

Skits Six: The Future of the Rose: The Day the Cooperative Program Died

by Sandra Gail Campbell

So now you have your rose you must decide what you're going to do with it. Do you put this fragrant thing of beauty in a vase unattended until it dries up and is only a reminder of the beauty it once had? Or do you press it between the pages of a history book reminding you of what it once represented? Or are you going to do what's necessary to maintain it: prune it, water it, give it sunlight so that it can benefit you with its intended purpose?

We've been telling you the Cooperative Program is like that rose and we are at that place historically where we must make a decision on what we're going to do. Perhaps because the Cooperative Program has been around for so long we've begun to take it for granted. Think with us for a few minutes what it would be like if we did not have the Cooperative Program; if the Cooperative Program died!

Setting: *Newsroom*

Props: *Table, Chair, Microphone, Newsreport*

And this news report just in:

It has just been announced in Atlanta on this, the opening day of the 1995 Southern Baptist Convention, that a pageant celebrating the 70th birthday of the Cooperative Program has been canceled. The cancellation is the result of a successful motion to abolish the Cooperative Program. The vote came after an emotional debate characterized by such terminology as "out of date" and "time for a change." Although this would mean the collapse of state convention budgeting as well, the motion passed and all agencies were advised to begin organizing their own fund-raising staffs and to begin going directly to the churches. The Stewardship Commission is already trying to squeeze a special week of fund-raising techniques into both the Ridgecrest and Glorietta schedules. Donor lists, computerized mailings and incentive awards will be discussed. Seminary presidents will begin organizing student teams for all churches. These students will present programs then take pledges. The churches would be expected to provide meals, housing, and love offerings for each member of the team.

Con conversationally From Some Other Point on Stage

Later in the summer of '95 all missionaries are called home to spend a year raising financial support. Leaves of any kind are cancelled. Missionaries must speak in every church displaying artifacts, showing slides, and answering questions. They must also publish a newsletter requesting money. Churches are asked to have mailing lists available. Missionaries provide their own pledge cards.

Yes, this will cut into the missionaries' time to share the gospel, but this is a life and death situation and there is no other foreseeable solution.

Newsroom Scene

Dateline - New York City, July 6, 1995

The directors of the National Association of Good Causes, Inc. has expressed delight in the recent decision of the Southern Baptist Convention to end their Cooperative Program. Plans to make direct appeals to all 46,000 churches are underway. The chairman of the board is quoted as saying, "Now we can tap thousands of church budgets, by by-passing the man in the pew. If we can convince just one lay-person in each church, then that person can, in most cases, sway the budget committee who knows little or nothing of denominational causes. We operate on trust. If folks trust us, they will have little or no interest in audits, budgets or annual reports."

Other Speaker

The result would be additional mail, posters, cassette tapes, newsletters, and computerized phone calls flooding churches almost daily. Most churches wouldn't have the time or staff to cope with the high volume of information. And the cost of constant entertaining would be overwhelming. Although most Southern Baptist Convention churches are small, they can take a pride in sending one check that supports both state and national causes. They realize that, when divided up, some agencies receive only dimes and quarters. But knowing they have had a part, no matter how small, allows them to feel an equal partnership in our convention and in doing God's work.

The Cooperative Program has proved to be one of God's greatest gifts to Southern Baptists. It unifies our efforts and informs us of the totality of our work. It has substantially lessened the spirit of competition among our agencies, institutions, and ministries.

Speaker 1: So, do we leave the Cooperative Program alone like that rose in the vase, unattended but well-preserved in our memories?

Speaker 2: Or perhaps like the pressed rose, we press the Cooperative Program in a history book to be looked at later by future generations of Southern Baptists as a reminder of days gone by? (*Take a Rose in your hand.*) Or do we begin to tear off the areas of ministry currently supported through the Cooperative Program that we do not particularly like? Like taking the rose and tearing off one petal at a time (*act it out*) of those areas that we're not too fond of. We end up with only the stub. (*Throw the flower to the ground.*)

Speaker 1: Or do we take care of it? Pruning, watering, and giving it sunlight so that it will be able to blossom into that beautiful fragrant rose? Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches....a part from me you can do nothing." Apart from the rosebush the single rose lives but for a short time. Because of limited funds, overwhelming needs, and competitive attitudes, apart from the Cooperative Program we can continue but for a short time in a harmonious spirit. We are connected as a whole and we need each other and people need what we can

provide through our cooperative spirit. The choice is ours, but the time to make that choice is now. What will you do with the rose God has given you?

(Some of the ideas in this skit are based on a 1992 tract entitled, "The Day the Cooperative Program Died.")

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