \$300,000 to the IMB's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions and \$100,000 through the SBC Executive Committee for the SBC Cooperative Program Allocation Budget. Gifts sent directly to the Executive Committee rather than through a Baptist state convention are defined as designated gifts, not CP giving. David Roach and Art Toalston, "Cooperation Central to Platt's Vision at IMB," Baptist Press, August 27, 2014, <http://www.bpnews.net/43240/cooperation-central-to-platts-vision-at-imb>.

<sup>4</sup> J. D. Greear, "What David Platt's IMB Presidency Signals about our Future," the J. D. Greear Ministries website, August 27, 2014, [http://www.jdgreear.com/my\\_weblog/2014/08/what-david-platts-imb-presidency-signals-about-our-future.html](http://www.jdgreear.com/my_weblog/2014/08/what-david-platts-imb-presidency-signals-about-our-future.html). Emphasis in original.

While Greear is certainly correct about the struggle some younger Southern Baptists have with the Cooperative Program, it is important to remember that CP percentages have been declining for more than 40 years. The current situation results from multiple generations deemphasizing Cooperative Program giving through Southern Baptist churches.

the 1981–82 fiscal year (the first year churches reported their undesignated receipts to the convention), Southern Baptist churches contributed an average of 10.7 percent of those receipts through the CP. By 2014–15, the percentage had decreased to 5.18 percent.<sup>5</sup> This decrease has been a cause for alarm. In fact, this downward trend reached such proportions that Tom Elliff, past president of the International Mission Board, asked, “Have we really concluded that we can accomplish more by ourselves than we can together?”<sup>6</sup> Many Southern Baptists seem to be reassessing the means, method, and motivation for cooperation within our convention. The history of our convention has demonstrated that there are significant practical benefits of working together; however, these no longer seem compelling for a growing population of Southern Baptists.

As we consider the mission of the Southern Baptist Convention into the twenty-first century, it is helpful to understand where we have come from. Historian Leon McBeth has observed that “the ‘delegates’ who met in Augusta, Georgia in May 1845 to form the Southern Baptist Convention would hardly recognize their creation today. . . . The name remains, but almost everything else has changed.”<sup>7</sup> Part 1 of this book traces the development of the Southern Baptist Convention from a foreign missionary society into the world’s largest Protestant denomination. This section shows how the Southern Baptist Convention works today. It will describe the work of convention boards and entities and show how the Cooperative Program supports God’s mission through the church.

Part 2 explores several key biblical themes to show how the mission of God determines the mission of the church. It will show that cooperation among churches is a key component of God’s mission. We worship one God, a missionary God. His mission is to redeem for himself a people, the church. He has commissioned his church to make disciples of all nations by starting local churches to share in this one mission. The mission of the church, therefore, is a corporate mission, and cooperation is a means of obeying the Great Commission. It is my hope that everyone who studies these pages will be convinced that the Southern Baptist cooperative structure is more than a denominational identity; it enables Southern Baptist churches to fully participate in God’s mission.

The final section makes several observations about the current state of Southern Baptist cooperation and encourages Southern Baptists, especially younger Southern Baptists, to embrace the cooperative efforts of the convention. No one operates under the illusion that everything is perfect. However, the Cooperative Program and

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<sup>5</sup> Statistical data in this book has been compiled by the SBC Executive Committee based on SBC Annuals and the convention’s Annual Church Profile.

<sup>6</sup> Tom Elliff, “First Person: Will Southern Baptists Rise to the Challenge?” Baptist Press, October 8, 2012, <http://bpnews.net/38880/first-person-will-southern-baptists-rise-to-the-challenge>.

<sup>7</sup> Leon McBeth, “Cooperation and Crisis as Shapers of Southern Baptist Identity,” *Baptist History and Heritage* (1995): 35.

the cooperative structure of the convention provide means for any church, no matter its size or location, to participate in the mission of God.

I am a lifelong Southern Baptist. Through the “cradle roll” program, my name was on the roll of a Southern Baptist church months before I was born. I am a product of the Southern Baptist Convention. I was saved, mentored, and called to ministry in a Southern Baptist church. I received my education through Southern Baptist schools. I have been honored to serve on the staff of several Southern Baptist churches and as part of the administration and faculty of a Southern Baptist seminary. My passion for missions and my missionary experience are results of the Southern Baptist Convention’s work. The greatest commandment is to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. Southern Baptists have helped me to love God in all of these areas. The Lord has used this convention to make me who I am.

This book is written by a Southern Baptist for Southern Baptists. It is my offering to the convention I love, as well as my plea to fellow Southern Baptists. Many predict the demise of denominations in general and the Southern Baptist Convention in particular. I refuse to believe that such demise is inevitable. My prayer is that this book will provide you with reasons to embrace the cooperative identity of this convention and work to make it the best it can be for the glory of God and the benefit of the nations.

This book is the result of my doctoral studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. It is an attempt to transition my research and writing from the academy to the church. To be frank, the process has been more difficult than I originally imagined. A dissertation is a strange piece of literature in that it only needs to pass the inspection of a few people. I am writing this book for a larger audience. Though I have tried to eliminate technicalities and assumptions, I fear I have, in some instances, failed. This fault is mine alone. I am extremely grateful to my friend and colleague Greg Mathias. He has read every word, and provided helpful insights and corrections. I also appreciate the partnership with B&H Academic in producing this book. Thanks for reading. It is my sincere prayer that you and I will experience the fullness of Christ as we engage in God’s mission together.

PART I



THE HISTORICAL  
DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTHERN  
BAPTIST CONVENTION



# 1

## FROM MISSIONARY SOCIETY TO A CONVENTION OF CHURCHES

Southern Baptists have a rich history, a robust denominational structure, and a resilient identity that encourages voluntary cooperation among churches on a broad range of convention activities. The convention we see today stems from a loosely structured mission society. In 1845, a portion of that society adopted a structure that allowed for a diverse range of ministries and encouraged cooperation among local churches as the means of accomplishing this vision.<sup>1</sup>

### AMERICAN BAPTISTS UNITE AROUND GLOBAL MISSIONS

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Baptists in the United States had little structure beyond the local church. Some churches gathered in local associations; however, this simple structure did not translate into national, or even statewide, denominational organization. This changed on May 18, 1814, with the establishment of the General Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States for Foreign Missions, commonly referred to as the Triennial Convention. This convention was formed when Baptists organized themselves around the cause of foreign missions for “diffusing evangelistic light, through benighted regions of the earth.”<sup>2</sup> The first national identity for Baptists was a missionary identity.

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<sup>1</sup> This claim that the Southern Baptist Convention was established for missionary purposes is in no way an attempt to neglect what historian Leon McBeth has labeled the “blunt historical fact” that slavery was a chief issue leading to the breakup of the Triennial Convention and the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention. Leon McBeth, *Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 382.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from *The Proceedings of the Baptist Convention for Missionary Purposes* (Philadelphia: Ann Coles, 1814), 6.

The story of this missionary identity for American Baptists began, ironically, with the appointment of several Congregationalist missionaries by the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions. In February 1812, Adoniram and Ann Judson, along with Samuel and Harriett Newell, Samuel Nott, Gordon Hall, and Luther Rice, left the United States for a seven-month journey to India, where they planned to serve as missionaries. Adoniram Judson knew that when the group arrived, they would encounter William Carey and his team of Baptist missionaries. Judson wanted to be prepared to discuss (or perhaps refute) the Baptist beliefs about baptism, so he studied the biblical teachings on the topic. This exercise did not end as he anticipated. Judson was looking for support of the Congregationalist belief in infant baptism, but he ended up rejecting his previously held belief and accepting Baptist teaching on the subject.

Judson became convinced that the word translated *baptize* in the New Testament could only mean to immerse in water and could not be used to support any other mode of baptism. This discovery led him to question other aspects of his previously held beliefs. Further research led Judson to conclude that Christian baptism could only be understood as the immersion of professing believers. As one might imagine, this discovery was troubling. Not only did it challenge his theology; it also meant that Judson himself had never been baptized! Ann was originally opposed to Adoniram's conversion. However, after her own study of the Scriptures, she became convinced and joined him. Once they arrived in India, both Ann and Adoniram were baptized and resigned their appointment with the Congregational mission agency.

Fellow missionary Luther Rice seems to have held similar doubts about infant baptism. After talking to William Carey and reading Judson's baptism testimony, he too became a Baptist and resigned his missionary appointment. Because of their conversions, Rice and the Judsons were essentially stranded in India. They had a strong missionary calling and were firmly convinced of their new faith; however, they had no avenue for the financial support of their work. Eventually, Rice returned to the United States to raise support for the new Baptist missionary efforts. His fund-raising efforts and tireless work gave birth to the Triennial Convention. According to Baptist historian William Wright Barnes, Luther Rice, "more than any other man, may be called the organizer of the Baptist denomination in America."<sup>3</sup> Even though Rice originally planned to return to the mission field, he never did. Instead, he spent the rest of his life working within the Triennial Convention, providing an identity and purpose for this growing body of Christians in the new world.

In the beginning, the Triennial Convention served as a centralizing network for previously disconnected Baptist missionary societies (and individuals) scattered throughout the United States. Rice's intention for the first meeting of the Trien-

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<sup>3</sup> William Wright Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Study in the Development of Ecclesiology* (Seminary Hill, TX, 1934), 21.



nial Convention was to bring together delegates “for the purpose of forming some general combination of concert of action among them.”<sup>4</sup> The Triennial Convention became the first ever national organization of Baptists in America. David Dockery, former president of Union University, has called this event “one of the most significant events in Baptist history.”<sup>5</sup> However, despite the monumental nature of this organization, within thirty years the unity of the Triennial Convention was shattered and the Southern Baptist Convention formed.

Several factors contributed to the eventual breakup of the Triennial Convention. Chief among them was slave ownership and missionary appointment, which became a significant point of tension between Northern and Southern Baptists by the 1840s. As Southern Baptists saw it, barring slaveholders from missionary service precluded them from fulfilling the Great Commission and demanded the formation of a new denominational body.<sup>6</sup> According to Jesse Fletcher, “The Southern Baptist Convention walked on the stage of history burdened by its defense of a practice which subsequent history would condemn and which Southern Baptists themselves would one day condemn.”<sup>7</sup>

There also seems to have been tension among Baptists about the deployment and support of home missionaries. The Southern states felt their region was underrepresented and that funds and missionaries were being directed elsewhere. However, the problems within the Triennial Convention, and its eventual breakup, can be found in the different visions for ministry and convention structure. According to Baptist historian Leon McBeth, “Whoever fails to grasp the differences between society and convention methods will never understand Northern and Southern Baptists.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. The constitution of the Triennial Convention stated that the convention should consist of “delegates, not exceeding two in number from each of several Missionary Societies, and other bodies of the Baptist Denomination, now existing, or which may hereafter be formed in the United States, and which shall regularly contribute to the general Missionary fund, a sum amounting at least to one hundred dollars per annum.”

<sup>5</sup> David Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 38.

<sup>6</sup> In the opening resolution of the 1845 convention, Southern Baptists wrote, “Were we asked to characterize the conduct of our Northern brethren in one short phrase, we should adopt that of the Apostle. It was ‘Forbidding us to speak unto the Gentiles.’ Did this deny us no privilege? Did it not obstruct us, lay a kind of Romish interdict upon us in the discharge of an imperative duty; a duty to which the church has been, after the lapse of ages, awakened universally and successfully; a duty the very object, of our long cherished connection and confederation?” *Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention Held in Augusta, Georgia, May 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th, 1845* (Richmond: H. K. Ellyson, 1845), 18.

<sup>7</sup> Jesse Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 40.

In 1995, the messengers to the 150-year anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution confessing and repenting for racism and the support of slavery in its past. The resolution openly acknowledged: “Our relationship to African-Americans has been hindered from the beginning by the role that slavery played in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention; and . . . many of our Southern Baptist forbears defended the right to own slaves, and either participated in, supported, or acquiesced in the particularly inhumane nature of American slavery.” See Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention,” SBC website, 1995, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amresolution.asp?id=899>.

<sup>8</sup> McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 347.

Baptists in the North preferred the society model while Baptists in the South preferred a convention or associational structure.

### SOCIETY VERSUS CONVENTION STRUCTURE

*Convention or association* refers to a denominational structure that is church-based and embraces a broad range of ministries. Local churches are able to support and participate in foreign and home missions, education, publishing, and other ministries by participating in one convention. The work of the convention is carried out through delegates who represent the churches of which they are members. The vision and mission of the convention are defined by the work of the whole denomination.

*Societies*, on the other hand, are single-cause-based. They are established and held together to serve a single ministry or purpose. Membership consists of individuals who are interested in the cause and invest financially. The society is not connected directly to the local church. Instead, individual members from churches participate or do not participate depending on their interests in the specific cause. Rather than embracing multiple causes, a society focuses on foreign missions or local missions, education or publication, or another social ministry. Each society is autonomous and is generally controlled by a board of directors who are also financial contributors to the cause.

As observed earlier, despite its name, the Triennial Convention initially operated as a society, convening individuals and other societies, rather than delegates from local churches, as a means of advancing a foreign missionary cause. However, many of the founders envisioned a Baptist denomination with a broader range of ministries. Richard Furman, the convention's first president, pled with delegates to expand the ministry beyond the foreign mission field. He wanted the convention to adopt a home mission strategy and educate pastors. In his presidential address, he said, "It is deeply to be regretted that no more attention is paid to the improvement of the minds of pious youths who are called to the gospel ministry."<sup>9</sup> Luther Rice shared this desire for a more expanded focus. Under their leadership, the Triennial Convention started to be involved in home missions, Christian education, and also published material for its members. However, this broader convention structure lasted less than a decade.

Most historians agree that Baptists in the North, especially New England Baptists, were unhappy the Triennial Convention had expanded its ministry beyond foreign missions, embracing a more denominational structure. Their frustration was rooted in at least two concerns. First, they expressed theological concerns. They felt the independence of the local church was being violated. Francis Wayland, pastor of

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Furman, "Address," *Proceedings*, Baptist Convention for Missionary Purposes, 42. Taken from McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 352.

First Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island, said, “I do not see how a church can be *represented*.” These brethren believed external organizations were made up of individuals and could not claim to work on behalf of a local church. Second, they raised practical concerns. They believed that the emphasis on other ministries diverted monies away from foreign missions. One observer, Baron Stow, claimed no new missionaries were sent to Burma between 1820 and 1823 and plans for beginning work in Brazil and Africa in 1815 were postponed because of insufficient funding.<sup>10</sup>

In 1826, the Triennial Convention reversed course and embraced its identity as a foreign missionary society. All other ministries were eliminated. Wayland, who originally supported a broader ministry structure, led the convention to adopt this new vision, noting the expanded ministry was viewed negatively “by so decided a majority that the attempt was never repeated, and this danger was averted. We look back at the present day, with astonishment that such an idea was ever entertained.”<sup>11</sup>

Two other factors contributed to the redirection of the convention. First, Richard Furman died in 1825, and with his death, Baptists in the South lost one of the strongest proponents for a broader convention structure. Second, and perhaps more important, New England Baptists were able to move the 1826 convention meeting from Washington, DC, to New York. In previous meetings, they had not been able to garner enough voting support to address their concerns. In New York, however, because of the expense and difficulty of travel from the South, the largest voting bloc was made up of delegates from the Northern states. Of the 63 delegates, 23 were from Massachusetts and 17 were from New York. This coalition made the way for a change in convention structure and leadership. The society method won the day within the Triennial Convention, and regional tensions flared, a factor that eventually contributed to the establishment of the Southern Baptist Convention.

### SOUTHERN BAPTISTS CHOOSE A CONVENTION

According to historian Robert A. Torbet, when Baptists from the southern United States gathered in 1845, they chose a “new type of Baptist organization.”<sup>12</sup> McBeth observed that Baptists in the South “favored a unified, cooperative denomination in which one general convention did various forms of ministry” while Baptists in the North “preferred an independent society approach.”<sup>13</sup> It is important to understand why Baptists in the South preferred (or did not oppose) the associational method

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<sup>10</sup> McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 357–58.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Wayland, *Notes on the Principles and Practices of Baptist Churches* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1856), 184, cited in Robert Andrew Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People: 1607–1972* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1974), 112.

<sup>12</sup> Robert A. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 293.

<sup>13</sup> Leon McBeth, “The Broken Unity of 1845: A Reassessment,” *Baptist Heritage* (July 1998): 28.

for missions and ministry support. They shared similar convictions regarding the autonomy and independence of the local church. But where Baptists in the North rejected associationalism, Baptists in the South embraced it. Multiple factors contributed to this.

First, the social structure of Southern communities encouraged associationalism. New England states were made up of townships. These townships were governed through strict democratic rule; each citizen attended town meetings expecting to have a voice and a vote in local decisions. This fostered a sense of individual responsibility in decision making. Southern states, on the other hand, governed themselves quite differently. Rather than townships, these communities were made up of counties. McBeth observed that the social structure of Southern counties was “at times almost feudal.”<sup>14</sup> Decision making was not the exclusive responsibility of the masses but was more centralized. This form of government seems to have made Baptists in the South more comfortable with a representative denominational structure.

Second, William Wright Barnes has noted that another reason Baptists in the South were more willing to embrace associationalism can be found in their statements of faith. These statements allowed, if not encouraged, formal cooperation between local churches. For most Baptist churches in the South, the statement of faith developed by the Philadelphia Association served as the primary confession. This document affirmed the existence of both the universal and the local church. While it described local churches as having autonomy and the authority to carry out all ministries, discipline, and the establishing of leadership, the confession also noted that God’s command for believers was to “walk together in particular societies, or churches, for their mutual edification.” The Philadelphia Confession does not seem to acknowledge any conflict between cooperation and local church authority. Even the South’s General Baptists, most of whom settled in Virginia and North Carolina, though opposed to aspects of the Calvinistic theology espoused by the Philadelphia Association, adopted confessions that encouraged partnership between churches. Barnes noted, “Although [they] were Arminian in theology . . . they held to a centralized ecclesiology in agreement with the fundamental spiritual idea of Philadelphia.”<sup>15</sup> Whereas early Southern Baptists held different understandings about nuanced aspects of the doctrine of salvation, they held enough agreement on the doctrine of the church to make space for voluntary association between churches.

Third, many Baptists in the South had already experienced the benefits of cooperation and realized that voluntary association did not necessarily undermine local church autonomy. One of the largest and most influential associations was the Sandy Creek Association. Philadelphia pastor Morgan Edwards observed that in just 17 years, this association had “spread branches westward as far as the great river

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<sup>14</sup> McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 350.

<sup>15</sup> Barnes, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 7.

Mississippi; southward as far a Georgia; eastward to the sea and Chesopeek bay [*sic*] and Northward to the waters of Potowmack [*sic*].<sup>16</sup> The Sandy Creek Association was more than a friendly gathering. This association engaged in many functions that were typically considered the responsibility of the local church: placement and ordination of ministers, baptism, administration of ordinances, and church discipline. These churches were comfortable with associationalism, and when the Southern Baptist Convention formed, they embraced a centralized organization and cooperative ministry.

Fourth, and perhaps the most significantly, Southern Baptists chose a different structure due to the leadership and influence of two men: Richard Furman and W. B. Johnson. Richard Furman was the pastor of First Baptist Church in Charleston, South Carolina, from 1787 until his death in 1825. As noted earlier, when he served as president of the Triennial Convention, Furman was a strong advocate of a denominational structure supporting a wide range of ministries. Furman's greatest influence came through his protégé W. B. Johnson, the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Johnson was arguably the most influential person with regard to the structure of the Southern Baptist Convention. Even before 1845, he was a recognized leader among Baptists. He served as a pastor in Georgia and South Carolina, and while in South Carolina, worked to organize the state convention and served as its president. Johnson also served on the organizational committee and eventually served as president of the Triennial Convention. Johnson's reputation and previous leadership experience helped him lead the SBC to adopt a structure that supported a wide range of ministries and encouraged congregational cooperation.

At the first gathering of Southern Baptists in 1845, Johnson described two possible structures for the new denomination:

I invite your attention to the consideration of two plans: The one is that which has been adopted for years past, viz.: separate and independent bodies for the prosecution of each object. . . .

The other proposes one Convention, embodying the whole Denomination, together with separate and distinct Boards, for each object of benevolent enterprise, located at different places, and all amendable to the Convention.<sup>17</sup>

According to McBeth, "It is clear which plan Johnson favored; in fact, in his coat pocket he already had a draft of a constitution which would set the new Southern

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<sup>16</sup> Morgan Edwards, *Materials Toward a History of Baptists*, 2:92.

<sup>17</sup> Robert A. Baker, *A Baptist Source Book, with Particular Reference to Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1966), 114.

body on the convention plan.”<sup>18</sup> At last, Baptists in the United States seemed to have become what Luther Rice and Richard Furman hoped the Triennial Convention could be.

From the first meeting in 1845, Southern Baptists chose a structure that was quite different from the one they were leaving. Article V of the new constitution stated, “The Convention shall elect . . . as many Boards of Managers, as in its judgment will be necessary for carrying out the benevolent objects it may determine to promote.”<sup>19</sup> Jesse Fletcher noted, “These brief words ensured that Johnson’s Furman-nurtured concept of a broad-based denomination effort . . . was in place.”<sup>20</sup> At the inaugural meeting in Augusta, Southern Baptists established the Foreign Mission Board and the Domestic Mission Board. In 1859, Southern Baptists opened the first denominational school for training pastors and missionaries, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Then, in 1891, Southern Baptists established a Sunday School Board, charged with printing denominational literature for churches. Within relatively few years, Southern Baptists had taken strides to establish a convention with a wide range of ministries.

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<sup>18</sup> McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 389.

<sup>19</sup> See “Original Constitution of the Southern Baptist Convention,” 3, at Baptist Studies Online, accessed June 7, 2017, <http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/constitution-of-the-sbc.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention*, 49.