

Book Review of:

Hildreth, D. Scott. *Together of God's Mission: How Southern Baptists Cooperate to Fulfill the Great Commission*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018.

Review by Thomas Seckler

March 28, 2019

584 words

Scott Hildreth, assistant professor at Southeast Baptist Theological Seminary, writes an easily readable, highly informative book about “how Southern Baptists cooperate to fulfill the Great Commission” (subtitle). The author writes this book as a member of the Southern Baptist denomination primarily for the benefit of other Southern Baptists. His desire is threefold: to inform Southern Baptists about their history of cooperation, to undergird the idea that cooperation for the sake of the gospel is founded on the scriptures, and to present a proposal for further cooperation. These goals are addressed in the three sections of this book.

In part one, Hildreth provides an overview of the historical development of the Southern Baptist Convention and of their cooperation for the Great Commission. Prominent in this section is an explanation of the Cooperative Program (CP), which is a central fund to which Southern Baptist churches voluntarily contribute and which provides financial resources for foreign missions, North America Missions, six theological seminaries, and the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission. Hildreth emphasizes that the CP is more than merely a mission board, but rather the way in which Southern Baptists cooperate in mission (36).

In part two, Hildreth builds the case that cooperation as carried out by the Southern Baptists is founded on the scriptures. Foundational to this argument is a discussion that God is himself a missionary God, that he enlists humans to participate in his mission, and that “local church

cooperation is an important means of fulfilling God's mission" (55). In this section, the author provides a concise yet powerful overview of mission (and more specifically *cooperation* in mission) based on the scriptures.

In part three, Hildreth proposes ways in which Southern Baptists can cooperate in mission. A foundational argument of this book is found on page 74, "We worship one God with one mission. Each local church is not permitted to create its own mission. Thus, cooperation is not merely pragmatic or programmatic. It is fundamental to full participation in God's mission." Hildreth discusses the sobering fact that Southern Baptist churches are giving decreased amounts to the Cooperative Program, and he offers recommendations for future cooperation, including looking to a theological basis for cooperation, seeing cooperation not exclusively as financial assistance to the CP, and viewing the CP "as a tool, not a tax" (80-83).

Hildreth guides the reader well through his short book, and he does accomplish his purpose. One weakness of the book, however, is that terminology could be better explained. Although the author does seek to define terms and organizations, it is possible to become confused with the myriad terms used to describe the organization and mission activities of the Southern Baptists. A glossary would be helpful. In addition, the author seeks to demonstrate that the Southern Baptist Convention is uniquely positioned to contribute significantly to God's mission (1, 84). This declaration was clear. However, a more thorough explanation of this "unique position" would have been helpful, including perhaps a comparison to other structures or denominations. In spite of these shortcomings, this book is informative and valuable. It should be read by Southern Baptists who are interested in mission, as it provides perspectives about their history and current practices. This book is also important for non-Southern Baptists, including undergraduate students. It helps them understand the workings of the largest Protestant denomination in the

world. More significantly, it concisely lays a solid theological foundation of mission in the Bible, specifically the need to cooperate with God—and with each other—in his mission.