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...YES

*The Co-operative Program*

IS SCRIPTURAL



Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee

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# Yes, the Co-operative Program Is Scriptural

BY C. B. WILLIAMS

A Baptist Indian in Oklahoma met a missionary of the Home Mission Board at the station to take him up to the Baptist church to preach. The Indian pleaded, "You tell us what the Jesus Book says. We want you to stay a whole week and tell us what the Jesus Book says."

Our Baptist people everywhere, in country and hamlet, in town and city, want to know what the Jesus Book says about the way they are asked to do their work. Is the Co-operative Program scriptural? Let us see!

## Scriptural In Its Objectives

The objectives or aims of the plan are taken from the scriptural times. These may be classified under five heads.

### I. EVANGELISM.

The bottom rail of the Co-operative Program is evangelism, or soul-winning. Our secretaries, missionaries, teachers, and pastors all stress the winning of the lost to Christ as our first duty. Is not that scriptural?

1. John the Baptist was a soul-winner. He won the first two disciples to Christ. "On the morrow John was standing, and two of his disciples; and he looked upon Jesus as he walked, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus" (John 1:35-37\*). These two disciples were Andrew and John who later became apostles.

2. Andrew, one of these, at once went home after his brother Simon. "He findeth first his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah (which is, being interpreted, Christ). He brought him unto Jesus" (John 1:41-42).

\*All Scripture verses, American Standard Version.

3. Jesus himself was a great soul-winner. He won the woman at the well of Sychar (John 4: 7-42); the paralytic (Mark 2:5); the insane man with a legion of demons in him (Mark 5:19); Levi-Matthew (Mark 2:14); Zacchaeus (Luke 19:2-9); and scores of others.

4. Jesus calls us to be soul-winners. "Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1: 17). This is his service call to Andrew and Peter.

## II. MISSIONS.

The second rail in the Co-operative Program is missions. Soul-winning is the bottom rail of missions. We may stay at home and win souls, and that is evangelism; but when we go and win souls, that is missions. For convenience our Co-operative Program has state, home, and foreign missions. Is this program scriptural? Let us see:

1. State missions is illustrated in Luke 10: 1-2: "Now after these things the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself was about to come. And he said unto them, The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest. Jesus was in the state of Perea across the Jordan and these seventy missionaries were sent out as state missionaries. See also Acts 1:8, "Ye shall be my witnesses . . . in all Judaea" (another state).

2. Home missions is illustrated in Acts 8, where Philip goes to another state, Samaria, and preaches the gospel; and also meets a foreigner, the Ethiopian chamberlain, and preaches the gospel to him, baptizes him, sending him on down to his own country as a foreign missionary.

3. For foreign missions we have abundant scriptural proof: "Go . . . make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19), etc.; "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole

creation" (Mark 16:15); "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations" (Luke 24:47); "Ye shall be my witnesses . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8); "There were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:20). Thus the great church at Antioch was organized and became another center of foreign missions.

### III. TEACHING.

The third rail in the Co-operative Program fence is teaching. We try to teach our church members and their children in the Sunday school, the Baptist Training Union, our Baptist colleges, seminaries, and missionary training schools. We have nearly thirty colleges, four Baptist seminaries, and two missionary training schools. Are we following the Scriptures in this teaching program? Let us see:

1. Jesus was the Great Teacher. Forty-five times in the Gospels he is called Teacher, many times The Teacher. See John 3:2; Matthew 5:2; 7:29; 9:35; 11:1; 13:54, etc. He says, "Follow me." We are trying to do so in our teaching program.

2. The twelve and Paul used teaching as one of their principal methods of winning people to Christ. See Acts 4:2, 18; 5:21, 25, 28, 42; 11:26; 15:35; 18:11, 25; 20:20; 28:31.

3. Teaching is to follow evangelism and missions. "Go . . . make disciples . . . baptizing them . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20). Are not these Scriptures convincing? The churches are commanded to teach (Matt. 28:20). We are commanded to study that we may know how to handle the word (2 Tim. 2:15). God once winked at ignorance but it is no longer so, and he now commands men to repent (Acts 17:30). Repent of what? Of their ignorance about him and truth. Surely none can know his Word and claim that there is no Scripture for our teaching ministry!

#### IV. HEALING.

Through the Co-operative Program we now operate a Baptist hospital in nearly every state of our Southern Baptist Convention, and the Southern Baptist Hospital in New Orleans. We are caring for and healing many thousands each year in these eleemosynary institutions. Have we any Scripture for a healing program? Let us take a look:

1. Jesus was the greatest healer the world has ever seen. He cured people with diseases now incurable by all the discoveries medical science has made—paralysis, epilepsy, rheumatism, extreme forms of insanity, and scores of moderate forms of diseases—fevers, nerve troubles, etc. He also cured deafness, blindness, even congenital blindness (John 9:20). He raised Jairus' daughter who had just died (Mark 5:41-42), a young man being taken to the cemetery (Luke 7:12-15), and Lazarus after he had been dead and buried four days (John 11:39-44). See Matthew 8 and Mark 2 for extended healing programs by Jesus.

2. Peter and John cured the crippled beggar at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:1-10). Peter cured Aeneas at Lydda and raised to life again Dorcas at Joppa (Acts 9:32-41).

3. Paul healed the congenital cripple at Lystra (Acts 14:8-10), cured the sick at Ephesus (Acts 19:11-12), and "the rest also that had diseases" on the island of Malta came, as well as the father of the chief man, Publius, sick with "fever and dysentery" (Acts 28:8-9). Paul also raised to life again Eutychus who fell dead one night from an upper window (Acts 20:9-10).

#### V. HELPING THE HELPLESS.

Through the Co-operative Program we maintain orphanages in all our states. Through our Relief and Annuity Board we are caring for needy ministers, their widows, and orphans. In a private way hundreds of other widows are cared for by our churches. Is this phase of our work scriptural? "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the

fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). So those who back the Co-operative Program have "pure religion" of the New Testament type.

## Scriptural in its Agencies

Our Co-operative Program is carried on by six principal agencies: Churches, pastors, associations or conventions, boards or standing committees, secretaries, and missionaries.

### I. CHURCHES.

There are about 26,401 Baptist churches in the South, the most of which are in some sense serving through the Co-operative Program. Just as we have these churches through which our evangelistic, missionary, educational, healing, and charity work is being carried on, so in the New Testament times it was through the churches at Jerusalem, Antioch, in Galatia, Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica), Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, and others, that the program of Christ was carried out in the first century (Acts 8:4-5, 14, 26; 9:32; 11:19-21; 13:1-4; Rom. 15:27; 1 Cor. 16:1 [churches of Galatia]; 2 Cor. 8:1-2; Gal. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1, 2 Thess. 1:1; Rev. 2 and 3).

Churches found the plan of co-operation in the Scriptures and adopted it for their local use. Messengers from these churches made up the state associations that adopted the co-operative plan of working together. It is false to claim that the program was handed down to the churches by secretaries; churches through their messengers handed it to the secretaries!

### II. PASTORS OR BISHOPS OR SHEPHERDS.

Christian history tells us that James, half brother of Jesus, became pastor of the church in Jerusalem just before the middle of the first century. Paul tells us how pastors were elected (by raising the hand *cheriotoneo*) in the churches planted by him and Barnabas on the first missionary tour (Acts 14:23). He also tells Titus

(Titus 1:5-9) and Timothy (1 Tim. 3:1-7) that the churches of Crete and Asia must be manned by pure, consecrated, and competent pastors or bishops. He knew that the pastors, then as now, are the key men, to lead the churches so that Christ's program may be put over.

### III. ASSOCIATIONS OR CONVENTIONS.

The smaller bodies of messengers from churches are called associations. The term "convention," except in Kentucky, Illinois, Maryland, Missouri, and Virginia applies to the state bodies, and also to the body of messengers from the whole territory of the convention. Is there a scriptural warrant for such bodies? The first association or convention was held in Jerusalem in New Testament times. It was the convention (gathering of messengers) to settle the problem of circumcision and determine how the missionary program among Jews and Gentiles was to be carried out. Paul, Barnabas, and Titus were messengers from the church at Antioch. "I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus also with me" (Gal. 2:1). James, pastor of the church, Peter, and John were the messengers representing the church at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9). Only two churches had messengers at this convention; but 200 years ago many of our Baptist associations and conventions had only a very few churches represented.

### IV. BOARDS, OR STANDING COMMITTEES.

The Co-operative Program is carried on through standing committees, sometimes called boards. Is it scriptural to have these boards or standing committees to administer the finances of our colossal missionary, educational, and eleemosynary program? Yes, we can find the first rudimentary board, or finance committee, right here in our New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 8:16 we find Titus as the first member (chairman) of this New Testament board. In 2 Corinthians 8:18-19, the second member of it is "the brother whose praise in the gospel is spread through all the churches; and not only so, but who was also appointed by the churches to travel

with us in the matter of this grace" (the vast fund being collected from all the churches for suffering Christians in Judaea and to cement the Jewish and Gentile wings of Christianity), "which is ministered by us to the glory of the Lord." Here is mentioned the third member of the financial board: "Our brother, whom we have many times proved earnest in many things" (2 Cor. 8:22). In the next verse (23) he calls these three members of this committee "the messengers of the churches, they are the glory of Christ." Verses 20 and 21 give us Paul's motive for thus handling the Lord's "bounty" or fund, "avoiding this, that any man should blame us in the matter of this bounty . . . for we take thought for things honorable." The great apostle thought this method of handling large sums of money for the kingdom was the safest and most "honorable." Is it not so today? By and far it has proved to be so.

#### V. EXECUTIVE SECRETARIES.

In New Testament times we find the twelve and later Barnabas and Paul also called apostles (Acts 14:14). But the apostolic age closed with the first century. In the New Testament, Peter is the secretary for missions among the Jews while Paul held the same position for missions among the Gentiles. "James and Cephas (Peter) and John . . . gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision (Jews)" (Gal. 2:9). This was the agreement made at the first great association or convention held at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were to direct the mission work among the nations, Peter and John among the Jews.

After Peter's death John succeeded him, and after Paul's death Timothy became secretary, or superintendent of missions, in Ephesus, directing the program for the state of Asia. After Timothy's death John assumed the leadership in Asia. He was so strong a defender of the true gospel that he was banished by the Imperial Government of Rome to the island of Patmos

(Rev. 1:9). John was the secretary, or promoter, of the Christian mission program; he was the magnetic leader and so was exiled.

#### VI. MISSIONARIES.

The Co-operative Program works through missionaries in the state and out to the nations. We have hundreds in our state fields, scores for the Home Board among the Indians, Jews, Mexicans, and other foreigners in the homeland, and hundreds on the foreign fields in China, Japan, Italy, Palestine, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Africa, etc. Is this scriptural? See Luke 10:1-3; Acts 1:8; 8:1-40; Matt. 28:19-20; Especially see Acts 13:3: "Then, when they (certain leaders in Antioch, not the whole church) had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they (the leaders) sent them away." But notice, these leaders were led by the Holy Spirit who said to them (v. 2), "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them." In this case the prophets and teachers sent forth the two apostles, Barnabas and Paul.

### Scriptural in its Principles Of Administration

1. No human magnates or dictators to manage it. In 3 John we see Diotrephes "who loveth to have the preeminence among them . . . prating against us with wicked words." Men like him were "prating against" John who was humbly leading as superintendent of the mission work in Asia (state). Diotrephes was against the missionaries sent out by John (v. 10).

2. Leaders (secretaries) led by the Holy Spirit and chosen by the churches administer the affairs of the Co-operative Program. Peter and John were the superintendents of the work among the Jews; Paul and Barnabas of the work among the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9). This arrangement was decided on under leadership of the Holy Spirit at that first convention held in Jerusalem.

3. Fraternal co-operation among the churches

and workers is the basic principle of operation. This is the New Testament principle. That was the principle decided on at that first New Testament convention. "James and Cephas and John . . . gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision (Jews)" (Gal. 2:9). These leaders, led by the Spirit, co-operated in the spirit of fraternal fellowship. So do our churches, pastors, missionaries, secretaries. "For we are God's fellow-workers" (1 Cor. 3:9).

4. Systematic contributions from the churches to support the program. The Co-operative Program seeks through the Every-Member Canvass each year, led by the churches and pastors, to provide the funds for promoting evangelism, missions, schools, orphanages, and hospitals. Is this scriptural? "Bring ye the whole tithe into the store-house . . . and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (Mal. 3:10). "Upon the first day of the week (our Sunday) let each one of you lay by him in store, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come" (1 Cor. 16:2).

CONCLUSION: Now, fellow-Baptists everywhere, in country and hamlet, in town and city, since this Co-operative Program is scriptural in its objectives, agencies, and principles of administration, ought we not, one and all, to back it with our prayers and money? Everything we are commanded by our Lord to do is included in this plan of working together. It distributes to each cause or agency according to its importance and its relative needs. It gives every Baptist and every church a chance to have some part every month in the whole program of our Master. Safe, sane, scriptural, and economical, it has already brought greater good to our Baptist cause than any other plan ever used.

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