

SOUTHERN BAPTIST HISTORICAL
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Interview with Owen Cooper (by Jim Young)

Q--What in your view are the greatest accomplishments of Southern Baptists during the past two years?

The fact that S. Bapt. for the 3rd consecutive year have baptized more than 400,000 people is a noteworthy accomplishment. We had an alltime high in the number of foreign missionaries under appointment. We are maintaining the same number of home missionaries. With the exception of one year we've had in our seminaries the greatest enrollment we've ever had. The income last year in aggregate was over one billion, 200 million dollars. And that reflects some of the measurable accomplishments.

Now when you get into some of the intangible accomplishments, one of the things most ~~pleasing~~ pleasing to me is the growing interest on the part of laymen to become meaningfully involved in the total denominational program--not just in the local church, but meaningfully involved beyond the local church.

And then I see a quest on the part of many Baptist people to try to make a greater place in their life for the Holy Spirit....I think this is a needed area in S. Bapt. life, as individuals, as churches, as organizations...that we should make a greater place in our life for the direction and leadership and filling and power and strength of the Holy Spirit.

What evidence do you see that the lay movement is really growing among S. Baptists?

An increasing number of lay people are getting involved in various types of mission activities. they are assuming greater responsibilities in the area of witnessing, much of it growing out of lay witnessing training program sponsored by the HMB. Actually, the bus ministry is entirely dependent on a large number of committed lay persons--men, women and young people. Laymen have more time now and many of them have more money. They will respond to requests to get involved

in areas at home and areas abroad. There are increasing numbers of people who are making ^{lay} ~~their~~ ^{services} available through the summer student missions program, the associate mission program, as career missionaries, and as retirees to the FMB. All of these are some indications that lay people want to assume more responsibilities as lay ministers.

Q--Do you have any ~~regrets~~ ⁹ about things that have happened in S.B. life within the last 2 years? Or do you see any trends in S. B. life that you don't like?

My biggest ~~ma~~ regret would be that S. Bapt. did not become more meaningfully involved in the World Program of Reconciliation through Jesus Christ that was sponsored by the BWA. There ^{are almost a} ~~are many~~ hundred ~~xx~~ Baptist groups that are involved in this, and some of them very meaningful. S. Ba. have the greatest ~~reser voir~~ of knowhow and techniques in the area of evangelism and missions, I believe, of any religious body in the world. This is not something we should hoard. We should share it with others. One way to share it is to get involved in programs that cross Baptist denominational lines. This may have seemed to be of little consequence to us because of the great programs we have, but i think would be helpful not only in this country but beyond for S. Bapt. to really get involved in this program.

Another disappointment to me is the fact that the HMB has approximately 150 volunteers to go into areas in this country where there are many many unchurched people, and they do not have the money to send them. Somehow the money that is in the pockets of S.Ba. ought to be made available to send this great group of missio aries out.

Hopefully, I would have wished our baptistms this year would have exceeded the most we've ever had. I look forward to the time when we have 1/2 million baptistms. But we're going to have to work hard on it. The population decline. means there will be ~~fewer~~ fewer baptist childredn to baptize in the future.

We're going to have to redouble our efforts just to hold our own in this ~~eam~~ area. I like to see progress in this area, and when we slipped back some this year it was a source of disappointment to me.

Q-Baptist Faith and Message Fellowship...what about this controversy between so-called conservatives and so-called liberals? The ~~idea~~ of this BFMF statement. Should S.B. be greatly concerned about this especially in light of the Lutheran controversy over Concordia Seminary.

A- Actually, a liberal S.B. in the classical sense is somewhat of a conservative himself. We just have varying degrees of conservatism. So we have some more, and some less conservative people than others. A few years ago it was the less conservative people who were coming to the SBC in an organization and creating ~~um~~ quite a little comment. Now it is the more conservative people who are coming.

I do not look at either of these as threats at all. I think this can and probably does serve ~~and~~ ^{as} a useful purpose. I look at S. Ba. like a giant ocean liner that is being ~~birthed~~ ^{borne}. You'll have a couple of small tugs on either side, one pushing to the left, the other to the right. They couldn't handle this ship by themselves. The pressure will help keep the ship on course. Therefore, those who are less conservative among S.B. are always challenging us to broaden our horizons and maybe a little greater involvement in social ministries, and programs that might be more attractive to some of our young ~~and~~ ^{er} people; and then those who always call us back to the basics of the Bible. We all have a tendency to get enamored with success, rather than with the author of success. I see no bad purpose in people saying, "now stay with the ~~fundamentals~~ ^{Basics}...fundamentals of the Bible. But I do not see either of these forces, now or in the future, ^{foreseeable will} ~~assuming~~ the proportions that they will be actually divisive to any substantial extent among S.B. We lose a church or two every now and then to the right and to the left. When a church feels it cannot maintain fellowship with the SBC, I see no reason why it should not seek fellowship in groups where it feels compatible. But so far as any great

division among us, I do not foresee it, because basically, ~~every~~ 99.44% of S.B. would subscribe to the statement adopted by S.B. in 1963. But that does not mean every one of us will interpret any verse of scripture just exactly alike. Now there's only one thing worse than having a division of opinion ~~x~~ among S.B.-- and that is if we all thought exactly alike. When we all begin to think ^{are going to} exactly alike, we stagnate, and it won't be long until we become relatively stale and I think we will lose some of our power and some of our potency and some of our enthusiasm.

Q--What hopes do you have for S.B. in the future?

Maybe I better give you a book on this one. (Laughter.) I think as a Bible believing group of people accepting responsibility for evangelism at home and missions away from home, that my hope is that we will measure up more nearly to our potential. I think the greatest enemy S.B. have is probably success. It is not theological differences. We do so well that we may be content with success. And then our numbers are so large, that ~~when~~ when we multiply numbers by what we do as individuals, we get astronomical figures, like 12.3 million members, and like \$1.2 billion in gifts. Now many people may say, a billion dollars ought to be enough to put in the cause of Christ. But when we think about there being 2½ billion people in the world who've never heard about Jesus, and ~~when~~ when we think about the opportunities to send missionaries out, ~~known~~ and to use modern technology such as radio and television, all of which costs a substantial amount of money, it's a great challenge to S.B. And my hope is that we will reverse the trend of giving less proportion of our income. 10 years ago, we were giving 2.2 % of our income, and the last figures I saw, we were giving about 1.9 % of our income. We've got to give more to offset inflation and to expand. So the first hope is that will provide the means to carry out some ~~bold~~ programs that our HMB and FMB and our state conventions have in the area of evangelism and missions.

Then I have great hopes for the involvement of great multitudes of lay people in the future. These people are available. We have 80,000 people who retire every year. If even 1 % get involved a year, that would be 800 a year. We have great numbers of people who take early retirement, who reach their financial goals in life. We have great numbers of students who graduate from Baptist colleges, and we make no effort as S.B. to place these in positions where they can serve strategically. I feel that we should have a "employment agency" to help ~~them~~ them find secular employment in places where they can serve Christ. (Example: A fellow (S.B.) ~~in~~ in western Nebraska told me on one ~~occassion~~ occasion, 'I need 4 engineers. Can you tell me any place where I can get 4 S.B. to consider?') We ought to be placing hundreds of Baptist graduates, not only from among the 15,000 who graduate from Baptist colleges this year, but also from among the 25,000-35,000 ~~who~~ who graduate from our state schools--and many of these would accept the call and commission to go out into an area in secular employment and help establish missions. Much of our work in new states and new areas in this country, and even in foreign countries, has been started by lay people. So I have great hopes the convention will open up new channels and avenues for a greater involvement of lay people.

I would also hope we can increase the areas in which we have missionaries and the number of missionaries we have both at home and abroad. It takes about 2,500 S. B. to support one missionary, either home or foreign. You take the average church with 2,500 members and they will have a staff of 20 people. But we're a little mixed up. We want 20 people to serve us, most of whom have already claimed the gospel and the promises of it, and we have one person representing that same number to go to the world where they don't know the gospel. Now I'm not critical of the church staff--we need them. It is not a matter of either/or; it is a matter of both/and. And we have the resources to claim the lives of more ~~people~~ people and to send more people out as missionaries.

Then one area of special concern to me is the Northeast section of the country. If you drew a line from Chicago to St. Louis and over to Norfolk, Va., you'd take in about 1/6 of the country, but 1/2 of the people. And I'm told that 45% of those people are unchurched, which means that 45 and 50 million unchurched people live in that area. We really ought to go all out in carrying the gospel there. The people will respond. Last year in New England Association, they had a baptismal ratio of 4:1. In the nation as a whole, it was 30:1. So people will respond. In some areas we've reached the saturation point and we need to be more effective in areas of this country where people are responding to the gospel and where the fields are really white unto harvest and the laborers are truly few.

These are some of the hopes and aspirations I have.

5 Q--How much time and travel has the job of SBC president taken, and what are your views of the role of the SBC president?

A- I was scheduled to retire in May, 1973, as president of MCC, but earlier, we'd selected a fine team to take over management of cooperative that manufactures fertilizer, so soon after my election in June, 1972, we elected my successor as ex. vp, and I began to ease out, and 100% out in May, 1973. So I made myself available in the fall of 1972 almost fulltime for this task. Not that the real duties of the SBC presidency require full time, but I was available, I was in the process of retiring, and the number of invitations that come in are far beyond what one man could do if he gave full time to it. And I began to accept more and more of these invitations. Before the date of the SBC in Dallas, Mrs. Cooper and I will have visited each of the 50 states and we've been on five continents. We've enjoyed it. I do not keep a travel log, but I estimate I've been averaging about 400 miles a day. But I'm not positive about that. I've enjoyed it very much.

I do not think ~~the~~ role of the president of the SBC^C should be stereotyped. I think each person ought to bring to the office his concepts, his ideas, and ~~an~~ degree of freshness. We make the office more effective that way. I have assumed ~~my~~ my role as president of the SBC, largely because of my lay status, largely because I've been working with all agencies of the convention for a long time, through an extended tenure on the Ex. Com., not as one to come out and ~~and~~ launch some program that the SBC might get involved in; but to try to interpret to the people of S.B. the existing programs and plans of our various agencies. I've gone up and down the ~~country~~ country trying to let people know what the SBC is, how it functions through its agencies, that they ~~are~~ really a part of it, ~~xxxxxxx~~ and the real support of the covenant comes from the grassroots of the country. I've not tried to launch something new but to strengthen what we have.

Then I've tried to enlarge the vision of our ~~xxxxxx~~ people by letting them know we are a great people doing a good job, but there is yet room for improvement; and if we are going to evangelize the world, we are going to have to substantially improve our commitment ~~xxxxxx~~ and our support in that area.

Q-What do you plan after leaving the office?

I will re-retire, and they will review the situation. We are working with the BWA, Men's Department, trying to strengthen that organization to bring about greater fellowship among lay people in the world. I'll be giving a reasonable amount of time to that. I am president of the Pan American Union of Baptist Men, and I have neglected that for the past 2 years, and I will be giving more time to that. I am very much interested in India, and the Lord willing, I hope to participate in some programs that will bring the gospel to more people in India. I will continue serving on the boards of directors of several companies in which I am involved.

Mrs. Cooper and I have had a taste of travel, but we want to travel differently from now on. We want to travel leisurely. This fall we are planning

to take 40 or 50 S. B. to New England while the leaves are in the height of ^{visit} their color and see the foliage, and ~~and~~ Baptist work and try to acquaint these people with our work there. We want to enjoy our children, and our grandchildren, and our local church. We've almost said goodbye to our local church, and we want to get meaningfully involved back in our local church. Maybe a little golf now and then.

Q--What do you think will be the key issues at the SBC in Dallas?

With a great ~~PM~~ ^{PM} night Tuesday, a great ~~PM~~ ^{PM} night Wednesday, and a great meeting Thursday night with Billy Graham, the matter of evangelism and missions is going to be paramount in the minds of the people out there. And that's really the great issue before us. Because we see so much alike on it, we often say, that's really not an issue; but it is an issue. It is a question of civilization ~~survival~~ survival. It is a matter of getting Chstn ethics and xtn viewpoints and Xtn morality reestablished in this ~~own~~ country and spread in other countries. So there

So there will be issues growing out of that. It is my understanding there will be a motion presented to take the evangelism division out of the home mission board. Well, this will be one debate relating to this subject. I do not feel as president of the convention I should ~~position~~ positionize myself on these ~~em~~ issues...

I think also there is going to be a motion made that will have something to do with the ordination of women as deacons or ministers. I do not know what form it will be in, but I have been in communication with one man who says he intends to make such a motion. I have an idea that if such a motion is made, it will be debated, and probably there will be some resolutions that will ~~engender~~ engender some hope debate, but ~~but~~ I would not try to anticipate those. I would ~~know~~ there is enough "issues" to maintain interest, but not enough to push us off into any acrimonious debate. Baptists have differing points of view and it is entirely

appropriate that they should air these points of view and get the other fellows viewpoint. That's part of the democratic process through which we operate.

Q-Would you comment: if you see growth in the overall work of the Brotherhood Commission.

The involvement of men in Xtny to me is indispensable. Pastors ~~xxxx~~ nowadays have to spend so much time counseling frustrated youth, people who have family problems.... (tape ended), that the demands on his time are far greater than in the past. Pastors do not have time to get out in seeing lost people, though they should and do some of that. Now the lost people are not going to church like they used to. The lost people will be where the layman is working on Monday morning. I think we've got to shift this emphasis in the future and get lay people to realize that the effective witnessing in the future is going to be by them, where they are during the weekdays, ~~xxxxxx~~/.....I also believe that the growing demand for financial resources up and down our convention demand a greater commitment of laymen in the area of Xtn stewardship. So much depends on this involvement of laymen.

Therefore, if this is indispensable, and to me the next great thrust of Xtny awaits the involvement of lay people meaningfully and in large numbers, and if this is true, the agency of this convention which has as its sole responsibility the enlistment of laymen is very vital. Now I know other organizations are involved with lay people, the SS is a lay movement--the largest lay movement we have. So this is not exclusively a function of the Brotherhood Commission. The HMB is seeking to involve lay people; the FMB; they both have people who work full time in this area. The Brotherhood is the one who works exclusively in this area, and charged with ~~them~~ trying to bring this support in focus. Therefore, I see great need.

The second thing is that I like what I see going on down at the Bro. Comm. in Memphis. A freshness, a new ~~mmim~~ viewpoint, innovative ideas, creativity, They are ~~mmmm~~ severely limited in funds. And it takes times to develop these programs. ~~They~~ You just can't push a button and ~~they~~ start rolling out. But I have great hopes for the work of the Bro. Comm. and am pleased with the progress they have made under the direction of Dr. McCullough since he has been there.
(Question not on tape*)

Sometimes, the question is asked me, how am I as a layman received. I want to say, I could not ask for a better reception. The hands of the pastors have been extended. The pulpits have been open. The fellowship halls have been available. And at no time have I felt anything standing between me and where I was going because I was a layman. I want to thank the churches and pastors for that.

But this is as should be and as would be expected. I'm asked sometimes why there are so few lay ~~people~~ presidents of the convention. My general answer is ~~thats~~ that it is difficult for a lay person to get the exposure necessary to be known. I do not feel there is animosity toward ~~the lay people~~ a layman. But lay ~~the~~ people do not attend the evangelism conferences, many do not attend the state conventions, and ~~they~~ a great many do not attend the SEC; and they are just not known, and when the question comes from anyone voting for someone voting for someone he knows and appreciates as contrasted for voting for someone he doesn't know, generally, the person he knows is going to get his vote.

in your opinion
Q-What ~~do~~ is the overall ~~mmmmmm~~ mood of S.Bapt. Is there an optimism about S.B. life in general?

There is a little note of complacency growing among S.Bapt. We've been very successful. There is a tendency to say, 'they're getting along mighty well, we'd better build that activities building or we better get us another staff member.' And oftentimes this is done at the expense of the mission program of the church.

I feel S.B. are optimistic; I dont think with the promises of Christ we could help but ultimately be optimistic; for if he is on our side, who really can be against it. I dont think this is ~~from~~ foolish optimism, by thinki g we are going to conquer the world or win the world in the next 10 years. But i think it is optimism to the point of encouragement.

If feel the leaders of the convention must continually challenge our people, and our agencies must challeng us, with new and expanding programs so as to keep us away from becoming satisfied ~~with~~ and complacent with the good job we are doing.

Q As President of the Southern Baptist Convention and president of the Pan American Baptist Union, among other affiliations, how are you as a layman received?

A I want to say I couldn't ask for a better reception, the hands of the pastors that have been extended, the pulpits that have been opened, the fellowships that have been available and at no time have I felt any thing standing between me and full cooperation with ~~xxxxx~~ where I was going because I was ~~xx~~ a layman.

I want to thank the churches and the pastors for that; but this is as should be and as would be expected from gracious people/

I'm ~~xxxx~~ asked sometimes why there are so few lay pres. of the convention. And my genl ans is that its very difficult for a lay person to get the exposure necessary to be ~~it~~ known. I do not feel there is animosity toward a ~~lx~~ layman, ~~xxxxx~~ congresses. but the lay people do not attend the evangelism ~~conferences~~. they do not always attend the state conventions. they do not, a great many of them, attend the SBC and they're just not known and when the ? comes for anybody he knows and appreciates as ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ contrasted with somebody he doesn't know, genlly speaking, the person he knows is going to get his vote.

im happy to find this situation existing throught the convention.

Q (Would you ~~cooperate~~ ^{comment on with CP Anniv. (SBC) coming} the role of the Cooperative Program in what you just said?

A My understanding is that of the undes. \$ that comes into a church, 91 cents stays in the local church; 6 cents of it goes to the state convention; and 3 cents of it comes to Nashville.

^{figures up to 5} The Cooperative Program has proved to be the most effective way of channeling our support for our mission agencies and other agencies of the convention/

And anything we've found heretofore. It's a tremendously effective tool to work with ~~xx~~ as SBs. I think the average church needs to review its giving through the cooperative prog. After all, these agencies of the SBC and states are just an extension of the arm of the local church. The FMB is an extension of the arm of the local church in the area of foreign missions.

COOPER

(LAST TWO QUESTIONS)

And when you cut the CP, you don't hurt Nashville, you just reduce the number and effectiveness of our fm commitment. The hmb is an extension of the arm of the local church, ~~and if you cut the cp~~ in winning America for Christ, and if you cut the cp, you don't hurt Nashville -- you just make our work less effective in the carrying the hmb prog. And if we wld increase the CP, then we could hire these 150 missionaries that are ready to go out for the hmb.

Per onally, I blieve that a church should give at least 10 percent to the cp. and i think any less than that, it fails to bring a blessing to the church. And I also believe that any pastor who will get two laymen to support him, plus any women that are already in favor ~~in~~ of it, can help increase the cp giving in his church -- a pastor and 2 laymen plus the WMU --if he's giving less than 12 - 15% -- if they commit selves to it and inform the people of it. And I trust that by 1975 when the cp will be 75 years old. That we will be giving that year, \$150 million thru the cp to sustain these great mission and evangelistic, and training agencies (such as the seminaries).

END